

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 23, 1992**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 92/03/23

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would the committee please come to order. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to welcome all members to the first meeting of the Committee of Supply for this session of the Legislature.

head: **Interim Supply Estimates 1992-93**

MR. CHAIRMAN: The first item before the committee will be the material relating to the General Revenue Fund. Does the hon. Provincial Treasurer have any introductory remarks?

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Chairman, I thought it would be appropriate just for a moment this evening to put on the record three or four facts which I'm sure will afford the Assembly ample reason to pass these estimates that we're considering this evening. In fact, in some anticipation of what the opposition may say, I think it's also wise to have the record straight, because I know there'll be some opportunities for the opposition to cloud the issues as they usually do, this early in the session even.

MR. TAYLOR: The only cloud in here is your reign.

MR. JOHNSTON: Now we hear from the Liberals, who also happen to be here this evening. He's a classic example, my friend Mr. Taylor. I mean, he has to wait until he speaks to know what he's thinking about, that guy.

This evening, Mr. Chairman, I want to talk about the supply that I'm requesting on behalf of the government, and I think it's important to put some facts on the record. First of all, we need to think about what these supply estimates are. Really this supply is an estimate which is provided on surface in anticipation of passing a Bill formally authorizing the Legislature to vote dollars for the spending of the government's activities through the course of the fiscal year '92-93. That's essentially what it is.

The reason I make that point is that of course the discussion here will focus on a variety of other issues which are side issues to that. Remember the very important thing here. Really in terms of the tradition of Parliament it is this estimate which allows the government to carry its work forward from April 1, '92, in this case, through to sometime in the 1992 period. Probably our estimates will flow, in most cases, through to the end of June, early July. Now, that might be a little optimistic knowing the kind of discussion and time-consuming debate we hear from the opposition. Nonetheless, that's the rough estimate that we make, and that's the important point. What we do here tonight will be fully and formally debated as an ongoing item in the spring session of this Assembly. We will present a Bill which will formally authorize all this spending to take place, and it'll be debated in the normal fashion.

The point I'm making here is that today's discussion is not about whether or not the government is providing adequate financial reporting. It's not a discussion about Assembly time allocation, nor is it a discourse about financial reporting, but it'll all be drawn into this debate sooner or later during the evening. Surely it will, Mr. Chairman. I can look across the way and see the people in their normal tired manner digging out last year's

notes, and you're going to hear every item in the world discussed down to this little question of supply. We saw it already this afternoon when the Member for Edmonton-Highlands tried to make some sort of amendment to a motion which surely was out of order to begin with and, secondly, was out of order in terms of process. We know that's going to happen. So I wanted to make these facts clear to begin with tonight.

Secondly, it's not about special warrants. Usually the confusion across the way is that this debate is about special warrants. For some reason it always creeps into this estimate debate. The reason that happens, Mr. Chairman, is that in the odd year, usually every four or five years, when an election is called which interrupts the normal process of the Assembly, which starts normally in March and carries through to June, as I've noted, it is sometimes required that the government after the first day of the new year has to operate by warrant. When there's no government and we're in the process of an election or an election is going to be called very soon, it is sometimes necessary to generate the expenditures in place of this interim supply by way of warrant, and 99 percent of the time the opposition party across the way will confuse warrants with estimates of supply.

MR. McEACHERN: Nonsense.

MR. JOHNSTON: I want to make it absolutely clear that it is nonsense the way in which they confuse the matter. I actually agree with the member across the way that it's nonsense. So we want to have that on the record as well, Mr. Chairman. I agree with the member that it is in fact nonsense that that sort of confusion would creep into this debate.

Thirdly, Mr. Chairman, I want to provide some details as to where we stand. This estimate for the General Revenue Fund totals \$4.420 billion. Now, that is a lot of money, no doubt about it. Of course, it does represent a lot of expenditures by the government of Alberta, expenditures which flow through to municipalities, school boards, health units, hospital boards, and other partnership groups across this province who depend upon these dollars to carry out their operations and their mandates to provide first-rate services to Albertans. Of course, we have to meet those commitments, and we start making those commitments under new authority on April 1, '92. That's why the General Revenue Fund this year will be about 39 percent of the '91-92 estimates. That's the rough calculation we've used. It works out to be about 39 percent last year and 39 percent this year. That's the best guess, and to some extent we match it with the demand for money and the kinds of initial payments that we see taking place through that period. A lot of money, it's still an important expenditure on behalf of the government.

We want to have the authority, Mr. Chairman, to be able to make those cheques available for a wide range of creditors, to a lot of people who work in the partnership groups across the province, and to our own civil servants, because they depend upon that money and they have to have it by April 1. That point in fact has been acknowledged by the NDP Party, sic, and I think it's got to be acknowledged by this Assembly this evening.

So that's how that comes about. There's no particular magic in it. I'd be glad if there are any special explanations as to why, for example, in economic development one vote disappears, or I'll provide any additional information which I may be able to do. That's really all we're about here tonight. We're simply providing interim – that means between two intervals, between two points – supply, which means dollars, and it's an interim Bill. It's going to be accommodated by a more formal debate. It's going to be enveloped, if you like, by a larger Bill which will take place right

away, as soon as we get the budget ready, and that debate will be the focus of the entire Assembly. In that debate, Mr. Chairman, there is ample opportunity to discuss all the grievous items that the opposition thinks exists, which of course the government will refute, which deal with this question of time allocation in the Assembly, which would in fact explain away some of the policies of the government, and certainly which would allow a full discourse on any other item which may fall under the budgetary considerations.

So, Mr. Chairman, that's what this debate is about. It's about getting it done, getting our business under way so we have a chance to move through that period from April 1, '92, on to July or some other date early on in '92 and to provide the kinds of dollars that are necessary. I'd be glad to elaborate, go further, provide more fully any details which are missing or in fact provide a more simple explanation to the opposition across the way, but I think this Legislative Assembly, this Committee of Supply would be well advised to move these votes through so that we can get on with the job of providing supply to a large number of people across the province of Alberta.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Treasurer does it every year, doesn't he? He has to get up and tell us about the difference between special warrants and interim supply and things like that. The Treasurer, of course, mainly does that just to confuse the issue. We are not confused; we know the difference. In fact, the Treasurer recently issued some more warrants to the tune of \$406 million for the fiscal year we've just finished. The Treasurer is asking us to approve the expenditure of \$4.4 billion, some 40 percent of the budget, and the government seems to think that two days is enough time to do that, that we don't need to stop and talk about the different aspects of this budget. In fact, his explanation about what's in here is so minimal that it's really quite laughable.

8:10

Why should anybody trust this Treasurer with his record? This Treasurer has been wrong on every budget that he has brought in in terms of the deficit by a billion dollars every year since he became Treasurer. In fact, I would go so far as to say that he is purposefully wrong by a billion dollars every year, except this last year. It's going to be \$2 billion in this year we're just finishing. But in every other year the error in the deficit has been a billion dollars, and it's been planned to be that way.

The one year that it was on the positive side was the 1987-88 budget year, and he wanted to scare the taxpayers of this province into agreeing to pay an extra billion dollars in taxes. So by having a \$4 billion debt the year before, it was easy enough for him to do. He said: Look, we've got to raise taxes and close that gap a bit. He projected that he would have a deficit of \$1.9 billion in his budget, and it turned out he only had a deficit of \$900 million. [some applause] Sure, clap. He knew when he did it that he was just scaring the people of Alberta and exaggerating the extent of the deficit. That's the only year that it was on that side. All the other years the billion dollar misquote or misinformation, whatever you want to call it, was on the other side.

In the first year he said that the deficit would be \$2.23 billion. It turned out to be \$3.44 billion in the general revenue itself, a \$4 billion deficit in the consolidated overall. The consolidated in the second year turned out to be \$1.4 billion, and it's been about \$2 billion every year since. This Treasurer, as in almost every year, indicated that it would only be about a billion dollars. That was

the pattern right up until the '90-91 year. He claimed he would have a billion dollar deficit, and it's going to be closer to \$2 billion.

We still don't have the public accounts to show exactly what it will be, but if you look at the books from last year, you find that he was able to show that the revenues and expenditures had a difference of a billion 80-some million dollar, a deficit. Then when you turn over a couple of pages further and look at page 38, you find that his net cash requirements are \$1.76 billion. Now, I asked the Treasurer where the difference came between his budgeted figures and his forecast figures. How come there's a \$444 million difference there? He still to this day has not explained why.

MR. WOLOSHYN: He doesn't know, Alex.

MR. McEACHERN: Of course he knows, but he's just not telling the people of Alberta. This Treasurer is just intent, it seems, on giving out misinformation on a political agenda that doesn't tell the people of Alberta exactly what's going on in this province. There is no good reason for it. All he has to do is look on page 38 of the public accounts, and you'll see that he had an item called adjustments to cash basis under the net cash requirements of \$207 million, which was supposed to be a positive in the column that you're adding here about the deficit, and he turns out in the forecast to have a \$237 million negative, a difference of \$444 million between the figures. So that has to be added then to his billion dollar figure. Along with the capital fund that puts the net cash requirements anyway – if that's not the deficit, I'm not sure what it is – at \$1.76 billion. Now, that doesn't include the \$110 million spent out of the heritage trust fund.

Also, by the way, to get to his billion dollars on those first two pages, on the revenue and expenditure pages, he also included in there \$195 million that he had coming from Ottawa but had not yet got when he put the books together and when the fiscal year came to an end. Again he was projecting money that he didn't have. So there's another \$200 million there. So the deficit for 1990-91 is in the neighbourhood of \$2 billion, yet this Treasurer again, the same as he's done for three out of the four years previous to that, insisted that the deficit was going to be a billion dollars when in fact it was closer to \$2 billion.

We might take a look at the estimates for the year that we are now in. You know, if the Treasurer is going to ask us to trust him and handle the taxpayers' money, then he has to do something to start earning that trust. I've got to say that his 1991-92 budget didn't go very far towards that effect. In fact, I want to quote to the Treasurer some of his opening words when he brought in this budget last spring, and just think about where the province is now at.

Mr. Speaker, since the collapse of world oil prices in 1986, this government has vigorously pursued a two-part strategy to secure the future prosperity of Alberta. We have worked hard to diversify the economy and to balance the provincial budget.

It goes on to say a few other nice things like:

The success of our economic plan will keep Alberta growing while most of the country is suffering from a recession.

In fact, in one place here he said that the growth in Alberta would be "three times that of the United States" in the fiscal year we've just completed.

The 1991 budget builds on our achievements in diversifying the economy and creating jobs for Albertans. The success of our fiscal plan will keep Albertans' taxes low and protect our priority programs. The 1991 budget delivers on our commitment to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, this is a balanced budget.

Ha, ha, and we said ha right to start with.

Mr. Chairman, I suggest that all anybody needs to do is look at page 34 of the Budget Address from last year and see that the personal income taxes were overestimated, see that corporate income taxes were overestimated.

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

MR. McEACHERN: Yes, probably a couple of hundred million each.

The nonrenewable resource revenue: now, there was the laughable one. This Treasurer went to his department officials and said: what price do you think we'll get for a barrel of oil over the coming year? Now, they'd just come off the Gulf war, and for the first time he was right in the previous year about his oil revenues because of the Gulf war. It raised the amount of money, but this year there was no Gulf war.

AN HON. MEMBER: No golf course?

MR. McEACHERN: Oh, there was a golf course, but there was no Gulf war. Yet the Treasurer had the gall to suggest that the revenues from crude oil would go up. You know what his department people told him? They said that the price of a barrel of oil would be between \$18.50 a barrel and \$19 a barrel. The treasurer said: that's not good enough; I need \$23; I need a balanced budget. So he ignored all of their advice and all the facts and figures they gave him and just wrote in \$23 a barrel.

Of course, anybody looking at the nonrenewable resource sector revenues could see immediately that the crude oil royalty revenues were at least \$200 million high, the natural gas and by-product royalties were at least \$200 million high, and the bonus on sales of Crown leases – now here's the one that I think really tells the tale. If you look at the figures for the previous years, you will see that in '90-91 the Treasurer guessed that he would get \$515 million in bonuses and sale of Crown leases. He only, by his own forecast, got \$425 million. Yet with everybody in the world saying that the oil industry was going to be depressed for the year 1991-92, he had the gall to put the figure of \$575 million in for bonuses and sale of Crown leases. In other words, he raised it \$150 million for no reason whatsoever. Considering that the oil industry, of course, has really suffered this year and been worse than we expected, what do we find? Not only were we right about the original figures, that they were just fiction, but in fact things were even worse.

We have some figures here from our research department, March 12, 1992, which show that the revenues for natural gas royalties will be down \$409 million, crude oil royalties will be down \$240 million, oil and gas rights sales down \$313 million: even worse than we thought. The corporate taxes will be down \$200 million, as we said they would, and the heritage fund transfers, of course, were rather pie-in-the-sky. He was going to have to sell half of the heritage trust fund to meet the projections there, and he did sell some, but he's still over by least \$155 million.

8:20

On the revenue side the Treasurer was just dreaming and putting in the figures that he needed to make the budget look like it was balanced. He comes out with this \$33 million and says to the whole world: look; we balanced the budget. But he didn't balance the budget; he just doctored the figures. On the expenditure side he did do some whittling here and there, but in fact he was unable to really close the gap.

I've done a little exercise for the last three years about this time of year. I've done it for this year also; that is, I've taken these

figures from the budget, which is the last thing we have. I mean, it's absolutely scandalous that we don't have the public accounts for '90-91 right now. The Auditor General finished with them in October or November, yet the Treasurer sits on them so that he can release them about the same time he releases the new budget so that everybody is looking at the public accounts for '90-91, the forecast for '91-92, and the new budget for '92-93. They've got three years to try to digest all at once. That way he can tell a whole bunch of stories about bandying the figures around, which the Treasurer is very good at doing. Oh, he sometimes gets the wrong numbers, but he doesn't pay much mind to that, because mostly he's able to bluff his way through and make out he knows what he's talking about. So he convinces the population that it's all too complicated for them to really sort out anyway.

Now, had we had the public accounts back in October, they'd have been the only figures on the table for people to look at. We could have had a session of the Alberta Legislature back in the fall. You could have given us an update. It's been a disastrous year. The deficit for this year is going to be at least \$2 billion on the budget side alone. If you throw in the Capital Fund and the heritage fund and a few other things that the Auditor General throws into the works, the consolidated deficit of this province this year is going to be 2 and a half billion dollars, and the Treasurer has been going around telling everybody that he had a balanced budget. Now, that's incredible, Mr. Chairman.

There are consequences of telling those kinds of stories to the people of Alberta, and it's now finally caught up to the Treasurer. Last spring he went around bragging that he had a balanced budget when in fact he didn't. One cursory look at the budget from those of us who had been following it closely for the last five or six years and you could see that there was a billion to a billion and a half dollars in just doctoring the numbers, that in fact there were incorrect statements about revenues and expenditures that could not be followed through. Because we've had an extra tough year, we're now going to find that figure probably a billion dollars higher, and we're going to be facing a 2 billion to 2 and a half billion dollar deficit in the fiscal year that we're just completing.

The Treasurer is now faced with building the next budget, and one of the really sad things is that the Premier has decided that since they're unable to balance the budget, he'd better find another kick to get on, because it doesn't look too good when you've been going around for several years saying that you're going to balance the budget, and then you shout, "Eureka, we've balanced it." Even as he did it, he knew he hadn't really succeeded. The economy has gone even more sour than he expected, and we're going to have a bigger deficit than he expected. Now he's going to have to admit that. What do they do but try to find a way to avoid admitting that. So what we have now is a Premier who has suddenly become a convert to stimulating the economy to create jobs because, boy, we sure don't want to abandon Albertans in tough times. Well, I sympathize with the idea. I concur with the idea, but it's certainly a deathbed repentance. The Premier, knowing that they couldn't balance the budget has said: "Oh, well, that's not important now. We're not trying to balance the budget; we're going to shift our priorities and try to help Albertans through this recession," which he finally admits is in place.

Now, if you read the preamble to the budget last spring, of course everything was wonderful. There was no recession in Alberta. Everything was strong. Agriculture was even strong. Well, they were having some trouble, but the government was really pulling them through. Natural gas and oil, of course, were going to do great. Everything was wonderful last year, and we had a balanced budget. This country had been in recession for a

year by that time, including this province, and the government just didn't want to admit it.

So now they finally admit to the recession, not because they have suddenly been converted to wanting to help working Albertans particularly, but because they want to cover up the fact that they don't have the balanced budget they said they had. Now, the consequence of that is rather tragic really for the people of this province. If the Treasurer had been honest and had built into his budget a billion and a half dollar deficit, which would have been a truer picture of the projections at that time last spring, which is what would have been the case had he been honest with his numbers, then when he comes to this year and decides he wants to stimulate the economy – okay; there will be one more step there. Because the economy this year did not perform as well as we might have expected last spring, even what we projected last spring – and we were not looking at the picture with rose-coloured glasses, I assure you – we would find what we find now, and that is that the deficit's going to be 2 billion to 2 and a half billion dollars. That's not as big a problem or as big a mistake as claiming that you had a balanced budget.

Now the Premier says we're going to stimulate the economy in this new budget, so I'm really looking forward – I assume it will be April 2 when the new budget comes in – to seeing how big a deficit the Premier and the Treasurer are willing to put into the budget to stimulate the economy. In order to stimulate the economy in this province with a \$13 billion expenditure, you have to spend at least \$1 billion more this year than you did last year. Therefore, if the deficit in this current year is 2 billion or 2 and a half billion dollars, the new budget will have to have at least a \$3 billion deficit if not a 3 and a half billion dollar deficit to really be stimulative.

Now, you know what the Treasurer's going to do, of course. He's not going to have the courage to do that. What he's going to do is he's going to doctor his books again when he puts in the forecast. To explain what's happened this year, he will carry on with half of those mistakes, shall we call them, that he built into it last year and admit to about a \$1 billion deficit instead of a \$2 billion deficit, and then he will claim in this coming year, in this new budget he's going to bring in, that a \$2 billion deficit is a stimulative budget. In fact it won't be stimulative, because that billion dollar lie is catching up to us. So the people of Alberta are going to be told that they have a stimulative budget when they don't.

That's the tragic truth of where the Treasurer's penchant for doctoring the books by about \$1 billion every year has led us. Unfortunately, last year the billion to billion and a half that he told us was there that wasn't there when he said he had a balanced budget, because we've had a difficult year, has turned into a 2 billion to 2 and a half billion dollar deficit. Now he's really in trouble because he can't possibly stimulate the economy of this province in the coming budget as the Premier has been saying he should. I certainly sympathize with the idea that we're in a recession and we need some stimulation. We need some help to get people back to work. The number of people and the rate of unemployment in this province is really tragic. The government should be doing something, but they have boxed themselves in by the very process that they have used to budget and to tell the people of Alberta what's going on. They've been kidding Albertans by \$1 billion every year, that everything was wonderful, and now it's caught up to them.

Mr. Chairman, I don't understand how the Treasurer thinks that the people of Alberta should trust him to deal with the books any further. Really, if he were an honourable gentleman, after being found out the way he was, if he would ever give us the public

accounts to show what happened last year, if he would bring in his new budget and let us have a look at it and really be honest with it, the difficulties that this government has boxed us into are so great that he would resign. This government would resign, and we would have an election and elect a government that's prepared to tell the people of Alberta just how bad the situation is.

AN HON. MEMBER: That won't be you.

MR. McEACHERN: Well, it will be, and we will find the same kind of mess that the Premier of Ontario found when he inherited from the Liberals. We will find the same kind of mess that Romanow found in Saskatchewan when he inherited from the Devine government. The Allan Blakeney government handed over to the Tories in 1982 a balanced budget and no debt. Within nine years of hanging on as long as they possibly could and stealing the election of '86 by refusing to redistribute the seats, as they should have done and as this government is refusing to do – [interjections] oh, yes, exactly the same kind of process – and in handing out all kinds of taxpayers' dollars in the most frivolous and stupid manner, we now find the Romanow government has inherited something like a \$13.5 billion deficit when the government was trying to tell them it was about \$3 billion.

8:30

Now, I don't think we'll get caught on quite the same scale because we've been watching this government for long enough to know some of the tricks. Nonetheless, we know that we're going to find a real mess in the North West Trust thing. We're still going to have to bail out Softco with taxpayers' dollars, unlike what he said. We're still paying an incredible amount of money. The last \$51 million in special warrants was for Alberta Mortgage and Housing, the biggest boondoggle of all the boondoggles, bigger than Principal, bigger than North West Trust, bigger than all those other financial collapses, bigger than NovAtel probably or at least as big, bigger than MagCan, bigger than a whole pile of other government waste.

I can't help thinking that if this government is going to stimulate the economy, I hope to God they're not going to keep on doing it the way they've been trying to stimulate the economy up to now. You tried to get MagCan off the ground in the 1986 election. You claim it's a go. Of course, it falls through. In '89, three years later, they're determined to have it on, so they stump out taxpayers' dollars without any thought or care as to whether or not it's going to survive. Within a year and a half they're bankrupt, and we're now on the hook for \$115 million, a million dollars a month in interest payments. NovAtel: we sell AGT, a moneymaking concern, and turn around and buy back NovAtel. If that's the kind of stimulation that this government is going to put into the economy, we don't want any part of it. We do not want ministers handing out moneys to Northern Steel and Alberta-Pacific Terminals and Myrias corporation and GSR.

Chembiomed is one of the most interesting ones. This government built Chembiomed from scratch. They put in something like \$50 million, maybe as much as a hundred million if you count the amount of university time and effort that was put into it, and then at the end of it the minister has the gall to stand up and say: well, you know what it takes to commercialize a medical breakthrough; it takes 10 years and \$200 million. Well, I ask the minister: why did you sit down at the poker table if you didn't want to see the game through? He shouldn't have sat in on the game. He put in \$50 million over three years, pulled out on the company, and then said: what you've got to realize is that it takes \$200 million and 10 years. Well, either put in the 10 years and the \$200 million or

stay the hell out of the game. I mean, I don't know how dumb we can get. That's exactly the kind of . . .

**Chairman's Ruling
Parliamentary Language**

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. Order please. Is the hon. member prepared to consider the profanity that he used in his remarks?

MR. McEACHERN: I'm properly chastised. I apologize for saying the words, "stay the hell out."

Debate Continued

MR. McEACHERN: In any case, Mr. Chairman, what we need is a reorientation of our economic policy. We need to stop ministers from handing out taxpayers' dollars on an ad hoc basis to individual corporations, be it to try to pick winners or to help bail out their old friends. That's first and fundamental.

Secondly, we need a government that's going to nurture the economy of Alberta. This government jumped into a free trade deal without one study to tell us that it would be good for Alberta, not one study. What we need to start looking at is import replacement programs. What we need to do is to start talking to local communities about buying locally. We need local procurement policies. We need to start building and nurturing our own tax base in our own communities right throughout Alberta, including rural Alberta. What we do not need is to jump on George Bush's coattails in a North American free trade agreement. What we do not need is to jump on his bandwagon about the GATT negotiations. It's true that the European subsidies on agriculture are too high, but if you think jumping out of the frying pan into the fire of George Bush's coattails on total free trade in agriculture is going to solve the problems for rural Alberta, I'm afraid you're sadly mistaken.

What we need is a change of government policy, and we need to start building and nurturing our own local communities so that they can build their own tax bases and build a society where we can look after ourselves and become more self-sufficient, not throw ourselves onto the open market with the multinationals and the kind of vicious international competition that they are setting up. What they are doing is playing workers against workers and trying to reduce the workers of Canada to the level of the workers in Mexico. That is the agenda, and that's where we're going. We are shrinking the number of people that are paid a decent enough wage to be able to buy the goods and services. We have all the ability, the brains, the technology, the organization to produce, if we wanted to, enough goods and services for everybody. Instead of doing that, we're shrinking the number of people who can afford to buy the goods and services by pushing people out of reasonable paying jobs into poverty jobs along with the people who are unemployed and people who are on welfare. About 30 or 35 percent of the population in this country can't afford to buy their fair share of the goods and services that we could easily produce.

It's really kind of ironic that the Premier, speaking to the Rotary Club just before he went on holiday this January, actually talked about thinking ourselves into a recession, but of course it was going to be those people who pointed out that there were flaws in the government's policies that were going to cause it. Well, we didn't cause the difficulties. This government did and their policies did and their backing an agenda of Brian Mulroney and the multinationals that is not good for this economy. It is not good for the local people in the small towns and cities of this country. We need to change the orientation of that policy.

Mr. Chairman, this interim supply Bill has a lot of numbers in it that don't mean an awful lot. It varies, as I said, from 30 to 40 percent of the amount needed for the year in each case. What the Treasurer has to do, I guess, is to try to bring in a budget that is probably impossible. We've often kidded and called this Treasurer Magic Johnston because of the way he plays around with numbers and changes numbers and doctors numbers to make them look like what he wants them to look like, but he's boxed himself into a point where no matter what he does, the budget this year will be disappointing. It will show the bankruptcy of this government, and it will show that it's time this government retired, time they called an election, time they stepped aside and let a party that can run the province take over. I think that's what we're going to see in the near future.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's been some time since I've had the pleasure of commenting on the Treasurer's portfolio. While the circumstances under which I have acquired that privilege are unfortunate, it is with a good deal of interest that I once again have the opportunity to lock horns with the Treasurer.

I have observed over the years since I was last the Treasury critic that while there seems to be very little consistency in the manner in which this Treasurer runs the fiscal matters of this province, there are at least a couple of consistent elements. One is that the deficits are immense year after year, and two is that despite the obvious fiscal problems this government has created, the Treasurer never seems to stop smiling. I don't know whether those two are inversely related or directly related, but in any event that half-crazed grin across the way sometimes unsettles us over here.

MR. TAYLOR: With a surplus he'd go insane.

8:40

MR. MITCHELL: With a surplus he'd be hysterical. That's why we knew he didn't really have a surplus, Mr. Chairman.

In any event, Mr. Chairman, I am concerned, as are my caucus colleagues, with the prospect of authorizing this interim allocation of funds. I guess I'm concerned because I look at this Treasurer's track record and a couple of things are apparent to me. Given his lack of success in predicting deficits, predicting the need for special warrants, predicting expenditures, one can only have doubts when one looks at the list of funding requirements that the Treasurer is asking us to authorize in a debate such as this at this time.

I am concerned, Mr. Chairman, when I look at the history of special warrants that this minister has had to request, because it is an indicator, I think, of a lack of adequate responsibility in managing the fiscal matters of this province. That of course relates to a good deal of uncertainty that we would have in authorizing the kind of interim supply request that this minister is asking for. In 1986-87 he required \$288 million worth of special warrants. That peaked in 1990-91 at \$598 million. Now we're at \$406 million for the current fiscal year, and of course that's just what we know about. I expect that this Treasurer may set yet another record for unbudgeted expenditures, for expenditures which are "whoops, that's a surprise," for expenditures that were outside his ability to predict, and for expenditures which therefore truly do create great cause for concern about the competence with which this government is being managed fiscally.

Mr. Chairman, for a government that was able to manage through the most lucrative fiscal years experienced by perhaps any

government in the history of this country, as soon as this Treasurer took over in that portfolio, we saw debt servicing charges in 1986-87 of \$185 million, which was about 1.7 percent of the total budget. That wasn't bad. That has risen to \$1.05 billion in the current fiscal year, or about 8.3 percent of total expenditures.

Where we become extremely concerned is at the level of deficit spending year after year after year after year. You know, I had to admire the Treasurer, as I do from time to time, in his vigorous and pointed attack on the New Democrats in Ontario, where he pointed out so aptly that, yes, it was a frightening deficit that they brought down in their first budget. [interjections] Well, I want to draw the comparison between what my colleague from wherever was talking about, how Saskatchewan's New Democrats had no deficits and then all of a sudden the Conservatives took over and there were – or how did that work? The Conservatives had no deficits and then the New Democrats all of a sudden had to contend with these deficits somehow. Certainly in Ontario there were no Liberal deficits. There was a balanced budget, and then the New Democrats came in.

Let me make my point, Mr. Chairman. The Treasurer was so correct in pointing out that here was the New Democrats' first budget in Ontario, and its deficit was 18 percent of total expenditures: a horrifying figure, a horrifying level. That was a terrifying prospect, and it was a correct observation by this minister to point that out. But irony of ironies is that 18 percent would look like a picnic compared to what this minister has done by way of deficits. This Conservative Treasurer's first budget deficit, which of course corresponded to his first budget, was 34 percent of his total government expenditures. Now, wouldn't the people of Ontario have been aghast if a New Democratic Party had brought down a 34 percent deficit? Well, they were lucky. They got away with 18 percent. Albertans didn't. In 1988-89 the total deficit as a percentage of expenditure I think was in the order of 18 or 19 percent. In 1989-90 the total deficit as a percentage of total budgeted expenditure was upwards of 22 percent. So the fact is that this Treasurer, while being relatively aggressive about a New Democratic deficit in Ontario, has certainly nothing to brag about given his own track record.

What I should say, Mr. Chairman, is that out of the five budgets that he has brought down that we know about, that have been finalized, he has had three deficits in excess of 18 percent. Now, his sixth budget, '91-92, hasn't been finalized yet. We haven't seen the final figures, and we don't quite know what the deficit will be, but it isn't inconceivable that four of this Treasurer's last six budgets will involve deficits larger proportionately than the deficit experienced by the Ontario government and so roundly, vigorously, and aggressively criticized by this Treasurer. It is a classic case of the pot calling the kettle black.

What it amounts to in our circumstance here, Mr. Chairman, is more reason for us to doubt the kinds of figures that the Treasurer is presenting to us with respect to interim supply and for us to have serious reservations about handing over that much money once again to this Treasurer. What we would like to see before we can have the kind of confidence that we need to support and endorse this government's fiscal plan – and I use those words lightly with respect to this government – is a series of fiscal management reforms.

One of these, Mr. Chairman, which we feel is integral to proper fiscal management is efficiency audits by the Auditor General. We know that the Auditor General, of course, reviews what this government does each year, but his powers are limited. Our Auditor General can only say, "Did the Legislature authorize a million dollars for X expenditure area and at the end of the year was it spent in that way?" Well, generally speaking it is. About

the only thing that he can discover is whether some politician was stealing that money, and few do.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. JOHNSTON: Point of order, Mr. Chairman. If I heard the member accurately, he referred to a Member of the Legislative Assembly as stealing, which I think is totally out of order. I would hope that he would reconsider his words.

MR. MITCHELL: I'm struck by the sensitivity of the Treasurer to that, because that's not what I said. I said he could only determine whether some politician was doing that, and I say most of them don't.

MR. JOHNSTON: *Hansard* will show it. The rule still stands. You can check very clearly under 23. It imputes motives. If he's saying that my colleagues across the way have a guilty mind, that they're intending to steal from the government of Alberta, even the ND Party or even members of the Liberal Party wouldn't have that sort of a record or that sort of word stand to represent what the member has said. Surely, Mr. Chairman, Standing Orders and, in fact, parliamentary language clearly indicate that that's out of order.

Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: I'll reword that, Mr. Chairman. All the Auditor General of Alberta can do is determine what amount for a given area of expenditure the Legislature authorized and determine at the end of the year whether that money was spent there. He or she cannot determine whether that amount of money could have been spent more efficiently, less money could have been spent to achieve the same objective, or whether the money didn't have to be spent there at all.

The federal Auditor General, Mr. Chairman, has value-for-money audit powers, and while my caucus has brought to the Legislature time and time again this proposal to give the Auditor General true power to hold this government accountable and to ensure greater efficiency in the expenditure of Alberta taxpayers' funds, in fact the Treasurer and his caucus colleagues have resisted that particular initiative time and time again.

We need tougher budget scrutiny, Mr. Chairman. It's amazing to consider that year after year departments with huge budgets, over \$3 and a half billion for the Health department, have had as little as two or three or three and a half hours debate in this Legislature. Well, that just seems inadequate on the face of it, and I think any reasonable person would say that three and a half hours . . .

8:50

MR. PASZKOWSKI: None of your colleagues show up. Your colleagues aren't here.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, they would be if there was any hope of them having a chance to speak, Mr. Paszkowski.

AN HON. MEMBER: Where are your colleagues?

MR. MITCHELL: They're out campaigning in northern Alberta.

The fact is, Mr. Chairman, that it is a very, very broad brush that is passed over this budget, that there are far too rigorous limits on the amount of time that can be spent debating literally billions of dollars of budget in this Legislature.

What we are proposing is to in fact enhance the role of MLAs, even back-bench Conservative MLAs, by structuring subcommittees. Subcommittees would determine to review the department budgets on a much more detailed basis. They would have the power to call senior officials – anybody they wanted to – to appear before their proceedings so that not just the minister but these officials could be questioned and, I should point out, held accountable so that they, too, would understand that management accountability is expected of them. These committees would be given independent auditors so that they could get the kind of research and acquire the kinds of insights that would be necessary to make this process effective. It strikes me as odd that back-bench government MLAs even would resist this, because clearly they, too, could play a much more important role than it appears they are allowed to play by a strong and overbearing front bench.

We would suggest, Mr. Chairman, that priorities should be listed for the public. When it comes to capital expenditure, we would have an all-party committee of the Legislature that would review capital expenditures, request established priorities, and publicly list those priorities, indicating the line at which there is no more money. This would allow a government that seems to be pressed and pushed from all different directions, that seems to be without fortitude, strength, the courage to say no so that they could say: “Look; compare those capital projects at the top of the list with those capital projects at the bottom of the list. It is very clear that the priority is different and that we simply cannot give everybody everything that they are asking.”

We believe that all programs should be subject to a sunset principle, Mr. Chairman, so that no program goes on without review, without proper consideration periodically to see whether in fact it in its entirety is necessary.

We believe, Mr. Chairman, that contracts should be issued in public, and that in fact this process should be much more open than it is at this point.

We think that the Heritage Savings Trust Fund, what is left of it, should be sold so that the assets, such as they are, can be liquidated and that money can be put against the debt. The fact is that that Heritage Savings Trust Fund has not been utilized in the way that this government construed that it would be utilized. It has not achieved the objectives that this government had construed that it would be structured to achieve. In fact, it is, I believe, a millstone around managers' necks. They believe that they have money that in fact they do not have, and they continue to spend as though they have it. It is absurd on the one hand to owe money at a rate higher than the money in the Heritage Savings Trust Fund is earning. It is losing this province money day after day, and clearly we should liquidate the Heritage Savings Trust Fund and fold the cash into debt to pay down that debt.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we want to see a fundamental commitment from this government that they will use resource windfalls to pay down debt, not to instigate once again rampant, spiraling, government expenditures. I guess what we are saying is we need to see some common sense in the manner in which Albertans' money is being managed by this government. Given the track record of this Treasurer and given the absence of proper control processes, proper review processes in the fiscal management of this province, it is very, very difficult for us to support this Treasurer's request for interim supply. In fact, we will not support it; we will vote against it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready for the question?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

MR. GIBEAULT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have to get a few comments on the record with regards to these estimates that are before us. The Provincial Treasurer is proposing to ask our support for Advanced Education estimates. Certainly I am one who believes in investing in the future of our province and the young people of this province. I certainly am concerned about this, representing a constituency that has a very young demographic makeup. It concerns me the number of constituents that have been bringing to my attention how difficult it is to get access to the advanced education institutions of the province.

We all recognize that without some kind of postsecondary education, people have very limited prospects for employment and for contribution in our increasingly complex society. So I want to indicate to the Treasurer and to the Minister of Advanced Education that I want to see generous allocations under Assistance to Higher and Further Educational Institutions and also the vote Financial Assistance to Students. It does concern me, Mr. Chairman, that the policies of the government in this regard are very, very troubling because the tuition fees are continuing to escalate at a rate significantly above inflation, yet it becomes increasingly difficult to get student aid. Also, at the same time, this is a government that drags its feet when it comes to raising the minimum wage. So students are really getting squeezed from all angles. It's very difficult to get into the institutions, increasingly more difficult. The institutions are faced with establishing quotas and putting in grade levels, all things taken together that really just make it more difficult for people to get access to the universities, the colleges, the technical schools, and so on. Yet when they get in, there is limited financial assistance. Then it's more difficult for them even to make money in the labour market because the minimum wages in this province are so low.

Mr. Chairman, in terms of the estimates for the Career Development and Employment department, I have to express my concern. I would ask the Treasurer to clarify this, if he would, in his comments, but my understanding is that under Career Development and Employment there is going to be less initiatives, less spending in terms of the job creation programs, for STEP and PEP, the priority employment program and the student temporary employment program. Despite the rhetoric we saw in the throne speech that said that the government was going to give priority to jobs and stimulating the economy, there was nothing in the throne speech, and I challenge the Treasurer to tell us more today in these estimates he has put before us and has asked our approval for, of exactly what job initiatives there are going to be in there. If there are some new ones, I'm going to vote for them, but I haven't heard them yet, and I put the challenge to the Treasurer to justify them and to give us something hopeful that we can share with our constituents who are facing an unemployment rate in the neighbourhood of 10 percent, one of the most difficult job markets in recent memory. We have to get substantial commitments through the Department of Career Development and Employment to address this tragedy.

Mr. Chairman, also under the Department of Career Development and Employment is vote 3, Immigration and Settlement Services. We just have to remind the government one more time of the pressing need for additional services for English as a Second Language. Members may remember that the government's own task force on this issue recommended just not that long ago that the government should be spending an additional \$9 million under that particular vote. I want to put it to the Treasurer: is there going to be an addressing of that particular problem? It's not satisfactory – we have to realize this – to be bringing in

newcomers to our country and to our province and not giving them an adequate chance by putting them through a proper period of English as a Second Language training that not only has basic English but also has provision for providing some professional and technical training in the English language as well. We're wasting a great deal of talent in that area.

9:00

In the area of Culture and Multiculturalism, Mr. Chairman, we have to make a few comments there. I am shocked, frankly, that the Treasurer is putting before us a request in vote 4, Multiculturalism Development, of \$322,000 and under vote 1, Departmental Support Services, of \$689,000, of which some part has got to be to pay the minister's salary, when the Premier is on the record as saying that multiculturalism should not have the force of law, that we shouldn't have any legal support for this. How can the Treasurer be putting this before us today? I'm shocked that the Treasurer has the nerve to defy the Premier. That is what he is doing. The Premier has said that there is no legal framework to be had for multiculturalism, that we ought to take it out of the framework of law. If we don't have it in the framework of law, we sure as heck don't need a minister for it. That's money wasted, right down the tube. So I put it to the Treasurer to sharpen his pencil there. He and the Premier ought to get their act together. Either we have multiculturalism in this province and we provide some support for it or we don't. Now, which is it? The Premier is saying one thing, and the Treasurer is saying something else. It's too bad the minister of multiculturalism's not with us today, because I'd like to know what his thoughts are on this subject as well.

Mr. Chairman, again I mention the minister's salary. We just heard today and over the weekend his threats to the Ukrainian community, anybody who seems to disagree with him. Why are we paying a person like that? We know of all the conflicts he's had with other ethnocultural communities: the Sikhs, the Council of India Societies, the controversies of all kinds. If there's anything in these estimates that are before us that is a total and utter waste of money, it's the salary that goes to the Minister of Culture and Multiculturalism. I want to tell the Treasurer that he's got my support as a measure to realize an economy and save some money. We could slash that item.

Now, under Education, Mr. Chairman, I have to wonder about the commitment of the government to dealing with the problem of the Teachers' Retirement Fund. I know that the Minister of Education is apparently lining up some meetings in the near future with members of the Alberta Teachers' Association, and perhaps we can be hopeful in that area. Certainly there has to be action. A great number of teachers in my constituency are very concerned about the viability of their pension plan. Just earlier today I filed a petition with names of 230 teachers in the schools of Edmonton-Mill Woods who signed petitions. They want to see some leadership on behalf of the Minister of Education and the Treasurer to bring a resolution to this outstanding problem so that they will know that there is a solid pension that they can count on when they retire.

I want to also say, Mr. Chairman, that we have to look at being generous in terms of funding education. We shouldn't think of that as an expenditure. We ought to think of it as an investment, to use a word that the Treasurer likes, and I know his colleagues like it, because that's what it is, and we ought to be clear about that. Spending on education is an investment in our future. I know that school boards and teachers and schools have been struggling with budget allocations that barely cover inflation and in some cases don't in recent years. I want to be assured on

behalf of my constituents that the future of our children is not going to be compromised yet one more time this year by this government.

Mr. Chairman, to move along to the area of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, I want it to be clear that I certainly support this agency. It does a lot of fine work. If the Solicitor General would avail himself of their services, I'd be even stronger in support of it. He obviously needs some help there.

In terms of the Department of Health, Mr. Chairman, I also want to mention that people in Edmonton-Mill Woods, in my constituency, are concerned about the funding for hospitals. We have one hospital in Mill Woods, the Grey Nuns hospital, which is doing a good job as best it can under the circumstances. They had a recent cut in their budget even though they are serving a suburban metropolitan area that is growing daily with new houses and new families moving in. They are increasingly being squeezed, and I am very concerned about that situation. I would like to ensure from the Treasurer and the Minister of Health that there is going to be a strong commitment to ensuring that people in constituencies like mine, Edmonton-Mill Woods, and around the province will be able to count on quality health care when they need it. That is becoming increasingly in question, and I want to have some kind of response to that.

Mr. Chairman, in terms of the Executive Council vote, we have a vote for the Occupational Health and Safety Services. We noticed in the throne speech that the government was proposing to introduce some new health and safety in the workplace initiatives. I hope the minister is paying attention to my comments here so that he can perhaps respond.

Mr. Chairman, could we have some order from the people on the other side there? I'm speaking to the minister of Occupational Health and Safety. I'm speaking about the estimates of the Occupational Health and Safety Services under Executive Council. If the minister is now tuned in, I would like to ask him if he'd like to comment and elaborate on those very vague comments that were contained in the throne speech for new initiatives in the workplace. They sounded interesting.

I'm wondering if they're going to follow up on the suggestion of the labour movement in this province for having health and safety committees in every workplace in this province. If not, I'd like to know what they are, because clearly we've got much more to do in terms of reducing the appalling rate of accidents in this province. Some 60,000 people every year in workplaces in this province are injured or have a disability that they develop at their workplace to the point where they have to absent themselves from work and have to apply for workers' compensation benefits. Clearly, 60,000 workers who have families and dependents and so on - I would put it this way to the Treasurer and to the minister of Occupational Health and Safety and to the government: we cannot afford to let that tremendous loss continue unabated. We need to do much more in an aggressive way in terms of health and safety initiatives. As I said, the government made some references to that in the throne speech, and I want to know, in terms of these estimates that are before us: what exactly does the government have in mind? I'm inclined to support the government on the new initiatives, but I don't know what they are at this point. I can't vote for something when I don't know what is before us, so I'm asking the government to give us some more information about that.

Mr. Chairman, in terms of the Department of Labour, I have received a number of complaints from constituents about the lack of effort that seems to go into dealing with complaints to the employment standards branch. I have a number of cases where employment standards has taken a great deal of time in dealing

with complaints, has seemed to have a very white-glove approach to employers, in fact not doing what they're supposed to be doing: the Department of Labour standing up for workers. Sometimes it seems to me that the Department of Labour is confusing its role with the department of economic development perhaps. The Department of Labour, as I understood it, was to try to make sure that there are fair working conditions in this province and that employers abide by the labour code in this province, the Employment Standards Code. Yet I find a number of instances where people from the employment standards branch are cutting deals with employers to only pay employees half or less what they're owed instead of making sure that employers pay exactly and fully the very minimum amounts that are set out under the Employment Standards Code. I want to know that the Department of Labour is beefing up the employment standards branch. If they're not going to do that, they will not have my support on that vote.

In terms of Municipal Affairs, I would like to know what this government is proposing to do in the housing situation. We are facing a crisis now, Mr. Chairman, in affordable housing. We've had this government's federal cousins, the Tories in Ottawa, in their last budget eliminate the co-operative housing program, and I want to know what the provincial government is proposing to do about that. Are they even concerned? Have they made any representation on behalf of Albertans to try to ensure the viability of the co-operative housing program? I don't know. I haven't heard it. I'm giving the government a chance to go on the record tonight to tell us. Are there any new initiatives from the provincial level to make sure that we have new affordable housing? It concerns me that many of the new subdivisions of my own constituency are all now developments that are exclusively for high-income people. We are creating problems down the road for us if we end up like our friends south of the border, where they have wealthy people in the area in exclusive jurisdictions surrounded by high fences to keep everybody else out and some people end up in very poor accommodation, very substandard accommodation, or even homeless.

I'm asking the government to let us know what initiatives they are proposing in the area of housing. We know that the former Minister of Municipal Affairs, who's responsible for housing, left his mark by being the guy who hacked and slashed at the housing and Municipal Affairs budget. I'm hoping that we'll have something more rational coming out of the Department of Municipal Affairs now with the new minister.

Let me just conclude, Mr. Chairman, by making a few comments in terms of the budget of the Solicitor General. Vote 1, of course, includes the minister's salary. For all reasons that everybody's familiar with, I think we ought to simply eliminate that figure down to zero.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9:10

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Belmont.

MR. SIGURDSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to get a few remarks on record tonight. I know that the Provincial Treasurer has come to us with a great deal of concern about the end of the month fast approaching. He has to have a number of dollars available in order to continue on the operation of government. Now, I can appreciate that, and this afternoon we talked about guaranteeing that there would be interim supply, that we would pass that. We were concerned about the amount of debate that was going to be afforded the opposition to discuss some of the programs where some of this interim supply was about to go. We haven't seen that yet, and our concerns haven't been addressed.

This Provincial Treasurer wants \$4.4 billion in order, hopefully, to sustain the provincial economy for about a third of the year; I would think that should work out to about one-third of the year. Now, I would hope that some of those dollars are being dedicated to those programs that the Premier wants to use and to develop and to stimulate the economy. After all, we heard repeatedly in the Speech from the Throne that this government was concerned about the Alberta economy and jobs. Just on the second page, very early into the Speech from the Throne, the Lieutenant Governor says, "Stimulating the Alberta economy and jobs for Albertans must be our first priority." Well, I would most certainly agree. My goodness, Mr. Chairman, we have over a hundred thousand Albertans who are without work. So it's an obligation that the dollars that are expended by this government stimulate the economy such that jobs will be created for tens of thousands of Albertans who are now looking for work. Even in the second paragraph that's exactly what the Speech from the Throne addresses: stimulating our economy to provide jobs. The third paragraph: the words I highlighted there talk about what government "can provide in a fiscally responsible manner." A wonderful use of phrase; good choice in the English language. The Provincial Treasurer comes before us requesting \$4.4 billion, but where in this request have we got any idea about how the economy is to be stimulated, about how many jobs are to be created in what departments, on what projects? All of that information is very sorely lacking.

I'm very concerned about the mixed messages that I'm getting from the Provincial Treasurer and the gentleman who sits to the Provincial Treasurer's right, the Premier. I hear that the Provincial Treasurer thought that the Mazankowski budget that was just released in the federal House of Commons was not a bad budget, not a bad budget in 1992, seeming to meet the needs of Canadians at this time. That was a do-nothing budget. It wasn't going to stimulate very much at all, and here's the Premier now talking about Alberta having to stimulate the economy. How are we going to do that? Are we going to have the same kind of budget in Alberta that Don Mazankowski, the federal treasurer, has? Is that the kind of stimulation we're talking about? I would hope not, Mr. Chairman, because our needs are greater than that. The needs of the unemployed are greater than that, and if that's the kind of stimulation that the Premier hopes to have encased in an Alberta budget, then there's not much hope for the unemployed and there's not much hope for the Alberta economy.

So I would ask the Provincial Treasurer tonight when he makes some closing remarks to indicate to all members of the Assembly and especially to the unemployed just what projects, just what programs are going to be developed so that the economy is stimulated. Don't ask us just to come and sign a cheque away for \$4.4 billion without telling us where some of that money is going. What programs, what new programs, what innovative programs are going to be offered the unemployed so that indeed this economy is being stimulated?

As I go through the paper that was handed out today and I go through the departments, I can think of a number of programs that every department has as an opportunity to create jobs. I don't know if they're going to be tried or attempted. Maybe the government has some greater plan. Certainly today when I asked the Minister of Career Development and Employment to tell me what plans were specifically targeted towards smaller urban communities and indeed even the rural communities in our province, the Minister of Career Development and Employment told me I had to wait until we had a budget. Well, here's interim supply. Give me at least a little taste. Show me just a little bit of where that stimulation is going to occur.

It is going to occur in the Department of Career Development and Employment? My goodness, we've had all kinds of cutbacks in that department over the course of time. We had PEP and STEP. STEP was introduced at a time when the Conservative administration of Peter Lougheed was concerned about the youth unemployment rate. That's why that program was introduced. Now we're told that oh well, you know, unemployment isn't that bad; we can cut back on the program; cut back by 50 percent. [interjection] The Member for Redwater-Andrew agrees. The problem is, though, Mr. Chairman, that youth unemployment is twice the rate in 1992 than what it was when STEP was first introduced. So is it a cutback? Is that the fiscal responsibility that the government wants us to deal with and just ignore youth unemployment, or should we be trying to stimulate the economy and making sure that people between the ages of 16 and 24 have some opportunity to work, rather than be fiscally responsible? What's the choice? Some tough choices have to be made.

I don't see a municipal infrastructure program being regarded to the degree that it ought to be. I know that there are all kinds of problems inside municipalities with decaying sewer systems. Goodness knows, the transportation system in the city of Edmonton could use an injection of capital that will provide all kinds of capital construction jobs. Why wouldn't we be doing that in a time when the labour market requires that money? We're not going to be competing with the full employment figures and driving up the cost of labour. Now would be a good time to inject that money into the economy so that we can put people back to work. If we're going to wait until we have an unemployment rate of 3 or 4 percent, one, we might be waiting forever, but, more importantly, if we're going to try and then find people to work on those jobs, they're going to be working elsewhere and we're going to have to pay a premium to move away from one job in the private sector to bring them into public capital works projects. I don't see those programs contained in here. I haven't heard any discussion coming from the Provincial Treasurer about that matter.

9:20

Environment. My goodness, in the period of time since we last met in the Assembly last June we've had all kinds of concerns expressed by Albertans about environmental matters: about cleaning up the environment, about effluent discharge, about all kinds of emissions that are going on. Another opportunity, Mr. Chairman, quite frankly, for this government to become involved in a productive and proactive way. I don't see that coming from this government. It's just not there. Here is an opportunity for us to get involved in an area that quite frankly the private sector doesn't want to be involved in to the degree that it ought to be. Yet, as we try to stimulate our economy, here's an area where we could show some leadership and most certainly get people involved in environmental awareness and cleanup.

The Department of Family and Social Services. Again with the rate of high unemployment we've got in Alberta, as people start turning away from the unemployment insurance that they may have available to them for a short period of time, if there's no turnaround in this economy, people are going to be moving off of UI and onto social services. The social workers that I speak with are already overloaded. That was one of the major factors in a strike last year at this time: the caseload of the average social worker in the province of Alberta. I recall a number of commitments that came out of that strike, out of that labour disruption, where the government said, "Oh, we're going to look at case-work." Well, if you did, I don't know that you looked closely enough. If you think you did, then take a second look, take a third look, because as those people who lose their unemployment

insurance benefit turn to the Department of Family and Social Services, it's going to increase the caseload for social workers. We're going to need more folk there providing services: different kinds of services, not just intake workers and paper handlers.

The departments of Health and Municipal Affairs. We have the opportunity to build at this time capital construction projects that would house senior citizens. I'm sure that most every Member of the Legislative Assembly regardless of what political party they represent or what constituency they represent anywhere in the province have probably had petitions from their constituents pointing out the need for senior citizens' housing at low cost. [interjection] I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, I stand corrected. I thought I said every member, and the Member for Lloydminster says that he has not yet been contacted by a senior citizens group in his constituency. Well, let me tell you I have. Maybe I'll correct myself. I thank you for pointing that out to me. I'll correct myself and speak only for myself and tell you that I have had a number of groups come to my constituency office. I've gone out to a number of groups, and they are asking for capital costs so that they can construct homes that will keep people together: senior citizens, people that have pioneered this province wanting just to stay with their spouse.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

There's an opportunity for us to provide funds for that if we want to stimulate the economy and provide those jobs. Now is a good time to try and actively pursue that, but I don't see the government offering that as a possibility. I'm saddened by that, because I think those senior citizens deserve those projects. I can tell you that every time I go to the Emmanuel Home in my constituency, the seniors there have been trying to get funding for their home, for people that come out of the Dutch community, for over a decade. They've got the land; they've got some dollars available. Now would be a good time for us to provide funding, to provide mortgage, to provide capital money. Well, it doesn't seem to be forthcoming from this government. Indeed, the Minister of Health wrote a letter not too long ago to the proponents of that project and said there's nothing there. Well, if this is going to be a budget that stimulates the economy, that's one of the projects that could very well have gone ahead. Sadly, very sadly, it's not there.

My colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods spoke about the employment standards branch. Again I want to tell you that I think the number of people that are working at the employment standards branch - I guess I differ somewhat from my colleague - are providing yeoman service. They haven't got enough hours in the working day to keep up with the complaints that are coming in, and they can't enforce them. It's no wonder the Department of Labour wanted to try to secretly, covertly, privatize the employment standards branch, because they could then abdicate their responsibility to working Albertans that have a grievance against their employer. Well, there's a branch of government that deserves more funds because they work on behalf of Albertans who have been wronged, and I don't see any money going into that area.

You know, Mr. Chairman, just tonight, before we assembled here at 8 o'clock to discuss these requests for interim supply, we were hosted by the Co-operative Council of Alberta, and one of the groups that belongs to the co-operative council is the housing co-ops. Now, they are having all kinds of problems accessing federal dollars. In fact, they're not getting any. That's the Mazankowski solution. That's how Mazankowski stimulates the economy, by taking money away from people that are trying to

provide low-cost co-operative housing. Here's an opportunity once again for the Provincial Treasurer to start looking at co-op programs. Why shouldn't the province of Alberta be providing people that want to live in their own home dollars so that they can develop their own co-op? You would think that those folk that wanted to provide to some degree their labour, their participation in the co-operative movement would be responsible folk. I know that the two co-ops in my constituency certainly are. Again, in this department where there's an opportunity to provide that, no funding, no stimulation, no idea if that money is going to be coming down.

Social housing: another area where we could provide capital dollars to make sure that we're providing services for Albertans in need at this time of economic recession. The Edmonton Housing Authority has a waiting list so long that people who now go to put their names on the list for social accommodation are just rejected. The list has become unmanageable; that's how many people require social housing. This government, through the Department of Municipal Affairs, is trying to unload an awful lot of that. Well, another opportunity to create, to spend dollars and stimulate, to provide jobs for very needed services, but I don't see any commitment coming from this government, nothing there at all.

I was interested when the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark spoke about creating all-party committees. I think that's a suggestion that has a great deal of merit. I believe that if we were to have those all-party committees of the Legislature, there might be a better way to examine budgetary concerns. There's no reason why we need to have as many members here this evening to go through interim supply, and certainly, when we get into Committee of the Whole during the budget debate, there are members here that have no interest or limited interest in some of the departments that are being debated. We could be put into subcommittees and go off into those areas where we have a great deal of interest and examine line by line, dollar by dollar, the expenditures that are being proposed for that department. Then when you come back into the Legislative Assembly, you limit the debate to perhaps the minister, the opposition critic, and the third-party critic. All of the work would have been done in a committee and then brought back to the Committee of the Whole. That's the opportunity to limit the debate.

You know, it was interesting last year when the Member for St. Paul, the Member for Drayton Valley, the Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn, and myself attended a conference in Darwin, Australia, the Australasian public accounts conference. Very different attitude to what we have in Alberta, to what we have in most jurisdictions in Canada. Much, much smaller public accounts committees, where, believe it or not, the chairmen and ministers go to the public accounts committees and say: "I'm having a problem with my bureaucracy. Can you investigate this?" Those committees have saved millions of tax dollars for the Australian taxpayer.

9:30

MR. JOHNSTON: We need another minister.

MR. SIGURDSON: No, we don't need another minister, honest to goodness. No, that's not one of the jobs that I'm trying to advocate for.

But there's an area that we ought to examine seriously so that we can take a look at how we're spending dollars and how we're being accountable to the Alberta taxpayer. Why do we need to have a Public Accounts Committee of 21 people? Quite frankly, of the 21 I believe there are 15 members of the government caucus on there. I think that the Australian example is a better use of

electd members' time and certainly a better use of the tax dollars, the Australian taxpayer's contribution to their general revenue fund: committees of five or maybe seven with only one more government member than the opposition. They actually have staff to go and examine departmental expenditures, so they're checking up on a constant basis the expenditures of departments. What it is politicians doing essentially value-for-money audits, which the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark suggests the Auditor General be involved in. It's done on an ongoing basis, and it seems to be very successfully employed in Australia. I would most certainly like to see that kind of accountability developed in this Legislature so that we can lead perhaps North America, most certainly Canada, in public accounts committees.

Well, Mr. Chairman, I did want to get those remarks on record. I do believe that we have to have some kind of indication tonight from the Provincial Treasurer about this \$4.4 billion, not where it's going to be spent but how it's going to be spent in a way that's going to stimulate the economy and create those jobs. That was the commitment in here. I hear from the Minister of Career Development and Employment that that'll be the major concern which will be addressed in the budget, but I don't think it's too much to ask the Provincial Treasurer to stand up tonight and tell us, just give us an outline of what programs he hopes to use that are going to stimulate the economy to provide jobs for Albertans.

Thank you very much.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. DOYLE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Indeed, it's nice to be back here after having almost a year off. No fault of ours, of course. We were looking forward to coming back last fall.

MR. DAY: It must be nice to have a year off. We work every day. We're working 16 hours a day.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order please. Order, Red Deer-North.

MR. DOYLE: Mr. Chairman, I referred to being in the Legislature approximately a year ago, and I referred to being away from the Legislature for almost a year, and it certainly was no fault, I assure you, of the Official Opposition, because this Legislature should have sat at least six months in the last year.

Mr. Chairman, the estimates before us tonight I understand, having been a former municipal councillor and mayor. We had to pass interim budgets, but we always had the information before us. There were not many of those councils that there wasn't opposition on. They weren't always just *carte blanche* in front of us. But I see the \$89,000 for the office of the Ethics Commissioner. I'm much in favour of that, and perhaps later on I'll address the reasons why. It's because of the antics of at least one certain minister in this government.

Mr. Chairman, under the Attorney General's estimates, he has \$1.3 million for Fatality Inquiries; number 7, Crimes Compensation, \$480,000. Last year some members will recall the issue over the people who were contaminated by fuel in Hinton. I would think that more money could have been put into Crimes Compensation at that time, and that perhaps will save us something this year when some of these constituents and people who were contaminated by this fuel perhaps will come under the other title of Fatality Inquiries. This government has sat back and done nothing, caused a quasi-judicial inquiry that produced nothing. The people who were allowed to dig up the tanks and travel, beyond anybody's doubt, to some hidden place, where some people certainly know they are, have not been punished or had to pay any costs for the ill health of those who were contaminated.

The minister responsible for Occupational Health and Safety, of course, in his usual stance avoided doing anything to assist these people. So I would hope that the minister this year will consider some help for these people and have a proper inquiry so that these culprits can be caught.

Under Energy, Mr. Chairman, on the Minerals Management, I would hope that the management of the AOSTRA facilities at Fort McMurray, with an infusion of – the Oil Sands Research Assistance is \$5.495 million. Certainly with that amount of money the minister should not waste any more time on his meetings with people on other sources of energy, like the nuclear people.

Under Northern Development the Member for Edmonton-Belmont raised the question of all-party committees. I'm sure that the Member for Grande Prairie had a conversation recently as to why all the members who represent people under the northern development area are not on that committee. It is strange to me that when one is elected, whether they be in the Official Opposition or otherwise, when a town like Grande Cache comes within the boundaries of the northern development committee, the member that was elected in that area is not allowed to sit on that committee or have input into that committee. I would hope, Mr. Chairman, that these things will change in the future, especially when the New Democrats form the next government. You can rest assured that we'll be fair to not only the people of Alberta but to the other MLAs who are elected in the Legislature.

Mr. Chairman, under Occupational Health and Safety Services, \$4.124 million was requested. I would like to know if this \$4.124 million is money that is needed for things the Occupational Health and Safety minister does, like in regards to the seniors in Grande Cache, for instance, who had received a grant from the government of some \$26,000. The minister held that cheque in his pocket or in some place unfamiliar to others for some weeks and then on a Friday afternoon used the government plane to fly to Grande Cache to deliver this cheque. In the meantime, the seniors of Grande Cache wanted to pay the local businesspeople. They went to the banker, and the banker phoned the department. Certainly the cheque was out, and they should receive it any day, so the bank allowed the seniors to float an overdraft at some 21 percent. Well, those seniors in Grande Cache are out several hundred dollars while this minister was waltzing around with the cheque and then using a government plane some weeks down the road to fly to Grande Cache with his entourage to deliver this cheque. I've written letters to the minister and asked him to pay out of his own pocket at least the expenses that were incurred by the senior citizens, not to mention the cost of that plane for an unnecessary flight on a nice day to Grande Cache. I was very pleased to learn that he didn't have to pay for his lunch while he was up there; some of his buddies bought it for him. I hope that the money in this request is for none of these antics for a minister like this.

AN HON. MEMBER: Which one?

9:40

MR. DOYLE: I said which one it was. We all know which one it was: the minister of Occupational Health and Safety, none other. The usual stance of this minister, and he's asking us to approve somewhere over \$4 million. Shameful. Shameful.

Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to see that fish and wildlife are asking for some more funds for Fish and Wildlife Conservation. Indeed, I would hope that further than just conserving the fish and wildlife, some moneys will go into increasing the fish stocks in Alberta lakes. Outdoor activities are becoming more predominant in Alberta as time goes on. Especially with the nice climate we

have now, people are already looking forward to getting their fishing licence and getting out there on the lakes and streams.

Forest management: some \$49 million. I would hope that a lot of that money is spent on reforestation rather than decimating those trees. It was interesting to have a call today from a school in Athabasca asking if I could arrange for some hundred children to tour the Weldwood mill in Hinton to see how their operation goes and to see how the water content is near that Hinton mill. I would hope that some money in Environment would go to funding zero effluent for all the mills in Alberta, not just the Weldwood mill.

Mr. Chairman, the Member for Edmonton-Belmont raised a question on co-op housing. Recently, as we're all aware, the federal government, their country cousins, chopped the funding for co-op housing for all the people in Canada. I would hope that Alberta Mortgage and Housing, in the sale of some of their properties, would turn that money over to seniors who need some assistance in co-op housing, especially in rural Alberta.

The estimates before us are something that one must just guess at rather than being sure whether the right statements are made in these drafts. Under Tourism, Mr. Chairman, I see that the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation is asking for several million dollars. I would have thought that amalgamating the departments of Tourism and Recreation and Parks would have saved us many millions of dollars. For instance, Kananaskis Country Management: in 1988-89 the Auditor General raised the point of an overpayment of \$635,000 to Kananaskis Village Resort Association. In one particular year the former minister withheld \$58,000 based on repairs to the facilities. That will be less each year, I understand. The Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation mentioned recently at the TIAALTA convention in Jasper that his budget had increased four times. He bragged that it had increased four times. Well, that minister should be more responsible and reduce that budget somewhat. If they collected that \$635,000 from Kananaskis Village Resort that's been outstanding since 1988-89, he would only need \$3 million, not \$3.6 million, to be spent again on Kananaskis Country.

Mr. Chairman, in the Department of Transportation and Utilities the Construction and Operation of Transportation Systems, of course, would be the main systems under transportation. There appears to be no money here for road projects. I recall the Premier some years ago stepping off a plane, going to pave all the rural roads in Alberta, but we have Highway 40 between Grande Prairie and Grande Cache that for some years has been left off the schedule for paving. I had the opportunity last weekend to travel from Grande Prairie to Grande Cache, and believe me, there were enough cars on that road – in fact, as many as there are some days on Highway 16. I think the minister of transportation should this year for sure finish the paving on Highway 40 between Grande Prairie and Grande Cache.

Mr. Chairman, under Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, and talking about job creation, I wanted to inform the members of the Legislature – the minister, of course, already knows – that horse logging operations are going on in the Whitecourt riding with some people from the Wildwood area. We were originally out there and spent some time looking at the operation of this horse logging. It employs some six people to take one acre of trees off each day. Mechanical clear-cutting takes six people to do 50 acres without a tree left. The horse loggers generate a lot of employment. To do that same 50 acres, of course, would be 300 people, plus all the spin-offs from horse logging. We don't ask to go back 50 years or anything like that, but they have a unique operation going. Those people who are employed there are hardworking

outdoor people who really want to do the job and produce the amount of timber that is necessary to make the operation viable.

When the horse loggers take the trees from the bush, the only mechanical thing they use is a Cat that goes in there and clears a path through the willows or the alders, the smaller trees, just to make tracks where they go in with horses and pull the logs out that have been felled by a faller. They pile their logs along the side of the road the very same as the mechanical loggers. At that point, the trucks come and pick it up and do not harm the forest bed. Trees are left there. Some as big as eight to 10 inches around are left there, but because you've opened up the sunlight to them, many of those trees generate much larger each year.

The horse loggers estimate that they'll be back in some of those same places in four years and will be able to take out just about as many trees again. The smaller trees will be coming up. The pine and spruce that were overshadowed will be able to shoot up through, and perhaps another four years later they'll be able to take the pine or the spruce out of there.

Mr. Chairman, the bird life and the animal life remain the same. They're undisturbed, basically. Forestry, Lands and Wildlife work closely with these people, and they leave trees that have certain elbows in them so the bigger birds can nest there. It's a great benefit for the creation of jobs. We don't ask that all the forests be horse logged or have logging in this area, but if we would just work towards 50 percent mechanical logging and 50 percent horse logging or some selective logging, I'm sure that we would have a forest that would generate for many years.

Mr. Chairman, I would hope very seriously that the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, rather than just protecting the fish by cutting back on fish taken, would supply some funds to restock many of the lakes and many of the streams in this province.

My colleagues before me have mentioned the teachers' pension. I don't see in these interim estimates where there's any place for any help to the teachers' pension, but we hope that the Treasurer addresses that situation very shortly.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Stony Plain.

MR. WOLOSZYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I really appreciated the eloquent education lesson that the hon. Treasurer tried to give us. He talked about interim being somewhere "between two points," as I recall in his comments. That provoked some heavy thought on my part to figure out which two points this particular Treasurer could be referring to, and do you know, Mr. Chairman, it finally hit me. The two points that he is so concerned about and we are also concerned about are incompetence and mismanagement, and his interim supply certainly fits well within these two points. He went on to define what "supply" was. He said it was dollars. I'm afraid to say that these dollars are all deficit dollars, unfortunately. When we speak about interim supply and the necessity for it, we have to look at one of the Treasurer's points: mismanagement. If this government were to manage properly, we would have been convened at such a time when all the estimates could be completed in time for the expenditures at the end of March. The only reason we have a request for an interim supply is because of the fact that the government, for whatever reasons, did not choose to call the House into session.

9:50

However, having said that, we are responsible in the Official Opposition. We know that the people in the government must continue to function, and in order to function they have to have the resources to do it. However, that still begs the question as to

why we would have \$4 billion listed on 11 pages – one side, at that, of eight and a half by 11 paper, poorly utilized – no explanations, no rationale, no direction, just a few numbers and the Treasurer's persistence to try and convince us that we should help him somewhere between mismanagement and incompetence.

One of the areas that the Treasurer could be looking at to help his revenue side is to follow some advice which he was given a couple of years ago and implement his crazy propane tax at the wholesale level and thereby catch the people who are not paying it currently at the retail level. He knows what I'm talking about. If he chose to look into it, he would soon find that he could increase his revenues there significantly and equalize the payments that should be made by the people using it for motor fuel.

There is a significant number of dollars going towards education, and quite frankly I support that. The only problem we have is that there's hundreds of millions tossed around supposedly, as the minister alluded to earlier in question period, yet we don't have any kind of direction given when matters of health arise within the schools themselves. The issues are avoided. There are also the threats given to school boards for next year with respect to the twice a year count, better known as an unfair claw-back, based on the threat that if schools don't keep students in, then we'll fix them with dollars.

Staying on education, in 1983 the then minister King established the Minister's Informal Task Force on Teachers' Pensions, and the Department of Education, the ATA, and the Teachers' Retirement Fund were all participants. The report came out in 1984, and it recommended amongst other things that teachers' contributions be increased, that cost of living allowances be guaranteed, and that the government take responsibility for unfunded liability as it existed at that time. The report also recommended establishing a fully funded plan in the future, and currently this Treasurer has not taken any initiative to sort out the Teachers' Retirement Fund. Yes, he will say that he's got the Minister of Education going. I would hope that it's true. We'll have to verify that to see if in fact meetings were really scheduled between members of Alberta Education and the Alberta Teachers' Association in response to the questions presented by Ponoka-Rimbey earlier. That's one area I would like to see addressed, and unfortunately I guess we'll just have to hope. We don't get any kind of straight answers.

There are all sorts of crises happening in education currently, largely due to lack of direction. Boards are becoming extremely apprehensive. They get threatened with different kinds of processes every year. Last year it was something called corporate pooling; this year it's the claw-back on the twice a year count. Then report cards that heaven knows where they emanate from, but they are report cards telling us I'm not sure what. If they chose to pay attention in question period, if they'd followed the suggestions from the opposition, they wouldn't have had to waste the money on presenting most of that report card.

The Department of Health has a very significant amount of money that they are looking for, and again, because it's a people service, I don't have any great difficulty in supporting that. However, when the health units are permitted to withdraw without cause and without sufficient notice immunization programs from a school in the province, that makes me wonder if in fact either Education or Health are really doing their job, because again they put the health of students, of young children very low on their list of priorities.

The interim supply request obviously covers all the departments in the government, Mr. Chairman, and we have to sort of question again the Attorney General's spending. We have court backlogs. We have long waiting periods for court transcripts. We have clerical employees, the lowest people on that pay scale. When they are away on legitimate sick leave, they are not replaced, and

the workload gets shifted over onto other people, creating an administrative backlog that's unnecessary. The very way that appearances in court are scheduled brings one's curiosity to the fore. For example, it took 10 months to resolve a simple child custody case, although the legislation in the Child Welfare Act specifies much shorter time periods. But the lawyers on the government side found an angle to keep delaying it until the 10-month period expired. I have to wonder if it is very good to just turn around and give out \$4 billion, a good portion of it going to the Attorney General's department, without having a little bit better performance or request for better performance from the people involved there.

Under the Solicitor General's department we have heard over the course of the last year that there have been significant negotiations going on to improve policing in Alberta, the number of policemen. We haven't seen any movement there, and I think with the rising crime rate and the general problems that are occurring, I would like to see some movement made, especially in rural Alberta, to increase the number of RCMP made available to the various areas. I would also like to see some programs highlighted and promoted by the Solicitor General's department which have not been done yet. The one I'm referring specifically to is the rural Crime Watch area. Lip service is given to it, but actual support is not.

Under transportation we have a good chunk of money going to Alberta Resources Railway, and it's rather interesting to see that that railway keeps on hauling money out of the government treasury and not hauling many resources to replenish it. It's in other ridings too, hon. member, and it's still the same thing. It's not exactly being operated the way it should be.

Mr. Chairman, all in all, I think between the two points for interim supply that the Treasurer has referred to – namely, incompetence and mismanagement – it's unfortunate that due to the lateness of the year we have a hard time not to support this. I would like to see a little bit more accountability come in, a little bit more explanation, and perhaps even an indication of what portion of the overall request these numbers are going to be.

10:00

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

The other area of the economy that has been very, very hard hit has been agriculture. I have seen various lip service given to agriculture off and on and some very derogatory remarks made about some segments of it by this government, but I would like to see some honest to goodness thought and planning given to agriculture so that the farmers are able to help themselves. I would have to push very hard for some sort of system to ensure that the farmers who are forced to lose their property, firstly, are given very strong consideration in being able to refinance and, secondly, virtually a hundred percent assurance that they would not be run off the land. Some sort of arrangement could be worked out, and we're sadly lacking in any kind of initiative there.

There has to be, with what's going on currently with the uncertainties all over, a little better – as a matter of fact, much,

much better – co-ordination between Advanced Education, Career Development and Employment, and the secondary schools in the province to make sure that we provide the widest possible scope of opportunities to young people so they can get the necessary qualifications in order to promote their careers. Mr. Chairman, we are sadly lacking in that, as I alluded to earlier. The only direction that the Minister of Education is giving school boards is a threat to take money away in case their enrollments drop. This is taking money away from boards which are already pushed beyond the breaking point, rather than coming up with some realistic programs that could help these young people stay in school.

On the business of the dropouts for a moment, it's even questionable if Alberta Education really knows what the numbers are, because every time you get some information from them, you get different numbers, which I suppose is quite consistent for this government. Every time you get the same question asked, you get two different answers so they cover all their bases. [interjection] I don't think I would want to go quite that far.

The rest of the departments I won't go through individually, other than to indicate quite strongly that we should be having a much higher degree of accountability. The House should be called together at such a time as we can debate this without requiring interim supply. On that note, Mr. Chairman, I would suggest that we will be forced to support this interim supply, the request for deficit dollars, somewhere between the two points of incompetence and mismanagement.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

MR. STEWART: Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee rise, report progress, and request leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MR. SCHUMACHER: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to interim supply estimates of the General Revenue Fund, the Capital Fund, and the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund capital projects division for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1993, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

MR. SPEAKER: Having heard the report, do all members concur? Those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

MR. SPEAKER: Carried. Thank you.

[The Assembly adjourned at 10:06 p.m.]