

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 2, 1993**

**8:00 p.m.**

Date: 93/11/02

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order. Before we commence the Committee of Supply this evening, for the benefit of those in the gallery I'd explain that the committee stage is a less formal stage of the Legislature. Members are permitted to take off their jackets, to have beverages greater than water – they can have coffee or tea or juice – and to communicate with one another by moving back and forth across the House to the other side, if necessary, and may whisper. That's an admonition to them as much as to explain to the gallery.

head: **Capital Fund Estimates 1993-94**

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll call upon the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development to make a few comments and then invite comments from other hon. members.

Hon. Deputy Premier.

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Chairman, it was the government's intent to have the five ministers responsible for those various elements in the capital fund to perhaps give just a brief overview right at the outset and then move on to questions and answers.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's great. Okay. We'll let the five ministers begin then with Advanced Education and Career Development.

MR. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For those of you that were here in the spring session, this may sound redundant, as you've heard it before, but I would like to give a brief overview of the items that are included in the capital fund for this department.

The capital fund provides funding for capital construction of public postsecondary facilities not only for our department but for hospitals, nursing homes, water development projects, and other projects that fit the criteria. The Advanced Education and Career Development portion of the capital fund program 1 includes major capital projects for universities, public colleges, technical institutes, and the Banff Centre as well as equipment purchases for our provincially administered institutions.

Just by way of background information, if a new facility is to be built for any of the vocational colleges, it is built by Alberta Public Works, Supply and Services and is included in their budget. The capital fund enables the province to borrow funds for the construction of major public facilities and repay the cost of providing the new facilities over a period of years commensurate with the useful life of the asset. The repayment period for building is 35 years, and the repayment period for equipment is 10 years. The capital fund borrows the money to initially finance the construction projects. However, the capital fund is then reimbursed over the appropriate number of years through a budgeted expenditure from the department for whom the facilities are built. This expenditure item appears in the general revenue fund as principal repayment. The 1993-94 amount for Advanced Education and Career Development is \$17.7 million. That constitutes the repayment amount. Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development only repays the principal. The interest is paid by

Alberta Treasury from funds appropriated from the general revenue fund.

A brief explanation of the projects ongoing: the utilities upgrading project, the University of Alberta. This project, originally approved in 1988-89, is intended to provide more reliable utility services such as power and heating and cooling to the south university campus. The funds were provided to the University of Alberta, but the beneficiaries of the project include the Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre, the Red Cross blood donor clinic, the Jubilee Auditorium, the W. W. Cross Cancer hospital, and Corbett Hall.

The original approval was for \$19.2 million, but because of favourable bids and other priorities the university was permitted to reallocate some of the project funds to the animal facilities on campus. The university had planned to complete the project in the 1992-93 fiscal year, but because of delays and decisions by the city of Edmonton respecting the alignment of the LRT on campus, it was unable to complete the work. Therefore, the university did not spend all of its funds intended for the project, and the full amount of the remaining project funds carried on to the 1993-94 fiscal year. Due to further delays in the city's decisions the same funds have been carried over to the 1994-95 fiscal year.

The animal facilities: \$2.689 million. This project was originally approved in 1991-92 in response to the need for the renovation of animal facilities at the university's Faculty of Medicine and the heritage research centre. It will be completed in 1993-94.

The University of Calgary business expansion program is almost finished, I believe. You will notice that there's about \$57,000 left to complete that project. The Professional Faculties Building at the University of Calgary, \$12.436 million, has accommodated growing numbers of students over the last decade and accomplished this through squeezing the timetable changes.

Grant MacEwan Community College, City Centre Campus: \$46.04 million. It has been built to accommodate 4,500 students in a new facility that includes the new physical education centre available to students at the college campus and the learning resource centre able to accommodate a 6,500-student campus. The 72,300-square-metre project was completed ahead of schedule and under original budget.

The Alberta Vocational College, Lesser Slave Lake: \$252,130. These funds are for equipment and furnishings for various construction projects essential to the operations of the college in northern Alberta. These projects, which are part of the Public Works, Supply and Services projects, include a new campus at Lesser Slave Lake of \$50,400,000. That has to do with Lesser Slave Lake. I'll leave that, and we'll hear from the other ministers and then accept questions.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the Minister of Environmental Protection I'm pleased to provide opening comments as they pertain to the capital fund.

The Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation, Mr. Chairman, in joint venture with the private sector owns and operates the province's major hazardous waste treatment centre near Swan Hills. The original design of the centre allowed for expansion to meet various needs including an extensive inventory of hazardous waste warehoused over the last decade, increased demands to clean up orphaned or other sites around the province, and ongoing disposal requirements by Alberta's industry.

The estimated cost of \$26.6 million of capital funding for 1993 represents Alberta waste management's 40 percent share. It will complete the incineration expansion and provide for an expanded infrastructure which includes the building's equipment and the improved storage areas to service the increased volumes. The new incinerator, Mr. Chairman, was completed in October of 1993 with the remaining commercial operation to be completed in the spring of 1994.

Mr. Chairman, the treatment centre at Swan Hills will continue to be the North American leader in technology and treatment efficiency. International interest in the operation has resulted in the export of Alberta technology and expertise.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The minister of transportation – do we have such an acting person?

MRS. BLACK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the Minister of Transportation and Utilities I'm pleased to present the capital funding for the department.

There is \$14.6 million involved in the capital funding this year. This is completion of a project under the Al-Pac construction program which provides the funding for connector roads and secondary highways north of Calling Lake, along the Grassland connector, the main plant access along Highway 55, and the Athabasca bridge.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8:10

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Chairman. This year Alberta Municipal Affairs asked for \$20.8 million in the capital fund for construction of social housing. This is mainly for the construction of seniors' self-contained projects and the upgrading of seniors' lodges and/or the building of new lodges. There was a moratorium put on '93-94 new capital construction, and therefore some 28 projects proposed for upgrading in the lodge business will not be considered in this budget. The only expenditures this year will probably be around \$14 million direct in cleaning up some of the ongoing projects that were around the province, those lodges and self-contained units that were already under construction, such projects as you might find in Ponoka or Sylvan Lake or Sherwood Park lodges. If anybody is interested, we will get them a complete list of the projects that were under construction in the '92-93 year and continued on.

Not here in this capital project division is another group of private nonprofit programs which included this year some \$10 million for private nonprofit housing. These were not going to go ahead, but the federal government is pulling out of their 70-30 cost sharing on December 31, 1993, and we have no idea what they will replace this with in the province. They had committed some 10 and a half million dollars in projects to nonprofit organizations to build projects in the province of Alberta. I'm pleased to announce that so we wouldn't lose the 70-cent dollar, we have agreed to go ahead with some 12 projects, and they are spread throughout the province. The nonprofit organizations actually put up the capital, so it makes no cost or cash flow to the government. Of course, when they're built, we then enter into a 70-30 cost sharing with the federal government in relation to the interest buy-down to 2 percent that these nonprofit organizations will affect.

I'll just give you an example. One of them would be in Edmonton here. The City Centre Church Corporation will be looking at 50 units to replace the existing Women's Emergency

Accommodation Centre for \$2.436 million. It is run by the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation for homeless women in the inner city. The existing facility is in very poor condition, and this replacement is a strong commitment to those services provided through Alberta Family and Social Services.

There are some other 11 projects in the province, in Calgary and in Grande Prairie, and the list of where those will be going is available upon demand. The actual cash flow contribution that we'll have to give won't come into effect till these projects are in the ground. The total number of them will mean around a \$300,000-plus dollar payment, and the federal government will pay approximately \$680,000 over the next 35 years after they're built.

I'll stop there because, as I say, I don't think there's much more to this division.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The '93-94 capital fund budget for the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services totals \$181.4 million, which includes \$166.3 for the construction of hospitals, nursing homes, and health units plus a \$15.1 million budget item for water development projects. Funding for the construction of government facilities under the capital fund is no longer required as both the Remington-Alberta Carriage Centre in Cardston and the Reynolds-Alberta Museum in Wetaskiwin were completed in '92-93.

The \$166.3 million budget for health care facilities as initially put forward included funding for the following. There are 50 approved health care projects which are in various stages of development throughout the province. There are two health units, in Grand Centre and Sherwood Park, as well as four health unit projects in Medicine Hat, High Level, Airdrie, and Fort Chip. There's \$20 million in this for capital upgrading initiatives to address functional or physical deficiencies at identified health care facilities. There is included in this \$2.8 million for major maintenance projects at the Foothills hospital, Calgary, and the University of Alberta hospitals, Edmonton. There's also \$2 million in this for hospital waste management, primarily for the installation of biomedical waste cold storage units at health facilities throughout the province. This storage is an essential part of the government's initiatives to have the private sector transport the waste to new centralized disposal facilities operating at current environmental standards.

On October 4 of this year the government announced reductions to the health care budget, in keeping with our commitment to balance the provincial budget in four years. The announcement set the stage for the substantial restructuring required for Albertans to continue to enjoy secure health care benefits at an affordable cost over the long term. These reductions followed the roundtable on health held this past August in Red Deer. This was in keeping with this government's commitment to consult with Albertans from all areas of the health sector as well as the public as a whole. Consultations on changes to the health system will continue in the series of roundtables now complete throughout the province.

A major concern voiced by Albertans is that all existing space in the health system be utilized fully before we undertake any more new construction. We have therefore put 27 health care capital construction projects in the planning or design stage on hold. The reason for deferring projects in the planning and design stage is to allow sufficient time to reassess the health facility needs that have to be met within this province. These deferrals will result in a \$31.8 million reduction in '93-94 in the cost of building health facilities within this province. There are currently 17

remaining projects on which construction is under way. These projects have undergone a series of reviews over a time frame of many years in some cases. These reviews confirmed the projects to be priorities that meet the demonstrated needs of Albertans. If priorities are changing, it is important that capital spending be reconsidered in light of recommendations brought forward from the roundtables and the public consultation process. Accordingly, capital expenditures for the planning and design of health care facilities will be deferred until appropriate reviews are undertaken.

The budget for water development projects addresses three major initiatives, which include the Little Bow project at Champion, Alberta, the Milk River project at Milk River, and the Pine Coulee project at Stavely, these three totaling \$15.1 million. The Little Bow River project will provide 50,000 acre-feet of water storage and permit 20,000 acres of irrigation expansion in the area. Benefits from this project will include provision of secure water sources for Vulcan, Champion, and Carmangay and for domestic and stock watering uses and a reduction in water diversions from the Highwood River during low flow periods. This protects the trout stocks, and the enhancement of Clear Lake will come into this for recreation purposes. The Pine Coulee project will provide 41,000 acre-feet of water storage and secure water supplies for Claresholm and Granum, two towns in southern Alberta. It will also provide domestic and stock watering additives and for an estimated 8,000 acres of existing irrigation. It will allow future irrigation expansion to 21,000 acres, and additional recreation opportunities again will be created at the nearby Willow Creek provincial park.

Mr. Chairman, construction of the Oldman River dam and the reservoir were completed in 1992-93. With the completion of this important water management project, storage for 400,000 acre-feet of water was provided to benefit the 125,000 people that live in the Oldman River basin. The storage permits the assurance of water supplies to these 125,000 Albertans who depend on the Oldman River, and it assures supplies to irrigation districts who in turn supply water to many municipal, domestic, industrial, and recreation water users, plus it has the potential for an additional 170,000 acres of irrigation expansion in that area. With the completion of the dam and reservoir in '92-93, funding from the capital fund is no longer required. However, as I indicated on September 27 during my presentation to the Committee of Supply, there is some fisheries mitigation work and monitoring activities that continue at the Oldman River dam. Funds for this work are provided from the general revenue fund.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my opening remarks. I would be very pleased to answer any questions from the Committee of Supply regarding the '93-94 Public Works, Supply and Services capital fund estimates.

Thank you.

8:20

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. With that endorsement, Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. At the outset I would like to thank the minister. He's made the task of trying to understand the budget, both the operating budget and the capital budget, a very easy task for newcomers like myself, and I do appreciate that.

I'd like to start my questions this evening with a view to exploring the kind of planning that goes on for the capital projects that we see in the budget and the planning that is undertaken by the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development for the institutions they are responsible for. My first question is:

what kind of long-term planning of facilities is under way, and are the budget sums that we see in this budget part of such a long-term plan?

The need for an overall strategy I think must certainly have been addressed if one looks at the materials that were distributed for use at the advanced education roundtables. Several of the enrollment scenarios that are outlined in those documents are really quite frightening when you see the magnitude of the increases we might expect. It's estimated that by the year 2005 the 18-year-old population will grow from 35,000 to 47,000 students, and if you couple those with the students that are already in institutions, it means that there's going to be a great growth in student population. Even if the interest in enrolling in postsecondary institutions remains at the 1991 level, we're going to have staggering new numbers of students to accommodate. These projections are very modest. Other projections in the documents indicate that currently about 60 percent of our high school students move on to postsecondary institutions of one kind or another, and it's expected that this percentage will grow as changing professional and job and market demands make more education a prerequisite for employment.

Now, I know that trying to project that far ahead is very difficult at best. How fast that rate will increase is uncertain. It depends on many factors: the economy, the admission standards that institutions put in place for students, the financial capability of government, and government policy. Again, if you look at those roundtable materials, the inescapable conclusion is that there are going to be vast numbers of new students and that somehow or other they're going to have to be accommodated by the system.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

I think where these students will choose to enroll in postsecondary programs is also an important factor, and again those materials tried to address that. Are they going to be attracted to institutes, to colleges, or to universities? Again that's tied to the kinds of employment opportunities and whether or not college programs are seen to be as valuable as university programs and the local availability of study routes. The best estimate in the documents is that the university population is going to more than double, and certainly the college population is going to double by 2005. So my first question is: what kind of long-term planning of facilities is under way to accommodate this wave of new students?

Secondly, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask what requirements are placed upon institutions for multiyear capital plans and for their projections for capital projects? I ask the question out of my experience with school boards where school boards were required to try to make some very careful estimates of population projections. Many of them spent considerable resources trying to determine how many students they were going to have to accommodate in the future, and then they were to come up with long-term plans to try to accommodate that population. I know that a number of the institutions have departments of institutional planning or resources devoted to institutional planning, and so my question is related to that. What are the requirements for coming up with projections and plans and sharing those with the department of advanced education? If such plans are required, how are those plans among the institutions co-ordinated, if they are?

A third question, Mr. Chairman, that arises is: what governs the construction costs of new institutions and new construction? Is there a per square metre cost that contractors and builders must follow? Again, in just some cursory asking around, there seem to be widely varying costs. For instance, between the King's College renovations and the construction of Grant MacEwan, there was a

dramatic difference in the square metre cost of those two institutions, yet they were put in place at the same time, almost out of the same budgets. So what kind of guidance are contractors and architects given in terms of developing plans? Are there any constraints put on them in terms of the balance between administrative space in those buildings and classroom space? Is there any requirement that classroom space must occupy the majority of buildings that are built? Attached to that is the question about private funding, but I'd like to leave that alone for just a minute. I'm more interested in how construction costs are controlled. Again it's related to my experience as a school trustee, where there was a per square metre cost established by Alberta Education and school boards were required to come in at that price or to make up the difference out of local funds.

My fourth question is: are institutions required to develop and to update campus plans? I look at the campus that I'm most familiar with, which occupies probably some of the best property, riverbank property, some of the most scenic, some of the most valuable property in this city, and yet architecturally it is a disaster. If you look at the Butterdome sitting across the street from the Jubilee Auditorium, if you look at Cameron Library wedged in amongst engineering buildings and you think of the grand setting that that site could have made for a university, it's somewhat appalling. I know that back in its history the University of Alberta did actually have a site plan that called for grand avenues and open spaces, and that seems to have been abandoned. I think it's unfortunate, because it's not only the University of Alberta. If you look at the University of Lethbridge, the site of that university, if you look at the space on the Calgary campus, there should be, if there isn't, some attention to campus plans and campus development. Again, if you look at American campuses and campuses around the world where there are very, very strict planning guidelines in place, architects are not allowed to violate the setting in which they place buildings.

I know in the past it's often been a race against time to try to get facilities in place to accommodate students and staff and researchers. If you look down the road, it seems that we're going to be in a similar time crunch trying to accommodate a lot of new students, so I think the question of institutional planning for campuses is an important one to at least think about at this time. I'd be interested in what is required.

The fifth question I'd like to ask is: are the departments of Alberta Education's and advanced education's facilities planning synchronized in any way? Do they plan so that there could be deliberate sharing of recreational and classroom facilities? There's been a long history of that kind of sharing in our province. The first Legislature met on the third floor of McKay Avenue public school in this city, so there has been a history of facility sharing. I wondered if that is still part of Alberta Education's institutional planning.

Those are some of the initial questions I have. I'd leave it at that now. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

**8:30**

**MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**MR. SAPERS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to talk to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services and ask some questions tonight to do with the \$166 million in his budget that is allocated to health care facilities. I'd like to start off by noting that nowhere can we find any particular sense of agreement between, first, the proposed budget for the construction of those health care facilities, then the press release that he shared on

October 4 announcing a number of health care facility projects being put on hold, or, for that matter, any real evidence of co-ordination between that ministry and the Ministry of Health. I'll note that the Ministry of Health in that press release was talking about cutting \$122 million out of their budget, but of course \$31 million or \$32 million of it was actually out of the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Service's budget. That leads me to my first question, and that is: these projects that were put on hold or were deferred for some point, is it planned that they're going to come back on the front burner later on this year? Have they really been taken out of the budget, or are they going to be added back in the budget? If they're going to be put back in the budget, in what order will they be put back in? What will the priority be? How will that be determined?

Now, the minister has stated that some of these projects are on hold pending the outcomes of the roundtable discussions.

**MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** I'm sorry. Order. At least one Liberal and a Conservative – a little less noise. I can't hear the hon. member. Thank you.

**MR. SAPERS:** Thank you.

The minister stated in his opening remarks that the termination of these projects would be pending the health roundtables. In fact, he mentioned that the health roundtable discussions helped guide the decisions. Of course, if that were the case, there would be a total moratorium on health facilities capital construction, because that's certainly the advice that I heard at the roundtables that I attended. So I'm curious about those opening remarks.

Now, for the projects which are going ahead, has the minister in fact been involved with the Minister of Health to ensure that these construction projects which have been allowed to proceed will have sufficient operating funds once they're completed? If not, why not? If he has no guarantee that they'll be operated properly, why are we going ahead and building them? I'd also like to know whether or not he's had discussions with the Minister of Labour regarding the changes that are happening in the health care labour force and the purported labour force readjustment plan that that minister has told the Assembly he's working on and how that all figures in the construction and the ultimate operation of these facilities. Furthermore, has the minister worked with the Minister of Health to make plans regarding the construction of public health facilities and nursing stations? The trend to provide more and more health care services outside of hospitals, moving towards hospitals without walls, and moving to more community-based care must involve a plan to provide the facilities necessary to provide a public health focus, a community health focus, and ultimately a home care focus.

I'd also like to know if the minister can inform us what use he sees that can be made of health care facilities and what budget implications it would have to convert these facilities which have already been constructed. Given that they are structurally satisfactory but their use is going to change, what impact will that have on his budget? Again, what discussions has he had with the Minister of Health regarding operating funds for these transition facilities?

Moving to vote 1.2 – I'm looking at Medical Referral Centres – I note that five of the listed projects are currently deferred. Now, the Royal Alexandra hospital is listed at 80 percent complete. I'd like to know when we could expect this project to be fully completed and operational. When it comes to the diagnostic services that'll be provided at this facility, does the minister have any studies that have shown that the centre will be adequately

staffed and in total operation once construction is complete? Or will it just be mothballed like some of its twin facilities?

A question about the regional hospital in Lethbridge. That's listed as 99 percent complete, and I find that very curious. The 1992-93 estimates show a projected expense of \$5,000. However, the '93-94 estimates are for \$245,000. Now, if it's 99 percent complete, and we only spent \$5,000 last year, why are we spending a quarter of a million dollars this year to finish that last 1 percent?

Under 1.3, funding for specialized acute care facility construction, I notice that three of the projects that are listed are deferred. Now, the projects that are deferred, I'd like to know on what basis those three were deferred and the other acute care facilities have been pushed ahead.

I'd like to ask a specific question about the Cross Cancer Institute here in the city of Edmonton. Now, this facility must be nearing completion, if not completed already, yet administrators from this facility have reported that they are very concerned that they will not have sufficient operating funds to open the new area. Again my question about co-ordination with the other departments: why would this particular project go ahead without operating funds being made available?

Alberta Hospital Edmonton is a facility that we all recognize has serious structural problems. The deficiencies at Alberta Hospital Edmonton have been well documented for years and years. There are cracks in the walls. There's no running water in the dining room. There are serious heating problems, cooling problems, windows that won't open or windows that won't close. Certainly this must be a priority in anybody's books. I'd like to know if the minister could explain why this project was put on hold. Again, looking at Alberta Hospital Ponoka, yet another mental health facility has been put on hold. Why the low priority in capital construction for mental health facilities? It's curious that both large facilities were deferred. Can the minister share with the Assembly the specific criteria that led to the deferral of these projects?

Now, the Children's Health Centre is a particular interest of mine. We had a political promise to build a centre of excellence for children's health, the northern Alberta children's hospital. Now, that idea disappeared, and probably appropriately so, but it metamorphosed into this Children's Health Centre, which of course isn't really a facility. It's a program to co-ordinate services. Yet we see that there's been a capital allocation, a construction allocation for this. Where exactly is this project at? If the change was really to move to a hospital without walls and to do this as a resource and co-ordination program, why is it even showing up in this budget? Now that the funds for the construction to facilitate the consolidation of children's services at the university hospital have been deferred, what does this tell us about this whole project and the nature of co-ordinating children's health for northern Alberta? Maybe the minister could share with us what he knows about the long-range plans for the Children's Health Centre for Edmonton.

**8:40**

Another facility that I'm particularly concerned about is the general hospital reconstruction in Slave Lake. Now, this community has been waiting to have their facility replaced since a flood damaged their hospital. This project, however, didn't make the short list. It didn't make the cut. I'd like to know why. How was this project evaluated in order to determine that it should be held back at this time and particularly in reference to some of the hospitals that were allowed to go ahead? I make particular reference to the Immaculata hospital in Westlock. Now, this

project has been the subject of a great deal of debate and speculation already. Albertans just simply don't believe that this decision was made simply on the basis of it being a health priority. People can't understand why this project was chosen to go ahead while other projects were deferred. Could the minister please tell us now? Could he lay to rest all the fears and the thoughts of Albertans that there was some kind of political interference in this decision? Now, it's recognized that this facility is old, and it's been in need of replacement for years and years. Nobody's denying the need for bringing that facility up to snuff or, for that matter, making available to the residents of the Westlock area accessible acute care treatment, but why specifically was this project given priority now in the climate of fiscal restraint when calls have been for a moratorium and when other hospitals demonstrating equal need have been put on hold? How exactly did it stack up against Slave Lake or, for that matter, Alberta Hospital Edmonton?

Now a question I have about health facilities waste management. It stated in the October 4 press release that these projects are 70 percent complete. There's a variety of projects around the province. Could the minister tell us at which hospitals the biomedical cold storage sites are being constructed? What are the criteria as to the distance one cold storage site will be from the next? Is there in fact a regionalization plan for cold storage or, for that matter, for all biomedical waste in general? I'm assuming, of course, that the need for cold storage is going to escalate given the Minister of Environmental Protection's somewhat contradictory messages that he doesn't want to see hospital waste go into landfills but that he also doesn't want to see regional incineration. So it looks like our cold storage sites are going to be just bursting at the seams. I'd like to know on what basis we're allocating funds for biomedical cold storage. What plan, if any, is in place for the rationalization of that service?

Turning to community-based hospitals, I'd like to know: was any consideration given to current occupancy data by the minister and the proximity to other health care facilities before construction projects at community-based facilities were started? Now, I note that three projects have been deferred; others are going ahead. Again, my same question: where exactly is the plan and the co-ordination between your ministry and the Minister of Health?

A specific question about the Border Counties general hospital in Milk River. I note that this project was recently started, but it's now listed as already 50 percent complete. I understand that there are a number of beds here, necessary beds, for long-term care, but there are also acute care beds going into that project, Mr. Minister. I'd like to know: did you do any studies to determine that all of these beds will be fully operating, that they'll be staffed, that there'll be nurses and other medical professionals on-site, that in fact there is a patient demand or a health demand that is driving the construction of these acute care hospitals? Will in fact there be an occupancy rate that will justify this expenditure? Or are we looking at, in fact, another hospital that will have occupancy in the low teens or even less?

Now, I know that my colleagues have some other specific questions about some mental health facilities and about some long-term care facilities, so I'll defer to them but may rise again if there is anything left over. Thank you.

**MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

**MS CALAHASEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few questions and two specific areas and would like to first of all thank the minister of advanced education for finally doing the completion

to the AVC facility, which in my view was really needed. However, the one question that I do have is that although we have this \$15 million facility in Slave Lake, there is some need for housing for those students. There are very low vacancy rates in Slave Lake, plus the price of trying to find a place is very high. I just wondered whether or not that is going to be contemplated, any kind of housing construction in the near future or at least looking at some possibility of having private contractors get involved so that we can get something that will accommodate those students.

Sometimes when I look downtown here and see that facility that was built, Grant MacEwan – when they first started, they decided that they were not going to build this megaproject or at least a megafacility. Then I see this I don't know how many millions of dollars facility we have downtown. It makes me wonder whether or not their priorities have been taken care of in the sense of educating the kids, or are facilities more important? I think sometimes when we do build facilities, we should also take into consideration that there are other needs that must be looked at.

The other item that I think is really a very important area too in contrast is Lesser Slave Lake-Grouard. I know there have been some plans to do some renovations and some development there. I just wonder whether or not there are any plans for anything like that at some point in the future. Once we can rationalize the fact that yes, we can spend money there – and I understand the problem we are experiencing relative to making sure we take care of the deficit and the debt. I definitely would be one that would not push for something that is not needed in an area. I think in the future when we do get our budget in hand, we can start looking at something like that.

I wanted to address some questions to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. In your speech, Mr. Minister, you brought out the fact that there are going to be 12 new projects coming forward to nonprofit organizations for seniors' lodges. I wonder, what does the list consist of, more specifically within rural Alberta? I want to know if there are new structures under these 12 projects and what those new structures would be made out of? Are they all self-contained, or are they seniors' lodges? Are there new structures for seniors' lodges? If so, I would like to have my answer to the question of why Slave Lake was not considered amongst the priorities.

Since 1989 we've attempted to get the seniors' lodge in Slave Lake, and throughout it all we've received a negative response. I think most of my seniors have now outlived three ministers in their ministerial capacity. It's amazing that we still have seniors who don't have a place to go. First of all, we've got 40 or 50 seniors above the age 60 range in need of a facility. It's very difficult as a person and as an MLA to watch people having to leave in order to go and die, because when they leave there's one foot in the grave as soon as they leave their place of residence. The reason is because, first of all, we have no hospital with extended care. Unfortunately, there is no extended care in the Slave Lake hospital. I hear all sorts of people talking about their needs in the other communities. When we're talking about needs, we have to look at what is really not in the community, what other facilities are available. The same with housing: anything to do with that kind of idea.

What I wanted to know was – there's no lodge at all in Slave Lake. We've got some self-contained units which have been the saving grace for Slave Lake. I think it's really important when we start to address seniors' needs that we must look at what is needed in a community. I know that the federal government has shirked its responsibility in dealing with this issue, and I would encourage the Minister of Municipal Affairs to see how he can ensure that

those areas that do not need lodges should not even be considered a priority item. I know that in the past we've looked at renovations and supposed additions to facilities which take in our seniors as well as any seniors throughout the area. So they make their case to have additions to their facilities when in fact it is our people they're using. The people of Lesser Slave Lake is what I'm talking about when we're looking at outside in the Falher area as well as in the Westlock area. I think that's an important concept when we begin to look at what possibilities exist for lodges. If the federal government is not going to do its duty and take care of the seniors, then maybe we should look at privatization or private sources in trying to get a lodge in the Slave Lake area, at least taking care of the seniors in that area.

Social housing, an issue which is of quite dire consequence, in my view, in the Lesser Slave Lake area. A lot of people think that any time you have the ability, you should be able to get houses. Unfortunately, in some of these small communities there is no such thing as even renting a facility or a house for any accommodation. If they don't have a place to move from their parents' house, they've got nowhere else to live. I know it is very difficult to try to make some decisions relative to how we can deliver programs. I want to commend the minister for the direction he has gone in looking at ways to come forward with some recommendations in that area, where we can start looking at people taking care of their own and making sure they have authority to do that. I know once we start going in that direction, we make the people at least start to take control and determine what should happen in their communities. I want to say to the minister that that's an excellent idea, but I would also like to recommend to him that maybe we should also look at the buy-in program where people can get into making sure they are part, buying into anything we're going to put forward in any kind of housing capacity.

Thank you.

**8:50**

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Speaking this evening to the capital estimates for Environmental Protection, as the Acting Minister of Environmental Protection has indicated, the capital estimates are for the expansion of the Swan Hills special waste treatment management facility. This is intended to be the final portion of our 40 percent share in a joint venture with Bovar Inc. for that facility. I note and the Acting Minister of Environmental Protection has indicated that the investment for this year is \$26,560,000, and that is in addition to the 1992 amount of \$11,440,000, for a sum total in the past two years of \$38 million on this one facility. That is a staggering amount of money for one particular project at a time in Alberta's history when funds are scarce for many projects and many operating budgets including our health care budgets, our education budgets, and our social services budgets.

I just want to make the point, Mr. Chairman, that we've got to continue looking at our priorities. We're now going to spend a total of \$38 million on this Swan Hills waste facility, and, as I say, that's an incredible amount of money. The acting minister mentioned that this facility is a major special waste treatment facility. It should be stated that it's not a major facility; it's the only facility. This facility has a monopoly in the province of Alberta, and no other business enterprise can participate in the environmental protection field in terms of the disposal of hazardous waste. Only one facility is entitled to all the special waste in Alberta, and I think it's important that we make that point.

I want to continue making a couple of comments, Mr. Chairman, and then finish off with a sort of overall omnibus question with respect to the capital project for the special waste facility. There was, as all members know, an NRCB hearing to deal with the expansion of the facility, and that's what these funds are budgeted for. Comments were made at that time that the planned expansion, which incidentally went from 13,500 tonnes of capacity for hazardous waste up to now 40,000 tonnes of capacity for hazardous waste at that facility – there was some concern raised at that time that the increase in the facility to that capacity level was far too excessive for the period of time we're talking about in terms of the expansion of the project. It was stated at that time that it would be preferable to have a smaller expansion at that facility and, if necessary, a further expansion at the beginning of the century if demand could justify a further expansion.

That decision to expand to this capacity level was made partly on the understanding that that facility would also be receiving hazardous waste from the oil industry. I believe consideration was also given to oil waste going to the facility. I notice the Acting Minister of Environmental Protection is indicating it was not. I'll accept the statement, but my information is that in fact it did. If it was not, there was at least some uncertainty about whether or not that would be going, and we now know that through the ERCB hearings going on and through changes to the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act that took place before that Bill became law, oil waste is not considered hazardous waste and does not go to that facility. So there is some question about whether or not a 40,000 tonne capacity is going to be used at that facility. Perhaps to illustrate that point, Mr. Chairman, we did hear the Minister of Environmental Protection indicate in the House today that for the test burn at the facility, which will continue from this point through to full operation early in 1994, what is required is approximately 8,400 tonnes of PCBs and PCPs to the facility. The minister indicated today that there are no PCBs in the province of Alberta; there are no PCBs in the province of Alberta. They are all gone. There's no backlog. We don't have any PCBs and PCPs. Now, we also have an Alberta-only policy, so to gather and incinerate 8,400 tonnes – we don't have that, and I know we're not talking about just PCBs and PCPs. We don't have that inventory in the province of Alberta, yet we have a facility that's capable of taking up to 40,000 tonnes of hazardous waste. It obviously begs the question about where the inventory comes from to handle this facility.

The other difficulty, of course, with an expansion of this size, as I've already alluded, is that it takes other small business out of the marketplace. While the acting minister did make reference to the fact that we now have state of the art technology that is exportable, technology development doesn't stop. We now have no ability to take advantage of any new technology that may come along in the future, at least to the year 2000, for the treatment of hazardous waste. Obviously it's going to raise a concern that if newer technologies come along and perhaps other jurisdictions create a better facility, this may become a white elephant because we have invested heavily in existing state of the art technology. Who knows? We may find ourselves having less than state of the art technology at some point in the future. We can't even take the advantage or benefit of other small businesses developing new technology. There's lots of it. There's bioremediation. There's chemical remediation. There are lots of other busy, active entrepreneurs out there dealing in the area of waste reduction and waste minimization dealing with hazardous waste materials. We aren't going to get the benefit of that in the regime we've created here in creating a monopoly with one massive facility. We're not

going to get the benefit of that newer aggressive technology, and that's obviously a concern.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.  
The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

DR. WEST: Yes, would the hon. member entertain a question in debate under *Beauchesne* 492?

MR. COLLINGWOOD: No, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: We'll continue on.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you.

The issue also should be made, Mr. Chairman, that the expansion of the facility to the 40,000 tonne capacity level does legitimately raise the question as to whether or not Alberta will be forced into changing its Alberta-only policy to import hazardous waste from other jurisdictions. I have been asking the Minister of Environmental Protection about this issue. I believe the question is a legitimate concern for Albertans, because Albertans know we have a massive, high-capacity, state of the art, one of a kind facility, and by the minister's own admission other jurisdictions are looking at us and saying: can we deliver our hazardous waste to your facility?

9:00

I am not, Mr. Chairman, advocating that we in fact invite hazardous waste into the province. What I am advocating is that the government act responsibly in dealing with the issue of whether or not it is both economically sound and environmentally sound, that we at least open up the debate to Albertans to get involved in consultation about whether or not it is environmentally sound and economically sound to consider the importation of hazardous waste into this province. I think the government has an opportunity here to do something right, to start the process now to invite public consultation on an issue that we've got to look at in the future about what we're going to do with this facility. I want to leave that with the minister to consider, because I think it presents an excellent opportunity to invite public consultation, not in an afterthought way, not in a knee-jerk way, not in an ad hoc way, but in fact developing an overall positive sound strategy on how we as a province deal with the disposal of hazardous wastes.

Members of the Assembly will recall that a written question was asked of the Minister of Environmental Protection about some contracts dealing with that facility. We were told that because those contracts are third-party contracts, Albertans are not entitled to see those contracts. Mr. Chairman, Albertans will want to know that 38 million of their dollars in the last two years have gone into this facility. The government must come to understand that when one penny of the taxpayers' dollars goes into any capital project, it's wide open. Every document, every statement, every word, every paper belongs to the people of this province. It does not belong to the government. Thirty-eight millions of dollars of taxpayers' moneys into this facility – let's see the documents. They're not my documents. They're not for me to see. They're not for you to hold. They belong to the people of Alberta. Make them available to the people of Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, we now see with this particular program 1 on capital projects the amount of \$26,560,000 for the expansion. It

would appear that this will be the final usage of capital funds for the Swan Hills facility, but I would like to leave the question with the acting minister: is this all we are going to have dedicated to the Swan Hills facility? Again, while the question may be somewhat rhetorical, can you assure us that we are not going to end up with a white elephant, and we're not going to end up with a Swan Hills facility that looks just like all of the hospital incinerators around the province that can't operate anymore? Some didn't operate at all because they were out of date by the time they got built. Let's make sure we don't have another white elephant.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I want to thank the minister for answering questions I've had on senior housing in the past. There were some questions that weren't answered. I would just like to ask if I'll be getting answers for them or not in the future.

We see that close to \$21 million is being spent on senior housing and, as the minister has mentioned, will be going to new projects, 12, across the province. I guess I do have some questions on the many senior lodges that need to be upgraded very soon. We know that the sooner we upgrade them, the less it will cost. The longer you let these facilities deteriorate, the more costly it will be.

We're also aware that there are many social housing projects in the inner city - I imagine throughout the province; I know for sure in Edmonton - that need upgrading and need serious upgrading. There's no mention of any funds going into these projects. With the cuts to bring in a balanced budget, it would appear that for the next three or four years there will be a limited amount of money. I guess the question I have is: how are these facilities going to be upgraded and maintained with the lack of money?

The \$21 million represents about a 110 percent increase over last year's forecast. However, AMHC only expended \$9.9 million or 53 percent of last year's budget. My question is: why was the entire budget not spent in 1992-93, and where did the money go?

The other questions I have: again, will the minister tell us or give us a list of the seniors' lodges that needed upgrading and what the criteria for the upgrading will be so all Albertans and also all of the lodge foundations will know at this time? Also, what will the time lines for the upgrading be? There are several. We have one in our own foundation that is badly in need of upgrading. It would at least give the foundation board guidelines as to what they can expect.

We also know that the federal government is ending some of their funding at the end of this year, December 1993. There will still be the need for social housing. How does the province intend to act or work through this and come up with a solution? We know that there are several models and ways of doing things. As we look at privatization, I guess I have a number of questions on privatization. To what extent does this government intend to privatize senior housing and social housing in the province? Will the foundations that exist now be considered for privatization in the future? If they are, how will the funding operate? Who will get a chance to bid or to put out tenders for these lodges?

My other concern, a very important one to the seniors, is the fact that seniors need to know in advance. They don't want things given to them on the spur of the moment. It upsets their life-style. It causes anxiety and pain for them. In fact, I have one example of

my grade 3 teacher, who was in one lodge and needed to move to another lodge for more care. It took about eight months for her to decide, to make up her mind and make the big step to another lodge. She was leaving everything she had behind. She had a few possessions, but her friends, her whole support group was there. It was not an easy solution for her. It was with great stress and anxiety that she finally did move into another facility. So we'd ask the minister to give that great consideration and that things be done in consultation with the seniors, perhaps with the Minister of Community Development.

We know that there is a lot of different seniors' housing in the province at this time, some 12 projects, as mentioned by the minister, done by nonprofit organizations. It seems to be working well. That's where they buy their facility and get back a certain return after it's not needed any longer. So seniors can stay in the areas where they have lived throughout their life, which is very important, and in their own community for the support groups' support, their doctors, medical help, and so on.

If privatization is going to take place with the new projects, I'd like to ask the minister: who is going to operate them? On what basis? To what degree will they be privatized? Will there be funding for operating costs coming from the government? With the federal government's funding coming to an end, I know there are discussions going on at this time to look at senior and social housing across the provinces, across Canada, where ministers are getting together with the federal minister and looking at alternatives to meet the needs. We also are aware that the number of seniors will increase by about three times what we have today by the year 2010. What is needed, of course, is a way and means of meeting these needs. I'm not inferring that the government has to meet the needs, but it should work with different groups, different organizations, private and nonprofit organizations, to search out, seek new ways, seek old ways of doing things that can apply to the different communities.

#### 9:10

I appreciate the comments made by the Member for Lesser Slave Lake that the needs of each community must be looked at and a priority list should be set up for all constituencies or municipalities in the province so everyone will know where they stand on the list and those with the greatest needs will be served first, instead of whoever can get to the minister for political expediency at certain times. This is what Albertans want to see and are demanding. Albertans are fair minded. They want to see the needs met of different people throughout the province. Those with the greatest needs should have their needs met first.

I would also like a list of the 12 new projects that the minister mentioned earlier and where they will be located across the province. I would also like the list of the nonprofit projects and more information on how they will operate, the details, the criteria used in these projects. Also, I'd like to know if the minister has gone to other places across Canada and the States to see how the needs are met in other places that have an aging population and that have gone through the process Alberta will be going through in the next 10, 15, 20 years. Questions I do have are: how many senior lodges or rooms will we need in the next five years, 10 years, 15 years, and how is the government going to work with other groups, the private sector and so on, to make sure this happens?

Again, I would like a report back on the cost or the money needed to upgrade the senior lodges that are in need of repair over the next five years to see what amount we're looking at and what budget should come into this department in the future.

These are some of the questions. The other ones I have, again from the last day – I would still like answers where possible to questions on the senior housing that we do not have.

With that, I conclude my remarks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My first questions would be to the minister of public works. I'd also like to put them to the Minister of Health. Indeed, it's been touched on by some of my colleagues, and that is the co-ordination between Health and public works. I did touch on this when I was speaking to the public works estimates.

With regards to the capital projects, it's not just myself as the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan that's asking these questions. Albertans would like an appreciation as to how this government indeed prioritizes capital projects. Particularly in the future I think it's important that when dollars are scarce, we make the right kinds of decisions and make sure that when capital moneys are expended, the greatest good is indeed being served.

I look at Westlock and Slave Lake and Alberta Hospital Edmonton. None of these facilities, of course, are in my constituency, but over the past decade it's been clearly identified that if there was going to be replacement facilities, the two Alberta hospitals and also Slave Lake and Westlock indeed were in need of replacement. The question also has to be asked in looking at rationalizing health care: where indeed should acute beds be placed? I think back to Florence Pearson, a lady from Slave Lake. I can remember for the past decade this lady advocating for the replacement of facilities not only in long-term care but in active treatment in Slave Lake, and once again we see that this community has not achieved that.

Now, with regards to Alberta Hospital Edmonton, not only are the acute care and rehab beds needing replacement, but I would want the minister to please address the question: are there capital funds within this capital budget particularly for the power plant upgrading or indeed replacement? Also, what is the status of the laundry facility in Alberta Hospital Edmonton? Having mentioned laundry, what is the long-term plan and co-ordination taking place not only within the health care facilities but also within the correctional system for laundry being achieved within these facilities? I know when I was still involved in the health care field, it was being suggested that hospitals would not indeed be allowed to do their own laundry and that there was a possibility that we could see a monopoly situation being created, at least in northern Alberta or the Edmonton area. So I would be looking for an answer to what's happening in Alberta Hospital Edmonton's laundry facility. Also in relationship to capital projects, whether it be in laundry or some other facility, with regards to operating funding, how is this being co-ordinated with Alberta Health or with the Justice department?

In relationship to those operating funds in the capital projects that we've seen approved, I'd also like to identify a facility that not only serves the constituency of my colleague for Sherwood Park but also Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan; that is, the health unit and also the long-term care facility. A concern not only of myself – I hear constantly from constituents and also Albertans: if we're building these new facilities, can we be assured that there are going to be operating funds to run them? Now, we see an example right in the city of Fort Saskatchewan. On one hand, a long-term care facility that because of budget restraints reduces the number of long-term care beds, which doesn't make sense. Indeed, when you look at the rationale of getting the best value for

your dollar, the minute you cut back beds in a facility that's operating today and open up a new facility, your operating budgets are going to increase. There doesn't seem to be any rationale or long-term planning when it comes to capital projects in relationship to operating budgets.

The other that is very costly to Albertans, I would suggest, when we're looking at capital projects, particularly long-term care facilities, is that many of our residents that need long-term care, whether they be seniors or Albertans, as the Member for Lesser Slave Lake and my other colleagues have identified, in many instances are having to leave the communities they've lived in for, in many instances, 70, 75 years. Suddenly they're finding that they're being placed in a facility quite some distance from their community. This is costly not only to the family, but I would suggest it's costly to our health care system. Anyone who's been removed at that point in time in their life – it's a very negative thing to happen, and it has, I would suggest, psychological impact to that individual. So once again we're back to co-ordination and long-term planning.

9:20

With regards to the capital projects – it's been asked already, and I hope we're going to get an answer to this – we're saying that a number of these projects are being put on hold until the roundtables are completed and the recommendations are looked at. I've asked this question once before, Mr. Minister. How can participants in roundtables make decisions when it comes to replacement facilities unless they know the conditions of these facilities? Certainly the residents of Slave Lake know the conditions of the Slave Lake hospital, but when it comes to psychiatric facilities, whether it's Alberta Hospital Edmonton that serves all of northern Alberta or Alberta Hospital Ponoka that serves central and southern Alberta, very few people visit these facilities unless they've got loved ones in them or they're volunteers. So how indeed can the roundtables give credible recommendations when it comes to capital facilities replacement if they're not familiar with those facilities?

The reason I'm stressing this is that if it isn't people like myself and board members from these two facilities advocating for the psychiatrically ill, 10 years from now we'd still see them being housed and the staff working under these atrocious conditions, and I think that would indeed be unfortunate to happen. We know we're trying to deinstitutionalize and see that these people move into the community, but the reality is that we're not seeing the dollars moving at the same rate that we're deinstitutionalizing, whether it be Michener Centre or whether it be Alberta Hospital Edmonton or Alberta Hospital Ponoka. Once again I'm saying: capital projects, operating funds, redirecting dollars, and close co-ordination between social services, Alberta Health, and public works. If that doesn't happen, I can see a significant growth in our justice system budget to meet the social needs that come from lack of co-ordination and planning.

With regards to the other capital projects I just want to touch on Westlock once again. Are we sure that the design as presently being constructed right now meets the restructuring of our health care system? In other words, you look at Barrhead hospital, you look at Westlock hospital, and I could name the others within that geographical district. Is there really a health care concept with a minimum of acute care beds, long-term care beds, a community health and the social services support system all being housed under one roof? If indeed that's what's happening, once again we're missing the boat. We're not expending our dollars wisely. I think that indeed is unfortunate, and a moratorium should have

been put in place to ensure that the Westlock community gets the facility for the future.

Mr. Chairman, I'd also at this point in time like to direct my further comments to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I want to acknowledge that, yes, social housing is indeed needed within our community, and I commend public works and Municipal Affairs for Lions Haven in the city of Fort Saskatchewan. It is a facility that meets the needs of seniors in the community. Once again we've got to make sure that projects like this and future projects for social housing are done on need and not through political decision-making. That's the way we get the best value for our dollar. I certainly would be supportive over the next decade seeing that we keep pace with ensuring that we have the appropriate housing in the appropriate places for our seniors.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to talk a little bit about the health care capital funding allocation under the Public Works, Supply and Services vote.

It's very difficult, of course, to evaluate these capital construction projects given the information that we have, and that's really my first point: the reporting process for the budgets is relatively limited. It's very difficult to discern from the information that we're given why it is that one capital project is receiving the government's authorization over capital projects that don't receive the government's authorization. I know the member for Slave Lake, for example, is very concerned about that very question. Why is it that any number of these projects are being authorized, but the Slave Lake hospital project, which we know is under some pressure to be built because of the flood of that facility, hasn't been addressed and won't be built? I would hope that were we to be given more detailed information, that kind of question would be resolved.

On the other hand, I am concerned that I'm making a pretty broad assumption. The assumption I'm making, of course, is that in fact there is a set of criteria, there is a regularized process, there is a way in which this government does in fact prioritize capital projects and decides that one should be built and one shouldn't be built. But I don't see that, Mr. Chairman. I certainly don't see it from the information we've got, and I don't have very much confidence that somehow that information may in fact even exist. My first question addresses that, and that is: could the minister of public works please provide us with two things, the set of criteria under which these projects for which authorization is being requested arrive on this list that's been presented to us, the criteria for which that is the case, and a prioritization list that would somehow show that these programs have a higher priority for whatever reason than projects that don't appear on this particular list?

Our belief is that capital projects are one area where significant savings can be made in two ways. Clearly, you can save the money that would be put into the capital project, and secondly you can save the money later that will be put into operating these projects. Now, I will say that to some extent the government may be solving that problem, because while they're funding a project like the Royal Alex renovation and expansion, they haven't committed any extra funds to the Royal Alex to operate that. I guess they've in part addressed half the problem, but they still are doing construction that may or may not be justified. Certainly from the information we have, it's very, very difficult to determine

how it is that they are justified. My broader point is that there are savings to be made in capital expenditure.

It's interesting to note that the roundtable on health care in Red Deer and subsequent roundtables have called for a moratorium on capital construction. As is becoming a trend or a theme in this government's approach to dealing with the public, they come part way to meet what they perceive to be a demand from the public, so they've done a partial capital construction, quote, unquote, freeze. They've said: we're putting \$31 million worth of projects on hold. I guess I'd like to ask the minister how it is that he determined that the suggestion from the roundtable was only half or one-third correct, one-fifth correct, and how he distinguished that some should be put on hold and others shouldn't be put on hold.

**9:30**

My second question, the corollary of that, is: are they really on hold, and what does "on hold" mean? For how long? How will the decision be made and when to take them off hold if that is to in fact be the decision? This begs a broader question. How do we prioritize capital construction? It isn't simply even that capital health care construction projects should be compared or prioritized only against themselves, within that particular envelope, if you will. I think a strong argument could be made that capital construction projects should be compared across the range of construction projects so that somehow we say that that particular hospital is more important than that particular footbridge or that particular curling rink. Then I think we have to have a complete list, a prioritized list. I think we should see those projects that have been considered and aren't going to be built, that haven't been presented for authorization to the Legislature. We should be able to see them in a ranked order fashion, a prioritized fashion, and we should be able to, as a Legislature, vote on these projects line by line, project by project to see whether in fact in a free-vote circumstance they can hold up on their own merit or on some kind of merit. I think that particularly in times like these that would be a test that is truly worth while.

I also would like to ask the minister: what assessment of these projects has been made in relationship to the likelihood of a new regional governance approach? While the previous Minister of Health, to her credit, made much of regionalization, her successor or the government, after she was asked to leave, downplayed regionalization I think in anticipation of an election, always believing that in fact they would regionalize. We see that now they're speaking much more positively of regionalization. In fact, that is a very strong suggestion that came out of the roundtables, that you simply have to regionalize to deliver services more effectively. The question I ask then is: given that regionalization appears to be coming, have these capital construction projects been considered on the basis of their regional health care delivery implications? Are each of these projects needed or will they be needed after a regional governance program is in place that can then determine whether or not you need facilities as close to one another as many of the facilities currently are in this province? A further question that I have is: what consideration of these capital projects has been given against the possibility of having a more comprehensive, efficient ambulance system in this province?

I think that many people understand that all too frequently health care capital construction decisions have been made not on the basis of health care decision-making but on the basis of political consideration or on the basis of economic development consideration. As an aside, I think I'd like to make the point that in fact the previous Minister of Health was known to be making, beginning to make decisions on the basis of, believe it or not, health care consideration. It may well have been that that's why she lost

the leadership and was later summarily drummed out of her party: for actually beginning to make the right kind of decisions. As remarkable as that might seem, it is well known and widely known that in fact that is why she lost.

MRS. BLACK: Wrong.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, you know, you can say, "Wrong," but certainly the general consensus is that . . . [interjections] I must have hit a nerve. Certainly the general consensus is that the Conservative Party rural MLAs were very concerned that Ms Betkowski was beginning to make some very tough decisions.

My point is that much of this decision-making seems to be driven by economic development considerations, and the irony is that many people who live close to these facilities in fact end up not wanting to stay in those facilities at all but wanting to come into urban or larger regional centres because that's where they get the kind of health care they need. What this leads me to, I think, is a really unsavoury and artificial rural/urban distinction in the delivery of health care. I think that the government has perpetrated this myth – contributing much to the deficit problem that we now face – that if you have a building, somehow you have health care. Well, clearly you don't necessarily have health care because you have a building. Of course, buildings are obvious, and they probably buy votes. The fact is that people, rural residents in many cases, come to major regional and urban health care centres because that's where they get the highest quality of health care. This artificial rural/urban distinction is very, very divisive in a society, is very corrosive, and in fact sees the Minister of Health meeting herself going the other way.

The fact of the matter is that as many as 50 percent of the patients that go to the U of A hospital are rural residents. So by continuing to build facilities anywhere that, one, we don't have information on whether they can be justified from a health care basis and, two, that we don't have information on how it is that they are prioritized one against another and against other than health care projects, we see the decision-making process here to be, I believe, fraught with problems, to some extent without a context, and falling into the danger that: who knows if these projects are required for health care or for economic development or simply for cynical political reasons?

I think the minister owes us a greater explanation of why it is that each of these projects is required and why it is that projects like the project in Slave Lake, which the Conservative Member for Lesser Slave Lake has argued so eloquently is required, hasn't been authorized by the power structure, the hierarchy, in her own party. So I leave those comments and those questions with the minister.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to ask some questions and make some comments regarding vote 1.6, Auxiliary Hospitals, and vote 1.7, Nursing Homes.

From the government's own background release on health projects under construction to continue and projects in planning and design stage deferred, I count 241 auxiliary hospital beds deferred and only 100 additional new beds that are in the process of being added. Also, 50 nursing home beds are being added with none deferred. Mr. Chairman, on the surface this may look good and responsible on the part of the government, that given the state

of the province's finances they saw fit to defer some projects thus saving Alberta taxpayers some money, but below the surface we have a serious crisis developing, and that is a long-term care bed crisis. In Edmonton alone the current waiting list for long-term care beds is 384 seniors and elderly. Most of these seniors and elderly are taking up precious acute care beds while they wait. One large Edmonton long-term care facility is indeed reporting a waiting list of six years.

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

Long-term care is in a crisis situation, Mr. Chairman, which will only worsen as the baby boomer bulge works its way through the health care system. Therefore, long-range planning is of the essence if we are going to meet the future needs of our seniors and elderly.

9:40

What is so disturbing about this, Mr. Chairman, is that this crisis did not have to be, had the previous administration been more responsible in their spending. Yes, we do now have a new Premier and many newly elected members who I think are struggling to fix this mess, and I'll be the first to wish them well for the sake of this generation and future generations to come. Otherwise, we could be in for some very, very tough times.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I want to turn our attention to vote 1.6, Auxiliary Hospitals, and vote 1.7, Nursing Homes, and ask some questions and make some comments.

Vote 1.6, Auxiliary Hospitals: I see there are five projects currently deferred, four projects are under way, and some are very nearly completed. When I say nearly completed, in fact some of them should probably be opening. As of October 4 in the government background I see that the Claresholm care centre was 85 percent complete. There they were constructing a replacement 80-bed psychiatric rehabilitation extended care centre. Then St. Joseph's hospital in Edmonton was 99 percent complete at that time. It should indeed be almost opening. Then we have the auxiliary hospital in Lloydminster; this was 98 percent complete as of October 4. It's a new 50-bed replacement auxiliary hospital and nursing home, and these are renovations. Then we have the Strathcona long-term care facility. This is just in its early stages, 15 percent complete, I see, according to the background. This is going to be a much needed 75-bed long-term care facility.

I also want to echo our Member for Edmonton-McClung, and that is regarding the lack of information. It is very difficult for us indeed to rationalize these projects just by looking at the information we have.

Vote 1.7, Nursing Homes. Here we only have one project currently deferred, which would have provided 50 beds. Again, it's difficult for us to rationalize why this was deferred, except for monetary reasons of course.

My questions are going to be quite general. The first one is: has the minister in conjunction with the Minister of Health done studies to determine the economic cost of not building long-term care facilities? What studies have been done to measure the effect that the slowdown of the building of long-term care facilities has on society? People, almost exclusively women, who could otherwise be working and paying taxes, are sometimes forced to withdraw from the work force and care for their elderly parents. The stress placed on families is very significant.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A point of order, Mr. Minister?

DR. WEST: Mr. Chairman, would the hon. member entertain a question in debate?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. YANKOWSKY: What studies have been done to relate the cost of construction against the societal cost of the reduced work force? Have studies been done to determine the cost-effectiveness of converting some of the underused acute care hospitals to long-term care facilities? Is there a regionalization plan which will provide a co-ordinating role in determining where any future facilities will be constructed? What is the priority list for auxiliary and nursing home projects? Which project currently on hold will be the first to come off hold? What about other projects which did not even make it to this list? What is the priority list for these? For example, Sylvan Lake has plans for a much needed long-term care facility. Where does this project come into the list? The minister did mention some construction at Sylvan Lake, and I take it this is a lodge that is being constructed there.

Also, in June of 1992 we made the then minister aware of pressing needs for long-term care facilities in the communities of Hinton and Edson. Has any consideration been given to ease the needs there? We heard, of course, tonight from the Member for Lesser Slave Lake regarding the need at Lesser Slave Lake and the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan about the need in Fort Saskatchewan. Also, in June of 1992 we brought up the need for a long-term care facility in Spirit River. Again, has any consideration been given to ease the need there?

In view of the very small number of long-term care beds actually being added and taking into account the government's policy of 96 percent occupancy levels introduced in 1991, has the government considered lifting this 96 percent count so that every available bed can be utilized?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have no further questions or comments.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Cypress-Medicine Hat, you're rising on a point of order?

DR. L. TAYLOR: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Seeing no other hon. members across the way rise, I thought that I would try and answer some of the questions that have been put forward. It seems like a lot of them came to my department. I should make note that if I don't answer them all tonight, we'll try and answer them tomorrow night. Failing that, as I have done before, you will get your answers in writing.

We talked about the \$166 million that public works has in capital construction throughout the province. The first thing that was brought up was the co-operation and the process that takes place to determine which of these projects goes ahead and how they reach the stages that they're at right now. Some of your questions would be better directed to the Minister of Health because that department determines the need, through co-ordination and consultation with local boards and local area people that are involved in the health care delivery who are also constituents of that area. Further, it determines the viability of any project in a certain area. This has gone on for years and years within this province. While you can question the process, in most cases you can't question the results, because in virtually all cases the facilities were needed in those areas. I think, though, that when we look at the roundtable discussions and they said we have to put

a moratorium on all capital construction in the health care area, until such time as we've all sat down . . . [interjection] Sorry?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. We have one member – Cypress-Medicine Hat, will you please comply with the request? Thank you.

Mr. Minister.

9:50

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm sure that he was listening quite avidly, though, at the same time.

Mr. Chairman, as we mentioned before, the roundtables did say that there should be a moratorium on all capital construction. I believe that's a valid direction, and yet you have to inject some common sense into it in places where the need has been determined. You have to proceed with some of those, because it's a very complex process, the whole health care delivery process within the province. Now, we put 27 projects on hold – they're in different stages of design and programming – because we felt that the time was right to further determine the needs, through the consultation process, as to whether we're looking at more long-term care beds or maybe more flexibility in the construction of these facilities where it would allow a conversion from one use to another to better utilize the total space. I think that's a valid concern that came out of the roundtables that have been held so far. Of course, we haven't seen the reports from the most recent roundtables, but I'm sure that they will follow up on that.

I can assure you that there is the utmost co-operation and co-ordination between my department and the Department of Health when we're looking at these projects. We go out and review them to see if there's a more viable way, a more economical way of building the facility and at the same time meeting the needs of the people in the area. I get back again to how, when you're looking at the aging population, we have to look at everything very carefully to make sure that we can accommodate the changes in the needs within the communities.

I guess, having said that, there are times that I have a problem with people from southern Alberta determining the needs of the people in northern Alberta without knowing all the facts. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung talked about having votes in the House on each project as it comes forward. I think the only thing worse than having a vote in the House would be an uneducated vote within the House. Now, there's been all kinds of criticism about some of the projects that have gone forward in a variety of areas, particularly the one in Westlock. There have been accusations of political favouritism and a variety of other things there. At the same time, I have still challenged everybody from southern Alberta, central Alberta, or the good people from Edmonton to go out and have a look at it. Once you have looked at the old hospital and have all the facts in your hand, then come back and tell me that there was no need for that hospital to be built, because I don't think you can do it.

We have to look in our planning . . .

MR. MITCHELL: I didn't even raise Westlock.

MR. THURBER: No, you didn't raise Westlock.

Mr. Chairman, I believe it was the Member for Edmonton-Glenora that talked about health facilities and nursing stations, et cetera. In my view, that is still part of the process. My department looks after the construction end of it, but I think on the overall picture we have to determine where there are areas where maybe these are the best facilities for that particular area. That will be determined by the Department of Health in conjunction and

in consultation with the roundtables, the people of the area, the boards, the consumers of the area, and I think that's as it should be.

There have been specific questions about several different facilities within the province here. I don't know if I should get into those tonight, because I can see that my colleagues here probably are saying: why don't you be quiet and sit down, and we can talk about these tomorrow earlier? I realize that some hon. members are again trying to expand their knowledge in all of this. I appreciate that, and I will expand your knowledge in it.

AN HON. MEMBER: There's lots of room.

MR. THURBER: Yeah, there's lots of room to go in some cases.

Mr. Chairman, I think that due to the hour of the night, I would like to move that the committee now rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Sohal in the Chair]

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the 1993-1994 capital fund estimates, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report and the request for leave to sit again?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[At 9:57 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

