

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title:** Thursday, May 8, 1997 1:30 p.m.  
Date: 97/05/08  
[The Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. On this day as we remember VE Day, victory in Europe 52 years ago, let us bow our heads in silence as we remember all who died in the Second World War.

We give thanks to God for all those who died in defence of freedom and peace.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Peter Maier-Oswald, consul general of the Republic of Germany in Vancouver. Germany is one of our more important trade and investment partners in Europe. We exported \$166 million in goods and services to Germany in 1996, and I'm pleased to say that our trade partnership with this country continues to grow. I'd ask that the consul general please rise in the Speaker's gallery and receive the recognition and warm welcome of the House.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to the report of the Standing Committee on Private Bills that was concurred in by the Assembly yesterday, I now move that the petitions for private Bills presented in the Assembly on Monday, May 5, 1997, now be deemed to be read and received.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that the Department of Economic Development and Tourism will not be designated by the Leader of the Official Opposition pursuant to Standing Order 58(4).

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, today I'm pleased to table four copies of a document just recently released entitled *Striking the Right Balance: A Summary of Views*. This document is the result of Alberta Health's consultation with Albertans on what should be included in the new health information protection Act. The responses will be incorporated into draft legislation to be tabled later in this session. The document is available to all Albertans through my office, and I encourage all MLAs to contact my office if they want copies for their constituents.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table four copies of the annual report of the Alberta Association of

Registered Nurses, an association that has a long history of service to the citizens of this province.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of documents I wish to table. They're from a consortia of 11 mental health serving agencies in the city of Calgary. Firstly, a copy of a letter to Mr. Bud McCaig, chairman of the Calgary regional health authority, dated January 28, '97; next, a Community Mental Health Services Planning Committee statistical report in terms of services and waits in the city of Calgary; next, a fact sheet prepared by the same consortia; and then finally, a community needs assessment for acute care psychiatric services, city of Calgary, prepared by Dr. Holley: all of that relates to needs in the city of Calgary.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to this Legislature some young visitors from very nearly all over the world. They're foreign students that attend St. John's school of Alberta in the constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar, and they are from varied places such as Mexico, Venezuela, Ukraine, and Hong Kong. They're accompanied here today by Ms Julia Stanbridge-Zard. They're in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, thank you. It is my pleasure and honour today to introduce to you and through you a group of students from St. Anthony's school in Drumheller. This is the first opportunity that I've had to introduce a group from the new riding of Drumheller-Chinook, which I am very honoured to represent. The group are accompanied by six adults: Mr. Gerry Hamilton, Doug Harvey, Mrs. Karen Roth, Mrs. Laurie Bolin, Mrs. Heather Lapham, and Mrs. Corinne Pugh. I would ask them to stand and receive the very warm welcome of this Legislature.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some visitors from out of the country. Cicih Sukasesih is a former worker at a Nike factory in Indonesia where people get paid \$1.20 a day, contrary to Indonesia's laws of a minimum wage of \$2.75 a day. She is accompanied today by Dr. Saraswati Sunindyo, a professor of women's studies at the University of Washington, and as well Jim Selby from the Alberta Federation of Labour. I'm pleased also to introduce our staff member Anna Dashtgard. I would ask these people to rise, please, and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister of science, research, and information.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you one of my constituents and one constituent from Lac La Biche-St. Paul. They happen to be brothers. They're with the Alberta Conservation Tillage Society, and they're interested in promoting conservation soils in Alberta.

They are brothers Bryan and Brad Hearn. Would you stand and receive a warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Hon. Walter Paszkowski, Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, it is a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Lois and Bill Akers from Fox Creek. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly my friend of long standing, Dr. Allen Pearson, who is the dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario, accompanied by two Edmontonians whom I also happen to have known for a long time: Dr. Joan Munro, who has been teaching at the University of Alberta, and my dear wife, Swinder Pannu. I'll ask Dr. Pearson and his friends to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I have a list of other hon. members who apparently want to introduce a guest, but there has been no movement.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, did you have a guest to introduce today? [interjection] Okay. The hon. Member for Red Deer-North? Hon. Minister of Health, did you? I have these notices given to me by hon. members. Is there any other hon. member who would like to introduce a guest? Okay.

**head: Ministerial Statements**  
1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

**Crime Prevention Week**

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pride and honour that I stand before you today to inform you and through you the people of Alberta that this Saturday, May 10, marks the kickoff of Alberta Crime Prevention Week, being held this year from May 10 to 17. Across the province community groups and police services will be joining together to promote and participate in Alberta Crime Prevention Week. I encourage all of my colleagues here in the House to seek out and participate in any of the local Alberta Crime Prevention Week activities that may be held in your constituency.

The theme of this year's Crime Prevention Week is Crime Prevention Works for All of Us, and indeed it does, Mr. Speaker. Evidence of this exists throughout the province and is due in large part to the co-operation exhibited between police and community members who in working together have achieved considerable success.

It will be my very great pleasure and honour this coming Saturday at McDougall Centre in Calgary to officially recognize seven individuals, two community groups, and a business by presenting each of them with individual Alberta Justice crime prevention awards. These awards, Mr. Speaker, are presented annually to recognize the outstanding crime prevention work that goes on across Alberta. Behind these awards are some truly

amazing and remarkable people, people who in their own way are taking responsibility for crime prevention in their own communities. They are doing vitally important work that contributes to safer communities and benefits us all.

The ways in which these individuals contributed to community safety is manifold. They include setting up and running a program to accompany university campus pedestrians after dark, teaching students about the serious consequences of drinking and driving, and setting up and participating in programs such as Rural Crime Watch, Block Watch, Retail Watch, and Crime Stoppers. Mr. Speaker, our hats should be off to these dedicated citizens and the thousands of others across the province who have not been officially recognized with an award, for it is these people who truly personify the spirit of Crime Prevention Week.

Community involvement really is the key to a safer Alberta. Community involvement means that not only will crime be reduced, but people will continue to feel safe in their communities. Albertans need to feel safe in their own homes and communities, Mr. Speaker, and they can best achieve that feeling of security by getting involved. This is what Crime Prevention Week is all about.

There are a number of things that community groups, businesses, and indeed all Albertans, young or old, can actively participate in. I encourage Albertans to get involved with community-based groups such as Block Parents, Neighbourhood Watch, Rural Crime Watch, and others like them. These programs are very effective tools in preventing crime. They are also an excellent way for Albertans to learn first hand about crime prevention while at the same time fighting crime.

Youth justice committees have become another important element in our crime prevention efforts. These committees, staffed by volunteers from local communities, provide an opportunity to deter future criminal activity by showing first-time offenders the impact that crime has upon the local community and its members. I am pleased to report that there are currently more than 50 youth justice committees across the province working with young offenders, and more such committees are being planned for adults in the near future.

Also within our communities there is an important role for business to play. Businesses are encouraged to provide support and leadership in preventing crime. Business people who are already involved have learned that it is a good investment to sponsor crime prevention activities and to have good security measures in place on their premises. I am glad to say that more and more Alberta businesses are actively participating in crime prevention.

I must also point out that individual Albertans can play an important role in reducing crime. They can help by taking responsibility for their own personal safety and for helping others to be aware and make wise decisions. Every Albertan can help prevent crime by reporting drunk drivers, keeping an eye out for trouble, and becoming involved in helping the victims of crime. Volunteering and supporting community-based groups and activities for kids, such as Boys and Girls Clubs, Guides and Scouts, sports and athletic clubs, hot lunch and after-school programs, are a few of the other ways in which individuals can become involved in this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, during Alberta Crime Prevention Week, from May 10 to 17, police, community groups, businesses, and individuals will be staging events to educate the public about crime prevention. Displays and presentations will be in place across the province in schools, shopping malls, police stations,

and community halls. I encourage every Albertan to take advantage of the opportunities that exist to become involved, especially during Crime Prevention Week, because it is by becoming involved, by accepting that responsibility that we can all work together to make a difference and ensure that crime prevention works for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a representative of an organization that once was privileged to receive an award during Crime Prevention Week from the government of Alberta, I am pleased to respond to the minister's statement and to remind all Albertans about the importance of getting involved in crime prevention at a personal and individual level.

My congratulations to the individuals, businesses, and community organizations who are active in crime prevention and all of those who are being recognized for their efforts during this week. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we should be recognizing them day in and day out, year round.

Of course, crime prevention has become so much more than simply providing information to the police or getting involved in Block Watch or marking your valuables for identification. Crime prevention is now a much more global concept which demands more attention from government as opposed to less. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would offer that crime prevention is no longer simply a game of cops and robbers in which the government can play the trees.

We need an integrated response from the provincial government, and while we do see some slow movement in this direction, much more attention needs to be paid to involving departments other than the Attorney General. We have to involve more fully the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the Department of Family and Social Services, the Department of Community Development, just to name a few, in terms of fully getting a handle on what we can do to prevent crime before it costs us all. Mr. Speaker, initiatives such as restorative justice, which seeks to address the imbalance that crime causes in communities, crime prevention through environmental design, which helps us plan crime out before it occurs, and crime prevention through social development are just a few of the many strategies which need to be more fully explored and then employed by this provincial government and its partners in preventing crime.

Mr. Speaker, I join with all Albertans in looking forward to the continued and increased support from the provincial government for crime prevention activities.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**  
**Sequence of Business**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before I call on the representative of the Official Opposition to raise the first question, the Chair would like to make a request of all hon. members. If all hon. members would look at the Order Paper, we have this afternoon, following Oral Question Period, Members' Statements, Projected Government Business, and normally the Chair would then deal with points of order before calling Orders of the Day. Earlier this week, hon. members approved unanimously Motion 17, which would see the presence of a distinguished visitor to the Assembly, and the Chair would like to suggest and ask that hon. members

would endorse the Chair's conclusion that at the end of Oral Question Period and before moving to Members' Statements, we deal with the presence of the individual identified in Motion 17. Would that be acceptable to the House?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposition to it? Thank you very much. Then we'll proceed on that basis.

head: **Oral Question Period**  
**Child Welfare**

MRS. SLOAN: Over the past few weeks the Minister of Family and Social Services has stated a number of contradictory positions about children suffering from abuse, neglect, and death in the care of government. The report of the child advocate recommended the creation of a specialized investigation process involving external, impartial, objective, arm's-length participation from community professionals, foster parent associations, youth representatives, and advocates. My first question is to the Minister of Family and Social Services. When will the minister implement the recommendation of his government's child advocate in 1993 by creating an external, impartial, objective body to investigate cases of abuse and neglect of children in the care of government?

1:50

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before we get going on this, I would like to table with the House four copies of all the deaths of all the children who have died in child welfare care from April 1 of '94 to February 28 of '97. I would like to table that. In going through this – and I did just receive this – there are about one or two cases that are still before the court, so I cannot comment on that. But there are things such as acute disease, car accident, accidental drowning, and there are some suicides in there as well.

Mr. Speaker, I think that what the member needs to realize and what she needs to understand is that every case where a child dies when they are in care of the government is put before the medical examiner. The medical examiner then determines whether or not the Fatality Review Board deems it necessary to look for any external causes, anything that could have been done.

Mr. Speaker, I will in no way endorse deaths of children that are in our care, but they are a very high risk population. That is why in our performance indicators what we have looked at is actually the number of children that are undergoing any aspect of neglect or abuse. We want to get it early, we want to get it fast, and we want to deal with it accordingly.

The information that was just tabled shows that what we are doing right now is very good. The Fatality Review Board is an independent board. We have no ability to alter their decisions. We live by their decisions, Mr. Speaker, and to date they have not shown us to be at fault in it.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would the minister, then, care to share with this Assembly how he can say that children have not died from abuse and neglect when the medical examiner's report does not categorially relate child death at all or to the categories of neglect or abuse?

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request the hon. member to take a look at the document that I just tabled. I have

gone through each of them, and each cause of death is put there. When it comes to suicide as a cause of death, again, whether or not there was neglect, whether or not there was abuse, it is very difficult to say. I stand by the comments that I made for the year of 1995 that there was no abuse.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, there is one case that is awaiting confirmation of a cause of death. There are a couple of cases that have been taken to court, and I cannot comment on those cases at the moment. Of the 12 children that died between April 1 in 1994 and March 31 of 1995, which was our worst year as opposed to five in April 1, '95, to March 31, 1996, and six from April 1, 1996, to February 28, 1997, there were none that were caused by neglect and abuse.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Justice then: will this minister use his power under section 36 of the Fatality Inquiries Act to "order that a judge conduct a public inquiry into" the deaths of every child that has died in the care of government?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, not at this time. However, if the minister of social services is of the view that our department can assist with respect to this matter, then we would be happy to oblige.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, if I may, add to that, we are in no way trying to hide anything. With the Fatality Review Board, the fatality review commission that looks at each death, we are more than willing to say if it was our fault, if there were problems with it. To date it hasn't been. We learned that we are dealing with a very high-risk population. We are dealing with a population that is at risk for death in our care. We are not happy with their figures; we would prefer the figures to be zero. But I really must stand here and say that the foster parents in Alberta, the people who are looking after these children are doing a great and fabulous job.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Second main opposition question, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

#### **Word of Life Centre**

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a Word of Life Centre conference held just eight weeks ago in Red Deer, Pastor Larry Keegstra is alleged to have told a workshop that witchcraft in Canada is routed through native culture, the Roman Catholic church, and some of our Prime Ministers. He continued: the rise of women into places of control releases witchcraft; the spirit of witchcraft tries to get women into places of false authority and tries to get men to stay out of the place of authority. It was also reported that he claimed that witchcraft infiltrates the church further through the introduction of other religions brought into Canada through immigration. My question is to the deputy Premier. Are these notions regarding natives, women, the Roman Catholic church, and immigration consistent with the policies and goals of this government?

#### **Speaker's Ruling Questions outside Ministerial Responsibility**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, first of all, to my knowledge there is no deputy Premier, so perhaps clarification for that.

The Chair is really having a difficult time following the intent

of the question. So if it's the Government House Leader who is responding, or in this case the Minister of Community Development – I'm not sure what the parameters are, but find a very narrow vein here because, hon. member, it's difficult to follow.

#### **Word of Life Centre (continued)**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that there is even a narrow parameter in that statement or question that would require an answer from this government. This government stands on its record with aboriginals, with women's groups, and with our religious organizations in this province.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Madam Minister. To the same minister: then why would your government have given the Word of Life Centre and School Society over \$900,000 in public grants over the past three years through the departments of Education, social services, and advanced education?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, our government through a variety of agencies provides grants to community organizations over a number of years. If the Minister of Education or the Minister of Family and Social Services or one of those other granting departments would like to discuss an individual grant to a group, they may wish to supplement my answer, but we do provide grants to many groups. I don't know what the hon. member is trying to lead into the tie-in to a grant that is given to an organization unless it was to a specific speaker, and I don't see that that information has been provided.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. To the Minister of Education: given that the bulk of public money granted to Word of Life organizations is through the Department of Education, what safeguards has this government in place to ensure that such hatred and intolerance is not being taught to children?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, within the province of Alberta there are approximately 500,000 students. We give parents choices in terms of the types of educational choices that they make for their children, whether those choices are within the public system or within the separate system, within charter schools, private schools, and so on, or home schooling for that matter. We think that it is the responsibility of parents to ensure that their students are going to schools that teach the types of things that they feel are important. There is a curriculum that the private schools such as this centre are obliged to follow up with, and we do monitor their compliance to following the curriculum of the province of Alberta.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Questions outside Ministerial Responsibility**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the Chair's interjection at the conclusion of the original question raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre had to do with – to the Chair's knowledge a certain individual name that was identified is unassociated with the government of Alberta. Following that, in the second question the hon. member raised a question seeking information about public dollars that apparently were directed. That certainly would have made the second and third question in order, but the first one had a parameter that was very difficult for the Chair to understand. So perhaps that's just a suggestion for the future.

Third main opposition question, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

2:00

**VLT Plebiscites**

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and the former minister of lotteries have made it extremely clear that if citizens in a municipality objected to VLTs and wanted to get rid of them, then all they had to do was get a plebiscite going by petition and the government would abide by the results of that particular plebiscite. Well, last night the town of Black Diamond rejected a plebiscite even though it was clearly a proper petition, legal, with sufficient names. It was rejected because the town of Black Diamond objected to the costs of the plebiscite. Keep in mind that the Premier has consistently repeated that he guarantees democracy will prevail when it comes to the VLT issue. My first question to the minister responsible for lotteries: what steps will the minister take to ensure that the promises made by her government will prevail?

MRS. BLACK: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that under the Municipal Government Act there are provisions for citizens making petitions to municipal government leaders as it pertains to petitions and the procedures to be followed. The position we have put in place in this government is in fact that if a municipality through a plebiscite process ratifies a decision one way or other, it goes through their council. They would then contact us with a decision of that council. It is not up to this government to intrude into that arena when it is already laid out in a framework that should be followed by municipalities.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, then can I ask the minister: is the minister prepared to front the plebiscite cost from lottery revenues to allow the citizens of Black Diamond to exercise their democratic process and then to duke it out later on with the town council as to who pays?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, no.

MR. WICKMAN: My question, then, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: will the minister guarantee this Legislative Assembly that she will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the Municipal Government Act is abided by?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, throughout this entire debate on whether or not under section 236 of the Municipal Government Act – and relative to plebiscites the whole philosophy of our government is to place on the community, as much as the community will abide, the responsibility for making decisions among themselves on VLTs.

**Safeway Labour Dispute**

MS BARRETT: Many striking Safeway workers earn such low pay and get so few hours of work per work that they have to go to Family and Social Services for benefits, whether it's top-up income benefits or for day care subsidy. Mr. Speaker, in the last week or so we've had numerous calls at our office from striking Safeway workers, telling us that they have been cut off from those benefits because they were told to cross the picket line. My question to the Minister of Family and Social Services is this: can he confirm that during a labour dispute persons on strike are not to lose any of their social services benefits?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, when people go on strike, what we do is that the children that are there, their children – they must

look after them quite frankly. We do not pay people to go on strike.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll take this opportunity of filing four copies of the rules of social services that say that these people are not to be cut off any of their benefits.

Is the minister prepared to describe what actions he will take to ensure that from this time forward no striking Safeway workers or any other worker who's on strike and receiving top-up benefits from social services will be cut off?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, when the people who are going on strike have been on social services and their facilities for recouping, for getting the money have not changed, then, yes, I will. What has happened to date is that there have been cases where the strikers, rather than looking after their children, rather than causing it, have put forward their children to the day care centres, to other centres. They have put in for welfare, and as I've stated before to the hon. member, it is the rule of this government that we're staying neutral in this debate.

MS BARRETT: Neutrality is not the issue, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister kindly commit to reimbursing these people for the top-up benefits to which they are entitled by law and by his own department's policy?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much. Again I will reiterate: we are not taking sides in this labour dispute. If they were able to get the benefits before, then they are able to get them now. They are not going to get the benefits purely because they are striking and put their children in care. We are not going to pay for that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

**Crop Insurance**

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My comments today are actually about the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation in reference to the '96 annual report. One of the programs the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation offers is crop insurance, and reading from the report, it's evident that the premiums collected from the insured persons barely cover the indemnities which are paid out. My question to the minister of agriculture this afternoon is: is it true that while the premiums barely cover the indemnities and \$13 million in administration is not covered, we have yet reduced premiums to the insured persons by a further 25 percent?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, the farmers in the province of Alberta have delivered their fair share in balancing the Alberta budget. In fact, we have reduced our departmental budget by 46 percent. We've eliminated completely all of the commodity-specific programs such as the gross revenue insurance program, the tripartite red meat stabilization fund, the Crow benefit offset, and I'm quite sure, Mr. Speaker, that there are a few other programs there that I don't quite recall that we had a few years ago.

Alberta farmers are competing against other provinces and other countries that have very significant ad hoc support programs, and this new-look crop insurance is to help our farmers compete on the world market by increasing the participation of farmers in the crop insurance area. We're hoping to see our acres increase from

7.3 million to 9 million. The extra funding going to this program is \$16.6 million. However, we know that having more acres in is going to make the program more self-sufficient and stable in the very near future.

MR. DOERKSEN: To the same minister: what steps is the minister taking to move towards full cost recovery?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we are taking a number of steps. One of the areas is, of course, in the area of administration. We have the lowest administration costs in crop insurance in the country of Canada. In fact, we've been at 10 percent for the last six years. To give this House additional information as to the spread of the administration costs, we're looking at administration costs in the province of Newfoundland with an increase of 300 percent, Quebec at about 60, most of the western provinces anywhere from 13 to 16 percent, and we're at 10.

We're also looking at privatization in crop insurance. We have a pilot project in the hon. member's riding in fact looking at privatizing adjustment services. We're also looking at offering administration services to the Peace River area, which will increase the area covered and will again squeeze down the administration costs.

MR. DOERKSEN: Could the minister also explain to me how the farm income disaster program, which appears to be another insurance program, is different than the other insurance programs offered by the AFSC?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is referring to the farm income disaster program. This is a whole-farm program. It's not commodity specific, so it's GATT friendly. The program itself does not pay on negative margins. It pays on 70 percent of the previous three years' margin. So if a person does not use crop insurance to increase the margin, there is not – this program is not going to cover anybody that hasn't driven any margins in the previous three years. So it's not there to support those farmers that haven't been productive in the past.

Mr. Speaker, there is a \$50 application fee to cover the preliminary administration costs, and it's a 1 percent application after that, capped at \$450. So administration is borne by the farmer.

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

## 2:10 Mental Health Services

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two years ago the Provincial Mental Health Board published a plan for a much better mental health system and called it the Road to a Better Future. Well, it appears that in this province this is a road with far too many turns and apparently a road without any end. My question this afternoon is to the Minister of Health. What is the final date, the outside date when mental health services will be turned over to the Capital and Calgary regional health authorities?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Mental Health Advisory Board has been working since its appointment in August 1996 to deal with some issues and problems in the system and to develop, which is very important, their long-term business plan. They have pretty well completed that planning exercise, and in general terms we are going to be working with the regional health

authorities, which have indicated to us that they are in varying states of readiness and willingness to take on this responsibility. Certainly we look forward to completing the transfer as far as community mental health services in 1998.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question to the same minister would be as follows: why is it that the government finally acknowledged that we have unacceptable waiting lists for a host of other kinds of medical procedures, yet continues to ignore the 345 Calgarians on waiting lists for housing, outreach and rehab services as well as the thousands of other Albertans waiting for the same kind of service in other parts of Alberta?

MR. JONSON: I'd like to, in response to the hon. member's question, Mr. Speaker, make two points. First of all, with respect to the Calgary regional health authority, it has in this year's budget a very significant addition of funding with respect to supporting mental health services under their jurisdiction both through the increase in the basic overall formula funding for the regional health authority as well as in the provincial services component, which assists with the whole budget. It is my understanding that they're in the process within the next two or three weeks of opening an additional 31 new acute care treatment beds in Calgary for a net increase, I think, of about 20 overall. So there is action and there is support being provided in Calgary.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, with respect to community-based services, I believe that at some time previous I indicated that one of the issues that the Provincial Mental Health Advisory Board had to deal with and that I acknowledged was that there was some major difficulty in the balance of community mental health funding across the province. I hope in the fairly near future to announce some steps to deal with that. So there are very significant responses under way.

MR. DICKSON: My final question, Mr. Speaker, would be this: since approximately one in every five Albertans suffers from a mental illness, why is it that only 3 percent of the Health department budget is focused on mental health programs and services?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have noted the two statistics quoted by the hon. member, but I hope you will pardon me if I have a sort of question in my mind as to their validity. We will check on that and perhaps come to an agreement one way or another.

The important thing here, though, is that over the evolution of mental health funding in the province of Alberta it is resting, you might say, or located in three different departments at least: one being Family and Social Services, one of course being Health, and to some degree you might say in the Education budget. Without going on too much further, Mr. Speaker, we recently came up with an estimate that there's probably about \$160 million of the Family and Social Services budget that supports community mental health related programs. So if we bring together the money there, the money in the Health budget, you would find it would be quite a bit higher than 3 percent.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

## School Closures

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parents in the Redwater area are concerned about the possible closure of their high school

due to low enrollment. To the Minister of Education: is the minister considering closing the school in Redwater?

MR. MAR: Whenever a school board makes a decision to close a school it's always a difficult decision for the community. But, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Education I do not make the decision to close schools; school boards do. They make their decisions in accordance with a list of criteria and in accordance with the policy that they set. They have public meetings with their community. They are of course elected people who are accountable to the people who elect them, and they make those difficult decisions.

In the case of Redwater school, Sturgeon school division No. 24 would have to look at the factors that affect the school and make the appropriate decision. My role as the Minister of Education, Mr. Speaker, is to ensure that they follow their appropriate policy in accordance with their written policies and make sure that that is done in accordance with that policy but not with respect to looking at the merits of making the decision.

MR. BRODA: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: can the minister explain the process school boards follow when they close a school?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, each school board in the province develops its own written policies on school closures in accordance with department policy. Any possible closure must be raised at their regular school meeting. The board must then hold a public meeting to discuss the closure with the community, and once members of the community have had the opportunity to be heard, then the board is able to make the decision as to whether to close the school.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, although every school closure ultimately requires my approval, I would base my decision on approving the closure based on whether the board had followed its policy.

MR. BRODA: My final supplemental question to the same minister: how many schools have been closed over the last five years?

MR. MAR: I have looked at this particular question, Mr. Speaker. School boards have closed a total of 31 schools in the past five years, since June of 1992, but I would point out with some celerity that school boards have opened 38 new schools, including charter schools, to meet the needs of students just in the last two years. So while 31 have been closed in the last five, 38 have been opened in the last two.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. Before rising, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, the Chair sometimes has a difficulty hearing, but I'm sure *Hansard* will point this out: was the word, hon. minister, "celerity"?

MR. MAR: Celerity, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you.

## 2:20 Solv-Ex Corporation

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, my questions today are to the Minister of Energy. With regards to the oversight of the Solv-Ex

Corporation's tar sands operation the former Minister of Energy said, "The government of Alberta does not get involved in the financing of the project." Undoubtedly this minister is aware that Solv-Ex Corporation is being investigated by the FBI, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, the British serious fraud office, and the National Association of Security Dealers about allegations of stock manipulation, fraud, and links to organized crime. With regard to the financing of this operation, is this minister of the same opinion the former minister was, the head-in-the-sand treatment, or are you about to do something about the investigation, sir?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the lead-in to that question had a lot of allegations in it that I wouldn't trespass on as far as answering in this Assembly, so I'm not going to answer that.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, a second question then: with regards to the investigations by all of those foreign and domestic agencies, is the minister about to do absolutely nothing with regard to an \$8 million lease that is currently in operation?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the financing issue with Solv-Ex is not an Alberta issue. The funds raised for Solv-Ex are raised in Europe and the United States, completely out of our jurisdiction. Solv-Ex today has met all the requirements of our regulator and is in good standing as far as the operation of its leases in Fort McMurray.

MR. WHITE: A final supplementary to the Minister of Justice then: given that confidence in our financial markets, our oil sands, and our regulatory bodies is absolutely necessary to a favourable investment climate, will the minister ensure that his department co-operates fully with the British and American authorities investigating Solv-Ex Corporation?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of our department having been contacted at this time. However, if a query comes forward, then certainly we'll co-operate in any way that we can.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

## Crop Damage Compensation

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Due to the very wet fall season and the early winter snows nearly 50 percent of the crops in the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake were not harvested last fall. This spring several of the fields experienced high water levels. What were once high-quality crops are now no better than a poor to fair feed crop, if you're able to harvest. To the minister of agriculture: is there a compensation program in place to help farmers recover some of their input costs?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister and hon. member, the Chair had extreme difficulty hearing the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. There was some chatter going on here. Now, that was between the questioner, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. We'll ask for the question to be repeated if - okay; if you heard it, that's fine.

MR. STELMACH: I heard the last part of the question. I believe

the hon. member is referring to the large volume of unharvested crop that's out there in the fields. There are more and more calls coming into our office, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the serious deterioration of the crop and contamination and infestation by mice. Also, a lot of crop and swaths have been swept away by water.

Those farmers that had crop insurance had the ability to apply for the unharvested acreage provision in crop insurance, which would have given them an advance of up to about 25 percent of their proposed yield. It's an advance that goes to the farmer, and then in spring, once the farmer picks up the crop, that portion of the advance is subtracted from their total payment. Over the last 10 years about 96 percent of the advances that have been given to farmers have been recovered through their payouts.

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Speaker, besides the fungus problems on the crops, other problems such as small holes – you made mention in regard to the mice – we've also had problems with regard to crop loss from deer and waterfowl. To the minister again: is there compensation for this type of crop loss?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we do have the wildlife compensation program, which covers some of the costs of damage done to crops by big game and waterfowl. Again it's a maximum of \$83 an acre, and it'll only cover those crops that are insurable under the crop insurance program.

MR. DUCHARME: Again, to the minister of agriculture. You made mention with regards to farmers having crop insurance. For those who do not have crop insurance, are they entitled to any assistance from the province?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we do have the farm income disaster program, which will cover reductions in the margins for farmers, especially those who are going to lose a significant amount of crop due to the poor quality being harvested this spring. In fact, there are some grain elevator companies that are refusing to accept this crop. Some farmers have to now bin the crop and use aeration systems to get the odour out.

The only choice farmers have, if they don't have crop insurance, is through the farm income disaster program. However, Mr. Speaker, for those farmers that have crop insurance, that will help increase their margin, and as a result they will qualify for more compensation through the farm income disaster program.

This is an excellent opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to remind farmers who have crop insurance: please don't torch your crops. If you feel that they have no value, don't burn them before you contact the people at Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. If you burn the crop without anyone adjusting, you won't get paid.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

### Biomedical Waste Disposal

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, in the government's rush to switch responsibility for the handling of biomedical waste, they forgot to create new regulations. It has now been more than eight months since that mistake, and we still have no regulations that will protect the public from this very dangerous health hazard. We are talking about eight tonnes of waste a day. All of my questions are to the Minister of Health. Given that this ministerial lapse of

responsibility was pointed out to the government last September and the minister committed to solve this problem by December, why are there still no regulations for the handling of biomedical waste?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly I would like the development of these regulations to have proceeded more quickly than it has, and I look forward to their completion in the near future. However, as was indicated at the time this concern was first raised, we do have the regulations and powers with respect to the Public Health Act. These provide protection with respect to and a process for dealing with all harmful substances including, of course, the very great potential that there could be in biomedical waste. That structure is in place and continues to be in place.

MS CARLSON: Those general nuisance regs are not adequate for contaminated blood and organs, Mr. Speaker.

Has the slow development of regulations anything to do with the fact that biomedical waste is now going to the Wainwright regional incinerator instead of the purpose-built facility at Beiseker that has more or less closed down now?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker, not to my knowledge.

MS CARLSON: In the absence of regulations, Mr. Speaker, how can we be sure that the waste is being properly handled at Wainwright since it never was built to handle biomedical waste?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in answer to the first question, we do have the provisions of the Public Health Act, and as I've said, we will certainly try to complete the regulation development exercise as quickly as possible. Along with the hon. member, I do have a concern about the time that it is taking.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by the Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

### Technology Upgrading in Schools

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More than ever, technology plays a major role in our children's education. One of the goals of the Department of Education is to improve student access to information technology. In order to do that, our schools oftentimes need to be upgraded from a technical point of view, from an infrastructure point of view. The schools in Medicine Hat, in particular, require significant amounts of rewiring to accommodate the upgraded computer technology. Why can't the Medicine Hat school board use capital reserves to pay for the building upgrades that are required to accommodate computers within their schools?

2:30

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, at the outset I have to make a quick comment about the word of the day. I had a choice between celerity and rapsallion. Rapsallion hardly seemed to fit.

Mr. Speaker, the short answer to the question is that they can. If money in a school board's building reserve fund has not been previously committed to an approved school building project, then the board may submit that request to the school buildings branch for upgrades that will accommodate computers.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some boards have money in their building funds from before the province took over



full funding of education. Can these boards use that money to purchase such things as computers, software, networks, and other essentials for computers?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, school boards have a number of different types of reserve funds. There would be one for vehicles, there would be one for equipment, and there would be one for buildings. As of February of 1994 school boards were advised that the money set aside for building projects must be used for capital building projects approved by the school buildings branch. But school boards have complete control over reserve funds relating to vehicles and equipment, and they can use those moneys in those funds for computers and other information technology purchases. We have asked for school boards to continue their commitment to modernizing and upgrading their buildings and to use the money in their building reserves funds for approved capital projects.

MR. RENNEN: Mr. Speaker, if the minister wants boards to use their building reserve funds for capital projects, where's the money supposed to come from for technology upgrading?

MR. MAR: As I already said, school boards can use their reserve funds for vehicles and equipment for technology. In addition, they can use the learning resources that come from the basic instructional grant that we give to schools on a per student basis.

Mr. Speaker, to help school boards make the most of their technology dollars, we have loosened the restrictions on what qualifies for matching funds, and as well the announcement that was made with respect to Microsoft, which allows boards to buy software at a significant discount, will provide much more leverage for board dollars to go to that. Microsoft has estimated that the value of this agreement is about \$10 million, so that is \$10 million that the school boards won't have to pay for software.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

### **Ethics in Government**

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I continue to hear from Albertans who are very concerned that there are inadequate safeguards to prevent conflicts of interest within our government. To the Minister of Justice: is it the policy of this government that senior government officials will continue to be prohibited from engaging in conflicts of interest by law, or should we simply rely on a code of conduct which cannot be enforced by the Ethics Commissioner?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've had some questions raised on conflicts of interest before. I've indicated in this House that we will be tabling legislation shortly, so I feel that it's probably inappropriate for me to be commenting on that until we do table the legislation.

MR. SAPERS: More good intentions, Mr. Speaker.

In light of the comments made by the Ethics Commissioner in his report released earlier this week that the time has come for the registration of lobbyists in Alberta, is the government finally prepared to accept this very reasonable and very important recommendation?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, quite some time ago the concept

of having lobbyists register was considered by this government and rejected, and that position has not changed.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, will the government accept reality and admit that it is inappropriate, unwise, and potentially costly to appoint a person to serve simultaneously as both the Ethics Commissioner and the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

MR. HAVELOCK: No, Mr. Speaker.

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

### **Calgary Media Services Loan Pool**

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary board of education has a very large collection of video learning resources and operate it as a central loan pool. The Calgary public board is considering closing this pool because of budget issues. Representing my constituents and responding with celerity to their concern as written in this letter here, my question is to the Minister of Education. Will your department provide enough funding to keep this video loan pool open for the students of Calgary?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, there are of course many different learning resources that school boards have at their disposal to teach the curriculum established by the Department of Education, but I want to make it very clear that the decisions on which resources are used are very clearly decisions made by local school boards, in this case the video resources budget decision made by the Calgary board of education. The board is charged with the responsibility of delivering education to students. The board must assess its priorities in terms of its spending to make the best use of its available resources, and I maintain that the board is adequately resourced to do exactly that.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to point out that shutting down the pool doesn't mean that the resources are being lost. The Calgary board of education may have other ways of teaching that are more cost-effective alternatives, and those are things that we always encourage boards to do.

MR. CAO: To the same minister: if the Calgary board of education does decide to shut down the video loan pool, what effect will that have on the students in the rest of the province?

MR. MAR: It is a little bit difficult to say, Mr. Speaker, but I can advise the hon. member through you that the Calgary board of education is part of a provincewide consortium which purchases video materials. I've looked into the matter for the member, and my department provides about half of the \$270,000 that the consortium needs to buy the provincial rights from video distribution agencies.

The other half of the money, Mr. Speaker, comes from partners that are school boards, and the Calgary board of education has one-sixth of the students that are served by this consortium. So if CBE pulls out of this consortium with respect to the videos, the remaining partners in the consortium would have to assess whether or not they would be able to pick up the balance of the costs in order to continue that learning resource being made available to their students.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will

Calgary's decision to close the pool mean that the provincial consortium could shut down, and how will that affect students' access to the video resources in the rest of the province?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, it's a very difficult question to speculate upon what will happen, but we'll have to first see what decision the Calgary board of education makes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

### Infection Control

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent number of hospital infections reported throughout this province has been related to hospital cleanliness. Hospital infections are serious for the patient and for the health care system, and they seem to be growing in number. Last year's region 10 medical staff report stated that in a four-year period, bacterial resistant infections had risen a startling 1,900 percent in the Edmonton hospital system. My first question is to the Minister of Health. Is it not more cost-effective to keep our hospitals clean and prevent infection than to try and clean up after an infection has established itself?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the area of maintenance and cleanliness of course is extremely important to the health care system. We have in the Capital health authority area, if this is the specific region being referred to, provided, as I said earlier today, very substantial increases in funding. I could go through the list, but I've already made members of the Assembly aware of those amounts in those various areas.

One area, however, I would like to emphasize and repeat is the money specifically directed towards frontline staff, which of course, as the priorities are set by the regional health authority, could very much help in this particular area: some \$50 million and a commitment, that we have checked on with the Capital health authority, to hire 300 additional staff.

2:40

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question: what provincewide protocols has the minister in place regarding screening for antibiotic-resistant bacteria, given the high level of transfers between regions and hospitals and long-term care facilities?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, each of the regional health authorities has policy, protocols if you wish, with respect to the controlling of infection. They are dealing with this.

One thing that I would also like to point out to hon. members, which I'm sure they appreciate, is that with the use of drug therapies and of course with the development of new conditions, new diseases, there is an ongoing challenge for health care systems all across this country and all across North America and the world, for that matter, to keep up with some of these challenges. As I've said, we have committed additional resources in very significant amounts to the health care system, knowing that this is one among many of the challenges they face.

MRS. SOETAERT: My final supplemental to the same minister. Mr. Minister, if the public is paying for our hospitals, why can't Albertans have access to these infection rates for each hospital? That's something they deserve to know.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not have material with me in the Assembly today, but if I recall correctly, overall statistics with respect to infection rates are one of the factors that we're working with in terms of our overall accountability and reporting system in Alberta Health.

### Man in Motion 10th Anniversary Mr. Rick Hansen's Address to the Assembly

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the history of the development of the British parliamentary model of government is such that the hon. members who are elected to serve constituents in an Assembly of this sort are protected by a bar in front of the main entrance to the Assembly, and we have a Sergeant-at-Arms on the British model who protects the bar. It is a rather unusual event for an Assembly to invite a person, other than one who has earned the right by way of the democratic process, to enter onto the floor of the British forum of democracy.

Earlier this week hon. members dealt with a motion, Motion 17, that would invite a special guest to come before the Assembly. So pursuant to Motion 17 I now ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to open the main entrance doors of this Assembly.

[Mr. Rick Hansen entered the Chamber and took his place at the bar] [applause]

THE SPEAKER: The Man in Motion Tour, undertaken by Rick Hansen 10 years ago, captured the imagination not only of the people of Canada but the people of the world. Many words can be used to describe the outstanding accomplishments of Mr. Hansen. Those which emerge foremost in the mind and the memory of the Chair are hope, dedication, endurance, enthusiasm, and accomplishment.

Hon. members, please welcome to the floor of the Legislative Assembly of the people of Alberta a truly great Canadian, Mr. Rick Hansen. [applause]

[Mr. Hansen proceeded to the head of the Table]

THE SPEAKER: I'd like to now call on the hon. Minister of Health for some words on behalf of the government of the province of Alberta.

MR. JONSON: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, members of the Legislature, and visitors in the galleries, it is my pleasure to welcome to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta an extraordinary person who has brought hope to disabled persons across Canada. In May 1985, motivated by his hope to change how people perceive disability, Rick Hansen began the Man in Motion World Tour. That tour remains to this day a vivid and lasting memory of courage and hope in the hearts and minds of all Canadians.

Mr. Hansen joins us today as Canada celebrates with him the 10th anniversary of the Man in Motion Tour, and as we celebrate that anniversary, Mr. Hansen has a new dream and renewed determination. He has turned his extraordinary commitment and perseverance to establishing the Rick Hansen Institute at the University of British Columbia just this past February. The vision of the institute is to help remove the barriers that limit people with disabilities from reaching their full potential. I know that all Members of the Legislative Assembly join me in wishing Mr. Hansen every success with the Rick Hansen Institute.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note that encouraged by the efforts and the vision provided by Mr. Hansen, the Alberta

government founded the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities in 1988. Our government's commitment to the council was reconfirmed earlier today by the Premier when he announced that the term of the council will be extended beyond its original mandate of July 1998. As the Premier himself noted this morning, since its inception the council has provided valuable advice to the Alberta government on policies and programs supporting persons with disabilities. It has helped our government take into consideration specific needs as we develop long-term plans for all government services.

I'm also proud to note that the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research has contributed to medical research in areas of benefit to people with disabilities. For example, research on stem cells by Dr. Weiss at the University of Calgary has opened the door to repairing brain and spinal cord damage, and a team at the University of Alberta led by Dr. Stein is making advances in stimulating paralyzed muscles.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Mr. Hansen on behalf of the government of Alberta and on behalf of the people of Alberta for the gifts he has shared with us: for the awareness that he has fostered regarding persons with disabilities, for the fire of inspiration and motivation he has lit in all our hearts, and for the pride he has given us all as we call ourselves Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, members of the Legislature, and visitors in the galleries, it is my honour to welcome to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta a man who has changed the way we look at ourselves and others and who has showed us that anything can be achieved if you set your mind to it: Mr. Rick Hansen. [applause]

THE SPEAKER: Now may I call on one of Mr. Hansen's friends, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, on behalf of the Official Opposition.

2:50

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ten years ago this man had a dream, an incredible dream. Put yourself in that particular position: out on the west coast, sitting there surrounded by a handful of really firm supporters, with a few shekels in the bank, not knowing exactly what was down the road except that it would be country after country, season after season, and who knows what. How many of us would have actually said: what have we gotten ourselves into? How many of us would actually have taken that first spin? Not me. I wouldn't have. Whatever he has – I don't have what it takes, and I doubt anybody in this House has. I once wheeled five miles. I once wheeled with Rick Hansen on Whyte Avenue. By the time I went one block, he was four blocks down Whyte Avenue, and the crowd started to chant, "Go, Wicky, go." So I shut her down. That was it for me.

Rick Hansen touched the world in three ways that come to mind quite readily. First of all, he leaves behind a legacy, the legacy of the 60 million plus dollars for research so that someday spinal cord injuries may be eliminated.

Secondly, he single-handedly changed buildings to accessible buildings, and I experienced that in Thunder Bay, Ontario. After the election in 1989, when we were down there for a few days at my sister's place, she arranged for me to be interviewed at the local TV channel station. She had checked it out. It was accessible. When I went there, I couldn't believe it: an old CBC building, nice parking in front. I went inside and marveled to the crew. I said: I can't believe how accessible this building is. They said: we had to do it; Rick Hansen made us. I said: what do you mean Rick Hansen made you? They said: we wanted him in the studio on the Rick Smith show, and he wouldn't come until

we agreed to renovate the building to his specifications. I'm sure that was done dozens of times along the way.

The third and the most important is the change in people's attitudes. Suddenly, being in a wheelchair, you could feel proud. People would look at you and say: God, he's one of those guys. There was something that changed people's attitudes. Suddenly they realized we were equal, in some cases above being equal. It proved that with determination you can live out your wildest dreams. You've just got to have the guts to try.

You, sir, are not only a Canadian hero, but you're one heck of a class act. [applause]

MR. HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, hon. members, I just would like to say what an incredible honour and privilege it is for you to have invited me in here to be able to make a presentation on behalf of people with disabilities in this province and to also reflect to you a little bit on this 10th anniversary the dream behind the Man in Motion Tour.

When I was an athlete traveling the world, I met hundreds of people with disabilities from countries around this world who all shared a common goal and a common challenge. They all had abilities, yet they were continually limited by incredible obstacles in society. It was not enough that they had to deal with their own particular personal challenges, but they had physical barriers everywhere, attitudinal barriers that continually limited their expectations and opportunities. So I vowed one day to try to apply my talents to be able to send a message to people that indeed, if barriers are removed, incredible potential is inside each and every person with a disability. My goal was to wheel around the world through 34 countries and challenge people to remove those barriers as a result.

Now, there were some difficult times out there, but the incredible support I received from people around the world motivated me, particularly when I came back to Canada, when people welcomed me home after being on the road for over a year and a half. It buoyed me and encouraged me every stroke of the way. Coming across Canada in the middle of wintertime was a daunting task, but I know that when I came back here into this beautiful province, a place that I consider to be very close to my heart, with many years of competition, many friends, I was completely overwhelmed and encouraged.

The legacies that were left in the Premier's advisory council on disability, the Rick Hansen centre to promote health for people with disabilities, and of course the legacy fund in the Alberta Paraplegic Foundation, which continues to generate income annually as a legacy, were totally appreciated. The little children who were involved giving pennies and often giving teddy bears was one of those memories that I'll always have with me.

As I went over the Rockies into British Columbia and came home and broke that tape and the streets were lined with hundreds of thousands of people, the dream and reality met. But you know, when I broke that tape, I realized that even though we had accomplished so much, that we'd raised \$24 million, the sign behind me was exactly right. It said not only "Welcome home, Rick," but there was a little caption above it that said: the end is just the beginning. So with that perspective, I realized that we had to double our efforts, triple, quadruple our efforts, because indeed that person knew there were still many barriers out there limiting people with disabilities from achieving their potential.

In the last 10 years we've been continuing to work to build broader partnerships, to challenge governments to do more, not to come up with more money when there isn't more money but to

do more in thinking smarter, working more effectively, and building partnerships with the community. The private sector, not-for-profit organizations, all must meet this challenge together. This is not a partisan issue. This is not a singular issue. Disability is something that unites us all, whether you're a man or a woman, whether you come from rural Canada or urban Canada. We understand it is our friends, our daughters, our husbands, our sisters, our brothers. Disability is not a benevolent part of our society.

On this 10th anniversary I'm going back across the country to thank people for their support, to let them know that more must be done and that we must not look back but look forward to set new goals and chase new dreams. I'd like to say thank you to the people of this province and the members of this government for their incredible work to date. I'd also like to encourage you, to challenge you to work harder to see what you can do, to work smarter so that people in this country have a chance to reach their full potential, to be the best they can be with what they have. We can't be complacent. There are 4.2 million Canadians in this country that just want the opportunity to make their dreams a reality.

Ladies and gentlemen, we're challenging provinces in every country to leave practical and meaningful legacies that will keep that dream alive so no one will ever have to wheel around the world in a wheelchair again to draw attention to this issue, to let people know that there are 37,000 new brain and spinal cord injuries every year in this country. It costs \$15 billion, and over half of the injuries come from automobile accidents. It's time that people understood the consequences of their actions. We know that if governments were able to apply just a percentage of the revenue from penalties into a community fund, we would have an unbelievable lasting legacy. Provinces have reached and met these challenges in the past.

The momentum is continuing as it did on the original Man in Motion Tour, and I know that you will find the example to reflect what is special about this country. We're bonded by common principles, yet each province has the ability to find its unique solutions, to find its own path. I challenge you to remember the dream behind the Man in Motion Tour and to never, ever give up on it.

Thank you very much for allowing me to be here. I really appreciate it. [applause]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, Canadians tend to be a modest people who too often fail to recognize the incredible accomplishments of their own. The Man in Motion Tour a decade ago was one of the highlights in our nation's history. Rick Hansen gave to Canadians and millions of people on Mother Earth pride, hope, and a very positive definition of the words "character" and "determination."

As you leave this Assembly, Mr. Hansen, go with our feelings of love, of admiration, and of thanks. The people of Alberta are among the best of your friends. Depart knowing that we wish you peace, good health, and only the very best to you and your family. [applause]

[Mr. Hansen left the Chamber]

## head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the order for Members' Statements today is the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, then followed

by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Just a reminder to all hon. members, on the basis of the agreements that were made among the various parties, on Tuesday next the third party in the Assembly will have an opportunity for the first member's statement.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

## **Workers' Compensation Board**

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On September 22, 1996, 895 constituents came out to vote for me at my nomination meeting. On March 11 of this year 59 percent of those who cast their ballots in Calgary-Montrose chose me to represent them. I look around this Legislature, and every one of us has earned the right to be here to serve our constituents and all Albertans.

It goes without saying that every publicly regulated organization is expected to co-operate fully with us when we seek information on issues that affect our constituents. That is why I was furious when it took the WCB 14 months to comply with a simple request for information. Since March of 1996 I have repeatedly requested a copy of the questionnaire the WCB used when conducting surveys with injured workers. Betty Screpnek, chair of the WCB, Dr. John Cowell, president of the WCB, and other senior officials were made aware of my request. This information should be readily available, and I expected a quick response. However, I received one poor excuse after another as to why they could not release the survey.

It is now 14 months later, and they have run out of excuses. Reluctantly they released the questionnaire, although they did not extend the courtesy of forwarding a copy to me. Fourteen months was a long time to wait, Mr. Speaker. If we have to wait that long for every request for information, it could be impossible for MLAs to do our job effectively. If this is how the WCB responds to an MLA, how quickly do they respond to an injured worker? We cannot allow this organization to continue handling our requests in this manner. Someone at the WCB must be held accountable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

## **3:00 Disaster Services**

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the residents of Lethbridge-East and many people in southwestern Alberta, I'd like to recognize the strength and courage that's been exhibited by the residents of Peace River, Fort McMurray, and small towns in northern Alberta as well as the farmers in the strength and the courage that they've shown this year in facing the flood that's caused by the unusual melt that's occurred there.

In 1995 in southwestern Alberta from the St. Mary River area up to the Highwood we experienced a flood that was caused by unforeseen rain in combination with the melt of the snow in the mountains. Floods, no matter where they occur, create stress. They create trauma for individuals, for families. They basically result in the loss of a kind of possession. It invades the home. It takes away the security that comes with the feeling of home. We want to make sure that the people in northern Alberta recognize that we from southern Alberta understand because of our experiences.

I want to talk also a little bit about the importance of the compassion that's felt by all people when they provide stricken areas with disaster relief, and this is an idea that has to be

maintained. We have to make sure that our disaster relief programs are flexible enough that they can take into account many of these situations. Earlier today we heard a comment made about the issues that were coming forth again in the north because of the snow in the fall that caused damage to crops. Some of those farmers don't have the normal coverage that would be available through risk programs, and they in essence in many cases are also facing a disaster beyond their own control. We have to make sure that these disaster programs are in place, and we want to respect and recognize the trauma that this causes to the people of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Before I call on the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the hon. member will not know this, but above the hon. member is the former member for Olds-Didsbury, who's currently sitting in the Speaker's gallery.

Hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to have to do a little better job than I had planned on now because I'm being scrutinized by my former member.

#### 4-H Program

MR. MARZ: Mr. Speaker, this last Monday, May 5, I was privileged to convey the greetings of this Assembly to a very prestigious group of young Albertans from across the province. These young people were 130 of the province's top 4-H members who attended a three-day annual selections program at Olds College, which, as you know, is located in the heart of my constituency. This year's theme, Marketable Me, was a very pertinent one, given the challenges of an ever changing job market. As a result of the selections program, this year's delegates acquired many useful and practical skills on how to better market themselves.

Mr. Speaker, 4-H is truly a wonderful program for our youth in that it helps them to reach their full potential. As I stated in my remarks at the awards presentation, 4-H is an organization that produces the leaders of tomorrow. I really do believe that. As a matter of fact, one of our new colleagues in this Assembly was a former 4-H'er. A six-year member of the Red Deer 4-H clothing club, a one-year member of the East Lacombe 4-H beef club, and a former award-winning delegate to the national 4-H conference in Ottawa in 1971 sits in this Assembly today as the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

It was a pleasure for me to be in attendance at this event representing our minister of agriculture. As well, I was privileged to represent our Premier in the presentation ceremony to bestow the honour of the Premier's award on Miss Kristi Stelter of Bindloss, Alberta. One of Kristi's responsibilities will be to represent Alberta at the national 4-H members' conference in Washington, DC, in March of 1998. Award trips were also presented to about 60 other 4-H delegates who will represent Alberta at major educational programs and tours throughout Canada and the United States over the next 12 months. I invite all members of this Assembly to congratulate Miss Stelter as well as all the other winners and finalists who were in attendance.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, prior to moving to Projected Government Business, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

head: **Introduction of Guests**  
(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a privilege today to introduce to you and through you 15 visitors from the Duchess school. I would like to thank them in advance for being here for a full hour. I saw some of the children up there, and they were getting a little anxious towards the end. But again, thank you in advance. The teachers who have come with the children are Ms C. Dick, Mrs. Susan Boldick, Vern Alvis, Marion Snape, Jeannie Culligan, and Heather Finkbeiner. I would ask you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Projected Government Business**

MR. SAPERS: Pursuant to Standing Order 7(5) I would ask the Deputy Government House Leader, rapscallion that he is, to with celerity and certainty please provide us with projected government business for next week.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the unparliamentary language, I'd be pleased to advise that on Monday, May 12, under Government Bills and Orders we hope to proceed with second reading of Bill 5, the Persons With Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act; Bill 3, the Colleges Amendment Act; Bill 2, the Special Waste Management Corporation Act Repeal Act; and with time permitting, moving into Committee of the Whole to deal with Bill 9 and Bill 4. In the evening under Government Bills and Orders we'd go into Committee of Supply, the main estimates, day 16, with Executive Council and Advanced Education and Career Development reporting. Time permitting, Committee of the Whole would deal with Bill 4, Bill 1, and Bill 8.

On Tuesday, May 13, we have second reading, Committee of the Whole, and third reading as per the Order Paper. In the evening we have Committee of Supply, the main estimates, day 17, with Community Development and designated supply subcommittees reporting, and we have second reading, Committee of the Whole, and third reading as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, May 14, in the evening we have Committee of Supply, the main estimates, day 18, with transportation and designated supply subcommittees reporting, and we have second reading, Committee of the Whole, and third reading as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, May 15, we have Committee of Supply, the main estimates, day 19, with science, research, and information technology, the Provincial Treasurer, and last but certainly not least, Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs reporting, and we have second reading, Committee of the Whole, and third reading as per the Order Paper.

head: **Orders of the Day**  
head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

3:10

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call the committee to order. The oral notice of motion was that you were withdrawing Economic Development and Tourism?

MR. SAPERS: No. Mr. Chairman, the notice of motion was pursuant to Standing Orders, where the Leader of the Opposition designates the department. The estimates of the department were examined in subcommittee. It was decided that we would not be recalling the department. The department was also listed as reporting today. We will be dealing with the report from the department in the estimates debate today. The intent of the motion was not to recall the department.

THE CHAIRMAN: Now that the Chair has been fully informed as to the proceedings, just a reminder that the process that we agreed to last evening will pertain again today; that is to say, the minister may speak up to 20 minutes. If he should end earlier, then we would go five minutes from the third party and then 20 minutes from the opposition party.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Chairman, there should be a comma after your last statement: and the Official Opposition can use any time remaining of the unused time from the report of the minister.

THE CHAIRMAN: If that's the committee's understanding, I'm happy with that.

### Public Works, Supply and Services

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call upon the hon. Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services to begin this afternoon's considerations.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to appear before the Committee of Supply this afternoon to report on the '97-98 estimates and the 1997 to the year 2000 business plan for the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services.

I'd like to take this opportunity to extend a sincere thank you to my staff, who I think have done a very good job of preparing the estimates and working on the business plan not only in the last short while but throughout the course of the time that I've been their minister.

Mr. Chairman, on the evening of Monday, May 5, I presented the estimates from the plan to the designated subcommittee C of the Committee of Supply. I was quite impressed with the extent of the discussion and the interest expressed by the members of the subcommittee in the business plan and the estimates for my ministry. Although I was able to respond to some of your questions during the May 5 session, there are still a few questions, actually quite a few questions, to which I didn't have sufficient time to respond.

I'd like to make a comment about one particular member. The critic for my department must have set a record for the number of questions in the shortest period of time, and for that I compliment her.

The *Hansard* documenting this discussion is available, and my officials are reviewing it. We'll try to have all the questions answered in writing hopefully by the end of next week. I would think it would be appropriate at this time to indicate that I'll bundle all the answers and forward them to the critic for distribution to the members of the Official Opposition as the critic so chooses.

For the members of the Committee of Supply, let me briefly summarize the highlights of the estimates. They included \$108 million, including \$3 million additional funding, which will be allocated through the regional health facilities – this is broken

down roughly into \$83 million for major capital and \$25 million for capital upgrading projects – and \$16.5 million will be allocated for the renovation of seniors' lodges to have them comply with established standards.

In 1997-98 the department will continue to undertake additional capital works on behalf of large foundations in conjunction with their own large upgrading programs: \$33.2 million will be allocated to water management projects; \$25.7 million will be allocated for maintenance projects and general government construction projects and accommodation projects; \$97 million will be allocated for the operation and maintenance of facilities to support the ministry's program requirements; \$79 million will be allocated for the leasing of space for the department and eligible boards and agencies. Approximately \$24.6 million will be included for the operation of the government-shared telecommunications networks. Another \$22 million will be allocated for the operation of centralized data-processing facilities on behalf of government ministries.

Mr. Chairman, from the discussion that took place on Monday night, I believe that the committee supports the direction my department is taking and initiatives that we plan to carry out this year. I therefore request your support for the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services' estimates.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think I need to say thank you as well to the minister of public works for indicating that I was able to ask the most questions in the shortest period of time. I believe that is a compliment, and I would like to think that my questions were of a nature that would help to explain to Albertans how dollars in public works are being spent. I'm sure under the stewardship of this particular minister, those dollars will be well spent and well accounted for.

I do have, believe it or not, a couple of other questions, and I believe that some of my colleagues may have some questions as well. I understand that the turnaround time is not sufficient to allow for answers to happen. Some of the questions that I did ask were detailed and will require some research on behalf of the department.

One of the questions that I did not get a chance to ask last time was with regards to contracting out. Does the department know – and I'm interested, I guess, in across the departments. I'm not sure if this is within the jurisdiction of public works. It may be that each department has its own tally of what the total amount of contracted-out services is and what the cost benefit is of those contracted-out services. I would imagine that somewhere there is a total of that figure. Otherwise, how does the government know that their philosophy that indicates that it's cheaper to contract out is working? Perhaps that's something that could be spearheaded through the department of public works. If not, perhaps the department can direct me and my colleagues to the appropriate department gathering those statistics. Perhaps it is Treasury; I'm not sure. I would imagine, as I indicated, that there must be some kind of evaluation on an annual basis that would let Albertans know whether this philosophy in fact matches the reality, whether in fact it is cheaper to contract out and in what cases and on what basis that is determined.

3:20

The minister had answered in the last go-round with regards to

my question on selling government assets that the determining factor was: what is considered fair market value? I do understand that concept, but at some point in time a decision is usually made by the seller not to sell because it is not worth selling. It's worth holding. The intent of my question was: at what point does the government say that it's not worth selling? It seems somehow that for some of the sales that we've heard of, where we're looking at selling at 10 cents on the dollar, again, there must have been a cost-benefit analysis done that indicated that, yes, this is worth while because in the long run we're going to be saving the dollars. How does that happen?

The minister was very kind in coming out to the opening in my constituency of McConnell Place West, which is a centre for Alzheimer's patients, a residence modeled on McConnell Place North. It is a leading-edge residential home for patients with Alzheimer's. I did want to thank the minister for his kind words at that particular opening and his obvious understanding of the need for these kinds of buildings to be built throughout the province. I'm sure he will be an advocate within government for extolling the benefits of having this kind of housing in Alberta. As the population ages, there will be more and more need for this particular kind of housing, and it's a prime example of a private and public partnership that I believe is working in this province. So I would like to thank the minister for his comments at that particular centre.

Also, there was a reminder about a chain-link fence, I believe, so those department members who were not there at the time may want to pursue that further with the minister, although he did give me some suggestions as to how to go about that.

We had this afternoon quite a moving presentation by Rick Hansen, the Man in Motion, and one of the things my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford also spoke about was the need for accessible buildings. I would be interested in knowing, as I'm sure many individuals in Alberta would be, if there are any dollars – I don't remember seeing them within the budget – allocated for ensuring that government buildings are made more accessible and, also, whether there is a policy. I'm sure there must be one. What is the policy with regards to building standards with regards to accessibility? Are there any dollars being contemplated through some of the programs that the government has for places to apply? I know that under CFEP community leagues can apply to have their buildings become accessible to individuals with handicaps. Are there any other dollars that the government is perhaps looking at with regards to buildings and accessibility?

Productivity plus is a program that we have heard about in the last couple of years. I'm wondering within this department what the measurements are to award dollars, as it were, for achievements in the productivity plus program. How many employees have had the dollars provided to them or have had rewards provided to them through the productivity plus program? What are the successes that we've seen as a result of the productivity plus program? What are the cost savings that have come about through that particular program?

One last comment because, as I said, I know there are others who are interested in asking some questions and our time is limited. With regards to partnerships with the private sector, in looking at some previous public works documents, I notice that it almost seems with pride that public works indicated that their partnerships with the private sector were mostly with companies that were from Alberta. I think it was the Alberta Public Works, Supply and Services 1992-93 annual report that I saw that in.

We're, well, four years down the road from that report, and I'm wondering what the percentage is now. I recognize that because of NAFTA there are some difficulties in saying that we will only buy services and supplies from Alberta companies, but I'm wondering what the percentages are. How many of the companies that we deal with and obtain services and supplies from are from Alberta, how many from Canada, and how many from other countries? What is the percentage and what are the dollar amounts as well that we are dealing with?

So I would again like to thank the minister for his co-operation and his willingness to answer the questions that I've put forward, and I would like to thank the department as well, being a new critic in this area and trying to learn as much as I can within a short period of time. Some of these questions may seem self-apparent to individuals who are working with these issues on a regular basis but will help in ensuring that I as the critic for public works can keep an eye on the government in this particular department. So thank you very much.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of comments. One of the stated goals is the "development of information technology architecture standards." A question I've had of the Education and the advanced education departments is: is there any attempt within government to have sort of province-wide standards? I look at the schools and the variety of equipment and the variety of software that's used, and it just seems to me that there are tremendous economies that could be realized if there were provincial standards that everyone would buy into instead of everyone being off on their own. It's something that I've found even difficulty with here being a Mac user and finding that the Legislature offices are IBM, and the specifications that came out even the other day for the use of laptop computers in this Chamber were predicated on IBM architecture. So my question is: have you consulted with other provinces? Is there any move within government to try to put forward some common standards for that?

One of the other questions I had concerns the performance measures, and it's something that has appeared throughout all the business plans. All the departments have been busy developing performance measures. It seems to me that in this department they're somewhat more appropriate and more manageable than they are in others, because many of the things that the measures deal with are objects, cost per square metre and inventories, things that are easily measured, and it seems appropriate.

One of the comments in the business plan talks about customer services. Is there any place in the budget where we have the cost of that monitoring? What did it cost to put the performance measures in place, and is there any costing out of what it costs to gather information annually on those performance measures as they are listed here.

3:30

The third question – leaving behind the performance objectives – is from page 240:

reduce administrative costs and provide ministries with increased access to suppliers by ensuring effective use of standing offers.

I don't pretend to know all the details of it, but is the intent, then, to limit the number of times you go to tender? Is there an upper limit on standing offers which the departments can act upon, or are they free, regardless of the price of the materials or objects or service, to draw upon a standing offer? Maybe I misunderstood

the streamlining procedure as suggested here, but I do wonder what this does to tendering. Is that really the intent, to cut down the amount of time and effort that it takes to tender services?

I guess the other question I have is a personal question in terms of the inventory that the department of public works has and how departments are able to draw upon that inventory. Just from our own experience, we were led to believe that if we no longer needed furniture in our constituency office, that if it went back, it went back forever. For instance, we had some tables that we didn't need, and if they went back to public works' inventory, they were gone forever and we couldn't ever draw them out again. I didn't pursue it; it wasn't that important at the time. How do departments draw upon the inventory?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Ask.

DR. MASSEY: Just ask, and you shall receive? Great. That's good knowledge to have. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

I think that covers the questions I had. Thanks, very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, want to thank the staff of the minister's department. I know they listened to a barrage of our questions the other night, and I'm certain those will be answered, as the minister has promised. I'll once again reiterate the lack of provincial buildings in my riding. Mr. Minister, I know that any project coming up will be placed in my riding because my entire riding is such a wonderful place in which to locate.

I want to add a question of clarification about the Peace River flooding and that dike situation that you were mentioning the other day. I guess it's to repeat the question, because we've heard conflicting reports about really what happened in all that, as to how high the dike was and why . . . [A bell rang] That's the shortest 20 minutes I've ever had.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just so the hon. members don't believe that Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert makes time fly, that bell going off was the first 20-minute period. The question is whether the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona then would come in after the 15 minutes. Okay. So we'll reset the clock, and Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: . . . will get another 20. You'll be relieved to know that I probably won't go for another 20 or 15. I think we make up the difference with what the minister had. Right? I only get 15, then Edmonton-Strathcona.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll set the clock and invite Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to continue her deliberations.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I had another concern over empty schools. What happens with the empty school buildings? How do you accommodate that? It is a good question, especially considering the question that came from Redwater today. Does public works take them over? Do school boards keep them and would then co-operate with municipalities, et cetera, for the use of them? Do they get the lease money from that then?

MR. WOLOSHYN: With Stony Plain elementary it's been leased out. They keep it, and the revenue goes back to the boards on the government side of it.

MRS. SOETAERT: Okay. Good. Thanks for that clarification. We're doing exactly what the Chair hates us to do. But we converse so well, Mr. Chairman. Sorry.

Hospitals then. Empty hospital space and wings. They're everywhere, in every department. Heaven knows where. [interjection] Okay. Well, that will be an interesting answer to the question then. I know your staff by now are rolling their eyes.

So I guess what follows from that question is: is there central inventory then? I'm thinking specifically, Mr. Minister, of the hammer mill in the Sturgeon general hospital that sits there idle. Is that under your domain, or is that under the Department of Health? It's under nowhere?

MR. WOLOSHYN: The RHA.

MRS. SOETAERT: Under the regional health authority? Yet if they don't have the money to operate it, it sits there idle. That's not within public works, but certainly you can relay that concern for me - I'm sure you will - because we want that hammer mill up and operating.

Is it your department's responsibility to contract out the dams? I'm thinking specifically of last year and the floods down south. If there had been a check system for floods, that might not have happened. Now, are those kinds of things under your department's purview, or do other departments come to you and say we need this? [interjection] That's what happens. You're just the workhorse for all the other departments. It's a sad and sorry life you lead, I know, Mr. Minister, but we respect that in here.

Anyway, I've made those few comments. I know I will get the answers. I'm not sure if Edmonton-Meadowlark asked it today. Are all the seniors' lodges wheelchair accessible or at least getting there? Are they built with that in mind, or do they apply for funding for that to change, if that is the situation then? If it qualifies, then they get a priority listing, and it gets done. So the original ones probably weren't built with wheelchairs in mind, but I'm assuming that probably the most recent ones would be.

I think those were the few points I had left to ask the minister today and of course a pitch for my wonderful riding of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert for when the government is into expansion and development again. He knows my riding is the best place to locate. [interjections] There are people that are arguing with me, but I do have the floor, so I reign; right? So Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, I'm sure, will be the next location for anything the minister of public works is looking at developing.

Thank you, Mr. Minister, for your responses that I know will come with - what's the word of the day? - celerity. I appreciate your time.

Thanks.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Public Works, Supply and Services has been an interest of mine for a long time because of the nature of my business. I'm wondering what the department is doing with regards to the level of the workforce, the in-house talent with regards to architectural services, with engineering



services, and particularly the specialty areas, fire protection and that sort of thing. I don't see any mention of it in the information provided and certainly would like to see what the trend has been in the department recently, whether it's to downsize the in-house component, continual downsizing and outsourcing of the bulk of the work, which has been a reasonable proposition for the department.

### 3:40

I'd like to know also what kind of specialties – the in-house expertise can only be generated from in-house in that there isn't any consulting area that would deal specifically with codes, the interpretation of codes, the enhancements of codes with modern materials. I'm thinking of poly B pipe in plumbing. Some of the electrical codes change from time to time. I'd like to know about the in-house expertise to examine those kinds of things to be able to keep up with the construction industry, to keep our building techniques in line with the economics of the day as well as to be able to allow our tradespeople to present innovations to the department so that they can have some examination from in-house.

Another area that concerns me somewhat is property management. It's a difficult area at best to decide what kind of force is required from in-house in the way of personnel, to be able to decide whether in fact we're in the mode of selling properties, whether we should be holding properties in some areas because the market is ascending, and to be able to decide what the complement is that the department should have in that area.

Another area that concerns me is information technology. We have such a rapid ascension. It used to be said in the business of technology management that you had to plan for a 10-year horizon. Well, in the last 10 years that horizon has come down to five and come down to three. Oftentimes after three years of using some hardware and software, we've found that the hardware, in particular, has been outmoded to the extent that our staff, the staff in the opposition's office, are having difficulty having our equipment operate the software that's available and that we intend to use. I'm wondering if the department has any different way of managing information technology both in the way of hardware and software.

The performance measures in all of those areas leave me a little bit cold in that I don't know how one does a performance measurement in property management other than the standard one of operating costs versus per square metre. That's an indicator of how well they're operating, but it certainly doesn't do anything for the upkeep of a building, the standards for a building that is in the portfolio of this ministry, whether it's kept to a standard that will keep the building in perpetuity or whether in fact it'll be deteriorating. There doesn't seem to be any performance measures that will indicate how that can be done.

The energy consumption performance measures seem to indicate that the department is doing quite well in respect of the consumption of energy and reduction in megajoules per square metre.

Property inventory, getting the inventory, I gather, in thousands of square metres brought down from a high of the mid-80s to now is a little difficult to discern from the material presented. It certainly would be nice to be able to see where the properties are going in the way of buildings. Are you selling them off? Are you keeping them in inventory? If so, why? What criteria does one use to decide those kinds of things?

The expansion of the financial performance, operating expenditure reductions. The targets seem to be set fairly low in the performance. In this particular performance the target of

lowering the cost of operating expenditures is an admirable end, although if it's at the cost of some normal maintenance operations, which would be an operating expense, I for one would prefer to have a full explanation of that kind of a target as opposed to just a target that says that at all cost we will get to a lower operating cost, because it certainly is not productive in the long run.

Capital investment. Again, capital investment in a performance measure is not easily attained. Well, the target may in fact be easily attained, but whether that target is the right target, I would prefer to have a little more explanation perhaps in paragraph form of the intentions and the goals of the financial performance in that particular section. A goal to "minimize the cost of common services" is an admirable one, but if it occurs that you're saving money now and paying later, it certainly doesn't seem to me to be in the long-term interests of the province of Alberta.

There are some other areas. You have a goal in your mission statement: "train and develop our employees to meet business needs." I haven't been able to find a line that clearly indicates how that money is spent, whether the expenditures are on the high end of professional development management training or whether we're talking more about the training and succession planning of employees in management services to move into areas. It doesn't seem to show that, and it would be kind of nice to be able to indicate where and how those funds are disseminated and split that from the professional training that the department certainly needs in the way of the technical areas to cover the areas that the department is responsible for.

Mr. Chairman, at this time I have no further questions. I believe that the department in fact is doing a reasonable job in most areas that I've been able to examine, but I certainly would like to have a little broader exposé and a further explanation of the business plan and the performance measures in paragraph form, simply performance numbers.

Thank you.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have just a few questions here for the minister. These are primarily geared to the lease properties that we did have. I'm sure that they don't only occur here in the city of Edmonton but in localities throughout the province. How many vacant square metres are there of leased space in the province? Along the same lines, what is the average length of time remaining on any of these vacant leased properties? As well, I know that the province has made a great attempt at trying to sublease a lot of these vacant properties, and I'd like to know how your efforts in subleasing the vacant properties have gone. As well, how do the moneys we receive on those subleases compare to what we're paying for our leases? As well, I would also like to look at the management of properties. The overall estimate expenditures for this program are slated to decrease from \$181.94 million to \$177.05 million. The question is: can the minister give a more detailed breakdown of how money is spent on line item 3.0.1?

A second question along the same lines. Why is the target for performance measure 6, the annual average operating cost per square metre of owned space, page 333, increasing while the department is estimating almost no change in line item 3.0.2? This supposedly would be the line item which corresponds to that performance measure. How much of the cost of property management operation on line 3.0.2 is spent on empty space?

3:50

Again along the same lines that I've had, moving along to planning and implementation of construction projects, overall estimates for operating expenditures for this program are slated to increase from approximately \$206 million to 210 and a half million dollars. My question: why won't the minister provide a more detailed list of projects which fall under line items 4.11.1 and 4.11.3, which are found on page 320? The overall estimated capital investment expenditures for this program are slated to increase from \$44.8 million to \$51.6 million.

My last question: can the minister give us a detailed explanation of why we are spending \$100,000 on the Legislature? This comes from line item 4.14.24, page 327.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. No? Okay.

If there's no further debate, we'll go to the estimates then. We have under consideration the 1997-98 estimates of the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services. After considering the business plan and the proposed estimates for the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expenditures	\$435,210,000
Capital Investment	\$51,935,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

### Municipal Affairs

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll call on the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have prepared my notes and hopefully will be brief, but I have some responses contained in the notes that were hopefully going to address questions that were posed to me during our earlier session.

Let me reiterate that our mission in the Department of Municipal Affairs is to be enablers and that renewal and relationships along with being customer driven, accessible, future focused, and accountable will be the targets this year as we serve Albertans in all of our municipalities, facilitating rather than doing and steering rather than actually driving.

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

If I may, in the emphasis on local level service delivery, I'd like to respond to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, citing a few examples of transfer of responsibilities to local housing management bodies and other administrative management issues that have been transferred from this government. Highlighted earlier, May 1, was the opening of the Credit Counselling Services of Alberta, and we're presently working on re-engineering corporate registry and vital statistics so that more services can be provided by the public sector. We've consulted interested

parties on the creation of an automotive council, modeled on the Real Estate Council.

I want to just comment again, in response to the hon. member, that lower interest rates, municipal prepayments on capital debentures have allowed us to reduce this year's allocation to \$2.6 million, for a total of \$17.9 million.

Also, on our unconditional municipal grant program at the 1996-97 level of \$57.7 million, including a budget of \$20 million for smaller communities with populations under 10,000 who are eligible to receive that: I would be pleased to provide more information on that particular component of those estimates, if they are required in any more detail and if these do not presently cover the concerns that were raised.

I should also acknowledge again this year the \$5 million included in the budget to help in the restructuring of municipalities, as has been done this past year in Cold Lake and in Wood Buffalo previously.

There's also a \$21.1 million reduction in the grant to the Alberta Social Housing Corporation due to lower interest rates and administrative savings from restructuring management, lower debt-servicing costs from disposing of non social housing assets. Again, putting the dollars where they're most needed in social housing will be the targets of the department.

We are still negotiating with Canada Mortgage and Housing to streamline our administration and reduce delivery costs, and that will be an area of emphasis for me throughout the next several months to make sure that we do as much as possible to come to some conclusions there.

We'll save more tax dollars selling properties used in the social housing program that are considered inefficient, inappropriate, or no longer needed and transferring the proceeds into more cost-effective and appropriate housing. There are several requests that daily cross my desk that we are responding to, and hopefully we'll be able to make the right determination of those.

Per diem grants for senior citizens' lodges have been modified so that the funding is based primarily on the number of occupied beds they operate rather than according to the size of their deficit, something I mentioned previously.

I want to focus now on registries in response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, referenced in *Hansard*, page C28. This year's estimates for registries have increased by \$415,000, or 1.1 percent, over last year, owing to onetime implementation costs of \$2.1 million, which are partially offset by administrative cost savings. While maintaining the high standards of services, the Alberta registries increased its gross revenue by \$21 million in '96-97, an increase of 9.3 percent. We believe this is directly related to the thriving economy. The business activity increased by 686,000 services, or 6.1 percent, over the same period. Operating expenses in this division total \$36.8 million, \$15.8 million or 30 percent less than in 1992-93. So in moving towards the self-sufficiency of people in the local communities, we have an anticipated reduction of our staffing in that area as well.

I'd like to respond to a question on page C21 from the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on our dealings with municipalities in terms of bringing them under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Staff from Municipal Affairs and Alberta Labour have had preliminary discussions with the cities of Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge both individually and at a recent conference on the subject. Both the AUMA and AMDC have formally asked us to defer implementing legislation for their members until 1999 and the year 2000, respectively. Once that

happens, you'll see our role as offering assistance, with perhaps a more active role in the initial training. There's no doubt in this ministry that that will be a major challenge in this next coming year.

I'd like to move in response to questions from the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo referenced on C21 and C22. Registry agents provide 123 products and services including drivers' licences; vehicle registrations; birth, death, and marriage certificates and marriage licences; land titles; personal property and corporate registry searches; personal property registrations; and raffle ticket licences. We're hoping to increase that product line to 150 once we redevelop the re-engineered corporate registry and vital statistics branch, which I referred to previously.

4:00

The incident of false identification in Calgary. Registry staff are still working with the police to investigate, ensuring charges are laid against the parties responsible. The registry agents are monitored closely by our department. Introducing the one-part driver's licence and keeping the photo identification on record have made the system more secure.

Operational changes on which we're working, beyond those I've mentioned already, include a more equitable system of property tax through assessment audits and current market value assessments. I'd like to just comment that there have been several people who have challenged some of those assessments throughout the province. It should be noted that this move to market value assessments is certainly nothing new, and it was a general agreement by the municipal politicians that that would be a wise move in terms of the thrust that the department is undertaking on behalf of Albertans. We're co-ordinating the transition to a uniform education tax system and, again under the umbrella of the previous comment, while challenging, I think will enable us to serve consumers better while they try to understand what's being done when they receive a tax notice.

We're working on consumer protection legislation, in response to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, reference C22, a new law to consolidate and modernize at least seven Alberta statutes dealing with fair trading in the marketplace. A discussion paper that went out last summer and a public opinion poll done this past January have been used in basing our thrust in drafting new legislation from their comments.

In terms of accountability, which has been referenced in terms of performance measures, I'd like to advise members we've taken a step to review all of our arm's-length organizations to ensure they embody the 10 principles of accountability within the department. All agreements will require a three-year business plan, updated annually: goals, objectives, performance measures, and budgets; periodic monthly, quarterly, annually reporting on progress in achieving goals and objectives; periodic revenue and expenditure reports; variances; analyses; identifying corrective actions, if necessary; timely disclosure of audited financial materials; government representation on self-appointed boards of directors of entities receiving government funds – and those are self-appointed in many different areas of this province as we look at foundations and other groups that request moneys – statement of role and responsibility of board members; delegation of signing authority policy; and segregation of duties for officers. Business plans and filed reports will be made available to the public. I can assure you that in the checks and balances that have been conducted with our recent agreement with the Credit Counselling Services of Alberta organization, they reflect the essence of these principles.

I'd like to just comment in response to the questions by the hon. members from Edmonton-Riverview, citing C26, and Edmonton-Meadowlark, C28, the two key performance measures relating to client satisfaction, local government restructuring process, and property assessments, both on page 230 of the Municipal Affairs Update in the business plan section of the Budget '97 update. That identifies the manner in which we assess the satisfaction levels of people that were using those services.

Finally, we surveyed randomly selected customers of our registry agents across Alberta by mail, receiving 670 completed surveys for a response rate of 35 percent. This survey helped us to determine what contributes to customer satisfaction, the difference in levels of satisfaction with different registries, different types of service, among individual and business customers.

Madam Chairman, I would certainly be pleased to receive any references from the hon. members present that wish to submit anything further.

Municipal Affairs has been serving the people of this province for 85 years with pride and hopes to continue to do so in a manner which will please all Albertans.

Thank you.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. A lot of the questions from the other night were answered, and I thank you very much. It was very thorough. One item that I did pose but I didn't get a direct answer for – at least I didn't hear it – was under grants in place of taxes, line 2.4.1 in the budget, to decrease from \$46.85 million to \$43.59 million. It should be noted that the department is expected to spend \$39.25 million on this line item. Now, I've got two questions. I want to know, Madam Chairman, if I can ask the question and get an answer, change my question another way?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, are you talking about a back-and-forth dialogue?

MR. GIBBONS: Just on this one item, because I didn't get a clear answer on what I asked the other night.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'm sure the hon. minister will be glad to get back to you in writing.

MR. GIBBONS: Okay, if necessary. Usually this item is quite stable, and it's hovered around \$45 million in the past few years. The question on this is: is the reason for the decrease in spending on this line item simply the sale of Crown property? Now, I've got a yes and a no. If yes, can the minister provide a list of names of people who bought this land from the province and for how much? If no, then why is this line item decreasing? Did you hear that? Okay.

MS EVANS: Madam Chairman, I'd like to just comment that it is decreasing because of the sale of properties. Certainly I would undertake to review the list of sales, too, with the hon. minister of public works. Our department is in charge of reimbursement to the municipalities, the grants in places the sales of properties occur. There are fewer grants required in terms of the actual.

Who they are sold to: I believe I would have to refer that question to public works.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you.

Under registries information and distribution, there again in all the reading I'm not sure if I got the answers for what I asked the other day. The overall estimated expenditure for this program is slated to increase slightly, from \$36.44 million to \$36.86 million. It should be noted that the program is forecasted to fall under budget in '96-97 by \$2 million. Now, this question was asked the other day by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but my questions to it: can this minister provide a more detailed outline on item 4.0.2? How much of the money, if any, is going to the registry offices which are operated privately? The second question on that one is: why exactly are we spending \$4.35 million in capital investments, line 4.0.2, and why did we spend \$2.67 million last year in this capital investment? There again this is something you can put in writing.

An item under estimate expenditures, estimate expenditures for the Department of Municipal Affairs, can be found on 291 to 299. Overall the estimate expenditures of this department have decreased from \$304.82 million to \$277.69 million. It should also be noted that the department is forecasting an underexpenditure of about \$26 million this year.

Questions on the department's support services. The overall estimated expenditure for this program is slated to remain about the same, \$14.9 million. However, '95-96 was considerably lower at \$13.7 million. Now, the question to this is: why is the cost of support services for the department's program 1 going up when the rest of the department is being cut back? The second supplement to that one is: why can't we spend the same amount on support services that we did in the '95-96 fiscal year? Supplement three question: why was there a \$150,000 expenditure on capital for finance and administration – this is under line 1.0.3 – when there's no money budgeted? The fourth question on this one is: what are we spending \$75,000 on this year in capital expenditures for finances and administration, line 1.0.3?

#### 4:10

Now, furthering my questions to this, Madam Minister, are some of the items that have been in questions to you from the House side this past week, and it's coming out of taxation to farms, ranches, and so on, the difference between a farm with buildings or granaries on it. I'm wondering if you can send over a complete breakdown on that, because the MG Act to me is very in depth on this breakdown.

Other than that, I thank you very much for the answers, and I'm going to just pass to another member.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just have a few questions for the minister. I was unable to be at the original committee meeting, so maybe some of these concerns have been addressed. I recall a question being asked the other day in question period, and maybe if I could have more clarification about the fringe area and what's happening – it's certainly an issue in my riding, as I'm sure you're well aware of. It seems that most people are sitting down at the table now, but it's gone through a bit of strife, and you and I both know that that serves no one.

In that regard, I know the Legal area has just made an agreement with Sturgeon. There are still other places up in the air. Certainly St. Albert has not finalized their agreement on the fringe area, and I know it's a concern for both the city of St. Albert and Sturgeon county.

The other thing that I have grave concerns over is that regional planning seems to be up in the air so much that I fear much of our agriculture land is being lost. I dare to say that some of the land in my riding is the best soil in Alberta, and I fear it's being eaten up by development. [interjection] There are people arguing with me already. There are certainly areas where development would be fine; it's not good agricultural land. But I see much of that land around Villeneuve, St. Albert, even the Spruce Grove area of Parkland being eaten up by development, and I think it's partly due to the fact that right now if you apply for a subdivision, you'll get it, because nothing solid is in place. I've seen all kinds of developments popping up in Sturgeon, and I have great concern over that. We seem to be in a phase of limbo as to what is allowed to be developed and what is not allowed to be developed. That really is of great concern to me because I see much of our agricultural land being eaten up by residential development.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

Another concern. Maybe the minister can work in regards to co-ordination of 911 across this province. I don't know if that's within your jurisdiction. I know it's all municipally promoted, but it's piecemeal across the province. So I'm wondering if the department can't in some way take . . . [a bell rang] I got robbed again, but I get to keep going; right? I'll make it short and sweet. That co-ordination maybe your department could help co-ordinate, because there are areas in this province that don't have access to 911.

That was just the first 20 minutes, so we have a few more.

I get several people asking me about amalgamation, if what happened in Toronto is going to happen to Edmonton, St. Albert, Sherwood Park. Great concern about that. So I'm wondering if the minister would stand up and clarify that that's not going to happen, and that would bring some relief to some of those people around here. The last question, because obviously so many people want an opportunity to speak. There is a conflict, as far as I'm concerned, with the county of Sturgeon that I will be working on. Highway 794 is not listed as one of their priorities because they want to change it to a primary highway. That hasn't happened, I'm told, in 10 years, that a secondary has been changed to a primary. Sturgeon county won't make it a priority. They're asking for it to be primary instead of asking for it to be repaved and widened. I don't know if the minister can maybe informally discuss with Sturgeon county as to what their plans are. It's not going to be changed to primary. I don't know how to get that accomplished. When I talk to truck drivers, actually, who travel this province regularly, they say that 794 between 16X and Westlock and Highway 37 between Namao and Highway 2 are the most dangerous highways in Alberta. I don't know if the minister can talk to Sturgeon county and see if they can negotiate some of that. I know you have friends all over the province, and maybe you can speak informally and see if you can't get that in motion.

With those, I know there are many other people who want to speak, but I thank you for your time on that, Madam Minister.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. A couple of questions, Madam Minister, that I don't think were fully developed during the committee process, and of course that committee process sort of truncates debate. I want to talk to you about the key performance measures listed in your business plan for your department. The first comment I have is a suggestion. You and your departmental officials may want to take a look at the performance measures published by Treasury and the format that is used by Treasury. You may have been present and heard part of the debate on the performance indicators of Treasury. I'm not speaking to the actual words, because there are some problems with some of the content, but the way that it's laid out is very useful, is very user friendly. You have sort of a table that has the strategies, the outcomes, and the measures. It's very easy to read and understand, and when constituents ask me about it, we can sort of go to the table. So that would be helpful.

On the specific measures, the one for client satisfaction for local government restructuring process. My question is this. It's a new program – and I understand that – but the performance measure is supposed to reflect specific “client satisfaction with the department's role in the restructuring process.” You talk about a survey. I take it that that survey will be an ongoing survey; we're going to do that year after year after year during this process as it unfolds. You achieved 93 percent satisfaction in that initial survey in '95-96, but your target is only 80 percent. Why would you undersell yourself? I mean, if your baseline is 93 percent, why isn't your target 93 percent or above, or at least maintaining satisfaction? Certainly, Madam Minister, it can't be your department's intent that you want to decrease satisfaction with what you're doing. So let's keep raising the bar on that one, and it would be helpful to me if I had a copy of the survey.

Now, the next one is going in the right direction: property assessments. Again it's a new program. We don't have anything to compare it against. We don't have a track record here. But the performance measure to me is one that should be pretty darn close to 100 percent if things were going well. It's “percentage of municipal assessments that comply with regulations.” Well, only 55 percent in your baseline comply. That should raise all kinds of alarms. But your performance target is only three-quarters; it's only 75 percent. Now, I understand that that would be a huge improvement. We're talking about a 20 percent gain, and that would be great. But, Madam Minister, what in the business plan can I turn to that will give me some comfort that we're going to get that up? I mean, even 75 percent is nothing to brag about. While I understand it would represent a huge improvement – and this will also unfold over time – I would appreciate some advice from you as to what's going to happen to get this one moving in the right direction a little more quickly?

Housing assistance I don't have particular concerns with. I see the absolutely appropriate target there for the “percentage of grants provided to Albertans in need.” The target is 100 percent. I'll do everything I can to help you reach that target. That's good to see, and I'm glad to see that commitment.

4:20

The cost of social housing though: this is one that left me scratching my head. The cost per unit target is \$2,653. That seems to be based on sort of an average costing, but it stands all by itself. I mean, what is it linked to? It may in fact reflect reality, and that's your intent, but we don't know how realistic that number is. So what is it linked to, and what kind of unit costing are we looking at in terms of quality of life surveys for the people who are receiving the benefit? Are we asking them

about client satisfaction the same way we look at local government's client satisfaction? I think that would be an important and powerful measure as well. So I would encourage you to put a little bit more flesh on the bones in terms of the response Albertans are giving you in terms of the value of the social housing commitment that's being made by government.

A similar comment on the registry services. I see that customer satisfaction for the privatized registries is being surveyed. I'm happy to see that. I've had personally good and bad experiences, which we can talk about some other time. What I find interesting here again: in '94-95 we see the satisfaction level pegged at 96 percent, '95-96 at 97 percent, but your target, Madam Minister, is only 90 percent. Let's not backpedal. The survey on this one is a little challenging. If you ask me, “Are you happier waiting in a shorter line?” obviously my answer is yes. But ask me about what kind of line and whether or not I believe that it's an appropriate divestment and whether or not my privacy is being adequately protected. Those kinds of questions should be asked as well. In my reading of the survey, those kinds of questions aren't there. It might give us a little better reflection of where Albertans are at on this. I mean, the die is cast. We know that this is the way the registry business is going to go. I'm not suggesting we revisit that, but let's move it along and make sure that people's true concerns are being reflected so that you have the feedback you need to adjust your policy accordingly.

I have one last question.

MS LEIBOVICI: Just if they're going to follow those recommendations.

MR. SAPERS: There were some recommendations . . .

MS LEIBOVICI: No. There are going to be.

MR. SAPERS: There are going to be some recommendations . . . Madam Minister, perhaps Edmonton-Meadowlark would like to just ask you a question. I'll just sit down, because I think we've got about a minute or two left.

MS LEIBOVICI: Just a quick question . . .

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. Glengarry.

MS LEIBOVICI: Meadowlark.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Well, something's haywire here, but go ahead.

MS LEIBOVICI: That's okay. Then you can go back to the list.

Just a quick question. I notice that there's a Rotary Urban Hope Conference that's being held in the city today to look at how to turn cities into better places, more community oriented. I'm just wondering what the follow-up is that the department may be planning with regards to some of these recommendations and how they would go about implementing or providing guidance to municipalities with regards to the recommendations.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are three areas

that I'd like to touch on, the first of which was touched on at least in part by some other members: the customer satisfaction of the local government restructuring process, in brackets preservation. I'm at a loss as to what that in fact means. I, too, would like to see the survey, because I'm quite sure that if you asked a local member of a municipality, you'd find that the satisfaction with the whole restructuring process is certainly less than 93 percent if you ask the right question, and the right question would be: money. This is obviously totally and completely in error if in fact the question of money was asked. Ninety-three percent. You can't come along and take a great deal of money out of a municipal government's coffers, which has very little discretionary income in any event and discretionary spending – it's pretty narrow – and then have the municipality answer: yes, yes, yes, that's the kind of thing we want done. That's independent of whether in fact it's necessary or not. Personally, I don't know if I believe it as to the case at all. The taxation of municipal government should be property based and property service related, which it currently isn't. Currently, as you well know from your experience, municipal tax is property based by and large, and there are some other odds and sods that come into it. Primarily the income is generated from property, but it's not expended on property. I mean, yes, there's fire service, protective service, and municipal planning. Certainly they're all used and are property related. But take things like recreation, which I know the minister's own municipality spends a great deal of money on, and that certainly is not property related. And there are other areas, social services, that are unrelated insofar as economic development, and a lot of other areas that are expenditures out of municipal coffers are not related.

Now, I would say that if there's any restructuring to be done, particularly dealing with a restructuring process and a satisfaction with the process, if you'd asked the right kinds of questions of the municipalities, you'd get a very, very different answer. You may get a little more dissent and a little more meaningful dialogue if you've asked those kinds of questions about how taxation is applied. Currently – and you heard it all the time in your municipal career, I'm sure – a constituent will come to you and say: “Why should I improve my property to make my property look better? The first thing that happens is the tax collector comes along and hits me with more tax.” Then you carefully go through the explanation of more property, more taxation. It's logic, but then they say to you: “Well, gee whiz, I look at the pie that you've given me annually to say where my money goes. Yes, I like all the expenditures, but why take it out of my property? Why not tax me on others, whether it be income tax, a value-added tax, a road tax, or any number of other kinds of taxation methods the provincial government has at their disposal that the municipal government certainly doesn't?”

I would really like to see a great deal more discussion on the client satisfaction in that particular item of local government restructuring, because from my experience in talking to the members of municipal governments, they certainly don't have that same feeling. It certainly doesn't add up to 93 percent; 80 percent is a lofty goal, I would suspect.

Another area that concerns me also is planning. Having had a great deal of experience in having to deal with Edmonton's planning, I found that in the subdivision approval process in smaller centres, the Calmars, I had a great deal of difficulty dealing with them because they don't have the staff. The department used to provide that through a local planning authority. It was rather expensive and it was, yes, a gift to smaller

municipalities, but at least when they came to do a development, the development actually worked. It had some planning parameters and a consultant that was hired to do the job or the in-house staff who did the job actually did some good, and that is all gone now.

#### 4:30

The other area that particularly concerns me, too, in the budget cutting: to my eyes, I can't see a darn thing in any of your documents that talks about planning at all. It used to be known throughout North America that the planning in the province of Alberta was very, very well done. The local planning authorities, the Edmonton and the Calgary regional planning authorities and a number of others, what they did was provide a forum in which members of municipalities could get away from their cloistered little view of things and understand how a member from a smaller municipality or a larger municipality could view things. It was a forum in which to talk about economic development collectively. It was a forum to understand about how one could deal with utilities on a collective basis, to iron out some of the problems and understand why there was a need to have central processing of water, for example, or transportation and to jointly go to the province and say: look; these are some areas that should be looked at collectively because this area of growth is occurring and that's not. And a simple understanding, an understanding that there's a common good in living geographically in a location that is next door to someone else, that there is something to be said for an arbitrary boundary called a municipal boundary that does not carve a difference between one person and another.

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

The last thing I'd like to say in the municipal planning area is that if you have to cut some expenses, the least that you should do is foster a small amount of money to bring those people together again and to be the organizing body. If you don't have an external body like the provincial government doing that, if you have, for example, the area that I'm familiar with, Edmonton, trying to do it, then Edmonton appears to be granddaddy trying to bring in all the smaller municipalities, and they get their backs up immediately and you don't get any proper leadership. So it would behoove a government to do that in order to maintain some semblance of municipal planning and not get leapfrog utility growth, not get transportation planning way out of whack with regards to the utility of transportation, and to provide some kind of semblance of economic development so that areas can actually grow and not step on each other's toes, not be continually in competition with each other.

I thank you very kindly.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.  
Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Good afternoon, Madam Minister. I just had two brief questions, and I think one of my other colleagues would also like to speak.

Given the lessons that we're all learning from the privatization of CKUA and transferring and outsourcing and all of the other words I've heard here, I'm wondering if Municipal Affairs is going back and looking at any of the other areas that things have been privatized into – the registries, the housing – either before this or now, going back to check that everything is on track and where you think it is. That was my question in that area.

I think one of my other colleagues has touched on this, but I'm just wondering: are there any other amalgamations being considered? I've spent a lot of time in improvement district 124, and I'm wondering if there are any other amalgamations being planned. You know, there was the one around Fort McMurray that happened. I'm wondering if any of the rest of those are being considered, especially given what we've learned from Toronto with peoples' unwillingness to participate in that and being forced into it by government. So if that's going to happen, I hope there's open and public consultation about it.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you Madam Chairman. I just have a few brief questions here for the minister as I realize that we're quickly coming to the end of time. In the constituency of Edmonton-Glengarry we do have a number of seniors' facilities, one of them being the Rosslyn Place senior lodge and Rosslyn Place senior cottages. These are in the process of being shut down, and some of the questions that the people in the cottages had were: why is it, when these are becoming vacant, that people are not being allowed to move into those vacant cottages, particularly when there is a big need in our area?

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry, hon. member, but the time has expired.

After considering the 1997-98 business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Municipal Affairs, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expenditure	\$277,690,000
Capital Investment	\$5,097,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$12,200,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

### **Economic Development and Tourism**

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I would ask the hon. minister for opening remarks.

MRS. BLACK: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I'm very pleased to be in this process. We had, I think, a very interesting subcommittee meeting the other evening, and I did welcome the comments from all members.

Madam Chairman, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the responses to the questions that were asked the other evening in subcommittee. We did review the *Hansard*, and I believe we pulled out all the questions that were asked from all members who were present at subcommittee D, so I would like to table those. I'm sure they've all been met, and if there are any that we haven't clarified, I do welcome requests from members to get back to us to have clarification on those answers.

Madam Chairman, this is a new portfolio for me, and actually it's one that I'm quite excited about, because when you think about economic development and tourism, it basically encom-

passes the growth and the prosperity and the development of this province. It's critically important for all of us to pay attention to this portfolio and to the growth and prosperity that we are going to be experiencing.

I know later this year I'm very much looking forward to working with and being supportive of the Growth Summit coming up because I think it will be a vehicle whereby we as a province will be able to look at some of the pressures we will experience from growth over the next number of years. Those will come in a variety of areas. I'm looking forward to the Growth Summit as a vehicle to bring people together to talk about how we deal with growth pressures as we move forward.

From the projections of growth that we are anticipating within Alberta over the next few years, higher than any place in the country with over 3 percent growth, it's going to be something we will have to deal with. We will have those pressures, whether they be in our municipalities, in our universities, in our schools, in our hospitals, in our communities, in our job training programs, in our apprenticeship programs and many other areas. It will be incumbent upon all of us to address those and set out almost a critical path of how we can move forward.

The budget for Economic Development and Tourism of course crosses a number of areas. Let's keep in mind that under this ministry when you look at some of our core industries, we have people in the ministry who are focused on agriculture, forestry, petrochemicals, mining, small business development, trade, and tourism. I can tell you, there's an awful lot of expertise and knowledge that is in this department that helps us.

We also have a special feature in Alberta, Madam Chairman, that is unique to Alberta. It's called the Alberta Economic Development Authority. Again, this was a group that came together as a result of the Premier's experience in Calgary back in the early '80s, when we had to come forward with some strategic planning for Calgary to help it with its economic development when things were not going very well. Our Premier had the vision to set up this authority that could take over some of the mission and visionary aspects of economic growth for the entire province. It's the only place in Canada that has such a vehicle and which attracts CEOs and top executives from all aspects of life to come and lend their expertise to a strategic planning model. I believe it's fundamental, and it's one of the best vehicles that we could have put in place to help us develop some of those strategies to deal with all of the aspects of development that we have within Alberta.

The actual vote is broken out into a number of programs, nine to be exact. We could go through them. The first program, of course, is the support area; it is a program that is more the area of the department. In program 2 we have our business and tourism development area. Program 3 is the financial assistance to the Alberta Opportunity Company. Program 5 is the western economic partnership agreements program. Number 6 is technology partnership agreements. Program 7 is the tourism programs. Program 8 is the financial assistance that was there for the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation. That is no longer being funded through this department. The Racing Commission and the Gaming and Liquor Commission are also funded through this ministry.

So there are in this document nine programs reported. Some do not have funds allocated to them this year because of moves to send them to the private sector, where they're better suited. Others do have funds. There's a total operating expense to be voted on today, Madam Chairman, of \$119,746,000. There's also

some capital of \$115,000 to be reported. So I would ask hon. members to focus on these programs.

Again I will undertake, as I have at subcommittee of supply, to answer questions by the hon. members, and if I do miss them, I know they'll bring them to my attention. We will endeavour to review the *Hansard* and get back with the answers as quickly as possible, as we have in the tabling that we've put before the committee today.

Thank you very much.

4:40

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MRS. PAUL: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Thank you, hon. Minister. I did enjoy the exchange we had the other evening. Actually, my remarks are going to be addressed to tourism, as that is my area of critique.

It is important that as legislators we do not overlook the importance of tourism to the economic strength and prosperity of the province. Tourism is one of Alberta's fastest growing industries, responsible for over \$3.6 billion in annual revenue, and we have not begun to tap the potential of the riches Alberta offers in this area. We are in an excellent position to build on those strengths, and I think you alluded to that the other evening.

We already have an internationally recognized reputation for offering world-class tourist destinations. The natural beauty of our parks and wilderness areas are without question the strongest factors that draw tourists to the province. We are also fortunate to have an incredible diversity in our landscape, from the Rocky Mountains to the badlands in the south of the province and to the lakes in the north. National parks were attracting tourists to our area even before we officially became a province. Alberta's beautiful scenery provides an excellent location for the whole spectrum of outdoor activities and sports.

Tourism can also be educational, as evidenced by the popularity of our historical sites, such as museums, and including the world-famous Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology in Drumheller.

Tourism opportunities are not limited to our wilderness areas, as Calgary and Edmonton remain two of our strongest and biggest tourist attractions. Annual events like Edmonton's Fringe festival and the Calgary Stampede year after year attract visitors not only from across Alberta and Canada but from countries in every corner of the globe.

Madam Chairman, economically Alberta is also an attractive destination, particularly for American visitors, who can benefit from a favourable exchange on their currency. As well, a high U.S. dollar has the effect of encouraging Canadians to spend their holidays exploring their own country. The fact that Alberta does not have a sales tax is also very attractive to foreigners and hopefully other Canadians. This adds up to the potential of great growth, especially in the areas of western-theme tourism and the hosting of even more major conventions.

With all these advantages it is no wonder that the tourism industry is doing so well. But there are barriers to growth and there are challenges, and that is where the government has a role, in diminishing and eliminating these barriers. Alberta is known around the world for Banff and Jasper and even for West Edmonton Mall. The Winter Olympics in Calgary also helped showcase part of Alberta to the world. There are, however, many incredible corners of the province that remain a secret not only to international tourists but to other Canadians as well. This barrier can be addressed by the effective marketing of these tourism destinations.

The Alberta Tourism Partnership is working to address this challenge, and it is the government's responsibility to ensure that the programs the ATP offers reflect the needs of Alberta's tourism operators, especially smaller rural operators who do not have the advantage of large advertising budgets. Through effective marketing we can change the perceptions of some that Alberta is a cold and barren wilderness and instead showcase it as a dynamic, friendly, and cost-efficient destination. Growth can be assisted by working to ensure more direct flights to our airports. Marketing efforts should be geared to bringing more visitors to Alberta during winter and shoulder seasons. Alberta is a beautiful and exciting all-year-round province, and there is no reason why we should be receiving the vast majority of our visitors only in the summer months.

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

Alberta must continue to upgrade and augment our services sector. Better hospitality training, increased language skills, and easier access to currency exchanges are just some of the areas in which we can improve. As legislators we must take even greater steps to educate Albertans on the opportunities that exist in this growing industry and assist Albertans to develop the skills that will be needed to take advantage of it. Because so many of our tourist operators are small businesses, it is imperative for them to work co-operatively together to make an impact on the international marketplace. I am glad that the ATP has started to make this even more possible.

It is important that with the advent of the ATP the government not simply remove its responsibility for addressing these barriers, particularly the ones that it has direct control over. The hotel room tax is a perfect example. Since this tax is a unique burden on Alberta's hospitality industry, the very least the government can do is dedicate a portion of the revenues raised by it for the promotion and marketing of Alberta's tourism attractions. Currently the revenues raised by the hotel room tax by far outstrip this government's funding for tourism initiatives like the ATP.

I am sure the new minister responsible for tourism already recognizes the immense potential for growth in Alberta's tourism industry. I hope she will make a commitment to help address the barriers and challenges that are facing this industry so that we can help the industry create even more jobs and economic prosperity for our province.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadow-lark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, and I appreciate the opportunity to address the estimates of Economic Development and Tourism. I will try and speak and be as brief as possible, even though I have quite a number of points to make, because there is a large number of my colleagues that want to address this department as well.

In looking through the mission, vision, core businesses, and goals sections, one of the first things that struck me was that people do not seem to be included in economic development. I would have hoped that in the vision statement there would have been some statement made about what individuals need to be economically prosperous, that the statement and listing under the Alberta advantage would have included as well perhaps statements that the Alberta advantage would include prosperity for individuals. When we look at the goals, again I don't see any goals that



deal with ensuring that individuals are able to partake of the increased activity in economic development, and that is not a goal. Increased prosperity for Albertans as a general overarching statement is not there, and the goal of looking at decreased unemployment rates is not a goal of Economic Development and Tourism.

4:50

In fact, in the key performance measures you would think that one of the key measures would be the number of people employed within the province and particularly, as a measurement tool, the number of individuals who are employed at low-wage jobs versus high-wage jobs. Now, the minister may say: well, that's not within my purview; that's within the Ministry of Labour or within the ministry of advanced education. The reality is that with regards to economic development, when you're looking at a philosophical viewpoint, the viewpoint could be to spread the advantages of increased economic development throughout Alberta and to all people within Alberta or it could be to just focus in on certain individuals. When we look at what has happened in the United States, true, their prosperity appears to have increased, but the reality is that the differential between high-earning Americans and low-earning Americans has increased as well. I would hope that that is not the direction this province would take with regards to economic development.

There is another question that I have regarding what the measurements are that are used when we look at economics within this province, because we have seen that the traditional models don't work. I believe there's a saying that economists make fine historians and very poor fortune tellers. I think when we are looking at economic development within this province, we need to look at perhaps different measurements and maybe try to be, as this province likes to indicate, a forerunner in different areas. This could be an area that we would look at; for instance, the measurement of what is considered productivity. Homemakers who are contributing to the production of community standards, if we want to call it that; homemakers who are contributing to society by raising children: should not their output be able to be measured with regards to economics?

When we look at areas such as the environment, we're very quick to say there's an economic value that we place on cutting trees down, but should there not be an economic value as well on maintaining our natural resources? I think we may get quite a different picture, then, of what economic development is if we try to shift what our parameters are. I think that's probably what we will need as we move towards the millennium.

That's leads me to a question with regards to the Growth Summit. Are the parameters within the Growth Summit going to be those traditional parameters? Or is the direction from the government with regards to what do we consider growth going to take into account the new methods that are available throughout the literature? They may be a little bit frightening to the economists who are schooled in the traditional school of economy, but perhaps we could look at some different methods of measurement. So I'd be interested to know if there is any direction to the Growth Summit with regards to that and also whether there are any guarantees. I know that with the government it's difficult to make guarantees, but whether there are any guarantees would indicate that the outcome of this particular Growth Summit will not be ignored like the outcomes of the Growth Summit that we had in I believe 1993 or the recommendations from the Toward 2000 conferences that were held.

There are other areas that I wonder if the Growth Summit or

this department will be looking at. There are interesting ideas floating with regards to taxes. The Provincial Treasurer has his idea as to what would be a fair and equitable way to tax individuals. We have talked in this Assembly before about how if we're looking at taxes and tax incentives and different ways of ensuring economic growth within this province, perhaps we look at providing an incentive for companies to keep workers, as opposed to laying off workers, or to ensure that there is retraining of workers. It does happen in other countries in the world and appears to be quite effective in ensuring that the unemployment rates are kept low and that valuable skills are kept within organizations.

There are other areas that I believe need to be examined and I think can rightly be examined by this department with regards to issues within the workplace, because economic development does occur within the workplace. Those are issues regarding those individuals who are 45 years of age and over. We seem to be losing a valuable contribution to this province when individuals are discarded because of their age. When you look at the high cost of unemployment to the economy – one article that I was reading indicated that Canada as a whole has lost \$45 billion to \$60 billion a year due to high unemployment rates, and that definitely has an effect on the economy. As there seems to be no department that is particularly involved with these issues – advanced ed does a little bit of it – I think it might be more rightly placed within economic development. As the minister is new, this is a suggestion that I am putting forward. I think the manpower issues that we see under advanced ed are probably more rightly placed within economic development because that would then give you a total picture. You would have the private sector and the business aspect, but you would also have that marriage, if you would, of the individuals who make it go. Without individuals business cannot go.

Of course, there's always the issue of minimum wage. In order to make the economy work, people need dollars in their pockets. I'm sure that most Albertans, when you talk about economic development, translate that into: well, how much do I then have in my wallet? One way to ensure that is to raise the minimum wage.

AMPDC. I notice that it was touched upon briefly in the estimates of, I believe it was, last week. I know that the goals of the department are to increase economic development within this province. What I would be interested in knowing is: how many companies and how many productions have we lost as a result of the lack of funding to AMPDC? Would the new minister reconsider the options that are available for ensuring that AMPDC or something similar is viable? I know that the industry has put forward many recommendations. One of them is to look at perhaps setting up almost a foundation, as it were, so that there could be tax credits provided for donations or for investments in the AMPDC. When we look at what has happened in Municipal Affairs with the debt counseling program, that in fact is going to be a charitable foundation. I don't see that the debt counseling program is going to be providing any long-term jobs or any opportunities, whereas AMPDC in fact does and in fact will if we support it to the extent that other provinces such as B.C. and Saskatchewan and I believe Nova Scotia have.

There is also another interesting proposal, if my memory serves me correctly, that has been put forward with regards to labour incentives and which may address some of the concerns around AMPDC and the lack of funding. I think that if the minister were to take a close look at what the dollars are that this particular

industry brings into the province, and as a result of the province's rather hasty decision – the AMPDC was ready, given a little bit of transition time, to step back and to divest itself of government funds but, however, was not given the opportunity. Yet we have many examples of departments within this government that have provided the bridge funding and are continuing to do so. It begs the question as to why this industry, that is providing millions of dollars to the economy within Alberta, was treated differently and, in my mind, rather shoddily.

5:00

I had a question for the minister of public works, who directed me to the department of economic development, that has to do with the ALCB warehouse in St. Albert. My understanding is that it is either being sold or has been sold. My question is: for how much, to whom, and for what dollar cost? That building originally cost the taxpayer about \$49 million to build. What has been the loss to the taxpayer with regard to that particular building, and are the losses the same as occurred with the warehouse down in Calgary? I believe that building was around \$9 million, and we gave it away for approximately \$90,000, I think it was. If those figures are not correct, I would appreciate receiving that information from the minister.

Those are, in a nutshell, what some of my questions are. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon in the good company of my colleagues here and make some comments on Economic Development and Tourism, an opportunity I've been waiting very patiently for, I might add.

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

I was very taken with the minister's comments and her enthusiastic approach to the department. I want to wish her well in it – it's the first chance I've had to do that – and I mean that sincerely. In her last capacity I know she was full of energy, and I'm sure she'll bring that all to bear in this next portfolio as well.

I'm particularly interested in the Growth Summit, which she mentioned in her speech, because I, too, am looking forward to that Growth Summit just to see exactly what it is that the business, labour, and social communities of our province have to say and what kind of plans they might have, what kind of suggestions they might have to lay before you. We have such a wonderful opportunity in this province, which has the greatest resources of any place in Canada, I feel, certainly the widest variety, the greatest depth of resources that you'll find anywhere, plus an extremely conducive business climate within which to maximize those resources and generate good investment opportunities, create some wealth, create some new jobs, and help Albertans get on with life in a truly competitive way. So I'm really looking forward to that Growth Summit.

I note here, too, that as part of the challenge that the minister is faced with, she has to look after the larger strategy, as it were, that would take us now through the term of her office into the 21st century. I find that to be a bit of a daunting task, but I'm sure she'll rise to that occasion.

There are some excellent projections made here under the key performance measures which I'll be monitoring very closely from my standpoint as Treasury critic. Included in there are increases,

I note, for exports and indeed the export companies, several of whom I suspect the Premier has had a chance to meet on his trade missions with the Prime Minister, others of which have come here to the province to take a look at our method of doing business and what types of products and people we have here and to determine in fact if they do want to do business with us.

I know there are a number of excellent projects that we've heard about that involve the agriculture sector, which ties in with our friends in Ukraine, for example. I know there is some co-partnering there that's been going on with farmers, and I share the excitement in that area on behalf of our Ukrainian ancestors. I also know there are a lot of interesting opportunities that we have with Ukraine and other European countries insofar as the oil and petrochemical industry is concerned, and I'm looking forward to seeing more of that. In a general sense, I'm very encouraged here that the minister feels that we will reach our targets under the number of Alberta exporters as outlined on page 121 of Budget '97 and that in fact she's projecting modest growth in that area over the next couple of years. So I'm interested to see how that falls together.

Also, I think I want to compliment the minister on one other thing, and that is, if I read the financial projections right, on actually downsizing her department a little bit. Is that correct, Madam Minister?

MRS. BLACK: A whole lot.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: There seems to be at least an attempt to streamline government. I've always been a fan of smaller, tighter governments, and I've been on record before as saying that many of my constituents have told me: the less government the better, the less interference by government the better, and let's just get on with the business of the economy. So I compliment you on that.

However, I'd be very interested to see how the diversification formula works in terms of economic development strategy. I want to just assure her that I will be very vigilant, watching and observing her department here to make sure that the diversification strategies that the minister has don't get us into any ruts or get us into any difficulties, such as some perhaps rushed ventures did during the last 10 years, which I realize was largely due to a previous government. Nonetheless, there were attempts made at diversification; for example, in the pulp and paper industry, which we're watching. [interjection] Yeah, I understand. The minister is saying that the government is now out of the business of being in business, and I applaud that. I ran on that ticket as well, so I'm happy to see it having been delivered on.

One other area that I'm somewhat disappointed in is still the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation. I understand why the government had to get out of it. I understand the dilemma that you were in because it was a business and government was perceived to be in business there. However, I do think that should be again revisited. Perhaps now that we've had a chance to see what the impact of that was, there might be an opportunity for the minister to review it again. I don't think there's ever any mistake in coming back and having a look at something with new information, with new tides changing, and seeing if we can't do something to gain back what may have been lost. I understand that Nova Scotia has done very well, Saskatchewan has done very well, B.C. has done extremely well in picking up many of our film projects.

It's a known fact that for every dollar invested by the govern-

ment in those areas, we have had a return of \$5 to \$6 on average and as high as \$15 to \$16. Some of it, Madam Minister, could be provided through a tax incentive situation, which one of my colleagues may already have mentioned. I hope you'll visit that area, give it a look. Maybe we don't have all the right answers right now, but it merits consideration, and I think it merits you sitting down with the stakeholders and saying, "Let us be sure that we don't have more of our infrastructure being eroded, that we don't have more of our people who are involved in the motion picture development and video development projects leaving our province unnecessarily," because once they do leave, they never come back.

I have several other issues I'd like to raise in economic development at another time, but I understand time is precious this afternoon, and there are a couple of other speakers. So, Madam Minister, I will take my spot so they can go on with their agenda and their questions.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.  
Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, and thank you for the opportunity to address this minister, to whom I have not spoken before.

I am going to tag onto what my hon. colleague has just been speaking of, and specifically that's AMPDC. I, too, would urge you to reconsider this, to revisit it and reconsider it. The demise of AMPDC and the resulting move away from the province of a number of firms that were producing television and film has affected, in much more than a trickle effect, the larger arts community here. We had a number of designers – scenic designers, lighting designers, costume designers – directors, actors all getting work through these different projects, and this work paid well for them. It was keeping them in Edmonton. In some ways it was subsidizing the rest of the arts and theatre community. These people contribute to the local economy. They rent their homes here, they pay their mortgages here, they buy their groceries, raise their children, and pay taxes. So all that money was coming back into the economy here, and we have definitely seen a difference. It's much harder for people to make a decent living just through the live arts scene. This has really affected us.

#### 5:10

During the election the members of these major film and television industries were pointing out the loss of I think it was \$2.5 million to the Alberta economy in the few months that AMPDC had been closed. I might be wrong on that figure, but I think I'm close. That's a lot of money to be losing out of this economy. I'm wondering if you've been keeping track of how much money has not come here or has gone away since that agency was closed.

One of the things that I know that industry has been asking for for a long time is better investor incentives through tax credits. Perhaps that's something you could have a look at or consider. As well, there was some mention of an endowment fund that would have allowed them more of a transition. Perhaps that's another way to revisit this issue and take another look at it.

Overall I think AMPDC was a good deal for Alberta. I realize that it got caught under the umbrella of getting out of the business of doing business, but I think that industry and the wider arts and cultural sector is not quite the same as some of the other things that you were involved in. I would hope you would revisit and rethink it.

As well, as far as economic development and tourism, I remind you and urge you to consider the arts and cultural sector. This has huge, untapped possibilities for you. We know how much activity it can generate. I have had no mention of it being included in the Growth Summit, and I think it's critical that that agency – you're telling me it is? Okay. Good. I'm really glad to hear that, because there's a lot there, and I think we would all be very remiss if it wasn't included.

Lastly and briefly: the minimum wage. This is critical to women as women are a higher percentage in the service industry and are also more of the part-time workers, both areas which tend to involve the minimum wage. This is affecting children. It's putting children in poverty and making a lot of women struggle in this province. We haven't raised that minimum wage in a long, long time. It's embarrassing compared to some of the other provinces, so I would urge you, please, to revisit and rethink that as well.

Thank you for your time today.

MS LEIBOVICI: I just wanted very quickly to bring to the minister's attention that she had indicated in the estimates that she'd be focusing most of her attention on attracting people to Alberta this year in all aspects. As she's probably well aware, West Edmonton Mall is within my constituency. It is one of the largest tourist attractions in Alberta, and I would hope that as she's doing the attracting, West Edmonton Mall will not be forgotten by her or her department.

MRS. BLACK: Absolutely not.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you.

MR. GIBBONS: I would just like to bring to the attention of the minister page 130, the tourism education fund income statement. You have had revenue over the last few years, but it doesn't say where it's disbursed to. That's a line figure that I have looked all over the place for. If I can leave that as a question to get back to me on.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the 1997-98 business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expenditure	\$119,746,000
Capital Investment	\$115,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MRS. BLACK: Madam Chairman, I move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

MR. CLEGG: Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of

Public Works, Supply and Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1998, and reports approval of the following estimates: \$435,210,000 for operating expenditure, \$51,935,000 for capital investment, for a total of \$487,145,000.

The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Municipal Affairs for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1998, and reports approval of the following estimates: \$277,690,000 for operating expenditure, \$5,097,000 for capital investment, \$12,200,000 for nonbudgetary disbursements, for a total of \$294,987,000.

The Department of Economic Development and Tourism for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1998: \$119,746,000 for operating expenditure, \$115,000 for capital investment, \$123,300,000 for lottery fund payments, for a total of \$243,161,000.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

MRS. BLACK: Madam Speaker, it's been an interesting week, and I would like to move that we call it 5:30 and wish all of our colleagues a very happy weekend as they go back to their constituencies and a very happy Mother's Day to all of us mothers.

[At 5:19 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]