

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, April 24, 1997 1:30 p.m.
Date: 97/04/24
[The Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Let us pray.

Our Father, keep us mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work give us strength and wisdom.

Amen.

Please be seated.

Hon. members, before proceeding, the Chair would like to draw to the attention of all hon. members a historic event that occurred last night during Committee of Supply. For the first time in the history of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta the presiding officer and the Table officers were all women. The Chair and I'm sure all members are pleased to recognize for the records of the Assembly that the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, Mrs. Judy Gordon, Mrs. Kamuchik, Clerk Assistant and Clerk of Committees, and Ms Shannon Dean, Parliamentary Counsel, were the participants in this historic event.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions here to file, both the same wording.

We the undersigned, residents of the Province of Alberta, eighteen years of age and over, do not believe VLT gambling is in the best interests of the people of this province, therefore respectfully request the government of Alberta to ban all VLTs.

The first petition has 27 names on it, was signed by persons from Leduc, and the other is citizens of Edmonton. This has been circulated by the Alcohol Drug-Education Association of Red Deer, Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition today on behalf of 919 persons from the Pincher Creek and Crowsnest Past areas of southwest Alberta concerned about sending long-term or continuing care patients to facilities other than in their own home town or in the districts where they reside.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented on April 23, concerning the eligibility requirements for financial subsidy at the Capital Region Housing Corporation, now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned, residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government of Alberta to review and revise procedures for eligibility requirements for financial subsidy under the Capital Region Housing Corporation.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

Bill 4

Meat Inspection Amendment Act, 1997

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 4, being the Meat Inspection Amendment Act, 1997.

The purpose of this Bill is to make minor changes to more easily enforce food safety issues in the meat industry and provide reasonable search and seizure powers to meat inspectors.

[Leave granted; Bill 4 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table four copies of a report entitled Child Poverty: What are the Consequences? The report illustrates what we know about the links between income and healthy child development as well as how Canada compares to other countries in the battle against child poverty. It concludes that despite the rhetoric generated, much remains to be done to improve the lives of poor children.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you today to the rest of the Assembly here 31 very bright grade 10 students from the Calmar school in the Drayton Valley-Calmar constituency. I believe that they are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise at this time and receive the very warm welcome of this House.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to introduce through you to the Assembly 18 grades 5 and 6 students from the Edberg elementary school. They are accompanied by their teacher Mrs. Sharon Anderson and parent Mrs. Donna Sand. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I also today have the privilege of making a further introduction. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the chairman of the Capital regional health authority, Mr. Neil Wilkinson. He is seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that members of the Assembly give the traditional welcome to a very hardworking member of our health care system.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my pleasure indeed to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 30 visitors from the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. They are 29 students from Archbishop MacDonald high school. They are in grade 10 right now. They are accompanied by their teacher Mr. Bill Kobluk. Mr. Kobluk is such a dedicated teacher of the political process that he even threw his hat into the ring in the last provincial election. I welcome them all to the Assembly. I'd ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome from this House.

head: **Oral Question Period**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Calgary Trauma Treatment Centre

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Centralizing trauma care at a single hospital, the Foothills hospital in Calgary, has huge risks. Now, with the VRE outbreak at the Foothills, there is a good deal of reason to be concerned that an entire ward or more could be potentially shut down, as was the experience in the Glenrose hospital in Edmonton and recently at a Kelowna hospital in British Columbia. Where does this government plan to send Calgarians, all southern Albertans in fact, if the Foothills trauma unit ever has to be shut down because of the VRE outbreak? There is only one trauma unit in all of Calgary at this time.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that to put one of the Leader of the Opposition's statements in context, there has been in the city of Victoria and greater Victoria area one trauma centre for many, many years, and it has served that particular part of Canada quite effectively, as I understand it. I could go on to list some other metropolitan centres in Canada as well.

1:40

The second point that I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, is that it is my understanding that in the Foothills hospital, where they have very modern facilities, very good equipment, a recently expanded and very well-planned trauma facility, they are taking action to control infections, which, yes, do regrettably occur in hospitals from time to time. The capability is there, comparable to any hospital that I know of, to act and to manage this type of regrettable occurrence, and they are doing so.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, where exactly would the Minister of Health and this government propose to send people from Calgary and southern Alberta if the trauma centre were to be shut down, knowing as we all know that there are far too few trauma beds across this province everywhere?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is basing his question on two assumptions that I think are not entirely correct. First of all, with respect to this type of event it usually involves one particular section of a hospital. It is managed and contained and eliminated within that particular area, and the overall hospital staff work as an effective team to get on top of the situation and deal with it as quickly as possible. That is the case with our experience as far as this type of event when it does, thankfully rarely, occur.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that, yes, in all systems and all places there are crises that arise. For instance, we do have a major flooding situation in southern Manitoba. People in Manitoba are rallying around. Help is being provided from other provinces. We had recently a very, very serious traffic accident up in northwestern Alberta. People came forth to help with that particular event. The hospitals in that area coped with it. With respect to any major disaster, which we're not talking about here at this particular point in time – this is a very hypothetical question – I'm sure that the dedicated health professionals, the people governing the health care system, and the people of this province would deal with it.

MR. MITCHELL: Two hospitals have had wards shut down in recent memory. What would the government do if this one shut

down, knowing that they have closed the Bow Valley centre trauma unit, which would have been the ideal backup for the single trauma unit at the Foothills hospital, serving all of Calgary and all of southern Alberta?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader knows that you cannot maintain a building in case there is a certain thing that might occur some time in our living memory. In Calgary through their planned restructuring and overall plan they have three modern hospitals, three hospitals with emergency capability, and if there was that type of event, which is very rare, they have the capacity on an emergency basis to deal with it. They have contingency plans.

Crossroads Regional Health Authority

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, this government has had the Doane Raymond report on the Crossroads health authority now for eight months. During that period of time the Minister of Health has received ample correspondence and analysis from the Official Opposition and many others on this issue, and he and his government have done absolutely nothing to fix it. The result of that inaction is seen in the recent Crossroads health authority financial report. Can the Minister of Health please explain why the Crossroads regional health authority has spent \$5.2 million last year, or three times as much per person, on administration as the WestView health authority, which is very comparable in its nature?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the hon. member is aware of this. Recently, not too recently now actually – some time has passed. There is an investigation by a neutral outside party being done of the Crossroads health authority to ascertain the validity of certain concerns that have been raised over the past number of months. I look forward to that review, its results, its recommendations, because I think that all involved, and certainly the minister, are concerned that there be the most effective use of funds possible in that particular regional health authority.

MR. MITCHELL: He did nothing until he was embarrassed into it, Mr. Speaker.

To the Premier: how is it that this government continues to brag so boldly that they have taken the administrative excesses out of the health care system and put this money into health care, directly at the bedside as it were, when in fact the Crossroads regional health authority is three times as expensive administratively as WestView is?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly taking 200 or so separate health jurisdictions and reorganizing those jurisdictions into 17 regional health authorities I'm sure saved a tremendous amount in administrative costs.

Relative to the Crossroads regional health authority, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member of the opposition, in the way that he's couching his question and, I assume, his concern, is admitting that this particular situation is an exception to the rule in this province, where we have brought down the cost of administration in the health care system. This is one among several concerns that we have that are part of this investigation.

MR. MITCHELL: He's wrong about that, Mr. Speaker.

Given that tens of millions of dollars are at risk in the management of the Crossroads health authority because of lack of accountability, what steps is the Premier going to take to ensure that this doesn't become hundreds of millions of dollars at risk across the entire health care system because of the same lack of accountability?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I'm not so sure that the question is directed at the Premier. It could be directed to the Minister of Health, who might ask the Premier if I'm going to do something. Mr. Speaker, the way the question was framed, it was: will someone ask the Premier? Well, do you want to ask me that?

THE SPEAKER: Third main opposition question, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries Inc.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Provincial Treasurer asked the Auditor General to examine the values of all government loans, investments, loan guarantees, and in particular the Al-Pac deal, but I'm still concerned about the collectibility of the Al-Pac loan in particular, which is growing at a very rapid pace. So today I am tabling four excerpts from a March 13, 1997, information circular from Crestbrook, one of the major partners, in fact the largest partner, in the Al-Pac joint venture agreement, which shows that they have deferred two consecutive payments to the bank in the last year due to insufficient cash flow. My question is to the Provincial Treasurer, which he may interpret more as a suggestion perhaps. Given that Al-Pac's loans from the banks must be paid out ahead of the government loan, will the Treasurer ask the Auditor General to take Crestbrook's cash flow situation into account when assessing the overall carrying value of the Al-Pac loan?

MR. DAY: Yes.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you for accepting that suggestion, Mr. Treasurer.

Given that the Treasurer receives regular cash flow statements from Al-Pac, can he tell Albertans what pulp price is required for taxpayers to receive interest payments on the \$374 million government loan?

MR. DAY: If I was able to do that and project that, Mr. Speaker, I'd choose another vocation. I will say that I will make available the required reporting that Al-Pac does to this government and to the Treasury. I understand that there is reporting that is coming out very soon, and when we get that - I think it's first quarter financials - we'll thoroughly review it. We'll make that available, and at that point if the numbers aren't there in terms of what's been paid to the bank, which I certainly don't have access to at this moment, I can pursue it and ask that question.

1:50

MR. ZWOZDESKY: It's the pulp price thresholds which are built into the agreement which we'll look forward to receiving.

Since the total amount owing by Al-Pac to taxpayers will be nearly \$600 million by the time the banks get paid out in the year 2003, what steps is the Treasurer taking to minimize our financial exposure and to craft an exit strategy?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, our commitment and our statement and the loan guarantees, very clearly to Al-Pac and to the people of Alberta: there is no forgiveness for these loans. The principle amount, the interest amount is fully required. We will maintain that position. We're not backing off on that. Hopefully things will continue for Al-Pac. We never know in this particular business, as I understand it, from day to day with the volatility of prices how they're doing and what their various stresses are.

The last figures I saw in terms of last year, what Al-Pac has paid out at all levels of government in terms of taxes is something of the order of \$128 million, money through jobs, of course, and salaries. So there has been some significant paying out that comes from this particular venture. To relate directly to the concern that the member has, which I share as an Alberta taxpayer, we are firmly holding Al-Pac to all commitments as written in that particular agreement.

Privatization

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to file today four copies of a transcript of a speech given in Toronto last November by the then economic development minister, currently the Minister of Energy. I'd like to quote a couple of lines from this. On privatization he says: "Liquor was the loss leader to start this campaign on privatization." In a separate quote:

We sold off government properties. We sold 70,000 units representing \$1.8 billion worth of property. We took big losses. It's probably the single largest loss - over \$2.5 billion - that the Alberta government has had. But you know, take your loss up front, sell for a loss.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: given that Albertans have always understood that the pursuit of privatization was a triumph of ideology over common sense, how can the Premier justify \$2.5 billion in losses just from privatization?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have access to those particular figures. I know it's not appropriate to ask the former minister, the minister who's - who's responsible now for liquor? I don't know if that . . . [interjection] Okay, maybe we'll hand it off to Municipal Affairs, because it was Alberta Mortgage and Housing that handled the sale. I recall the minister of the day speaking quite eloquently about getting fair market value for most of these properties.

Now, Mr. Speaker, not all of these properties went into private hands. Some of them are still public facilities. I know in the town of Innisfail, for instance, the liquor store is now a school and a very, very fine school. It was good use of a resource. Really, the school district there needs to be commended for coming up with such an innovative idea.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just don't have the answer, but I will attempt to get it for the hon. member. I do recall the minister of the day saying that they were trying to get the best price possible for these properties.

MS BARRETT: Well, I guess there's not a lot of information sharing going on in that cabinet when the minister of economic development, one of the most important portfolios in the cabinet, goes to Ontario to brag about losing \$2.5 billion in privatization.

In his endeavour to answer the question, Mr. Speaker, will the Premier also get for all Albertans and table in this Assembly an itemized account of every one of those \$2.5 billion in losses?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, "we sold off government properties. We sold 70,000 units representing \$1.8 billion worth

of property. We took big losses.” Is the hon. member alluding to liquor stores only, or is she alluding to the social housing and the huge inventory of social housing that we had, fully subsidized housing that never could be sold at the value that it was bought for? That, I believe, was in the late '70s and the early '80s, Mr. Speaker, when property was at an all-time high. Property prices were going through the roof then.

THE SPEAKER: Sorry, hon. minister. *Beauchesne* 409 clearly does not permit ministers to respond to questions concerning previous portfolios.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the admission that the government lost \$2.5 billion, using the minister's own words, probably the biggest single loss in the history of the government of Alberta, will the Premier please tell Albertans right now just how much more of the taxpayers' dollars he's willing to squander in this race to privatization?

MR. KLEIN: Well, this stretches over a long, long period of time. Many of the properties that were sold, Mr. Speaker, were acquired when the market was at an all-time high. Those properties were acquired through the mid-'70s, when property was going through the roof. I wasn't even the mayor of Calgary at that time, but I certainly recall the amount of public housing and the amount of subsidized housing that was available and sponsored by the then Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Well, we're no longer in that business. We had to get rid of our inventory. There was a deliberate government policy established, I believe in the early '90s, to sell off those properties. That has been achieved, and certainly, you can expect to get the prices that were in place in 1990, when the market was somewhat depressed.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I do appreciate comments through the Chair. That is most appropriate.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Calgary-Fort.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that our government's mission is to help the handicapped adult to be independent, and my question is very practical. Looking at the budget paper on the social services' budget, there is a provision for increasing the rate of AISH, the assured income for the severely handicapped program. My constituents have asked me what this increase means to the handicapped person.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. In the upcoming budget we are proposing a 1 percent increase in the AISH benefits, which would put it from \$810 to \$818. What we are, however, doing is increasing those benefits by \$20 million. Last year we spent \$200 million on the AISH program; this year we're spending \$220 million.

I would also remind the hon. member that we have the second highest program for disabled recipients in Canada. They range from a low of \$529 to a high of around \$920. We are alone in second place, keeping in mind that rents, the cost of living, the sales tax in Ontario, which has the highest, are considerably higher. So the actual purchasing power here is very close to

being number one.

Thank you.

2:00

MR. CAO: Can the Minister tell the Legislature what provisions there are to help people when there is an extraordinary expense such as larger bills or, say, the heater broke down?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When the price of propane went up significantly over the winter, we did put in a special program that allowed the AISH and welfare recipients to apply to look after that difference in the price. There is, however, no program at present in the AISH program to allow for extraordinary expenses such as water heaters breaking down.

MR. CAO: Under the AISH program can the minister explain to the House if both assets and income count when determining if someone is eligible for this program?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a question that has been raised by several MLAs in the House. To clarify it, the welfare or the SFI program is both income and asset tested. The AISH program, however, is only income tested. The rationale behind that is that we felt that if they were severely handicapped, we should not put any more onerous problems on them; therefore, their assets would not be tested. Significantly, it is only income tested.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Prescription Drugs

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. One of the major health concerns in Alberta is the high cost of prescription drugs. The cost of these drugs is growing faster than any other health-related cost, and the whole question of the practices of pharmaceutical manufacturers and the federal agency that monitors prices is attracting a lot of attention in Ottawa with the review of Bill C-91. My question is to the hon. Premier this afternoon. Firstly, what specific representations has this Premier made to Ottawa on behalf of all of those Albertans who want to see lower drug prices?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the letter with me, but certainly I sent a letter to the Prime Minister – it was dated March 3 – and encouraged them to continue to make progress on the Bill.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my follow-up question would be this: how can the Premier justify on the one hand advocating on behalf of the pharmaceutical industry, yet at the very same time his own government won't pay for brand-name prescriptions if there's a cheaper, namely generic, alternative available? It would appear the Premier is trying to walk forward and backward at the same time.

MR. KLEIN: Really, the key here is to strike a reasonable balance. The hon. member has to understand also that literally millions and millions and millions of dollars come into this province relative to pharmaceutical research, Mr. Speaker, and that's the other part of the equation.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, since even the pharmaceutical industry acknowledged it hadn't lived up to the bargain it made when Bill C-91 was introduced three years ago, my final question

to the hon. Premier would be this: what kinds of steps is he putting in place so that he's able to assess whether there's any kind of investment in this province that comes close to offsetting the enormous additional cost to Albertans who need prescription medication?

MR. KLEIN: One of the enormous costs associated with prescription medication is the tremendous waste, and that is an educational process. Thirty tonnes of drugs are rounded up each year and are destroyed at the Swan Hills waste treatment plant. God knows how many more tonnes go down the toilet or into garbage cans and are not rounded up. That's where the real shame is, Mr. Speaker. That's where the real waste is.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Community Lottery Boards

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, my question today is to the chairman of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Policy Secretariat, and it's an authentic constituent question arising out of the throne speech. Municipal government feels that it's appropriate to have elected persons handling the lottery money. Since municipal governments already exist, they would be an appropriate venue with no added costs. Does this fit with whatever description will be available to define community lottery boards?

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, it was my privilege to chair the Lotteries Review Committee and to now chair the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Policy Secretariat. Consistent with the recommendations the Lotteries Review Committee recommended that community lottery boards be put in place to distribute additional lottery funds within the community. In Budget '97 it has been identified that next year 50 million additional dollars will be allocated for this purpose.

Recognizing the value of using an existing board structure, we suggested municipal elected representation could well be included. However, we felt this representation should be minimal and a minority as Albertans overall wanted a cross-section community involvement and felt it essential.

Speaker's Ruling Questions to Private Members

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, the tradition of this House is that questions should be addressed to members of Executive Council. There have been previous rulings by hon. Speaker Schumacher that in certain circumstances and in certain situations questions might be addressed to those individuals who serve in capacities known as chairmen of special standing committees if those questions are dealt with in a matter of agenda items and scheduling matters but not policy items. Matters related to policy are dealt with by ministers of the Crown, who have an oath and certain responsibilities with respect to those matters.

I'll allow this to go today, but perhaps the phraseology of your next two questions might be in the context not of government policy. Those matters have to be dealt with by members of Executive Council, who have the oath and are sworn to attain such matters.

Community Lottery Boards (continued)

MS KRYCZKA: Then, Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct my

first supplementary question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. My first supplementary states: would it be more efficient to have the municipal council, the elected people, handle the distribution of the lottery money rather than creating several new boards?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, in response to the question, I think that variable would be as per the council's choice. I think that what the hon. member has advised is that there's a review of the stakeholder responses on this, that councils and other community groups are responding to what the structure of the board should be, and there will be a report later.

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: when might we expect a description of community lottery boards, how they would be formed, and their roles with respect to distributing funding for worthy community organizations?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, could I be so bold as to ask that the chairman of that review committee supplement my response. I am sure that it will be forthcoming, but I await your ruling.

THE SPEAKER: No. I'd invite the hon. minister to continue with her response.

MS EVANS: Then, I would provide that information at a later date. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater. I apologize for the inappropriate utilization in the name of your constituency, hon. member. I'd repeat again: Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Rural Hospitals

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Redwater hospital will be closing acute care beds because of doctor shortages, and patients are now being taken by ambulance to the nearest open hospital whenever Redwater is closed. The Minister of Health has a report on his desk advising him that Alberta's shortages of doctors will get worse, and a survey of rural doctors shows that 42 percent plan on retiring or leaving in the next year. So despite the rural physician action plan, things are getting worse not better. To the Minister of Health: when can the people of Redwater and area once again depend on their local hospital to be open when they need it?

2:10

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I understand the situation the Redwater hospital is open. It is operating during the traditional daytime working hours, and it is being served by physicians. The issue is that of 24-hour, or round-the-clock, service. As to what the particular circumstances are in terms of that longer period of service not being able to be provided by the current medical staff, I would have to investigate further. I'm sure that the regional health authority is looking at a way of managing the situation.

Now, with respect to the overall physician supply situation in the province, Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge as government, I acknowledge as minister that we do have a shortage of physicians in certain rural communities. We do have a rural physician action plan which involves the locum programs, which involves assistance with medical education and other incentives, and it is

working in this province.

I just met very recently with the executive director of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. They were able to report that through their initiatives I believe it was something in the neighbourhood of 15 or 16 doctors making commitments to go into rural practice. We are making progress in that particular area. We acknowledge that we have a problem, but we are acting on it.

MRS. SOETAERT: Mr. Speaker, that action plan is not working. I'd like the minister, if he could, to advise all of us here in the Legislative Assembly what other Alberta communities are at immediate risk of losing hospital services because of doctor shortages. Those communities need to act.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware at the moment of the number. It is a very, very small number, but I would certainly look into that.

Mr. Speaker, what I would like to emphasize here – and we can talk about the Redwater area. There's been the contention across the way that the rural physician action plan isn't working. Some months ago, perhaps over a year ago, the town of Smoky Lake was short of doctors. Through the vehicle of the rural physician action plan they were able to get two doctors to come and serve that community. I understand that the community is very, very appreciative and very pleased with the quality of service that they are currently receiving.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental. Redwater needs an answer today. They don't want any more reviews or reports. What can you do so that their acute care beds are open this weekend?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the very important aspect here is that I am sure the regional health authority will take action to make sure the people of the Redwater area are receiving health care as needed this weekend. This weekend. If the issue is in fact an issue of physician supply, we as Alberta Health will certainly be working to assist them in terms of that overall need being met.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton Mill Woods.

Education for the Disadvantaged

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent Statistics Canada report states that children from lower income families in Canada do not achieve the same academic standards as children from middle- and high-income families. The report also pointed out that children from lower income families are twice as likely to repeat a grade and three times more likely to be in remedial education. To the Minister of Education: what programs does this government have to help these children succeed in schools?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, at the risk of being didactic, I have traveled to many schools throughout the province, and it is true, in my observation, that many children from lower income families have greater educational needs and have fewer academic opportunities than children who come from wealthier backgrounds. The government has introduced two programs that will help equalize the opportunity for these children. The first one is called the PEP program, the program enhancement project, which provides

additional funds to ECS operators for children with significant social and economic needs. The second program is the EOP, or enhanced opportunity program, that is to continue the work set out in the PEP program and addresses the needs of children who are at risk in grades 1 through 12.

I think those two initiatives will help ensure that those children who come from those types of backgrounds will have better opportunities to succeed within our education system.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how do these disadvantaged children get the help they need and rightfully deserve?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, proposals are submitted by school boards to the Department of Education for eligibility under these two programs. Each proposal must contain strategies for specifically addressing the needs of local children. The criteria for eligibility under these programs can vary widely because of the wide variety of needs that children in those circumstances may have.

MR. AMERY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my final question is also to the same minister. Can the minister give me some specific examples of how students benefit from this provincial funding?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, as I did indicate, the criteria for eligibility under the program are very wide because the needs of these children can be very wide. Accordingly, the proposals that have come forward have been very wide as well. They range from things as simple as making sure the child gets to school every day to things like hot lunch programs. It might involve speech pathology. It could mean help for children to spend extra hours on math or language arts. It might also mean programs that will help parents be better parents in terms of promoting a stronger learning environment, home reading programs and such. The list is a very lengthy one of the types of programs that school boards have submitted and have been accepted by both the PEP and EOP programs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, I sincerely hope that certain colleagues of ours will not interrupt you as you present your question to the Assembly.

Education Funding

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure she won't.

Funding for school programs, resources for special-needs children, and large class sizes top the concerns of 40 Calgary public school councils. In the words of one parent: funding is totally inadequate. My questions are to the Minister of Education. What solutions to these concerns will the government Calgary caucus take to their upcoming meeting with the Calgary board of education? Would they share those solutions with the House?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I am strongly of the view that we achieve a great deal more through co-operation rather than confrontation, and I think that our Calgary caucus is very much interested in getting together with the boards, both the Calgary public and the Calgary separate boards, to work through solutions and identify what the issues are. I know that all members of the government caucus, regardless of whether they're from Calgary

or any other parts of the province, are concerned about issues as to whether or not the funding levels are appropriate for schools, but it strikes me there are a great number more issues. At the end of the day, we will continue to monitor those issues and continue to strive to seek solutions.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will they be suggesting ways in which the efforts of parents to raise millions of dollars for basic school needs can be reduced so that parent effort can be less than what it is right now?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to know the extent of fund-raising that is going on within the Calgary public board of education schools. The school board reports that \$24 million was raised last year. There are approximately 220 schools in the city of Calgary's public system. That would mean that each school would have to raise \$110,000 on average, and that is simply not the case. A review of some of the numbers that were in the \$24 million included, for example, cafeteria receipts.

It is not appropriate to suggest that fund-raising efforts of parents is not appreciated. Of course it is appreciated, but until we have better numbers and better figures and better facts available, it is difficult to know what the extent of fund-raising efforts by parents in Calgary in fact is.

2:20

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Their efforts are appreciated. They want some relief.

What actions will you suggest to prevent students in one school being funded at vastly different levels across that city given that have and have-not communities have quite different fund-raising capabilities?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is of course true to suggest that schools do come from different parts of the city, and there may be in fact different abilities of school councils to raise moneys. However, it is important to note that school boards do have the responsibility of ensuring that they recognize and serve those parents whether or not they have a school council that is able to raise money. It is a local decision and a local issue that should be dealt with by school boards with respect to making sure that funding is available for all students within the jurisdiction, regardless of where an individual school may be within that jurisdiction.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Hon. member.

Computers for Schools

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent editorial in the *Calgary Herald* was critical of Alberta Education's plans to put computers into schools. The specific criticism was that there is no clear, uniform curriculum, and the editorial went on to suggest that that program be put on hold until Alberta Education and Alberta school boards agree together on how the money should be spent. My question is to the hon. Minister of Education. Firstly, what, if anything, is being done to establish a curriculum?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the School Technology Task Force has been working with their education partners – the superintendents'

association, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and also the Alberta School Boards Association as well as teachers, administrators, and parents – to create a workable vision for technology in education. That group has been charged with the responsibility of developing learning outcomes, because it is clear that we do not want to be spending money in an area unless we can demonstrate that there is some result or some outcome that is positive.

That work is continuing to be done in the area of technology and will be completed later this year in the month of June, I expect. Boards and schools will then be able to make decisions on how to assist their students in achieving those outcomes, and the task group is working on ways which will provide support to boards in areas such as software, infrastructure, and also support and training.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you. My last question, once again to the hon. Minister of Education, is: are you prepared to accept the suggestion in that editorial to the effect of putting this program on hold until there is an agreement between Alberta Education and the Alberta school boards on how the money is to be spent?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the former Minister of Education has suggested to me that if we were to have to seek complete agreement, it might be well into the next century before that happened. However, what we have done is continue to work with these groups. In fact, it has gone on to matching funds that we've provided to school boards, and that amount in aggregate when matched is about \$130 million.

I'm happy to say, Mr. Speaker, that one of the really exciting things that's happened today is that I made an announcement earlier today that we've worked out a deal with the private sector, with Microsoft, and there is now a Microsoft agreement in place with Alberta Education that will allow school boards to have access to educational software at a discount of about 80 percent.

We do want to make sure, Mr. Speaker, that there is some flexibility. We also did announce that we were loosening the restrictions that will allow school boards to use our matching dollars for things like purchasing software and networking components. That has been greeted very favourably by the school community.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Capital Health Authority

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Capital health authority was established by the Minister of Health, it not only assumed responsibility for most hospitals and health units in the cities of St. Albert and Edmonton, but it also assumed responsibility for a multimillion dollar debt. The debt continues to hamper the ability of the Capital health authority to adequately fund and deliver necessary health care services. My questions are to the Minister of Health. When will the minister make good on his commitment to eliminate the debt that the Capital health authority assumed as a result of government policy?

MR. JONSON: With the overall approach to funding health care in the province, we have been able through government's management and meeting its fiscal goals to reinvest a significant amount of money into the health care system. In the case of the Capital health authority – and I would commend them for their hard work and budgeting skills – it is my understanding that

yesterday they were able to approve a balanced budget. So, Mr. Speaker, I would indicate that they are managing within the resources provided to them and I think providing good care.

In terms of debts and deficits, Mr. Speaker, that is something that we are reviewing across the province and working with the RHAs if there are cases where particular attention is needed.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The debt is still there.

Will the minister explain why he continues to force the regional health authority to pay off debts from their own operating funds when it seems to be government policy to forgive the debts of government-backed loans?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hope the hon. member is not advocating a return to a situation which existed in this province some years back, and that is that there was no incentive for hospital boards to balance their books and to manage their financial overruns. It was, I know, well meant at the time, but instead, when a particular hospital or hospital unit ran a deficit, automatically the provincial government came in and paid off the debt.

So I think, Mr. Speaker, the important thing here is that the overall approach of my department and of government is to plan and to manage budgets, balance budgets, manage debt. As I've indicated to the hon. member, this is something that we're certainly paying attention to.

MS LEIBOVICI: The regional authority inherited its debt.

Will the minister acknowledge at least this, that the dollars used to pay down the debt and interest accrued are dollars that are being taken away from patient services?

MR. JONSON: Certainly I acknowledge that any interest payments that the regional health authority here in Edmonton may be making are a component in the expenditures under their budget.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: Today, hon. members, three members' statements: the first will be by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Impaired Driving

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In an instant on June 23, 1996, near Morley, Alberta, the lives of three families were shattered. Four young people returning home to Calgary, returning to their families following a weekend camping trip were killed instantly in a head-on collision. The lives of these four young people were ended by an alleged impaired driver. He was drunk, and these young girls paid the ultimate price.

2:30

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I would like to read to the members of the Assembly an excerpt from the letter written to me by the parents of two of these girls.

Two of these young people were our daughters - Amber who was 20 years old and her sister Brandy who was 15, the other two (girls) were very close friends of our girls. Not only did we lose our family that day, but our life as we've known it has changed forever. As parents you work and dream for a

future for your children. Our dreams also died. We are left mad, angry and frustrated. Most of the time we are numb and sick. How do you walk away and rebuild your life? We are now at a point where we need to see changes made. How many more innocent people have to die before we realize the impaired drinking laws are not working?

Mr. Speaker, the alleged drunk driver in this case was charged with four counts of criminal negligence, one count of criminal negligence causing injury, and four counts of impaired driving causing death. This man did not even possess a valid driver's licence. By the time the preliminary hearings are concluded and a court date is set for the accused, a year and a half will have passed since this tragic day.

Mr. Speaker, this extended period of time is extremely difficult on families. How do these three families pick up the pieces of their shattered lives and move on when justice has not yet been served? In 1995 over 10,000 people were charged in Alberta with drinking and driving offences. Although this is down from 12,230 people charged in 1994, there are still 10,000 people driving on our roads while they are impaired, unnecessarily placing the lives of Albertans at risk.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, we must continue to educate and raise awareness to put an end to these tragedies, to save the lives of our children. I share this story with members of this Assembly on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Keuben in loving memory of Amber and Brandy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Millar Western Pulp Mill

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I'll be reading a shortened version of a letter that a constituent of mine, Mr. Malowany, sent about three weeks ago to the Premier. My constituent is still waiting for a reply.

Dear Mr. Klein.

I have just . . . [read] an article in the Edmonton Journal entitled "Mill got sweetheart deal" . . . The deal, as I read it, means that \$245 million of taxpayers' money has . . . vanished because of bad government decisions . . . Mr. Klein. You said you would get tough with the problems facing health care, education and seniors' programs, and there is no doubt . . . that you kept your promise. [However,] when it comes to getting tough on losing millions of dollars to loan guarantees you . . . strike out . . .

I would like to bring to your attention some other money that is owed to the government . . . My mother in law incorrectly filled out her application for her Senior's Benefit and received about \$900.00 more than she should have. The people looking after the Senior's Benefit found the mistake . . . about a year [later] . . . [She] was horrified to learn she now owed the government . . . under \$1,000.00 (that's about 8.3% of her yearly income, she only makes about \$12,000.00 in pensions!). The representatives for the Senior's Benefit program said that the money owed would be collected by taking back some of her future benefits as she can not pay the whole debt up front. See how tough your government can be when it puts its mind to it. [Well], if you can get \$900.00 back from a 74 year old woman you should be able to do better than 10 cents on the dollar loaned to Millar Western.

I would like to make a proposal to you; why not [offer] my mother in law the same . . . deal as the one to Millar Western. Have your government sell me the rights to collect the debt from [her] for about 10 cents on the dollar. I'll pay her debt of about \$900.00 for about \$90.00, and then you can reinstate her full Senior's Benefit entitlement. I doubt [however] you'll go for

it . . . Too bad, you . . . can not muster up the same type of courage to go after big business and teach them a lesson like you have taught the Seniors of this province.

If you would like to investigate the possibility of assisting in the writing off [of] my mother in laws debt, please do not hesitate to contact me (as her english is poor and was the partial cause of her error in her application.)

I look forward to your reply.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Education Restructuring

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon in these two minutes I'd like to speak briefly about some of the educational issues that were raised in my community during the election. As many of you know, there was a large forum held with over 40 schools participating. The parents brought forward a very strategic and well-thought-through series of issues for all of us to consider. I've been in contact with a number of stakeholders and parents, as one of the women who organized this meeting is a constituent of mine.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that we identify to this House some of those issues and also some of the suggestions to deal with them so that we have a vision of how to look at the implementation of the restructuring of education. Number one, I do believe we need a spirit of co-operation, and we have to recognize that all our schools and our boards and this government are in a period of transition as we reposition ourselves in education. I'm very pleased with the fact that an initiative of mine that we talked about in our community, a standing policy specifically identifying education as a priority, has been identified in this government. The standing policy on education and training is a significant movement forward.

We also have to look at the priorities of the issues that parents raised and encourage boards to include those priorities as they set their budget and policy decisions. I think it's important that we also look at who is responsible for these issues so that when we set these priorities, whether it's our teaching community, the parents, the business, or the students themselves, the trustees have the opportunity to allocate some discussion where those priorities may be developed. I think it's important to recognize the role of trustees as elected officials and their responsibility not only to set policy but to uphold the School Act. I think that issues such as special-needs funding and the question of taxation and the allocation of resources are going to need much further discussion as we move to this modified model.

Mr. Speaker, the last thing I want to recommend is that some of our schools are in serious transition and their size alone requires that in-depth review be dealt with, and I'm very committed on behalf of my constituents to participate in that process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Projected Government Business**

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 7(5) to seek some clarity from the Government House Leader as to the projected government business for next week.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, actually, I'd like to have the Deputy Government House Leader do that.

Thank you.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, it's anticipated that for the week of April 28 through May 1 starting on Monday afternoon, there would be addresses in reply to the Speech from the Throne. The evening of the 28th would see us deal with Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply. In the Assembly would be Agriculture, Food and Rural Development in committee C. In room 512 Energy in committee D. We would then revert to Committee of the Whole to deal further with Bill 6, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act.

On Tuesday the 29th, Government Bills and Orders, again addresses in reply to the Speech from the Throne. In the evening Committee of Supply would deal with Executive Council in the Assembly, committee B, and in room 512 Advanced Education and Career Development, committee A, and then deal with third reading of Bill 6.

Wednesday evening Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply, Municipal Affairs in the Assembly, committee C, and in room 512 Economic Development and Tourism, committee D, and second reading of Bill 7, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act.

On Thursday May 1 in the afternoon Committee of Supply, Education in the Assembly, committee A, and Community Development in room 512 in committee B, reverting to Committee of the Whole to deal with Bill 7, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders

head:

Second Reading

Bill 6

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1997

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move Bill 6, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1997, for second reading.

The first three sections of the Bill deal with the explanatory notes in terms of the expenses themselves, and then schedules A and B break it out departmentally and showing exact amounts.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, you rose and sat down. I'm sorry. Did I miss something here?

MR. SAPERS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The intent of my colleague was to speak to second reading on the appropriation Bill, and he had stood in his place out of sequence because the Treasurer had not moved it yet. He was trying to catch your eye before you called for the vote.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. House leader of the Official Opposition, I noted movement from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, and then when the Speaker moved, the hon. member moved down. Unfortunately, we have moved the motion. We've had the vote. So we'll move on. Perhaps next time, hon. member, just wiggle something, and the Speaker will really understand.

I appreciate, though, the respect shown to the Chair in terms of movement downward when the Speaker did move. I hope that this is not a major transgression. We'll be here for, I'm sure, several more days now discussing estimates, and I'm sure there'll be ample opportunity provided to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

We're now in Committee of Supply. The Speaker is leaving.

head: Committee of Supply
2:40

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call the committee to order.

head: Main Estimates 1997-98
Transportation and Utilities

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call upon the hon. minister to make his opening comments.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon. Certainly before I begin, I would like to take this opportunity to once again introduce my staff that are present and express my gratitude to the staff for the excellent work they have done through this past year. It's been a challenging year, and it's been the follow-up to the restructuring that's taken place. Quite frankly, I'm quite pleased and quite proud of the department that we have in place today. We're lean, we're mean, and we're going to do a very effective job.

Again, I'd like to introduce my deputy, Ed McLellan; June MacGregor, the ADM responsible for information technology and utility services; Bob James, acting ADM of finance and administration; Jim Sawchuk, the ADM for planning, programming, and technical services; Lyle O'Neill, the acting deputy for regional services; Sheena Sheppy, the director for financial planning and analysis; and Gary Boddez, the ADM for traffic safety services. Gary has just joined the department, and we want to welcome Gary. Gary of course is going to be heading up our whole new area as far as the delivery of safety services is concerned. They are the group that really make the wheels turn and keep the cars running, and we appreciate very much the efforts of the entire group and the work that they're doing.

The 1997-98 budget for Alberta Transportation and Utilities responds to the pressures created by the positive economic climate that exists in the province today. First of all, it's prudent as we're not requesting any substantive increases as far as funding is concerned. It's also prudent because it continues the trend to reduced requirements for administration. However, it also shows increased investment in the road system, responding to the growing economy and the growing needs of the province.

We've completed the commitments of our three-year business plan to contract out those areas of business that can best be delivered by the private sector. Highway maintenance, engineering design, and information services are now done by private firms who have the expertise and specialize in those particular businesses. We've successfully made the transition, and these major changes have allowed us to streamline the department. Our administration and program delivery costs are down over \$21 million since 1994-95. Our staffing is down from about 2,100 in '95 to less than 800 today. These savings are being reinvested in programs that benefit Alberta transportation systems and traffic safety goals.

We've also met our commitment to maintain our level of investment in municipal programming. In fact, we are reallocating funds so that our municipalities can better take advantage of the growing economy. We're working towards achieving the goals as outlined in our three-year business plan, and I'd just like to review some of those goals very briefly with you, Mr. Chairman.

Reinvesting in strategic highway improvements is our top goal. Strengthening rural/municipal transportation partnerships,

supporting urban transportation partnerships, improving traffic safety, managing Alberta's primary highway safety, supporting response to major disasters and emergencies, monitoring the motor carrier industry, supporting safe and cost-effective utility services, and supporting cost-effective government - I think that is really key to the whole success, Mr. Chairman.

The reductions in staffing levels to the target of 700 FTEs for 1997-98 is the result of our contracting-out and re-engineering initiatives. Certainly we are achieving our goals and our objectives in a very timely fashion.

In the way of some background, in the fall of '95 the department announced the awarding of the first two highway maintenance contracts. All contracts within the private sector were in place by October 17, 1996, and 1997 will be the first complete year the maintenance of Alberta's primary highway system will be performed by private-sector contracts. In that time we'll be able to successfully measure the successes of the initiatives that have come forward.

We were fortunate to have experienced a seamless transition from government operations to contractors, largely due, Mr. Chairman, to the close working relationships with the industry and the professional approach of both the current and previous staff members. Certainly we want to take this opportunity to commend and compliment both the staff and the industry in allowing for this transition to take place in such a seamless way.

The private sector had the opportunity to hire the skilled professionals and technical staff that were previously employed by the department in various regions of the province. Also a result of outsourcing, 91 out of the original 110 highway maintenance facilities owned by public works have been leased back to the contractors. Public works is in the process of disposing of the balance.

In the long run these are important benefits to government. We no longer have to operate and maintain a large inventory of materials, equipment, and facilities. These of course all have related costs and ongoing costs, so we no longer have to spend large amounts of money in those particular areas. Ultimately we save the taxpayer huge dollars.

Our budget for primary highway maintenance and preservation includes the direct maintenance activities such as snowplowing, crack filling, mowing, line painting, and on and on. These all have been contracted out, and in many cases the contractor subcontracts to smaller agencies who are able to perform those duties. So indeed what we've done is we've expanded the whole opportunities for businesses in performing highway maintenance. It also includes preventative rehabilitation, which is contracted out on a project-by-project basis, and our officers in the field who monitor truck weights, et cetera, thereby protecting the highways from damage. Our estimate for '97-98 shows a moderate increase over the '96-97 budget, and this demonstrates our commitment to preserving the public's investment in our highways and ensuring that our highways are as safe as they possibly can be made.

2:50

Our financial support to rural and urban municipalities remains strong, Mr. Chairman. Alberta's access to networks and highways and roads under municipal jurisdiction is vital for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods. Under the Alberta cities transportation partnership, grants are provided to cities for through roads and transit facilities and will be maintained at \$25 per capita. We also continue to fund specific primary highway connectors through cities under cost-sharing agreements. The reduction in the budget is due to the scheduling of payments under

these agreements. Grants for primary highway maintenance within cities will also remain at the current level of \$1,959 per lane kilometre. The street improvement program provides funding for local improvements within towns, villages, and summer villages. The program was scheduled to sunset in '96-97, but we've renewed the commitment for \$10 million for the year '97-98 as well as '98-99, and this will assist in meeting the transportation needs in these communities.

In this upcoming fiscal year funding to rural municipalities will also continue at existing levels. Under the secondary highways partnership \$86 million will be available for capital works and rehabilitation on secondary highways. A further \$50 million will be there and provided in grants for improvements to local municipal roads.

The resource road improvement program helps municipalities upgrade local roads. This is basically the program that is designed for resource road development, where we have resources moving through municipalities that do not produce that resource or do not process that resource. So that is where that program is effective, and it's one that we dealt with last night in some context with the supplementary estimates. The resource road improvement program helps municipalities with upgrading local roads that are affected in this particular manner. Alberta's growing economy has put pressure on some of the local roads, and we're responding by increasing our commitment to the resource road development program by some \$21 million. Grants are provided based on the project priorities identified by the local communities or the local municipalities, and the work is performed by local contractors who supply the materials.

We're also continuing to provide funding for rural utilities such as rural gas and electricity and remote heating allowance grants as well as municipal water and waste treatment grants. These are important of course because they're a part of infrastructure, and as the province grows, the needs of infrastructure will continue to grow, and we recognize this through the ongoing grant structure and the grant process.

Over the last year we've transferred some responsibilities to our rural utility partners. We will continue to work with these groups to identify additional functions that could be better performed directly by them. One example is the optional retail billing service currently provided by the rural gas distributors. This is a function that could be performed by the distributors.

With the changes in program delivery and administration a total reduction of \$21 million has been realized through this restructuring in the internal department costs for '95-96. These savings have been redirected and reinvested in our highway infrastructure. Towards that end we'll continue to undertake improvements to the north/south trade corridor. When the north/south trade corridor is completed, we'll have a safe, efficient network of four-lane highways throughout the province going north and south as well as east and west. We'll link the northwestern part of the province with the central and southern regions and on into the southern United States, where so much of our trade exists today and where the growth in trade has clearly been identified as our future. This will reduce transportation costs and allow Alberta industry, business, and communities to take full advantage of the North American trade agreement.

We must make the movement of product as seamless as possible and as quick as possible and as cost-effective as possible. This is critical because we are in a globally competitive world. Consequently, all our additional costing, whether it's transportation, whether it's production, whatever, has to be globally competitive,

and the onus is therefore on our department to see that we provide our service in transportation as cost-effectively as is possible.

Of the \$134 million of capital investment under program 2, \$45 million will be invested in this initiative this year. Work will include twinning of the existing two-lane sections and constructing key interchanges and bridges. Other construction and rehabilitation projects will take place as well. It won't all be focused just in this one area.

Special funding is also provided for improvements to the north/south trade corridor within the cities. Traffic growth on the border and on the primary highways are indicators that Alberta's economy is on the move and is indeed positive. In recent months traffic safety has received increased attention by Transportation and Utilities. As a result stronger measures are being taken to improve traffic safety in the province.

The department is in the process of developing an action plan in response to the recommendations of SVS Strategic Value Services, a consultant who assessed areas within the department involved with traffic safety programs, activities, and enforcement. The consultant's recommendations are contained in a review of traffic safety activities at Alberta Transportation and Utilities that was tabled about 10 days ago, and indeed we will be announcing the action plan before the end of the month, so we'll be bringing forward a plan of action very, very shortly.

The recommendations of this report, Mr. Chairman, just to summarize very briefly, were: establishing a traffic safety services division responsible for all traffic safety and motor vehicle related programs, including drivers' records, all classes of motor vehicle, all classes of operator licensing, commercial vehicle safety standards, commercial inspections, and compliance and audits; ensuring the application of consistent inspection criteria by partners throughout the province so that we don't have different criteria in each region of the province, so that it's all consistent, so you're treated in one part of the province similarly as in the other parts of the province and so the standards are as similar as possible; communicating the results of all carrier inspections to stakeholders on a regular basis; and increasing the number of officers who inspect trucks and school buses.

On April 8, '97, it was announced to staff that the department would adjust its structure to better address our traffic safety priorities. A team of people to work on this important issue under one umbrella is now being put in place, and the traffic safety services division has been created. An assistant deputy minister has been transferred from Alberta Municipal Affairs to head up this new division, and that's our friend Gary Boddez. Also note that no new funds were necessary to undertake these changes. All restructuring will be done within existing budgets.

I would also at this time like to add that commercial carrier safety will continue to be a high priority of Transportation and Utilities. We will work with the industry to improve company safety programs, and we'll provide positive reinforcement for carriers with exemplary safety records. We're also working to ensure public safety on roads and highways and indeed on all roadways throughout the province. We've begun a major traffic safety initiative focusing on driver education, awareness, and enforcement. Approximately 30 traffic safety groups, including police services, Alberta Motor Association, People Against Impaired Drivers, the trucking industry, and Health, Education, and other special-interest partners are working with us in this partnership agreement.

The programs under the traffic safety initiative are looking at Alberta's traffic safety problems and opportunities and laying out

plans to encourage continued improvement and prevention in the future. The long-term benefit will be a sustained infrastructure and cost savings to all Albertans. Alberta Transportation and Utilities has accomplished much during this past year. We've reduced costs through outsourcing and other efficiencies and have less staff overall from line staff to managers.

Alberta Transportation and Utilities will continue setting standards, developing specifications, monitoring compliance, and developing new programming. As we have shown, the savings from our reorganization and contracting out our activities will be reinvested in Alberta's transportation infrastructure. It'll go back to actually servicing the industry where it best services the industry. As in the past, Alberta Transportation and Utilities will continue to contribute to the province's prosperity and economic development by ensuring the provision of an effective transportation system, essential utility services in rural areas, and disaster and emergency services.

I'd be happy to answer questions as they come forward. Indeed for those that I may not be able to answer, I will commit that we will provide answers. Whether they're in written form or in verbal form, we will see that all the questions that are asked here today are answered.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to the questions.

3:00

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, just before you sit down, we would like to ask you if you'd like two or three members to ask questions and then you will answer, or do you wish to answer after each one?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Probably I will try and answer them towards the end.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. We have, then, first of all, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by St. Albert.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My congratulations to the minister on his appointment to Transportation and Utilities. I know that in your past portfolio your department has been very good about responding to our questions, usually in written form. I was listening as you spoke, and I've caught some of the things you said. So if you don't mind, some of the questions may be repeated, and you may have to repeat your answers for me at some point.

I also want to congratulate your department and the people who work within it. I know they do a very good job at what they do.

I'd like you to at some point repeat that part about a safety department. Mr. Gary Boddez is the assistant deputy minister of that, and my congratulations to him as well. [interjection] I'm sweet-talking so that I can get some answers.

If I might start with a few things that are of concern in my constituency. Then I will extend to some of the other areas in the province. I know the minister is well aware of the issue in St. Albert right now with the west boundary road. It's created a lot of division in the community, as I'm sure the Member for St. Albert is aware as well, and I hate to see that in St. Albert. Some of the concerns that have come from the people out there are that they question whether a proper environmental impact assessment has been done. As I understand it, it's usually the responsibility of the provincial government to provide that to a municipality before they can construct a road. Now, that was not done by the

provincial government. It was done in some form – and I think that's the question out in St. Albert right now – to some extent but not to the provincial standards. My question to you on that is: will the province look at doing an EIA of that area before construction of the west boundary road starts? It seems to be a common concern out there that that has not been properly done.

The other thing that people are questioning – and I realize that the minister will say that's the responsibility of the city, and that's fine. But it seems to be heating up into a bigger issue. I guess I'm asking: is the minister going to get involved? I don't know if any other alternatives to that route have even been looked at. Now, a six-lane road across Big Lake, in fact a six-lane highway. I don't know where they exist in this province. Not on 16X anyway. I guess I question if the minister could find out if there are any alternate routes that they've looked at or would look at or consider. I'm sure you heard – it was quite the hot topic on the news the other night – that it is a close vote: 3 to 4 on that council.

I guess I'm asking the minister if he could get more information from the city or at least make sure that all the angles have been looked at before this highway is pushed ahead, if it is needed. I agree that we need some sort of route out of the northwest corner of St. Albert, but I'm not sure it's a six-lane highway, and I don't think other routes have truly been looked at. If the minister could entertain looking at those alternate routes and the environmental assessment, I would truly appreciate that. That's the biggest one, that environmental impact assessment that has not been properly done.

Another area that I have, I'm sure, flogged to death over the last four years in here and that you won't be surprised to hear is highway 794, that goes from Highway 16X up to Westlock. The curve up at the Westlock corner has now been widened and straightened a bit, and I'm very grateful for that because I figured that was a death trap. The rest of that secondary highway from that curve to 16X is a death trap. There are no shoulders to speak of. If you get a flat tire, you take your life in your hands to change the tire. I realize the issue is because it's a secondary status highway. The conflict with that is that the MD of Sturgeon continually asks for it to be changed to a primary highway and the government continually says: we're not going to make it a primary highway; it's going to stay a secondary highway. Meanwhile that highway stays in limbo, and people are getting killed all the time. If the department could get for me the amount of traffic on that road, the amount of deaths on that road. Maybe it does deserve to be primary status. In fact, I would argue that it does. However, if that's not going to happen, maybe the minister can work with the MD of Sturgeon and say, "Please make it a priority for secondary status," because the municipality won't.

Meanwhile we have many gravel pits along that highway – you're probably familiar with it – a great deal of traffic going into the city, a lot of commuter traffic every day, and just at that one corner at Villeneuve in the past eight months three people have been killed. You know what it's like in a small rural community: as soon as you see an ambulance, you can bet your bottom dollar that you know the person in that accident. So 794 is personal to me as well as certainly a concern for this constituency. If the minister could work with the MD, somehow get them on board as to making it a priority for a secondary upgrading, or if the department would consider making it primary – I know that's their first request. Regardless of how that works out, primary or secondary, that highway needs to have shoulders on it so at least

people can change a tire when they are in trouble. I don't think it's an issue just specific to my riding, because many, many people use that highway in the summertime going out to lakes in the area and certainly en route to Westlock and other areas. I just can't stress enough how important it is that that highway be fixed.

I want to thank the minister for the work of the past department on the overpass on Highway 16X. That was a very dangerous intersection, and I appreciate that overpass being constructed there. I know there are also plans for Century Road, and farther down Highway 16X at Calahoo the Calahoo Road turnoff into Spruce Grove will be cut off and an overpass built a mile down the road. I'm grateful for that. I know that's been a very dangerous corner, where more lives have been lost, so I appreciate that work from the department.

I want to speak a moment about bus safety, and of course the minister knows I've been quite vocal on that issue. [interjection] That is an understatement, I know. I guess what I'd appreciate from the minister is a real clarification of how that new safety department is going to work and what the hierarchy is within that. Now, we outsourced, privatized, lost, or whatever you want to call it, safety inspectors, and now we've increased – what are they called? They change their name so often, sometimes I can't keep it straight – the traffic officers. Now, those safety inspectors used to have at least two mechanic's certificates, and now that those safety inspectors are gone and they're privatized – I think we're down to about five in the province in the private sector, but the minister may be able to clarify that for me. Since that privatization of qualified inspectors, we've had nothing but headaches with school buses and school bus safety. I'm sure it's been a headache for you as well, Mr. Minister.

I know the minister shares my concern. He comes from a rural riding, where buses are certainly needed to transport the major part of the population of our school-age children to school. I don't think there's anything more important than keeping our buses in top-notch condition. Certainly the incident that happened with Sturgeon Bus Lines, which supplied the St. Albert school districts, was of grave concern to many, many of the parents in St. Albert. I think we're very fortunate that not a child has been hurt or killed since this privatization of safety inspectors. I realize you've increased the traffic officers. It's my understanding they don't have mechanic's licences, so I still have grave concerns about the safety of our kids on school buses. I know the minister has taken some steps. That was one of the first things he did. I congratulate him on that. I wish my level of comfort was at a hundred percent on that. It isn't.

3:10

If I could have a clarification as to how many inspectors, when they inspect, where they're located across the province, how the spot check works. I know the city police have done several inspections. I'd like to know what happens to those reports when they hand them to the department of transportation. Who gets them? What's the follow-up? How do we prevent these things from happening constantly? I know my other colleagues want to talk a bit about bus safety, so I will leave that for now.

When you talked about outsourcing and privatization and jobs lost, I guess I have a few questions about that. Now that the department is lean and mean, in the minister's words, I do have some concerns. As I understand, at one time we had one of the greatest research departments in the world within the department of transportation, that we were respected around the world for the work we did in research for highway construction, with regard to materials and everything that's involved in highway construction.

My understanding of it is that we've totally lost that part of the department. I think over the long run we may regret that. So maybe my question to the minister is: where is that research happening now, if at all? If it's been privatized, what guarantees that the private companies are doing it? Do they only do it when they need it?

As we outsource and privatize, including painting lines on the highway and highway maintenance, who oversees all of that to make sure it's done? I know that in some areas the highway maintenance was excellent this winter, and in other places it wasn't excellent. I guess I have some concerns about those inequities across the province because we've privatized. I think there's a need for the government to be overseeing all of the private sector that has now been contracted out. It is still ultimately the department of transportation who is responsible to see that those private service providers are doing their job. So I guess I'd like to see how we are assured that those jobs are being properly done.

Who inspects the construction of the highways? I know the department used to have engineers that would make sure highways were constructed properly. Who's doing that now? [interjection] The minister goes out himself and checks it out. Well, that's good, but there are a lot of highways being constructed – and I'm hoping in my riding – which ties into the overall plan of the province, which I want to ask the minister about. Could I possibly get a copy of the plan of where we're going? You talked about the north/south corridor – and I think that's an excellent idea – but do we have an overall plan of where we're going in the province, particularly with concerns with northern development? You mentioned that for a moment.

Certainly Fort McMurray to Peace River: that's quite a trek to get to Peace River from Fort McMurray. You almost have to go down to Athabasca, I believe, to get back up to Fort McMurray. Are there any plans? So many of our resources are up north. The roads are taking a beating. [interjection] Look how I have to defend those northerners up there. That's because some roots of mine are in Peace River, hon. member.

Maybe we could work in co-operation with some of the companies: some of the logging companies, some of the oil companies. Maybe we could work out some joint agreements – a humble Liberal suggestion – so that the private sector does help pay for some of the construction of those roads. They're certainly using them. It would be to their benefit. I would certainly encourage that kind of thing.

The minister mentioned some resource roads. The extra money going for roads that do deal with resources particularly – I'm assuming that's mainly up north. But I am wondering. In the area of 794 there are many, many gravel pits. Does that maybe qualify them? I guess I'm asking: what are the qualifications to be a resource road to get that extra funding? Possibly 794 could qualify.

Oh, I really want to mention this one thing. Maybe the minister knows something about it. The city of Spruce Grove is very upset because some group – I think it's called Yellowhead development, something or other from the city – wants to change the naming of Highway 16 to 16A and make 16X Highway 16. [interjection] They're laughing at me, but if you're from Spruce Grove, you understand the situation, Mr. Minister.

If 16 is changed to 16A, the Spruce Grove businesses, the chamber, and the city think – and I agree with them – that it will affect their business and the traffic going to their city. Because if you look at a map and you're coming out of Edmonton and you

see Highway 16 and Highway 16A, you're going to take the main one, which at that point would be 16, and bypass the city of Spruce Grove and the town of Stony Plain. The whole reason they've built along the highway – a lot of their economic development and their tourism and all that is focused along Highway 16, and now there's a controversy about changing that name to 16A, which will affect the businesses along that highway. So if the minister could look into that for me, I would really appreciate it. I know the city and the town of Stony Plain and even the county of Parkland are not thrilled with that conflict that they're now facing. I know they're lobbying to keep it the way it is. So if the minister knows anything about that, I would certainly appreciate it.

I notice in the latest budget that there are 500 less jobs. I'm wondering if the minister – I know you said private outsourcing, et cetera. Do you mind being more specific? I guess as the critic I want to know: what areas is the government not providing anymore? With those 500 jobs lost, I'm just wondering: what areas are we not providing anymore within the department?

I want to ask the minister about call boxes along the highway. That was an issue about a year ago when one company could not put in a bid for it. It seemed that there was only one company qualified to have that contract, and then I heard later that that company went into receivership. I didn't bring the question to the House because I couldn't get to the bottom of the issue. So I guess my question to the minister is: where are we at with those call boxes along the highway? Can anyone contract to do that work? As I understand it, they get companies to support them, and then they put them up, but you need to work with the department as to where they're located and who puts them in place. So if the minister wouldn't mind clarifying for me what's happening with those call boxes. I think they're an excellent idea certainly for people stranded on the highways. We don't all have cell phones, so that certainly would be a good move.

3:20

The other issue specific to my riding was Wagner bog. Just before the election the environmental group that protects Wagner bog received a letter saying that there would not be a road going through the end of Wagner bog, which they were very relieved to hear. I guess I'd like to know the long-range plans for that specific area, because that group would like a real sense of security that it wasn't just an election move to keep them happy, that it was a sincere move on the part of the government to protect that area of Wagner bog.

I want to speak for a moment about Highway 37. It was widened this year from Highway 2 to highway 794, and I think that is excellent. I am concerned now about Highway 2 to Calahoo. I know there are some disputes going on as to whether Highway 37 is going to go straight or keep winding on the old path. I know that's an issue in the Lac Ste. Anne area. [Mrs. Soetaert's speaking time expired] Gee whiz, 20 minutes goes by quickly.

Mr. Chairman, with those questions to the minister – and I truly do appreciate your response to these questions – I thank you very much for this opportunity.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, want to start by congratulating the minister on his appointment to this important portfolio. I also want to communicate my greetings to his departmental staff, some of whom were sitting in the members'

gallery, I understand, awhile ago.

Mr. Minister, I have a few questions here. I should note that this is my first intervention in this House in debate on the estimates and budget. May I ask for an applause perhaps? [some applause] Thank you.

Mr. Minister, in your introductory remarks you focused on the privatization of a variety of services that the department previously engaged in itself, relying on its own staff. I note in the budget papers that over the three years bracketed by fiscal '93-94 and '95-96, the losses to the government from the disposal of capital equipment was \$612.636 million. Over these three years, then, the loss is well over \$600 million. They average about \$204 million a year over those three years. I notice also in the papers that there are some more losses to be incurred yet, although the numbers in relative terms are smaller. I wonder if the minister would be kind enough to provide information on the nature of these losses – what properties, what equipment, buildings, so on and so forth were disposed of? – and if he could provide an itemized statement on these massive losses to the citizens of this province.

I also note that the minister has assured us that privatization of these services need not lead to a decline in the quality of the highways or in the safety standards that we all want to maintain in this province for those who use highways, the transportation network and systems. I wonder if the minister would clarify the nature of the exact arrangements which the department now uses to monitor these conditions; that is, quality of road services, standards of safety, damage either to persons or to property such as vehicles from poor road conditions. How does the minister ensure that the standards with respect to these matters are adhered to, and where can we find information on what these standards are?

It has come to my notice that at least in the case of one private contractor, Carmacks Construction of Edmonton, a company which contracts for the maintenance of Highway 2 south of Edmonton and north of Calgary, during 1996 faced more than 40 lawsuits. I wonder if the minister has more detailed information on this matter, whether or not this matter has come to the attention of the minister, and the nature of these lawsuits. Some of these lawsuits might simply be by subcontractors who have not been paid or whatever, but I understand some of these lawsuits, some 40-plus, have to do with personal liability suits: damages that have been asked for by individuals and parties that may have sustained losses due to either poor maintenance or poor conditions on these highways. I would be grateful if the minister would look into this and bring some information on these matters back to the House.

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

Are there any performance indicators that the minister is either planning to introduce or has already introduced in order to assess the quality of the work that private contractors do? Obviously, there are some performance indicators that are indicated in the business plan summary on page 304 of this document here, but I don't see any information on the manner in which performance indicators of any sort are going to be used to assess the performance of private contractors. It's I think not unreasonable to assume that private contractors would like to maximize their returns on their business activities and therefore would be tempted to cut corners if possible unless there is strict monitoring of the quality of work that they are required to do and contracted to do.

Since the minister is also responsible for utilities in addition to transportation, I would like to ask the minister whether the department intervened on behalf of the citizens of Alberta, particularly those who live on fixed and limited incomes, when the Energy and Utilities Board of this province held hearings on changing the gas prices and perhaps propane prices in this province. As a result of those hearings, the gas prices and propane prices perhaps as well were nearly doubled all of a sudden, and the result of course is that citizens on fixed incomes have found it an unbearable new burden on them unexpectedly and without any warning. I wonder if the minister would indicate whether the department in fact intervened on behalf of the citizens at these hearings in order to advocate on their behalf against the dramatic rise in prices that the Energy and Utilities Board decided upon last December.

3:30

Secondly, I wonder if the minister has made any provisions in the budget estimates here to assist such citizens in case they incur such unexpected increases in expenditures again come next winter. If not, what is the message that the minister has for those people living on fixed incomes and limited incomes who in fact need the use of gas and other energy sources just to keep themselves warm in winter so that they don't get sick and therefore return to hospitals if the cost went up again?

At this point, Madam Chairman, I would like to conclude with these remarks and hope the minister will have some answers for us later on.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Madam Chairman. To the minister of transportation. My questions will be brief, Mr. Minister, because they are focused on the budget most specifically, because I've had the opportunity to be informed by your department with regard to the transportation plan, the northwest corridor, and in particular the transportation routes, as they impact and interweave through my constituency. So my question is, in particular, with regard to the budgeting process for the western bypass road and how it will be financed, if you will. If you could answer that for us. Also, the budgeting for the environmental impact assessment: has it been fully expended? If it hasn't been fully expended, are there more moneys to do a more accurate assessment? I just have those questions.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I have a number of questions this afternoon. The first one is one that my colleague ran out of time to ask, and that's with regard to bridge inspections. It's my understanding that you're no longer doing bridge inspections in this province, so that leads to a number of questions. One, how did you come to that rationale that it was no longer cost-effective or important or something that the government should be involved in? Secondly, what happened to all of the equipment? Was it tendered? Was it given to municipalities? Was it just sold? If it was tendered, who got that information? If you could address those questions for me, I'd be very happy to hear the answers.

If the equipment was sold to private companies, who were the

companies? How many of them were there? Now have they developed a monopoly in terms of bridge inspections in this province? We're wondering, then, how municipalities get involved in that. If these companies now have monopolies, how have they based their price-fixing then? Of course, with the downloading that's happening in municipalities in many areas, there's a concern about how they're going to pay for it. So if you could address that part of it, too, for me.

Then, is the provincial government doing some monitoring of the inspections in terms of how often and when the municipalities are getting them done? Do you get the reports back on the current status? It would seem to me that there is a potential in the long term, if you haven't done the inspections or if they're not done regularly and then not maintained regularly, we could have some chronic, long-term problems, which could be very expensive for the province and also lead to some safety considerations throughout the province.

That brings to mind a concern I had last year traveling from north of Grimshaw to the Peace River country, very beautiful country. You come from a nice part of the province, Mr. Minister. There was a concern from a number of people that I was with at that point in time about the bridge just north of there. They say that that bridge has been having some sort of repairs to it for more than 10 years now. I'm wondering if you could tell me why that would be the case. It's just a small, two-lane bridge. They have stop signs affixed to it so that it's one way. They fix one side, and then they seem to move over to the other side. This has been an ongoing, chronic problem for a long time. Could you just give us some information in terms of why that would be such a problem, and in fact how much money has been spent this past year in terms of fixing just that one bridge? You could take that under advisement. I'll get you the specific location of it. When I was reading through here, it just occurred to me. So I'll provide to you at a later time exactly which bridge it is.

Now, going back to your business plans. I have a number of questions. On the first goal that you have here you talk about reinvesting in strategic highway improvements. For many, many years part of my job was to write business plans, and it seems to me that this statement really is a strategy, not a goal. So I'm wondering if you had a specific reason for addressing it as a goal rather than an overall strategy and then outlining the number of goals underneath it, which I see that you have done to some extent.

In here you talk about having

for the first time, a three-year plan for primary highway improvements . . . included in the expanded version of this business plan, and that that plan is going to be distributed to "the department's clients and stakeholders." I would like to ask that we be included within that group. I think that as Official Opposition we are a stakeholder, and I would like to make sure that we don't get missed there.

Going on to goal 3. Well, let's deal with goal 2 first. You talk about strengthening rural transportation partnerships. So there will be some responsibility now for the maintenance of some provincial roads and highways with the municipalities. Has there been a change in the funding agreement?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: There's been no change in policy.

MS CARLSON: Okay. Well, is that a long-standing policy that municipalities would be responsible for all of the improvements there? With the other downloading that's been happening in government departments, I'm wondering if you're getting any flak back for that.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: There's no change.

MS CARLSON: No changes at all. Okay.

Improving traffic safety then. For a long time when we first saw all these considerations about bus safety, I thought that things were well under control, but after there had been a number of concerns and a number of reports back, inspectors were going out throughout the province, and specifically in Edmonton we still had ongoing, concurrent problems. In fact, this has happened to my own children going on field trips from their school. Twice this winter in minus 25 weather the buses that they were on broke down en route to some sort of a field trip. In both cases they weren't minor breakdowns. It wasn't like they had a flat tire or something of that nature. In one case the transmission in the bus actually blew, and they were located in an area where they didn't have any quick access to phones. While the driver on the bus reported back to his company, it was still a good 45 minutes or longer in each instance before the children were transported someplace safe. Now, that's a big concern. In the city if it takes that long, I'm wondering what kind of a problem we're facing in rural Alberta. How are you going to address that in a more aggressive fashion?

Not too long ago I heard the minister talking on TV about the increased number of noncompliance issues there have been with the inspections and how you've increased the number of inspections and alluding to the fact that perhaps the regulations that they were operating under might have been too stringent. I'm hoping that there will be no relaxing of the rules in that area. When we're talking about school bus safety and the transportation of children, I don't believe, truly, that you can ever be too stringent. Now, I've talked to a few bus drivers and owners of bus vehicles, who I think are conscientious people and do take the safety of children very seriously and who do keep their vehicles up to standard. It is possible still for them to make a decent living while doing that. I think that we should be looking at not only maintaining at least the level that you've got right now but perhaps increasing fines for people who are reoffenders in noncompliance issues in this area. You probably have some comments on that, and I'd be very interested in hearing them.

3:40

There's been an increasing number of transport field officers hired, and there's also been a recent announcement that there are going to be more of them hired. Just a personal point of clarification. At one point we heard a number of 113. Is that the number currently there, or is that the number that you're hiring up to? Or do we see an increase in those numbers beyond 113?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Twenty-five more.

MS CARLSON: Twenty-five more on top of the 113. That's good.

I'd like to know the technical qualifications for those people. Are they licensed mechanics? Do they have some record in the safety field? If they have a record in the safety field and are licensed mechanics, are there any other qualifications that are required? If you could address that for me, I would like to know that.

I'm wondering – it's not addressed anywhere here – about how you deal with the concern that weigh scales on highways throughout the province now have a lower number of hours to operate. How are you addressing concerns, which I have heard even in my own urban constituency, about trucks that are bypassing the

scales, traveling after hours when they're not open or on the secondary road system? I've had a number of complaints in my constituency that people can go border to border from west to east without actually ever hitting a weigh scale.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: We're hiring more people.

MS CARLSON: Hiring more people? Is that the answer? Are you planning to do that? [interjection] That's good. It's good to hear that. [interjection] So that's at the weigh scales. Does that also mean that some of those people will be in inspection vehicles on secondary roads where they may pick up offenders? [interjection] Okay; that's excellent. That certainly answers my question there.

On goal 3 I had another question. When you talk about supporting urban transportation partnerships, there's the "\$25 per capita for basic capital grants." I'm wondering if there's any additional capacity for dollars for ring roads in some of the larger centres so that the traffic can bypass the major urban centres. It isn't traditionally local traffic that would use a ring road, so I don't know if you have some other sort of funding formula for that. I'm sure you do. It's been an issue in this province for a long, long time.

Goal 4, improving traffic safety. What you're saying here is that you're consolidating "responsibility for [all] road safety programs." I'm wondering if that's going to meet the needs of all of the people who are concerned about that in terms of enforcement. Are there dollars attached to this? [interjection] This is just internal within your own department that you're doing this for? [interjection] Are there dollars going to be attached? The way I read it, improving traffic safety means that there's got to be public- and private-sector partners.

I need to know some information, I guess, about the private-sector partners. What's going to be their involvement? How many dollars are going to be allocated there? What kind of a change is that from what you've been doing there before? Can you provide us lists of who's getting the money and how it's been determined who the private-sector participants are going to be?

Goal 5, managing the primary highway system. When you talk about "outsourced functions related to the engineering and maintenance of the primary highway system to the private sector," you talk about the outsourcing having been "successfully completed." Now, that could mean that, yes, you've achieved the 91 out of 110 contracts that you talked about and that you're going to be outsourcing, or privatizing, the rest of them. I don't think that's really the concern here, whether or not the numbers have been reached. The concern is whether or not the maintenance is successfully being done up to some sort of standards that meet the needs of the public and meet whatever the criteria are that the department has set out.

You also talk about saving taxpayer dollars in there. Well, I would like to know specifically how you're saving the dollars. Is it because the total numbers that have been awarded in contracts are a lower dollar figure for wages, or is a depreciation factor and operating factor for the equipment involved factored in there? If so, what's happened to that equipment that the department used to have that is now being privatized? What criteria are you using to determine that they are in fact being properly maintained?

There are a number of complaints I think for all constituencies that have a major highway in their area or those who border it. This winter, specifically, I heard about a lot of complaints about the maintenance of Highway 16 on the east side of the city, and

I'm wondering if you have some information that you could provide to us about the number of complaints that you had for these private-sector operators and whether some of them had a much higher incidence of complaints than others and how the department deals with that, if we could compare the number of complaints about road maintenance: the private sector operating now and what the department had before. I know that there have been many times when I've been out on the roads and they seemed to be quite hazardous, although I will agree that this was a tough winter in that regard.

Even in terms of just operating road safety, I recall once traveling down to Calgary on Highway 2 in not very good weather when one of those large trucks made a U-turn not two kilometres in front of me on the one-way highway, came back some distance so that he could turn off one of those off-roads that would link him up to the highway going in the other direction. Now, of course that's a violation of safety rules and of grave consideration. It's hard to know how the public should address that situation when it comes up. Could you give us some guidelines about who you call and complain to and what steps are taken to correct that or investigate those problems so I would see that your department still must have some sort of a management system where they're watching and monitoring and then acting on cases that are of some concern?

Has there been a change in the number of accidents on those roads since they've been privatized from before, when you were maintaining them yourselves? I think this would be a really good area to have one of your client satisfaction surveys in so that we can see if people who live along those roads and who are daily or weekly users of them are as satisfied now as they were before. That might be here somewhere, but I don't actually see that.

Going to the key performance measures, I've got some questions on the mechanical safety of commercial vehicles. I'm wondering how you decided that an acceptable level of noncompliance with mechanical safety is just slightly more than three out of 10 vehicles. There might be national standards? [interjection] There are national standards. So that's well within the acceptable limits there?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Right in the middle.

MS CARLSON: Right in the middle? Okay. That's good.

Could you give us examples of the difference between a minor adjustment and a major adjustment, one that requires a mechanic's attention? So would you be talking about failed brakes, which is pretty significant, or just some other things on their vehicles which may require a mechanic's attention right then but aren't a huge safety risk? Just a couple of examples there would be very good.

Going over to road safety, I would like to know how you decided that 42 collisions per thousand licensed drivers are acceptable. There must be some national standards there again. Would that be the case? [interjection] National standards? Good. And how do we compare? Are we in the middle there too? Yeah? Okay, that's good.

I want to go back to the primary highway system just for a second. Could you table an example of a copy of a contract that's used with these private operators now and specifically address how they're monitored by your department? My colleague talked about 500 jobs being lost in this area. You'll know, I think, probably how many of those were picked up by the privatization. Do you have any idea of the kind of a wage differential we're

talking about there?

Going back to supporting cost-effective government, goal 6, I don't understand what you mean by that. Perhaps you could just give us a little bit of a definition in terms of what is measurable there and what your expectations are in terms of what hasn't been achieved.

3:50

Monitoring the motor carrier industry is goal 8. I don't have a real problem with people who have had a long history of compliance forgoing safety inspections. I think that's a nice, cost-effective measure. Perhaps they could forgo them on a yearly basis but have them every second or third year or something of that nature. I'm sure that's what your intention is there.

The concern, of course, is those who are repeat offenders. Is there any process for the public to know who major offenders or repeat offenders are in this instance? I think that would make a difference to the people using those carriers, and as well, it might make a difference to those carriers in terms of increasing the amount of compliance. I've heard figures of some companies finding a tolerance level of more than \$100,000 a year in fines as being an acceptable level of fines, because it's of course much, much more expensive to address the actual problem that they've got.

In terms of goal 9, you're from northern Alberta, so of course you understand the concerns there about all of those northern Albertans having affordable access to utility services. Every year we get three or four complaints out of that area that haven't seemed to be addressed by the Conservative MLAs. I'm wondering what further steps you're planning to do there to make sure that they do in fact have affordable hookup and that they have similar kinds of access that people closer to urban centres do. There always seems to be some sort of a concern coming out of that for us.

I think that's it for my questions for now. Yes, it is. Thanks very much for the answers you've given already.

MR. MacDONALD: Madam Chairperson, I would like to address my remarks this afternoon to the Minister of Transportation and Utilities. I would like to commend him and his department for providing this brief. I first met the minister three years ago in the Grande Prairie airport. We had quite a talk. I was listening, and he was talking. At the end of our conversation he was kind enough to give me a key chain which I still have, I still use.

MR. SAPERS: Did you report it to the Ethics Commissioner though?

MR. MacDONALD: I did not report it to the Ethics Commissioner, no.

I enjoyed the conversation, sir.

Today I would like to talk about the transportation plan you provided us. Some of the items I think are sound. Your idea on twinning the highway north into the Peace region is commendable. I have driven on that road many times. I have seen, particularly this time of year, the increase in the volume of traffic, particularly truck traffic.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Twenty percent.

MR. MacDONALD: Twenty percent? There is a large volume of heavy goods that are transported to go on the barges whenever breakup is over, the barges to the northern communities. It's

constant, 24 hours a day. With all the export trade that has been made available with the free trade agreement and the robust economy, it is a sound policy, I believe, to have a twinned highway from the American border up to and perhaps even beyond the Peace River country.

However, I have some questions about some of the transportation money that I see allocated here, particularly in my constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, this \$48.6 million in the Alberta cities transportation partnership "to ensure primary highways and truck routes through urban centres continue to meet demands and provide appropriate links to the rural portions of the Primary Highway System." Mr. Minister, one of the largest neighbourhoods in my constituency is the neighbourhood of Ottewell; 75th Street is the western border of the Ottewell neighbourhood. There is a lot of talk of opening 75th Street from 90th Avenue to 98th Avenue as a truck route. This at this time, because of the design of that road, is inappropriate. That road is a connector to the Capilano freeway, and as many of you know, many people travel on the Capilano freeway to attend Oilers' hockey games.

However, there are two junior high schools in the Ottewell neighbourhood. There's Ottewell junior high and Kenilworth junior high. The neighbourhood of Holyrood does not have a junior high school. It is a revitalizing neighbourhood, and the children must cross 75th Street at 94B Avenue. That is the only pedestrian crossing for those children to get to Ottewell junior high. If we are to open this up as a truck route, the majority of crossings during rush hour in the morning and in the evening will be those junior high students returning to and from school. This is not in our neighbourhood's best interests. As many as 30,000 truck trips a day would go through those eight city blocks. There is a truck route present, but it's over on 50th Street, and all truckers now are on the same economic playing field if they use that truck route.

Perhaps, Mr. Minister, we should talk about a *périphérique*, as the Parisians call their ring road. It's a ring road that goes all around Paris. Perhaps we should consider building one in Edmonton.

The industrial area to the east of my constituency is a destination for many of the largest trucks and the cargoes that they haul in this city. If we were to have a ring road incorporated into what now exists on the Whitemud freeway and the interchange from Anthony Henday Drive in the west with 16 and 16X – and you are to be commended for this, sir, for providing some of the funds for it – down to Highway 14, going to the east, up through the industrial area, perhaps on 17th Street but a ring road going around the city, these truck routes that everyone opposes would not be necessary in inner-city neighbourhoods. This truck route could perhaps also encompass the new military base, because the soldiers, whenever they go to Wainwright and to Suffield, have to have a road. The easiest road for them would be a ring road from the north end of the city going across and skirting around the industrial area and picking up Highway 14 and Highway 16 to the east. That way they could reach their destination safely in convoys.

I would also this afternoon like to talk about truck safety. If we are to open up all of these routes to trucks, how are we going to monitor the movement of dangerous goods? If we were to have an accident, say on the 75th Street truck route, when the children are leaving Ottewell junior high, it could be catastrophic. With the cutbacks in your department through privatization, where you're losing 30 percent of your entire departmental staff, or full-time equivalents as they're referred to, who will be available to

monitor this? The east end of the city, once again I remind you, has much industry. The cargo there is dangerous goods. We cannot allow this to happen.

4:00

Truck safety. We think of Ontario and the high-profile cases of tires on poorly maintained transportation trucks coming off, not only coming off but coming off at high speeds. They're lethal missiles. These missiles, these tires, have killed people. Earlier this afternoon my colleagues in their speeches reminded you of safety inspections. I would also, Mr. Minister, like to remind you that this is a grave concern of mine. The trucks are now larger, they're traveling faster, and their cargoes are heavier. We must keep our eye on them, and we must have qualified mechanics inspecting them. We must make sure that everything is in order: the brakes, the highboys, the engines, the exhaust. You go to a truck stop and you look. A lot of the oil field outfits are very, very busy. They're running 24 hours a day; time is money. Some of those trucks are not in the best of condition. If you could do something about that, I would be very, very grateful.

Now, there's also the issue of bus safety. In my neighbourhood there is a community school. People come from all over Edmonton. They're bused in small buses, in large buses, different companies. These buses are poorly maintained; I hear by random inspection. We do not need to have an accident where schoolchildren and perhaps the bus driver or other people using the highway system are injured before we're going to do something. We must be proactive.

I would also like to talk this afternoon on the transportation issue on that which is of most importance, and that is the use of trucks at increasing speeds. We increased speeds to 60 miles an hour. We did this quietly. The general public was not really aware of this. On some of the roads in this province that I travel on, the big trucks are going far too fast. They're not only a danger to themselves; they're a danger to the motoring public.

I look at this province. I look at a highway map. No matter where you go, there are some fine, fine roads. The roads are well maintained. They're level; they're graded. But some of them in the winter, believe it or not, are not very well plowed. Snow clearance seems to be a problem. The other day, as a matter of fact, I was coming to work, and on one of the local open-line radio shows the callers' comments were on the poor quality of snow removal this winter. The minister himself acknowledged in this House – if it wasn't today, it was yesterday – his concern about the heavy amount of snow that has fallen on this province this winter. Sometimes it would be noon or 2 o'clock in the afternoon before the roads were passable. If this is a result of the privatization – this is what the callers to the radio shows were saying. They were not happy with the conduct of the maintenance crews. This is from the general public, and if they're concerned . . . It's only a matter of time before there's a serious accident, and if the roads are not cleared, the trucks cannot deliver their goods.

We may disagree on many things with this Transportation and Utilities budget, but there's one thing we all agree on, and that is: if you've got it, a truck brought it. It is important that we maintain an infrastructure that allows the delivery of manufactured goods, the transportation of people to and from their work safely and on time.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Minister, I have three areas I wish to speak on or ask questions of you today. The first is an accounting problem I'm having here. The accountability statement in the front portion of your business plan, '97-98 to '99-2000, reads:

The . . . Business Plan . . . was prepared under my direction in accordance with the Government Accountability Act and the government's accounting policies.

If you'll turn to page 362 of your estimates and the operating expense on the bottom line of your program 5, disaster services, if you read that entire line, that line gives me a great deal of dissatisfaction in the government's accounting practices and budgeting practices. If you look to the far left and see the gross expenditures – those are actual expenditures in the year '95-96, and this is in disaster services . . .

MR. PASZKOWSKI: What line are you referring to?

MR. WHITE: Line 5, disaster services. The figure at the far right under gross comparable, '95-96 actual, there's some 55 and a half millions of dollars expended that year, actual dollars. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe that's the year that the Alberta government spent a lot of money in the Medicine Hat area. A lot of disaster services were put into that area.

Then carrying along to the actual expenditures – well, it's a forecast, but it should be awfully close about now I suspect. It's about 30 millions of dollars. After an expenditure of some \$55 million, the budget was then put at 12 and some million dollars, and the expenditures were \$30 million. You'd think that after a couple of years in a row the budget would start to reflect the actual expenditures expected. The alternative would be, when you have these expenditures that fluctuate wildly from year to year, as the weather does, to put a reserve fund together such that in low years you would add to the fund and in high years you would remove from the fund.

Well, it doesn't seem to be the government's practice at all in this case, and then we get to this year's estimates. The net expense is under \$3 million. It doesn't seem to make a whole lot of sense here, sir, to see how you could operate and call this a reasonable expectation of the expenditures. It just doesn't seem to make sense to me. Perhaps in your response you can aid me with those questions and have me understand why it would be that you'd have these wild underestimations of expenditures, particularly in this year.

I think you of all people, sir, will probably understand, having seen the devastation that you have in the last week, that there will be considerably more than \$3 million being expended. As I remember your explanation in the House the other day of how the expenditures of the Alberta government go, the Alberta government expends the funds in the first instance on each individual disaster. I couldn't recall whether – and I'm not sure that you explained it – that was location specific or whether it was one river disaster or one disaster in chronology, in time, or for the year. I wasn't sure. You can explain that, I'm sure, later too.

My fundamental question. You explained the inputs from the federal government and how that went 30 percent here and then increased over the magnitude of the expenditure. However that occurred, I'd like to see that written out for openers.

The second thing I'd like to see is some accounting for it. Surely the gross expenditures and net expenditures in '95-96, '96-97, and the expected in '97-98 would include some balancing income so that the next expenditures in fact show the reality of the situation. Therein lies my problem with the accounting. It just

doesn't have any relationship to the reality of what you expect to occur, nor does it have the reality of what you expect the income to be. At least it doesn't show in these accounts here, sir.

4:10

The second area of concern is also one of income. I draw your attention to program 3, which is the national infrastructure program. As I recall the program, it is administered by the municipalities. If that be the case, then the accounting here approaches what I would expect it to. It would be a straight expense, and the expenditure I thought this year would be 300 and some-odd millions of dollars and not the \$200 million that is estimated here. Now, I can understand that being the case if the infrastructure program and the federal government did not inform you early enough for the printing so that you could include it here, but I suspect that would be one of the amendments that you might like to put forward prior to the passage of this.

The third area that I'd like to ask questions about briefly. I've heard you say twice now that the need for capital works is dictated not by municipality to municipality or not by reason of one being one party or another but service to Albertans in general. I would think, then, that the standard would be – generally in the business, as I recall it, traffic movement at an intersection is the indicator of whether there's replacement required or a new facility, or if that particular location cannot be expanded to handle more traffic, then an alternate route is planned.

Now, I draw your attention to the Yellowhead Highway, going through the city in which I reside as well as through my constituency. On the west edge of the constituency there have been two overpasses on Highway 16X installed in the last five years. Certainly one has been completed in the last year and a half, and another one, I gather, is planned. If you take the traffic movements associated with the 12 directions that one has to consider as a transportation designer – that's north-south movements, east-west movements, and then movements to one direction or the other from those. You add up all of those in whatever combination or permutation you wish, and you'll still end up with about one-tenth – one-tenth – of the traffic movements that occur at 127th Street, which is a level crossing, and the Yellowhead or 156th Street and the Yellowhead. That would then lead one to the conclusion that those who use the traffic facilities farther west that I was talking about earlier have a much, much higher level of service than those who are in the city on 127th Street and 156th Street crossing the Yellowhead.

Now, I present this knowing full well that there is block funding, and as best as I can recall, you do not ever dictate exactly where those funds for the city of Edmonton are expended. Then I go to a city like Grande Prairie or Hinton, perhaps, where Highway 16 goes right through, and I believe it is a responsibility of the department all the way through that entire stretch, as opposed to the major centres. Well, no matter how you cut it, somehow or other, regardless of how the money your department puts out for these expenditures gets to the road, somehow in the translation the citizens that I represent seem to be shortchanged in that the service level is some 10 to 1.

I'll leave you with that, sir, and I'd like sometime to have an explanation of that. I would like also to have the same privileges provided by your department as what I thought I heard the Member for St. Albert explain, that she had a briefing with the department on the capital work in her area. I would like that opportunity also, sir.

Thank you kindly for your time, Madam Chair.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. I just have a couple of questions for the minister revolving around traffic safety and the fact that the department speaks to enhancing safety as one of the primary goals. I'm kind of wondering, then, why we're cutting \$2 million from the budget, from the forecast last year. We're going to \$33 million from \$35 million. Last year you had forecast \$35 million to an estimate this year of \$33 million.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: What line are you referring to?

MS OLSEN: I'll have to look it up here. We'll point that out to you.

I just wanted to clarify that you had mentioned to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie that you were going to increase the number of field officers to 113, adding 25 more new officers.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: We're adding 25 more new officers.

MS OLSEN: To the 113?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: We're adding 25 more new officers to what exists today is what I said.

MS OLSEN: Which is?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Which is roughly 75. We're bringing it up to a hundred.

MS OLSEN: Correct. Okay. Thank you.

The next issue I have is not related to traffic safety but just a question around major disasters and emergencies. Your performance measure talks about the effectiveness of emergency and disaster response. The measure provides information on the percentage of requests for assistance from municipalities responded to satisfactorily within 30 days when the government emergency operations centre has been activated in the event of real emergencies and disasters. My question is: have you not considered asking the question of people who actually received the emergency service response from you, if they're happy with the service? Why would you just develop your performance measure on that one question?

Going back to my first question regarding improved traffic safety, look on line 2.1.4, the difference between the gross comparable '96-97 budget and the '97-98 estimates.

On line 5.0.1 on page 362 you've budgeted only \$2.7 million in disaster assistance. You've got the Peace River flood, and there's a problem now in Fort McMurray, and we know that there have been problems in the past in the south. You budgeted last year \$12.7 million for disaster assistance. My question is: how much of that \$2.7 million has already been allotted to the Peace River disaster? So I just have questions around that.

Those are all my questions for the minister.

4:20

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Madam Chairman. I'd like to, if I may, Mr. Minister, focus on the key performance measures as a matter of interest. My interest arises out of my own field, education,

and the attempts to use measures such as these to track human endeavours and how inappropriate and controversial it's been there, starting back in the 1800s in Britain. It seems to me that they are much more appropriate for the kind of information that you're dealing with. So I have some questions about those indicators and how the department arrives at the levels.

When you have an indicator like mechanical safety of commercial vehicles and if you look at the projections, the targets across the three years, it says that one in five vehicles on the road will always require minor adjustments. Now, how do they arrive at one in five as being the benchmark? Is that based on some data, that that's what we might normally expect? Or is there some ideal that they work to?

I have similar questions all the way through. The transportation of dangerous goods: we have the business plan targets of 17 percent this fiscal year and then dropping to 15 percent in the following two years. It's a measure of the percentage of "on-road dangerous goods incidents with the potential for significant harm or loss to the public." Again, how did they arrive at the 15 percent? It seems to me that ideally we would want zero. That would be our goal. Is this sort of a balance between the resources that are available to address the problem and some kind of realistic goal? Or is it just acceptance, given the kinds of goods that are being moved around the province, that we're always going to have to expect this and nothing can be done about it?

The one that sort of surprised me, given the minister's actions the last few days, was the effectiveness of emergency and disaster response. The minister was so rapid in his response to the problems up north in Peace River and the floods there, yet it says:

This measure is defined as the percentage of claims where an assessor arrives on-site within 30 days of a claim being received after a disaster.

It seems to me that in this instance, at least, you're much faster than that and the department has moved much faster than that. How does that match this target of 30 days? Or is there something that's imbedded in this that I don't understand? It seems to me that the faster they get to the scene and get relief for people . . . Is it something to do with the term "assessor" in how that works?

The same with the last one: the reduction of commercial vehicle overloads. In the next three years they move from 13 to 12 and then to 11 percent. It looks like they're moving to some goal. I would just be curious to know, Mr. Minister, if there are sort of ultimate ideal goals for each of these measures that the transportation department sees itself moving toward.

One other thing and then I'll yield, Mr. Minister. It says just above the key performance measures that a number of other "goals are being developed for consideration in future business plans," and I just wondered what some of those goals were. I don't see one, for instance, in terms of fatalities on Alberta highways. Is there an intention to look at a performance goal? Would it be here, in terms of the reduction of fatalities to some measurable goal? Is that one of the additional ones you're looking at? I would be curious as to what ones you see being added to the ones that are here, which seems to be an excellent tool when you look at the north-south trade corridor. Projects are often under way and people have no idea of what kind of progress is being made in terms of the completion of those projects. This does give the public a good indication of how that progress is proceeding and some assurance that the government is working towards the goal. That's a good example of what I'm asking about. Obviously, the ideal target here is a hundred percent, to have the

corridor finished. Sometime down the road is there a similar ideal for those other areas?

Thanks, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Mr. Minister, I just had a couple of quick points to make on this. I'm pleased to see that there are strategic improvements of the highways planned. In particular, the area of highway that I'm concerned about should fall under your north-south corridor improvement.

I end up traveling from Edmonton to Athabasca and back usually about twice a week. I'm just noticing that Highway 2 from St. Albert to Clyde corner – I would question how effective the outsourcing of the maintenance has been on that particular stretch. I'm finding it more and more difficult to travel along there and dodge the potholes and the numerous patchings that have taken place there. In addition, the amount of traffic that's been traveling on that road with the workers involved with Al-Pac. They're all coming back into Edmonton on the Friday night and going back out again on the Sunday, so it's pretty much bumper to bumper there at those times. I'm sure that has contributed to the wear and tear on the highway. So I hope that that particular area is going to be improved or rebuilt or twinned, hopefully soon. I'm just wondering when it is planned to have that twinning happen on this section.

The second thing that I have been concerned about – again this has been brought forward to me by some of the people living in Edmonton-Centre – is the transportation of dangerous goods. I'm a little concerned with the targets in here. Maybe I'm misunderstanding them, but in reading through this, for your percentage of on-road dangerous goods incidents with the potential for significant harm, the target for this year is 20 percent, and your final target range is 15 percent. That still strikes me as a very high percentage, and I hope you're not saying that's an acceptable level. All we need is one of those tankers that is carrying hazardous goods to have an accident, and we have no idea of the kind of environmental damage that we could be dealing with. So I would like an answer to that. Is there going to be a continuation in the reduction of percentage which you're expecting there?

Those were the only two comments that I had. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Certainly we've got a rather large contingency of questions. Obviously, with the time that we have, we're not going to be able to answer them all here today, but we'll endeavour to answer as many as we can. Certainly the others we'll follow up with written responses. So we will respond to all of you regarding these questions.

The question was asked several times about the statement from the hon. Member for St. Albert. I mentioned last night, if the hon. member heard, that I will be tabling the programs for the next three years as far as all program construction is concerned. So this should not have been something new to you; this was mentioned last night. I will repeat it again, that indeed just as soon as time permits here, we will be tabling that. We also have the intention of tabling each individual rural constituency's

programs. You'll be receiving a copy of that as well because I think it's important that the MLAs understand what programs are going to be in their immediate areas. So this isn't something startling or something new here. We indeed made that announcement last night.

4:30

The west boundary road, the discussion there. There were, I think, three or four requests that actually asked for the province to get involved in the decision-making process. Can't have it both ways. We can't have the province making decisions, especially when the municipalities say: we want the authority. We're not going to have hybrids. We either do it one way or we do it the other way. If the municipalities want to make that decision and they've asked for it, then ultimately those decisions will be made by the municipality. It will not be imposed upon them, and it is not our intention to intervene where municipalities have clearly given direction that they want to be the ones that make those decisions.

Clearly there were at least three or four roads that were asked for, for us to move in and make those decisions. The municipal organizations, the AAMDC and the AUMA, have clearly given us a direction as to the process, and it is not our intention to go counter to what their wishes are. I personally strongly believe that better decisions are made locally than they are made away from the place where the actual action takes place. I've been the mayor of a community, and I certainly understand that the local people can make a better decision than someone sitting 500 miles away can make for them. Ultimately, at the end of the day that decision works out better because the people buy into it. Indeed, there may be a lot of debate, and there may be a lot of discussion. It may take a long time before that final decision is made, but at the end of the day that decision will work.

We have no intention at the present time to be looking at changing any more highways to primary highways. That may change, but as of today we don't have any thoughts regarding making any additional primary highways. As far as 16X and 16, we've contacted all of the municipalities involved, and we have received agreement from all of these municipalities that indeed they would agree with that change. Very recently we've had a bit of a flurry from chambers of commerce that say they don't agree. The direction we have clearly received was that there was agreement with that. So that's the direction we have received, and at this stage that's the direction we're using.

Several asked the question about budgeting for disaster services. I've just got a list here of all the disasters that have befallen the province and where disaster services has triggered through the years. I'll just go through briefly: 1985, \$1.3 million; '86, \$17.4 million; '87, the Edmonton tornado, \$40.2 million; '88, \$2 million. How do you budget for something like that? You simply can't, and we don't budget. The questions on the line items that are there in the plan: they're simply carryovers that are still being cleaned off from the year before. That's what we have budgeted for because we have a clearer direction as to what those costs are. Those are carryover items from previous disasters that we have budgeted for, and that's why there are discrepancies. We clearly don't budget for disasters.

As far as Fort McMurray – and I understand just a matter of hours ago Fort Vermillion declared a state of disaster as well, with severe flooding. We will find the money, we will deal with these disasters, and we will deal with them as fairly as possible, but we clearly cannot project what disasters are going to be. If we start trying to budget, we're being fools, because we have no way of

knowing whether we're going to be hit with a tornado, a volcano, a flood, or whatever the case may be. It is not our intention to start budgeting for disasters. So for those who have asked, the line items that are identified are carryover expenses from other disasters that have taken place.

As far as training of officers used to inspect carriers and vehicles, there is a training program for those officers. They're certified, and consequently they are able to go out and clearly identify what the weaknesses in vehicles are.

With the safety program that we're introducing under Mr. Boddez, we're going to actually start developing profiles. I guess it's about 10 days ago we tabled the list of recommendations that were brought forward as to what should be developed into safety standards. Before the end of April we'll be tabling an implementation process, because those recommendations are something that we feel have to be applied. So if you go back to the report that we tabled last week, I guess it was, that's what our intentions are and that's what our plans are. Part of the process was clearly to identify high risk versus low risk, because there is a difference between a cracked windshield or a cracked mirror and a steering mechanism that's totally out of line or tires that are bulging and things like that. It is our intention to develop a profile, it's our intention to audit the inspection process, and it is our intention to make the roads as safe as can possibly be. We're clearly defining the process. We'll be defining the implementation process, and we want to have that in place as early as possible. Hopefully by June we'll have it up and operating.

There are indeed cost measures that will allow us to operate more cost-effectively, operating under one safety ADM and operating under one safety division. In the past we had safety measures in a whole host of areas as far as transportation was concerned, and consequently each department had their own little safety area. We were doing a lot of duplicating, we were doing a lot of overlapping, and quite frankly I don't think we were achieving the level that we can achieve by simply having one particular area focusing clearly on safety. Consequently, we will be able to deliver a better program for less money. That's our objective, and that's our intention.

Call boxes were mentioned. We have talked to a company called Polar safety services. The hon. member is actually bringing forward a motion that is somewhat dealing with this, where indeed we identify markers and indeed we have call boxes that will allow for people to call in when they are in trouble. We have reason to believe that this can be delivered by private enterprise. We don't see any reason why the taxpayer should be delivering that service if private enterprise will do it. Obviously private enterprise has expressed an interest, and that's the direction we're looking at.

To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, we appreciated your questions. Does the department intervene on behalf of residents impacted by high gas prices? The Energy and Utilities Board, and how about propane? No, the department does not intervene. However, organizations who represent a broad spectrum of consumers certainly do that on behalf of the consumers, and I refer to the Federation of Alberta Gas Co-ops for example. As far as propane is concerned, it's not regulated by the board, so there is no regulatory process for propane.

4:40

Has the department budgeted to help consumers? No. We have other areas of social programming that take those areas into consideration. What we had was a marketplace operating this past year. There was a short supply for a period of time, and I'm

pleased to say that the prices have dropped almost as much as they had risen last fall. For a government to be in and outing will have a tendency of distorting prices more than it will actually have of stabilizing prices, so we have to be very, very careful where we have government intervening. No, we don't have any intention of getting involved. We do have a remote heating allowance where people can't access natural gas, can't have accessibility to natural gas. Then we do have a remote heating allowance that helps pay for the cost of propane, so that's the way the government is involved. The hon. minister of social services mentioned today that there was a special program for the needy when propane and gas prices went up high. If you could demonstrate a clear need and you were at the bottom end of the spectrum as far as income was concerned, yes, there was a provision made to help in that particular case. We have other areas of social programming that get involved in those types of activities.

What have we outsourced as far as AT and U is concerned? I think that was a question that was asked. We've outsourced the engineering services, road maintenance, mail service, blueprinting, commercial vehicle audits, information systems, collision data, and traffic monitoring. There were questions about monitoring. We certainly do continue the monitoring, and we maintain a fairly close profile on that. Construction contracts, of course, have always been outsourced. As far as monitoring is concerned, we play an important role there, and we will continue to do that. We have no intention of moving away from that particular area.

By and large, people who were employed by highways in many cases are still working in their same type of job. Certainly people weren't laid off in the sense of losing their jobs entirely. They're simply working for different people, and that's the beauty, actually, that you have. You have the opportunity in a democratic country of choosing who you work for, and those opportunities are still there.

As far as ourselves getting involved in Wagner bog, we've had a lot of representation from both sides on that one, and that's a situation that the local community is going to have to work out. When they give us a clear definition, then of course we'll be prepared to work with them.

As far as the quality of maintenance that's being delivered by the private sector, in the communication that we've received, strange as it may seem, we've received almost as much communication one way as the other. People are concerned that they see vehicles out there, claiming: "They're putting on too much sand. They're wasting the sand. They're wasting the gravel. Why are they out there when there's only half an inch of snow out there?" I know in one particular area we've received far more complaints about overmaintenance than undermaintenance. Quite frankly, we have not had a sharp increase in concerns. As a matter of fact, the level of concerns has been very, very low, and that in itself demonstrates that there must be a degree of satisfaction. There can't be a great deal of change relative to what the performances were before except in the one area. I don't know whether it's a group that's campaigning in a write-in or what it is, but there's certainly one area where we've had a lot of concerns about overmaintenance.

At this stage, Madam Chairman, I would move that we adjourn debate. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities has moved to adjourn debate. Is the Assembly in agreement?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Before I move to the next question, I would just personally like to thank each and every one of you for the consideration shown to me this afternoon and last evening and commend you for the respect and decorum that you have shown each other, particularly those that have been asking questions of the minister and his department.

Should progress be reported when the committee rises and reports?

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Transportation and Utilities for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1998, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

head: **Consideration of His Honour
head: the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Shariff moved:

That an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To His Honour the Honourable H.A. "Bud" Olson, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

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

[Adjourned debate April 21: Ms Blakeman]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise today and in my maiden speech address the Assembly in response to the throne speech. May I welcome the many hon. members who have temporary residences in Edmonton-Centre. My constituency office is located at 10042-116 Street. Please feel free to drop by or to call me.

I'd like to thank the people of Edmonton-Centre who worked so hard to get me elected to this position. Together with the campaign team they were a very determined bunch.

I am a native Edmontonian, born and raised on the south side. I opted to move across the river to Edmonton-Centre to buy my first home, and I've now lived in Edmonton-Centre for 11 years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I love Edmonton-Centre. It's the best place to live. I love the restaurants, the shops, the businesses, the parks, the golf course, our gorgeous river valley, the art galleries and theatres, the sidewalk coffee shops, the downtown malls, and of course the Legislature. It is a vital, active constituency, but what really makes Edmonton-Centre special for me are the

people. We have seniors, students, artists, government workers, retail and service workers, a strong gay and lesbian community, vibrant and active Chinese and Vietnamese communities, four strong community leagues, a variety of churches, synagogues, mosques, and other places of worship.

Most of us in Edmonton-Centre live in apartments, walk-ups, and condos. Some 31,000 people live in an area about 10 blocks by 10 blocks. There are only four neighbourhoods with single-family housing.

Before I prepared this speech, I went back to the notes I made while I spoke to many of the people in Edmonton-Centre. The people of Edmonton-Centre were very clear in what they expected me to do for them. They wanted me to watch the government for them, to question government on whether proposed plans would be in the best interests of the people as well as good fiscal management of their resources. They wanted me to protect them and be on guard for them.

4:50

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issues I raise today came from those notes made while meeting people at the doors. They have charged me to speak for them. We have a large seniors' population in Edmonton-Centre, including 13 subsidized seniors' residences. We also have a number of retired seniors living independently on their pensions. A few are very well off, and others are surviving and have to be careful. The seniors are very worried that health care is being eroded. Over and over I was told this. They're worried that their fixed incomes will not be able to keep pace with the increased fees and the many extras that they must now pay for. Seniors don't want the world handed to them on a silver platter, but they do expect to get what they paid for over the many years they contributed. Their incomes do not increase. They don't have the opportunity to get promoted or to go and get a better job. Additional costs for them must be covered by giving up something else. I heard stories that frightened me, stories of seniors who, because coverage of eyeglasses had been reduced, postponed getting new eyeglasses. They stumbled about, risking a bad fall, because they were trying to stretch their limited dollars a little further. They felt the shortsightedness of many of the new government programs was putting them in a position where long-term, more serious, and costly problems would occur.

The seniors weren't just concerned about themselves. They worried about their grandchildren's ability to get access to postsecondary education. Intergenerational debt is being passed on to this younger generation right now with higher university and college tuition. Isn't this short-term gain for long-term pain? We can only begin to imagine what our province will look like in 30 or 40 years when those students who couldn't afford to go to university or college are trying to retire on pensions based on wages earned at McJobs, and that's assuming that there will be pensions. What kind of intergenerational debt will we have passed on to them then?

One of the things I've noticed in the short time I've been in the House is the amount of reliance that this government puts on short-term savings over long-term management. I think this is one of the areas that's of big concern to the people in Edmonton-Centre. We have a lot of students who live in Edmonton-Centre. It's just across the river from the university, and Grant MacEwan College and Alberta College are in the constituency. These students are trying hard. They want to get a higher education to better themselves, to contribute to society, but as one young woman put it: how could she earn enough to put herself through

college on part-time minimum wages? Student finance loans barely covered her day care costs, and she would end up at the end of her schooling with a debt in the \$20,000 to \$30,000 range. Talk about a disincentive to better yourself.

Edmonton-Centre also has many of the workers who toil in the buildings around us, government employees. They wanted to know when they would be rewarded for their sacrifice in taking a 5 percent rollback. They have faced uncertainty in their job security. They have dealt with unbelievable stress in their workplace as they struggled to adapt to cuts in their departments, sometimes more than once in a year and often once they were already in the budget cycle. One man became very emotional when he spoke with me. He wanted to do a good job, be a good public servant and serve the people of Alberta well, but he kept asking me: how could he do any kind of planning, implement any kind of good resource management when the department had cut its budget several times in one year? He felt that his work was wasted and that in the long run it would cost the people of Alberta.

Human rights is another area where the people of Edmonton-Centre speak up. The gay and lesbian community, ethnic groups, and immigrants look to the human rights Act and the Human Rights Commission to protect them. Edmonton-Centre believes in human rights, in equal rights for all Albertans. We're not asking for special rights but for equal protection. Human rights are not about some finite bucket of rights where if you take some out, there is less for everyone else. It's about treating all people with respect and dignity and allowing people to participate in society without having to struggle with artificial barriers.

We in Edmonton-Centre are blessed with a strong artistic community, and I'm very proud that so many artists and arts groups call Edmonton-Centre home. The arts are a growing economic force and a good one for the Alberta advantage to invest in. It costs only \$20,000 to create a job in this sector compared with \$50,000 to \$100,000 to create one in other sectors.

Arts and culture is the third or fourth largest industry in Alberta, depending on which statistic you consult. The arts create a vitality and activity level that attracts people and businesses. A perfect example of this is the Fringe theatre festival. Its start in a rundown area of town in the early '80s revitalized the Old Strathcona and Whyte Avenue areas, attracting people and businesses. Look at the success story now.

Any corporation looking to move to a new location will scrutinize the arts community. They need to make sure that there is a vibrant arts scene to attract their executives and workers. Syncrude understands this. They sponsor artistic events and endeavours all over the province, not just in Fort McMurray, and not because they are good corporate citizens but because they need that cultural outlet to engage people, keep them interested, and keep their workers involved.

Art galleries, music, theatre, dance, film: that's what attracts big business and helps them keep employees. The city of Edmonton is currently seeking ways in which more artists can be enticed into the downtown area. They need artists to create that vitality and activity that attracts others.

A dollar spent on the arts has more than one and a half times the return to the surrounding community, and artists return significantly more to the community through taxes and other benefits than they receive from all levels of grants combined. The artists subsidize the arts for you so you can enjoy them. Art holds up a mirror so we can see who we are now and gives us the history and stories which we need to identify ourselves.

Edmonton-Centre is proud of our cultural agencies and our artists, and we want to make sure there is enough support for that community to survive and flourish. Arts and culture needs government support. Since the dawn of time it has never been without sponsorship of some sort: the church, the nobility, and now government. It is not a private-sector activity.

Edmonton-Centre is also home to many nonprofit agencies, especially in the social services area. The Boyle Street co-op, the Mennonite centre, the Sexual Assault Centre, the YMCA and YWCA, the Food Bank: all these and many more agencies are in Edmonton-Centre. These agencies work to get people back on their feet, train for a job, get employment, and become contributing members of society. They do this under incredible odds with appallingly small budgets, and their workload is increasing as government continues to encourage self-reliance, I think the phrase is, in the community.

Issues of concern to women is a big item in Edmonton-Centre. Women are 51 percent of the population, and in Edmonton-Centre we have an even higher percentage than that. Many of the women are retired or elderly, but we're also home to students, lots of retail and service workers, and professional women.

We don't have a lot of children in Edmonton-Centre. Most households have single people or couples, but where there are children, good quality, accessible child care is still an issue.

Safety for women is an issue, both on the streets and in the home.

Health care, home care, and caregiving is on almost every woman's mind. Women are still the primary caregivers for our families, so access to hospitals, emergency treatment, and long-term care is very important to us.

The economy. Women have suffered disproportionately under this government. Government layoffs hit women harder. Changes in health care and hospitals affected both nurses and women who shoulder the burden for their family's care. Student finance makes it more difficult for women with children to finish their education. Programs that are more user friendly to women have or are disappearing. The list goes on.

I was asked by the women of Edmonton-Centre to look out for them, to safeguard their interests and to protect them, and I take that very seriously.

I noticed in some of my reading that the then minister responsible for women's issues in a ministerial statement on March 7 lists programs that exist for women. Well, that was a year ago. Now, one year later, there doesn't appear to be a minister responsible for women's issues, and there are no programs for women in the budget.

5:00

The last issue that the people of Edmonton-Centre spoke to me about was the environment. Yes, they live in the centre of the city, but the care of Alberta's natural resources was of concern to them. They asked me questions I could not answer, questions like: why do we keep giving away our natural resources to these large, multinational corporations, who then proceed to poison the rivers and the land while sending the profits out of the country? How is this a good investment for Albertans? I can't answer that question. How could we have wildlife – elk, moose, and deer – that are so filled with chemicals that we are warned not to hunt and eat them? How can we have river systems with no fish because they can't survive in the water? Pick up a fish guide sometime and have a look at how many areas warn you not to eat more than one fish per week from a given river because it has so many toxins in its flesh that it's not safe for consumption by

children or pregnant women.

People, even people living in the centre of a large city, want to know that their natural resources are being well managed. Yes, we all want jobs and economic revitalization for rural centres but apparently not at the price we've paid recently.

The people of Edmonton-Centre elected me and charged me with the responsibility of representing them. As you can see, they are a thoughtful, passionate, vibrant, active, and politically aware group. I am proud to represent them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to talk about the people of Edmonton-Centre and their concerns. It was an honour to address this Assembly on their behalf.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the outset I'd like to extend my congratulations to the Member for Edmonton-Centre on her election to this Legislative Assembly and for her insightful words today.

It is with a great deal of pride that I rise to speak on behalf of my constituency of Calgary-Glenmore. I know that this is often called one's maiden speech, and as a gender-sensitive person in an age of political correctness I wonder aloud whether "maiden" remains apropos. On the other hand, I also appreciate that this term stems from a long-standing convention and tradition in the British parliamentary system, for which I have utmost respect. So in my first official act of political compromise I wish to present my made in Calgary-Glenmore speech.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to begin by thanking the Lieutenant Governor for delivering the mandate of this government for the First Session of the 24th Alberta Legislature in the Speech from the Throne. The constituents of Calgary-Glenmore have bestowed upon me the honour and privilege of being their representative in the Legislative Assembly, and for this I thank them.

The legacy of the former minister responsible for science and technology, the hon. Dianne Mirosh, who with remarkable diligence and verve served my constituency for close to 11 years, has left the people of Calgary-Glenmore with high expectations for an MLA. Mr. Speaker, I accept this challenge with enthusiasm. I can't help but note that my place in this House, located as it is in the patio area on the government side, is the same seat where Mrs. Mirosh started her career. [interjection] It takes 11 years.

I'm committed to ensuring that the concerns of my constituents are heard and that their needs are met. Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign I promised that if elected I would be the true representative of the people, as that is the highest calling of an MLA. I pledged then and I repeat my pledge now to be accessible, to listen, and to be the voice of the people of Calgary-Glenmore. Not unlike Premier Klein and this Conservative government I will keep my promise.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to represent the dynamic constituency located in southwest Calgary. Over 35,000 Albertans reside in Calgary-Glenmore, which is made up of the communities of Eagle Ridge, Chinook Park, Haysboro, Southwood, Braeside, Oakridge, Palliser, Bayview, and Pump Hill. Each of these communities have their own unique characteristics, which makes Calgary-Glenmore a tremendous place to live, work, and play.

Without doubt the greatest asset of Calgary-Glenmore is its people, a people of diverse backgrounds, a people who practise at

a high level tolerance, volunteerism, and community involvement, a people who work hard, who are well educated, and who since 1971 have shown excellent judgment at the polls by electing successive Conservative MLAs.

Mr. Speaker, Calgary-Glenmore has outstanding natural features. The Glenmore reservoir is probably the constituency's most notable one. It is fed by the Elbow River and is foreground to the grandeur of the majestic Rocky Mountains to the west. Glenmore reservoir and surrounding scenic Glenmore park offer many recreational pursuits, including sailing, hiking along Weasel Head, biking, walking, jogging, roller-blading along the extensive pathways, and of course communing with nature.

Calgary-Glenmore also boasts one of the city's most notable tourist attractions, the Heritage Park Historical Village. Heritage Park provides Albertans and tourists with a look into our province's past. Visitors experience half a century of Alberta's history as they stroll through the village's turn-of-the-century streets, tour restored historic buildings, ride an antique train across 66 acres of parkland, or observe a sunset upon the *S.S. Moyie*, a stern-wheeler that traverses the waters of Calgary-Glenmore. I would encourage the members of this Assembly and indeed all Albertans to visit Heritage park, if they have not already done so, and learn more about our forebears and the history of this great province.

Mr. Speaker, Calgary-Glenmore is also home to the Rockyview hospital, which is one of Calgary's three state-of-the-art acute care hospitals. It offers high-quality 24-hour emergency services and general medical and surgical services.

Mr. Speaker, as the representative for Calgary-Glenmore I will work diligently to meet the needs of the constituency. I'll encourage strategies and initiatives that will ensure my communities remain strong and continue to enjoy a high quality of life.

I wholeheartedly agree with the mandate of our government as outlined by the Lieutenant Governor. Fiscal responsibility must remain a priority of this government while ensuring that all Albertans have access to quality, responsive services. I am proud of our province's record. We have reduced our provincial net debt by half, legislated balanced budgets, and streamlined government. These actions have freed up Albertans' hard-earned tax dollars. This provides Alberta with a strong foundation on which to build. Mr. Speaker, fiscal responsibility is a constant feature of a caring government. Albertans pay taxes so that services are available when needed. It's our responsibility as government to provide prudent management of these tax dollars and to provide access to quality, responsive, and affordable services for all Albertans. By lowering our tax, our debt servicing costs, we are now able to reinvest in priority areas such as health care, education, and seniors' programs.

Education is a major focus for the people of Calgary-Glenmore. One priority is to have their children and grandchildren receive an exemplary education from early childhood services to postsecondary. Young Albertans must receive the necessary knowledge and skills in such areas as technology to meet the needs of the 21st century marketplace. I applaud this government's initiative, as announced in the Speech from the Throne, to introduce curriculum standards in technology for students and technical standards and certification requirements for teachers. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, we are on the right track.

Another priority is ensuring availability of retraining programs. We must continue to address the education needs of adult Albertans. Access to lifelong learning is part of the Alberta advantage.

5:10

During my campaign, Mr. Speaker, my constituents also told me that health care is a priority. Over the next four years I know that we will continue to look for better ways of meeting the health care needs of Albertans. We will continue to strive for a contemporary, accessible, and affordable health system that provides the very best medical care. It's necessary to address the pressure points in the system today while considering the needs of a changing population to ensure a sustainable system for the future.

Our population is increasing and aging. As we all know, the number of senior citizens in our province is growing, and this trend will continue for many years. Seniors helped to build this great province, and they deserve a quality of life that reflects the Alberta advantage. Mr. Speaker, there are many seniors in Calgary-Glenmore, and many benefit from special-needs assistance and the Alberta seniors' benefit. Over the next four years I will work with this government to improve upon a system that treats seniors fairly.

Mr. Speaker, community safety is also of particular importance and concern to me. During the election as I was knocking on doors, I noticed that my constituents, too, are concerned. Many people are taking precautions to ensure their own safety. Home security alarms and security bars on doors and windows are now becoming commonplace. So it is our role as the government to recognize the importance of keeping our communities safe through strategies aimed at reducing serious and violent crimes. I was pleased to hear in the Speech from the Throne that it is this government's mandate to implement such strategies.

My constituents, like all Albertans, want to keep as much of their hard-earned dollars as possible in their pockets. They will

be interested to hear that this government will be looking at a new law to cap its share of personal and corporate income taxes and other taxes at current levels until Albertans vote otherwise.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, as the elected representative for Calgary-Glenmore I'll strive to represent the interests of my constituents and to serve their needs to the best of my ability. I'm a proven problem solver, perhaps as a result of 22 years in the legal profession, and I'll use that skill in responding to the needs and concerns of the people of Calgary-Glenmore. I'll remain open and accountable and represent my constituents with the utmost integrity, honesty, and honour. I'd like to sincerely thank the constituents of Calgary-Glenmore for giving me this opportunity to be their Member of the Legislative Assembly. They've placed their trust in me, and I'll work to be deserving of that trust.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be a part of this government as we build on Alberta's strong foundation. On behalf of my constituents I firmly support the direction of this government that will lead us into the next millennium on solid ground. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move that we adjourn debate.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has moved that we now adjourn debate. Is the Assembly in favour of this motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[At 5:15 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]