

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, March 12, 1998**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 98/03/12

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray.

Our divine Father, as we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our thanks and ask that we may continue our work under Your guidance.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask at this time that the petitions I presented on Tuesday now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to examine and amend the Workers' Compensation Board Act to provide appropriate benefits to those Albertans whose spouses died in work-related accidents, and who subsequently lost their benefits due to remarriage.

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

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petitions I introduced on Tuesday, the 10th of March, be now and read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to examine and amend the Workers' Compensation Board Act to provide appropriate benefits to those Albertans whose spouses died in work-related accidents, and who subsequently lost their benefits due to remarriage.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition presented on Tuesday, March 10, regarding the Disfranchised Widows Action Group now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to examine and amend the Workers' Compensation Board Act to provide appropriate benefits to those Albertans whose spouses died in work-related accidents, and who subsequently lost their benefits due to remarriage.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petitions I presented on Tuesday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to examine and amend the Workers' Compensation Board Act to provide appropriate benefits to those Albertans whose spouses died in work-related accidents, and who subsequently lost their benefits due to remarriage.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition I presented the other day with respect to necessary changes to the Workers' Compensation Act be now read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to examine and amend the Workers' Compensation Board Act to provide appropriate benefits to those Albertans whose spouses died in work-related accidents, and who subsequently lost their benefits due to remarriage.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on March 10 regarding the Workers' Compensation Act now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to examine and amend the Workers' Compensation Board Act to provide appropriate benefits to those Albertans whose spouses died in work-related accidents, and who subsequently lost their benefits due to remarriage.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Bill 27

Electric Utilities Amendment Act, 1998

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Today I request leave to introduce Bill 27, the Electric Utilities Amendment Act, 1998.

This bill builds on the base established by the Electric Utilities Act introduced in 1995 and moves the restructuring of the electric industry forward by establishing the framework for deregulating existing generation, introducing customer choice, and increasing competition in the electric industry.

[Leave granted; Bill 27 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to present five copies of the wind power task force report, which helped set the stage for Bill 27, which was just presented in the House today.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file four documents today. The first is an information bulletin announcing Team Alberta North's participation in the 1998 Arctic Winter

Games in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, which run from March 15 to 21.

I'm also filing a letter to the athletes and coaches of Team Alberta North wishing them much success.

It's a pleasure to file copies of letters sent to Nagano regarding two more medal winners from Alberta at the Paralympics: a silver medal for Karolina Wisniewska of Calgary and a bronze medal for Ramona Hoh of Edmonton.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling copies of a letter from Mr. Duerr, mayor of the city of Calgary, dated March 9, 1998, addressed to the Minister of Energy, outlining concerns with the Electric Utilities Amendment Act, 1998.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-*Ellerslie*.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table 12 letters expressing concerns about the environment from grade 6 students at Banded Peak school in Bragg Creek, Alberta.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table answers to questions raised by opposition members in the subcommittee of supply on Monday, March 9, 1998. This is a package which covers the majority of questions. We will follow up and complete the list as soon as possible.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a petition signed by almost 200 people from Nanton, Alberta. They are asking the government to help them with problem cougars that are killing their livestock.

THE SPEAKER: The chair would like to table a memorandum from the hon. Member for Calgary-*Fish Creek* requesting that Bill 206, the Human Tissue Donation Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, be brought to the Committee of the Whole on Tuesday, March 17, 1998, as soon as House business will allow.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Jeffery Chan and 50 other students, colleagues of his from Brander Gardens elementary school. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Natalie Esteves and Mrs. Reva Martin, and parent helper Mrs. Wong. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce Brenda MacDonald. Brenda is a social worker, and this is her first time visiting the Legislature. I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-*Calder*.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislature 13 students from the Coralwood academy in the constituency of Edmonton-*Calder*. They are here today with their teacher, Linda Steinke, and with two helpers, parents Gloria Quintanilla and Carolyn Macomber. I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly this afternoon 32 visitors from the West Edmonton Christian school, which is located in the constituency of Edmonton-*Glenora*. I would like to have teacher Mrs. Darlene Eerkes, teacher aide Cynthia Caswell, student teacher Charlene VandeKraats, and parents René DeVries and Astrid Potvin please rise with the students and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

1:40

Institutional Confinement and Sexual Sterilization Compensation Act

MR. MITCHELL: The Premier said that his mistake in bringing in Bill 26 along with the notwithstanding clause was that his political sense hadn't kicked into gear. Proof of that is that the Premier only backed down when he realized that the political cost was going to be far too great. Well, this isn't about a political mistake, Mr. Speaker. This is about a Premier who was prepared, after being briefed along with his caucus on this bill, to deliberately trample the constitutional rights of some of the most vulnerable people in this province. To the Premier: why is it that the Premier has focused only on his political misjudgment while failing to acknowledge that he was prepared to stomp on the rights of some of Alberta's most vulnerable people?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we were not prepared to stomp on the rights of the province's most vulnerable people. As a matter of fact, we were trying to avoid having these people go through the costly exercise of very expensive and prolonged court actions.

It was explained to us by our lawyers with the advice of outside counsel that the notwithstanding clause was a tool that would give the legislation added weight, because they were sure that that legislation itself would be challenged on constitutional grounds, Mr. Speaker. Admittedly, we depended too much, I guess, on the advice of lawyers.

If there's one thing for sure about this whole case, there are lawyers involved. There are lawyers involved with the unfortunate victims of that terrible legislation of many years ago. There are lawyers now involved on the civil rights side of this issue. Many of these lawyers are probably members of the law firms we consulted. Certainly there are lawyers within the Department of Justice. Mr. Speaker, we acted on the advice of the lawyers, and when you get a whole bunch of lawyers together, they all have different opinions. But we acted on the best advice we were given by our lawyers, including the lawyer sitting beside me, who is the top lawyer in the province, the Attorney General and the Minister of Justice.

MR. MITCHELL: After being the Premier of this province for

over five years and having attended a multitude of national conferences including many on constitutional matters, how can the Premier say with any credibility whatsoever that he simply didn't understand himself what it meant to invoke the notwithstanding clause of the Canadian Constitution?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I gave an explanation to that. Certainly, relative to this case it was explained that this was a legal tool that could be used to avoid constitutional challenges that would further prolong the awards and the process that these unfortunate victims are entitled to.

I'll have the hon. Minister of Justice supplement.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Premier. As I explained over the last couple of days, the intent of the legislation was to balance the interests of the claimants with those of today's Albertans. Also, we were trying to promote settlement and resolve the same in a more timely and cost-effective manner.

Mr. Speaker, what I want to do is make it clear that the advice given to the Premier and to caucus was advice generated by my department and outside counsel for which I accept responsibility. I think it was good legal advice. The difficulty is that we did not weigh all the ramifications of that advice, including the political ramifications, and for that I am quite prepared to accept full responsibility.

MR. MITCHELL: Since the Premier and his caucus, as has now been confirmed by the Minister of Justice, are clearly unable to screen Justice legislation adequately, will the Premier set up an all-party committee of the Legislature to review Justice bills, as is done in many other Legislatures and the Parliament of Canada?

MR. KLEIN: Politics is not a perfect science by any stretch of the imagination. Certainly if these people had been in the position we were in, they might have done something that could have been . . . [interjection] Well, are you telling me, hon. member . . . He's intervening, Mr. Speaker, and basically what he's saying is that they're perfect. Can they guarantee the electorate of this province that for all time they will make absolutely perfect decisions? I hardly thing so.

Mr. Speaker, there are times when, even as a caucus and even after careful and full review by lawyers and by politicians, poor decisions are made. We recognize that. We wanted to come up with something that contained these three Cs: compassion, compensation, and choice. The plan, I believe, was right; the process was wrong. But nobody in society is perfect. People are vulnerable to not understanding the implications of things.

I read from the transcript of the Code inquiry. The now hon. member of the Liberal opposition, the hon. leader, was on the stand testifying, and the question was relative to a letter that was sent to him that he was supposed to have read. The question was:

Even if you read it quickly, it tells you that you are going to try and mislead the public by saying we no longer have assets equal to our liabilities. We are just required to.

Then it ends there.

Didn't that read that way to you?

Answer, and this is Mr. Mitchell speaking:

You know, Mr. Code, when I read that letter in my counsel's presence a week ago and I explained to him what it said to me, he will tell you that even then I didn't catch that particular implication.

Mr. Speaker, thousands and thousands of Albertans were hurt by the actions of that company, and this person at that time didn't

understand the implications. Thousands of people, Albertans, were hurt by that company.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier today. When this Premier supported the Justice minister's introduction of Bill 26 – and correct me if I'm wrong – did I not just hear you say that you ultimately relied on the legal advice you received from your Justice minister?

MR. KLEIN: And many others. The Department of Justice sought the outside legal counsel, I understand, of two firms. There was a good discussion of this matter, as I said, at agenda and priorities committee. There was a good discussion of this issue certainly at caucus. Mr. Speaker, a lot of research went into that particular piece of legislation involving, as I said, not only our own officials within the Department of Justice but outside counsel as well.

Relative to the process, again I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, the Premier basically covered it off. Outside counsel spent approximately a year reviewing similar case law across the country and came forward with the proposal which they felt was fair, would provide compensation, would provide the compassion that the Premier has spoken about. Again, to answer the question that was put: based on all that input that came forward, I took the issue before caucus, explained it to caucus with their assistance, and supported the bill at that time.

In light of the response from Albertans it was quite clear that while we had the compensation and compassion covered off, we had made a mistake with respect to the notwithstanding clause, which is why we decided yesterday to hold the bill back. I instructed counsel yesterday to move forward with settlements in accordance with the parameters of the legislation as quickly as possible. Also, those who wish to go to court certainly can do so.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Premier as well. Is the Premier telling us that the Justice minister, the man he defended vigorously in Tuesday's news conference, did not properly brief the government caucus on Bill 26?

1:50

MR. KLEIN: The hon. minister acted as the minister should have acted. He provided caucus with his best legal advice. He didn't provide caucus with political advice, nor is that his responsibility. We are all politicians. We are all politicians, everyone in this room. As I said, my political sense didn't click into gear. It should have.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since any Albertan who goes to a lawyer and gets bad legal advice would fire that lawyer, will this Premier now fire his lawyer, his House leader, and his right-hand man: the Minister of Justice?

MR. KLEIN: Well, the Minister of Justice also happens to be a lawyer. Mr. Speaker, if we were to fire every lawyer who gives bad advice, there would be no lawyers. Maybe that might not be a bad thing.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Child Welfare

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. Generally, this government attempts to hide its cruelty by claiming some economic gain. In this case the government is just plain cruel. Brenda MacDonald is a social worker who cannot work because of a medical condition. She has a 13-year-old daughter. Currently living on \$815 a month, she is in arrears for over \$600 in utilities. Already receiving in-home supports from child welfare, Brenda has been told by not one but two child welfare workers that when her utilities are cut off, her daughter will be apprehended by this government. To the Premier. February 24 your Minister of Family and Social Services stood in this Assembly and told Albertans: "Mr. Speaker, the child welfare workers do not – I repeat: do not – apprehend children . . . simply because they are poor." I am asking you to personally retract the statement made by your minister and acknowledge that families in this province are being torn apart by poverty and the rigid policies of this government.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, this involves an individual case. I don't know what the caseload is of the Department of Family and Social Services. I would imagine there are thousands. I will take the question under notice and discuss this with the hon. minister.

MRS. SLOAN: Again to the Premier: could the Premier explain the economic and moral benefit for this government in apprehending children from their families, safe environments, simply because their parents don't have enough money to pay their utilities?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, with respect to the specific case I will take this under notice and discuss it with the minister. Relative to the general policy, it is the policy of the department that professionals in the department will act in the best interests of the child. But I don't know the details relative to this specific case.

MRS. SLOAN: Is this rigidity and cruelty, Mr. Premier, not just another example of this government's desire to be the moral judges, helping those who are viewed as being deserving and penalizing victims, the vulnerable and disadvantaged?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, this member is alluding to highly trained professionals – and I mean professionals – who have to deal with these situations on a day-to-day basis. The policy of the department – and I assume the policy of the department is being followed – is that these professionals will act in the best interest of the children.

Institutional Confinement and Sexual Sterilization Compensation Act (continued)

MS BARRETT: Yesterday the Justice minister said in his ministerial statement: "I have instructed counsel to endeavour to reach settlements with the claimants according to the parameters set out in Bill 26," the official title being the Institutional Confinement and Sexual Sterilization Compensation Act. I'd like to ask the Justice minister if in those instructions he means to

retain the very tightly defined sexual assault as meaning an assault in the form of fellatio, cunnilingus, vaginal or anal intercourse, or digital penetration, notwithstanding all the Supreme Court decisions and the Criminal Code of Canada, that do not accept such a limited definition.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, the definition is based on the Criminal Code. Nevertheless, counsel will certainly have some flexibility with respect to the settlement discussions, and if they feel there is a legitimate need to settle with an individual and there's good reason to deviate, they will certainly bring that forward for government to consider.

What I was primarily referring to yesterday were the financial parameters. After a careful study of the case law across the country we had determined that the average payment that claimants had received for wrongful sterilization was approximately \$65,000, and we had set a limit of a maximum of \$150,000. Counsel certainly has the flexibility to bring settlement forward for government to consider beyond the parameters of the bill.

MS BARRETT: In his instruction to counsel yesterday, then, did the Justice minister also indicate whether or not the government will continue to deny liability for incidents that occurred in provincial institutions?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, if we are not able to reach settlement with a particular claimant, that claimant has the option to go to court, and at that time we will be relying on any and all defences which ordinarily would be available to the government.

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

Special-needs Education

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several of my constituents with special-needs children have become frustrated with the process they must go through at the Calgary board of education to get special education programs for their children. The process is bureaucratic, adversarial, and delays the delivery of services to their children. My question is to the Minister of Education. Why do parents have to go through this process to obtain the services their children need?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I do recognize the frustration that some parents experience in trying to get the best possible education for their special-needs children. The decisions for the types of programs and services that should be provided for those children in my view are best made at the local level and involve a number of different stakeholders working in consultation with each other, including parents, including the students, the teachers, the principals, and the boards who are responsible for providing those services.

I think the reason, Mr. Speaker, why this process becomes multilayered from time to time is because of the number of people who need to be involved in coming up with the proper assessment. Also, first assessments are made at the school level and might involve other staff members; for example, in Calgary at the CLC, or the collaborative learning centre level.

The assessment tools that are used are also extensive, Mr. Speaker. They would involve tests, interviews with the teacher, interviews with the student, review of the student's work, and also observation of the student. If parents are not satisfied with the

program that is provided, they do have the ability to appeal that decision to the Calgary board of education.

MRS. FORSYTH: My second question is: is anything being done to encourage a more co-operative approach to providing programs for special-needs children?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I think that to the credit of the Calgary board of education they are developing a more collaborative approach to providing services for special-needs students. What they have done is they have conducted a review of their services for special-needs students and established a committee to look at the results of the review and to develop action plans to ensure that this process is perhaps made a little simpler. As part of that process they've set up a number of working groups that include parents, and I think this is an initiative at the local level that I'm pleased to see. I would encourage them to continue to work in partnership with their parents.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister said that the parents have the ability to appeal, is there anything we can do to shorten that process?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, any parent that's dissatisfied with the decision of a school board on the education program that's being provided for a student with special needs does have the right to ask for a ministerial review of the decision. Review panels consist of three people: a representative from my department and also two independent specialists. The review committee will look at the assessment of the student and the services proposed for that student.

Again, in an effort to shorten the process we think that the Calgary board of education is doing a good job in reviewing its process currently and seeing if there's a better way to go about doing it.

2:00 **Head Start Program**

MR. SAPERS: Last week I brought to this Assembly's attention the early Head Start program at Mayfield school and that that school was preparing to lose at least 15 percent of its budget. The Minister of Family and Social Services responded: "I will commit that if it is a good program, if it is one that is helping children . . . it won't lose money." The program was told that it's losing 17 percent of its budget. To the Premier: what has the Minister of Family and Social Services learned about this program in the last seven days that has convinced him that it's not good enough and it should lose funding?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister responsible for children's services respond.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the early Head Start program was a program that came in on a kind of late basis, but basically it is a good program. What we're finding is that because we only had three years to be able to do programming for early intervention – when the Member for Athabasca-Wabasca was Minister of Family and Social Services, he indicated that three years was the way that we were going to go with early intervention. The first year there were very limited dollars that were spent, the second year not as many as we thought were going to be spent, and the third year we had

other dollars that would go into it, and we only had used something like about \$19 million.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, the process that we thought was going to be happening throughout the whole planning process would take over, and then the authorities would assume responsibility for early intervention programs. That did not occur. We have extended the planning process for another year, which has created the problem relative to determining who would then take over for early intervention.

We found that the early Head Start, although it is a good program, certainly is one of those that would be assessed in the overall program of early intervention. We are doing that now. We thought that we could do a number of wonderful things with the \$17 million that we have allocated. We are now having to assess every single project relative to whether or not the outcomes are going to meet, and if they do meet, we will be looking at that even more so. Each individual program will be assessed accordingly.

MR. SAPERS: Given that the Minister of Family and Social Services said that he wouldn't take money away from the program if it did what it was supposed to be doing and given that the junior minister has now said that these things are all going to be assessed, will the Premier please commit that he will not allow a single penny to be taken away from the Mayfield early intervention program until he is satisfied that that assessment has been done, until a complete review of that program is completed? Will you save the program, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Well, again, I believe the hon. minister is more familiar with the Mayfield program, and I will have her respond.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Mayfield early Head Start program – basically what we're trying to do is make sure that whatever we do in evaluating the project, we are going to be meeting the outcomes of what was stated. If it's in fact going to be able to be assessed in that review, we would look at what possibilities there are in terms of maintaining the present funding, and if they are not, then, yes, we will commit to the fact that we will look at it. If it is meeting the outcomes to the full extent of what we expected it to, we will certainly see what can be done.

Mr. Speaker, as the minister responsible for children's services, we have the early intervention, and early intervention is one of the areas we feel very strongly about. We're making sure that whatever has to be done in terms of assessments, we will continue to do so. If it does meet the strict program criteria that we have set out, as people have indicated, we will certainly look at that.

MR. SAPERS: Will the Premier confirm that this budget cutting has nothing to do with criteria and assessment whatsoever, that there was no intelligent program-by-program review, that this is simply an effort to save money? In fact, will the Premier confirm that the Minister of Family and Social Services directed his officials to simply cut any early intervention program with a budget of more than \$50,000?

MR. KLEIN: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to correct a misrepresentation in terms of cutting all programs. We are not

cutting all programs. We are looking at what has to be done in terms of assessment and evaluation of all programs and to determine whether or not they are actually meeting the needs of the community and the outcomes that have been identified by the project and the people who will be evaluating those projects.

Mr. Speaker, we are looking at every single one of those early intervention programs. We will be doing an assessment in terms of which projects should go ahead on their merit, and at that point we will ensure that whatever outcomes are being met, we will look at all the programs and ensure that those that should be getting the funding will get the funding.

Sexual Sterilization Act

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Some of my constituents have been left with the impression that the present government was responsible for the wrongful sterilization and confinement in provincial institutions. Mr. Premier, would you clarify this for my constituents, please?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not surprising. Two nights ago I was listening to a phone-in radio program, and certainly the host of that program left the impression that the Sexual Sterilization Act was indeed an act of this government. I heard on a television program last night the reporter alluding to the act being the Alberta government's legislation. Well, it was the legislation of the Alberta government, but it was legislation of 1928. I think it's so very, very unfair for the media to portray that it's this government's legislation. I welcome the opportunity to set the record straight.

The Sexual Sterilization Act was passed in 1928 by the United Farmers of Alberta government. It was designed to allow for the sterilization of mentally disabled people to prevent those individuals from passing on mental disabilities to their children. The act reflected the social thinking of the day. It was supported in this province by many prominent doctors and activists in Alberta. The act remained in force throughout the era of Social Credit government in our province. In 1972 the newly elected Progressive Conservative government, as one of its first acts, repealed that legislation.

That, in brief, Mr. Speaker, is the background of what happened then. Now we are trying our best to resolve the matter of compensation for what took place from the late 1920s to the early '70s, before, long before, our government's time.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental question is also to the Premier. Given the confusion surrounding this matter, who exactly were these prominent doctors and activists in Alberta who supported these types of measures?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there's some very, very interesting history here, and I think this should be put on the record now. These are people who certainly would have different thinking today, but nonetheless it's quite interesting to see who these people were. Again, I appreciate the opportunity to provide the facts. There was widespread support at the time. If you'll go back, you'll see that it included the medical community, academics, and social activists. The principles were also supported by the general public at the time. They were all supported by the media. The media were totally onside at that particular time.

I mentioned that it was an act of the UFA government and continued through the Social Credit era. Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy were at the forefront of the campaign for eugenic

sterilization. Louise McKinney publicly expressed support for this legislation. So did the United Farm Women of Alberta, the National Council of Women, and another name from the past, Tommy Douglas. They all supported this legislation.

2:10

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you for clarifying that.

After all is said and done in trying to correct the sins of the past so to speak, where exactly does this government stand today?

MR. KLEIN: Certainly where we stand today is evident, and the ministerial statement of yesterday certainly presented the government's position. Our intention has always been to try and find a fair solution to a very complex, regretful situation. It was something that happened during past administrations.

We want to do the right thing for individuals and for all Albertans. We have now put in place a mechanism that will allow claims to be settled out of court quickly and avoid lengthy and costly court actions. Claimants have a clear choice to seek a settlement now or, if they wish, pursue their claims throughout the courts. They certainly can continue to go that route. As I said yesterday, this whole thing is about compassion, compensation, choice, and doing the best we can for all concerned to make things right, to correct the wrongs of many, many years ago.

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

Private Schools

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Education. With the 22 percent increase in public funding of private schools, can the minister tell us the distinction between private schools run by nonprofit societies and those run for profit like Calgary's Webber Academy? What's the difference?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, regardless of the differences between the two, I think the important thing to note is that in both cases they are educating children in accordance with the Alberta curriculum. Accordingly, this is a matter that has been taken into account by the task force that looked at private schooling. I think that is the reason we provide some funding for these schools that are providing choices to parents.

Mr. Speaker, it's not full funding. It's not a hundred percent of the instructional grant that we give to kids that would attend public or Catholic schools, but it is a portion. We believe that's part of providing choices for parents, and that's the reason that as long as the criteria are satisfied that they are teaching the Alberta curriculum and we can review it, we can in fact justify the continuation of funding going to either of those types of schools.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does this government not have a problem with subsidizing a private school business where the first priority is profit maximization?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I think it's got to be made very, very clear that these are choices made by parents of school children in the province of Alberta. Should a parent choose to send them, in the characterization of the member, to a private school run for profit or through a not-for-profit society, in either case this is a choice that is made by the parent. We believe that that choice should be funded in part.

Now again, Mr. Speaker, to make it clear, they do not receive moneys for transportation, for capital, for administration. They only get a portion for instruction. At the end of the day, making sure that these kids are learning the Alberta curriculum through whatever process these parents believe is most appropriate as an educational choice for their child is something this government supports.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's public school boards must disclose their superintendents' salary and benefits. Can taxpayers have access to similar information for the chief executive officers for all private schools?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the suggestion is made, I think, by the hon. member who asked the question that somehow there's no element of accountability for private schools. In fact there is. Ultimately private schools would make a strong argument and I think a credible argument that they're the most accountable to the people who pay tuition. Those parents make those choices on behalf of their kids, and it is their responsibility as a school to be accountable to the parents of kids that go to that school as well as to the government. We do have in place accountability features so that we are satisfied that the moneys granted to such schools are in fact being applied towards the education of children.

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

Municipal Transportation Grants

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this great province of ours there'll never be another new city despite the fact that towns such as Hinton in West Yellowhead and Brooks in Strathmore-Brooks have reached the 10,000 population plateau. They will not call themselves a city because of transportation grants. To the Minister of Transportation and Utilities: will he confirm that towns of 11,000 citizens receive more grant than cities of 11,000?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of factors that enter into the response to this. We have to measure the fact that the cities under the MGA are authorities and owners of all the roads. Towns basically have authority over their own roads. As far as primary highways are concerned, we maintain the responsibility and the authority for that, whereas in the cities the city has the authority and the responsibility in total for primary roads as well as their own local roads.

In towns the decisions are made by Alberta Transportation and Utilities regarding the primary roads. In the cities the city has full authority over making those decisions. The cities have been receiving a \$25 per capita annual grant, and this past year they had a further \$7.50 supplement to that \$25 per capita annual grant. For towns, over a seven-year period it still works out to \$25 per capita, but that money isn't an annual grant. So in some cases they have to wait for that money to come forward, depending on the priority of all of the towns. So there is a fundamental difference as to how that funding is disbursed.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is: when will the Minister of Transportation and Utilities change the grant system to population-based systems for cities and towns?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: In effect, Mr. Speaker, the population-based system is in effect for cities as well as for towns, so it is the population-based formula that is the final determination for funding.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is: for towns that have a primary highway such as the Trans-Canada, what help will be given to them if this town becomes a city, using a population-based system?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The situation regarding primary highways – of course, in the cities they get an annual grant of \$1,959 per kilometre lane on an annual basis, so in that way that helps fund the costing of ongoing maintenance. Indeed what we try to do is provide funding formulas as neutral as possible for towns and cities. Now, that doesn't always quite work out that way because indeed there are variable amounts of primary highways that go through cities or towns. Consequently one town may receive a certain amount of funding that's entirely different from that received by another community. So it isn't always exactly the same, but there is a formula, and we try to base the formula as neutrally as possible for cities or for towns.

Utilities Deregulation

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, one of the principles the Minister of Energy has established for deregulation of the electricity industry in this province is that all Albertans, not just some, will share the benefits of that deregulation. That's a principle the Alberta Liberal caucus fully supports. However, in a March 9 letter to the Minister of Energy the mayor of the city of Calgary expresses concern that nearly \$1 billion, or 20 percent, in benefits from deregulation may not be shared or returned to Albertans. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Is the mayor of the city of Calgary correct when he claims that utility customers across this province will not share \$1 billion in benefits that they would otherwise be entitled to under deregulation?

2:20

DR. WEST: Depending on the assumptions that you use. We've had people from around the world – London economics, those from Chicago and other areas where there's been deregulation – do all the assumptions they can and put it into the equation. We have come up with the most fair evaluation in the contract out to the year 2020. The answer to the questions is no, based on their assumptions.

MR. DICKSON: My supplementary question, then, to the minister: given the analysis that's been done by the city of Calgary, is this not a question of shifting approximately \$1 billion of the costs of deregulation onto the backs of utility customers, not just in the city of Calgary but utility customers right across this province?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, absolutely not.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I want to know, Mr. Speaker, what concrete steps this minister is going to take to address the obviously huge discrepancy in calculations done by the city of Calgary. They arguably have as much expertise as this minister has in his department. How is he going to reconcile that chasm, that difference between the two estimates?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, there will be continual, ongoing discussions with all parties. This is a very complex issue of the deregulation of the electrical industry. As we go forward in the debate on the bill, as it goes through second reading and committee, we will bring out many of the factors that we've used to come to our targets, bringing a fair and prudent return to the people of Alberta as well as moving forward to a competitive market industry in the province getting ready for the next century.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Seniors' Health Care Premiums

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are about the health care premium subsidy program for seniors offered by our government. There have been some media reports regarding this program that have raised concerns among some seniors in my constituency. The concerns arise around Bill 22, which was introduced earlier in the Assembly. I do not wish to anticipate debate on this bill, but I do have some questions about the subsidy program itself. My first question is to the Minister of Health. Mr. Minister, can you tell this Assembly whether you are intending to change the seniors' premium subsidy program in any way?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, contrary to reports that may have some source with the opposition here in this Legislature, there is absolutely no intention to change the low-income subsidy or premium subsidy program for seniors in this province. I would like to emphatically emphasize that. Further, I would like to point out that in the province we have a very wide coverage in terms of the premium subsidy program. According to my statistics, 58 percent of Albertan seniors pay no premiums whatsoever, and another 4 percent pay only partial premiums. It's certainly the intention to continue with that help to our senior population.

MRS. O'NEILL: My supplementary question is again to the Minister of Health. Can the minister assure Alberta citizens that there is no plan by his ministry to raise the rates of premiums to seniors?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think I can certainly confirm that once again. There is no plan to raise premiums either.

I also want to put something else on the record, Mr. Speaker. There was reference to the legislation that has been tabled with the Assembly. This piece of legislation, as the critics well know, is intended to benefit seniors by making it clear that the seniors' overall benefits program and the premium subsidy are synchronized and they start at the same date of qualifying for those programs: a very simple thing, beneficial to seniors. That's what it's intended to do.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. My second supplementary then. Given that I want the assurance, this question is to the Minister of Community Development, responsible for seniors. Can the minister tell this Assembly whether she is proposing any changes to the Alberta seniors' benefit program that would affect the premium subsidy program available to Alberta seniors?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I can assure this Assembly and all Albertans that there are no plans or thoughts by this minister or this government to change the subsidy program for

seniors. In fact I believe there is no legislation that would do that.

There are two things, Mr. Speaker, that I will base that on. One, I think I can stand on the record that there have been no changes made to seniors' programs in this province in the last two years since I've had the ministry that have been made without consultation directly with seniors in this province. I will say that, secondly, the only changes that have been made, with their advice through consultation, have been to enhance those programs. There will be no changes made to seniors' programs without consultation with the seniors in this province.

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

Well Site Reclamation

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The departments of Agriculture and Environmental Protection are holding 10 workshops across the province to get input on well site reclamation criteria and the proposed selective audit program. Although new well site reclamation criteria were circulated amongst the industry, landowners only received a brief guide and questionnaire. When this government chooses to share information, they share selectively. Will the Minister of Environmental Protection tell us why landowners have not been provided with the full 36-page list of criteria that has circulated in the oil and gas industry instead of the six-page guide that went with the questionnaire?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member indicated, the entire package of the criteria for well site – there are a lot of pages. There's a lot of very technical information in there. I know that there are a lot of farmers out there who would understand it completely, so if a farmer wants to get those criteria – it's a discussion paper. The criteria have not been established at this point. But if the farmer wishes to get those, they will be available. It wasn't that we were trying to hide anything, like the hon. member indicates. That's not the point at all, but when you have a huge number of farmers, where do you stop? Where do you start? The decision was made that they would be available on request.

MS CARLSON: They've only circulated it to about 20 farmers so far, and you've never told them that they can get the full set of criteria, that it's even available, that there even are any, Mr. Speaker.

To the same minister: has he told the landowners that once released and certified the well site becomes the landowner's responsibility? Which is a fair cry from what you used to do before. No one has told these landowners that they're going to have the cost and the liability of any further environmental cleanup on these well sites. Why hasn't he told them that?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, since there were two complete questions in that one, I guess I'll answer them both at once. The fact is that the hon. member is completely wrong again. The farmer has even a longer period under the proposal. Currently, once a well site has been certified as being reclaimed, the landowner has one year in which to appeal that reclamation certificate. Under the proposal the landowner would have five years. In other words, the landowner will have the opportunity, if it's in a grain-growing area, to grow probably four crops. There is nothing that tells the story better than a crop on a piece

of ground that has been reclaimed. You can easily compare, once there's the crop on the reclaimed area versus the crop adjacent to it. So I think that we are giving the landowner an opportunity to have a longer period of time and be more comfortable with reclamation.

Mr. Speaker, as far as any contamination, the contamination will be the responsibility of the company that drilled the well or the owner of the well site at the time of the reclamation. If the company has gone into bankruptcy or is insolvent, then the government takes on that responsibility. So I think that we are giving the landowners, the farmers, even more protection than they had before.

2:30

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, given that the opportunity the minister is now giving the landowners is that they are going to be on the hook after five years for any future costs of cleanup, which is completely contrary to the policy you have now, is he going to tell the landowners this? A person in his own department said that it is not their responsibility to inform the landowners that this change is coming?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess that the answer to the fourth question – I'll have to remind the hon. member that she obviously does not understand the difference between contamination and reclamation. Because the fact is that if it is contaminated, as I explained in my earlier answer, it's the responsibility of the company. If the company has gone broke or is insolvent, then it falls back to the government. As far as the reclamation is concerned, I'm not going to go through that long explanation again of how we are actually giving the landowner a better deal under the proposal.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: Three hon. members have indicated their interest today in providing a member's statement. We'll proceed in the following order: first of all the Member for Banff-Cochrane, then the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, then the Member for Calgary-McCall.

Winter Paralympic Games

MRS. TARCHUK: Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to update the Assembly on the progress of nine Alberta athletes who are competing in the 1998 Winter Paralympic Games in Nagano.

These exceptional athletes have already collected five of the 12 Canadian medals won to date. With two days left of competition the number may even rise higher. Canada sent 32 athletes to these games, and remarkably nine came from Alberta. They are Ian Balfour of Pincher Creek, Dave Earner of Sherwood Park, Bill Harriot of Calgary, Ramona Hoh of Edmonton, Lorraine Kelly of Edmonton, Stacy Kohut of Banff, Warren Martin of Edmonton, Shauna Rauhanen of Cold Lake, and Karolina Wisniewska of Calgary. Two other Albertans, Pierre Shweda of Edmonton and Patrick Jarvis of Calgary, are participating as coach and chef de mission at the games.

As with the incredible number of Alberta medal winners at the earlier winter games, the successes of these Paralympic athletes is evidence of the legacy left behind from the world-class facilities built for the Calgary Winter Olympics in 1988.

It is with great pride that I mention a medal-winning athlete from the constituency of Banff-Cochrane. Stacy Kohut of Banff is a Paralympic athlete in Nagano. He is a dual silver medal

winner in the men's super G and giant slalom alpine skiing events. Stacy is considered a world-class mono-skier, which is quite an accomplishment for someone who is only in the fifth year of international competition. Stacy gained this title in 1994 at the second ever Paralympic Winter Games held in Lillehammer, Norway. Since then, he has successfully competed in numerous international events, such as the world championships in Lech, Austria, where he placed first in both the downhill and super G and third in the giant slalom. Last year he placed second and third in Alpine events at the world cup held in France. Stacy has faced adversity on many levels, yet has come out a winner.

I call on all members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating Stacy and the rest of these extraordinary Alberta athletes and coaches on the Canadian Paralympic team. I wish them well and the rest of the competitors the very best during the final days of competition.

Kananaskis Country

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, this private member's statement is made on behalf of grade 6 students at Banded Peak school in Bragg Creek, Alberta.

Dear Mr. Klein:

We are not very pleased with the provincial government's management of Kananaskis Country. We live near Logan Ridge, in which you are allowing CL ranches to log. Logan Ridge has been a landmark for more than 110 years. In order to clear grazing areas, CL ranches is logging parts of this environmentally sensitive area, and we want it to stop. This is public land, so locals have a right to enjoy it. We think the company that is logging Logan Ridge should let their cows graze in Springbank, where there are open prairies.

Development in Kananaskis is like chopping down your house for firewood. You might stay warm for a while, but eventually you won't have a house or a fire. Tree roots keep the soil stable, and if they log Logan's Ridge, the soil will become unstable, and that may cause a mud slide or erosion. This directly affects us here at Bragg Creek because our soil is very shallow. Much of the soil base is on a gravel bed.

Kananaskis Country was put on this earth to provide hundreds of animals homes and for people to come and see the wilderness and not have to worry about it being destroyed. The forest plays a big part in our everyday life. With all the carbon dioxide emissions we produce, the worst thing we can do is log extensively. The trees act as filters for our air. They breath in CO₂ and breath out oxygen. They fertilize the soil so other plants can grow. They are home to many wild animals, and selective logging destroys many animals' natural habitats and homes.

Animals will start to get squished into tiny areas and will die of starvation because all their food will be gone. We have proof that the trees you cut down won't grow back. This proof is from seismic lines that were cut a long time ago and still have no plant life on them. So this is why we are writing to you, Mr. Klein, because we are concerned about nature and trees. We really think you are making a big mistake.

Mr. Speaker, the letter sent to the Premier, copied to the Minister of Environmental Protection and myself, came too late. In the short time it took these students to do their research and find their voice, Logan Ridge has been clear-cut and burned.

O.S. Geiger Elementary School

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, literacy is a necessary tool for

success in life. In particular, possessing good English language skills is critical for all Albertans.

Today I wish to recognize the efforts of one school in my riding, O.S. Geiger elementary school. This school has the highest number of funded and nonfunded English as a Second Language students. The school has adopted a positive attitude towards literacy. The staff members – whether they be in physical education, social studies, math, science, language arts, or administration – all collectively advocate for literacy and assist their student population to achieve excellence in reading and English language skills.

I had the privilege of participating in the school's reading week initiative by reading to three grades 5 and 6 classes. There were some 90 students in attendance who also had other guests read to them, including Wilma McQueen from the University of Calgary, Jamie Crysdale of the Calgary Stampeders, Ken Youngberg from Alberta Theatre Projects, Karen Daniels from KISS FM, superintendent of schools Donna Michaels, just to name but a few.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to inform you that despite the high ratio of ESL students, the O.S. Geiger elementary school's philosophy translated into excellent test scores. For the year '96-97 the grade 6 class had 92.2 percent achieve acceptable and 15.6 percent achieve excellent test scores in writing. In reading 81.3 percent scored acceptable and 14.1 percent scored excellent.

On behalf of the residents of Calgary-McCall I take this opportunity to congratulate the principal and staff of O.S. Geiger elementary school and the numerous volunteers who contribute to promoting literacy in their community.

head: **Projected Government Business**

MR. SAPERS: Under Standing Orders I request that the Government House Leader please indicate the projected government business for the coming week.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you. Notwithstanding the past events, Mr. Speaker, at 1:30 on March 16 we will be dealing with Bills 20, 22, 24, 25, 27 and as per the Order Paper. That evening we will be in Committee of Supply. Reporting will be science, research and information technology and designated supply subcommittees, Environmental Protection and Family and Social Services. That's day 19 of the main estimates.

March 17, 4:30, Government Bills and Orders, we will be dealing with messages presented in supplementary supply No. 2, general revenue fund. There are two motions for supplementary supply and lottery fund, two motions. We will also, hopefully, do second reading on Bills 20, 22, 24, 25, 27. That evening we have main estimates; lottery fund, day 1 of one; supplementary supply No. 2, general revenue fund; day 1 of two; and day 1 of one, supplementary supply, lottery fund.

Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday evening Committee of Supply, day 2 of 2, the supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund; the final estimates, day 20, reporting of Community Development, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs; and main appropriation and supplementary supply, No. 2, bills will be introduced.

On Thursday, hopefully, second reading and/or Committee of the Whole for the main appropriation and the supplementary supply, No. 2, bills and that afternoon again bills 20, 22, 24, 25, and 27.

2:40

THE SPEAKER: Before calling Orders of the Day, a couple of items.

On a purported point of order, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm referencing Standing Orders 23(h), 23(i). In the exchange of questions put by the Member for St. Albert, the Minister of Health in his response to the first question said or intimated that the opposition had misled Albertans about Bill 22 and the government's intentions. The circumstances surrounding that bill are quite contrary to that allegation created by the minister in his response.

When I saw Bill 22, I contacted the minister's office. His office assured me there was no intention to make Alberta seniors' benefit recipients liable to pay the Alberta health care insurance premium. I then wrote the minister offering to attempt to draft an amendment that would still ensure Albertans have the statutory guarantee and that the administrative challenges confronting the minister could still be addressed. The reality is and the only thing I've ever said publicly about this has consistently been that if Bill 22 passes without more, seniors who receive the Alberta seniors' benefit will lose the current statutory guarantee they have. I thought that what was an attempt to respond responsibly was to offer to work with the minister to remedy that problem. So the allegation that in some sense the purpose of the bill has been distorted by the opposition I think is (a) unfair and (b) unwarranted.

Thank you.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's point is well taken in this sense, and that is that I should have been more specific as to which section of the opposition I was referring to; that is, the leader of the third party opposition vis-à-vis a press release that seems to have been reported on.

I agree that the Health critic for the Liberal opposition has been in conversation with me. I have, as he's indicated, indicated my willingness to sit down and look over possible amendments, and I would like to clarify that.

THE SPEAKER: Well, it appears that this is more of a dispute over facts than a requirement for clarification here. There's no allegation against any individual member.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. John Day, a former Catholic school board trustee in the city of Edmonton and a well-known figure in Liberal political circles. I noticed Mr. Day come in during question period. I would ask that he and his guest please rise and receive the welcome of this Assembly.

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, just a point of clarification on

production in the question period this afternoon. Things moved along really, really well. There was one point in time that the Speaker chose not to interject, when there was a question from the hon. Member for St. Albert to the hon. Minister of Community Development, even though the estimates of the Minister of Community Development are this afternoon. The Speaker might have interjected on an anticipation rule. As a result of him not doing that, he was a bit more lenient than normal to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie in her questions to the hon. Minister of Environmental Protection. There's just a little ebb and flow and a weave and bob that has to go on periodically. Twelve sets were accomplished today, which is good.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

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

head: **Main Estimates 1998-99**

Community Development

THE CHAIRMAN: To begin this afternoon's questions and answers and explanations, we'll call upon the hon. Minister of Community Development.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, under the ministry we have a number of areas, and I have four of my colleagues that have direct responsibilities in those areas. So with the Assembly's indulgence I would like to ask that those members give the opening remarks and use the time that is available to me.

I would first ask if the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, who is chair of the Community Lottery Program Secretariat, would make some comments.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, hon. minister. Just before I begin, I would like to give a little historical overview as to how community lottery boards came to be. This program was developed as a direct result of the provincewide public consultation that took place in 1995. It was initiated by the Premier and myself along with nine other capable individuals and traveled this province as the Lotteries Review Committee.

The committee was charged with the task of consulting with Albertans about the future directions for lotteries and gaming, and one thing that came out of that consultation was that we heard repeatedly that communities and individuals and associations felt that some video lottery terminal money should be returned to their communities and that their communities themselves were in the best place to analyze and assess who indeed should get the money. So the whole development of the community lottery board program was a direct result of public consultation.

In establishing the program, it was felt that two other areas were talked about a great deal. Many people through the consultation and subsequent questionnaires sent out to some 6,000 organizations felt that it should be a new board, that the board should be community driven and have community volunteers on it, that it should not be a municipal board, nor should it be a provincially appointed board. They also felt that to put into place new boundaries would be confusing, so they said: a new board but use existing boundaries.

Initially, when I first started to work on this initiative, this

program was under Alberta Gaming and Liquor Policy Secretariat, but it was transferred to Alberta Community Development in November of 1997. Actually Alberta Community Development is the place it should be because it is a grant distribution program and involves communities and community leaders.

Over the last few weeks you have probably noticed in some of your daily papers as well as weekly papers that municipalities have been advertising for people to sit on the board. One thing that we asked is for municipalities to take the lead role and form the nominating committee to go out and seek publicly volunteers – capable volunteers, interested volunteers – who would sit on this board.

We are actually moving along very nicely. To date we have approximately 65 community lottery boards in place with their membership lists having come into the department, and those ones have been okayed and will be up and running April 1. We are working diligently through the secretariat and Alberta Community Development to assist those other areas where we don't have their names yet, but we want them to definitely be up and running by April 1.

2:50

I'm very excited about this program because it has been such a long time in the making, and I really am very satisfied and pleased that it's finally taking shape. As I mentioned to you, this goes back to 1995 but even before that, because if you recall, the Premier met with mayors from northeastern Alberta in, I believe, 1994. There they talked to him and said they wanted to see some video lottery terminal revenues returned to their communities.

This program is indeed different from other granting programs that we presently have or had in the past. It puts the granting decisions in the hands of the community, and I think that's very, very important. This program is probably one of the broadest, most flexible granting programs I've ever seen in Alberta. Having served municipally, I know of quite a few, some that were very good and some that were very bad, such as the community tourism action plan. It was one that I remember was not well received by communities or municipal leaders. But I believe this program will make a difference.

In our consultation with Albertans going back to 1995, we heard repeatedly that fund-raising activities for smaller organizations were being hurt by several factors. Certainly one was the government-sponsored gaming and lottery opportunities that are now available, and a second one was that a number of organizations were going to larger projects such as the \$100-a-ticket dream home and the larger type of prizes. So the smaller organizations that needed to raise money were having problems.

This is one thing that the community lottery board grant program is designed to help: these smaller organizations. We see this program as helping a small team that needs \$500 for new uniforms or a gym group that might need \$1,500 for new mats or a seniors' society that has a place to hold meetings but needs some new chairs. These are the kinds of things that we believe this program will be able to assist rather than those big-ticket items. We already have a number of excellent granting foundations already operating, such as the Wild Rose Foundation, Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, the community facility enhancement grant program, which is a very successful program for larger capital expenditure items.

It has been said over and over that municipalities are not part of this, but yes, they are. We believe they're very important partners in this entire process. As I mentioned earlier, we asked them to form the nominating committee and find eager, enthusias-

tic individuals to sit on this board. We believe that by this community lottery board working together with the municipality, they certainly will be able to identify community priorities and needs. Most of the municipalities have set out and done their work. We have some excellent names that have come forward to sit on these boards, and we will work with the remaining few areas over the next couple of weeks to try to get them up and running as soon as possible.

We also have asked the municipalities if they're willing to offer some support, whether that support be as simple as providing a meeting room, coffee, a photocopier, a fax machine, et cetera. We also know that in many municipalities they have staff on hand that have worked for a number of years in recreation departments or other departments where they understand and know the granting process and know the individuals seeking grants. We're hoping that these municipalities will make some of this expertise available to the board, but it will be entirely up to them.

Community Development will be handling two of the larger administrative duties. They will be cutting the cheques. Everyone knows that when you have a number of cheques that must be processed and then sent out, it does take time and money, and through Community Development that will be done. As well, Community Development will look after the postproject audit, and that is the follow-up after the organization has received the money.

We have had some very good response from many municipalities who are willing to partner with the community lottery board and provide a number of items, and we've had some very good ideas come forward over the last two or three weeks on how they will deal with this so it can be done in the most cost-effective and efficient manner. For instance, when they were setting up their nominating committee and recruiting people for the board, one municipality phoned and asked if it would be possible that when someone was making application to the board, they could require more than one copy being made so that instead of the board having to photocopy the number of applicants needed for their membership, they would come in already processed to be handed out. It's things like that.

Through Community Development and John Pryde and the other employees that have been working so diligently on this, we are going to be putting out a newsletter in the next little while, once these boards are up and running by April 1, sort of a sharing of ideas so that one community lottery board will be able to garner some expertise and some sharing and networking with other community lottery boards. As well, the foundations that are presently operating and doing an exceptional job and that have been operating for a long time will also make themselves and their staff available to assist in any way.

Through Community Development we do have regional offices throughout the province, and these people working in these offices have been brought up to speed on this program, are excited about this program, and are there to help each and every community lottery board as they become established and sit down to set their own parameters and some of their own in-house bylaws that will need to be done. We've had several meetings to date, and there seems to be a common thread here: that people are waiting for April 1, that they know there are needs in their community. Groups and associations are ready to make application, and now we just have to ensure that everyone is up to speed so that we can all come together and this can be done just as quickly as possible.

Something that was difficult in the very beginning – and I know many members of this Assembly heard this – was that municipali-

ties were very upset they were not asked to be the community lottery board. As I've said many times in many places, whether it be at the AAMD and C or at the AUMA, the very groups and organizations, the very people that this grant program is intended for did not want municipalities to be the board. They wanted it removed from provincial politics, they wanted it removed from municipal politics, and they wanted the community as a whole to decide who and what should be funded.

As I said when I spoke to the AUMA and the AAMD and C several months ago, we did receive a number of phone calls and letters from very disgruntled municipal councillors. It would certainly have been easier for me and for the people that I've been working with to say: hey, we can make municipal councils the board; we can make them responsible. But that wouldn't have been doing my job, because that isn't what we heard in 1995. It isn't what we heard when we sent out numerous questionnaires asking people: how do you see a lottery board? Today I can stand here and say that this model and what we're bringing forward is what people have told us for the last several years they want, and I'm hoping that we have given them the flexibility so that they are able to do in their own individual regions and communities what is best for them.

We certainly do have some overall guidelines in place, that we're asking them to adhere to, but once those people on that board have made the decision, that decision will be theirs. The application will come to Edmonton, where the cheque will be cut and sent out to the recipient. The authorization on that application form will not be changed. It will be the decision, and it rests with the members of that community lottery board.

3:00

I think, hon. minister, I will stop my comments now. Certainly, members of the Assembly, as you get into debate and dialogue and discussion, I'll be very pleased to answer any of your questions. Many of you individually have certainly talked to me, and I hope I've been able to answer your questions to date.

This is a new program. We haven't had a program like this in Alberta before, so it will need constant evaluation and monitoring as we go along, and through my secretariat and with assistance from the minister, the minister's office, and certainly department people, we will evaluate and make recommendations as time proceeds. But right now I think it is imperative that these groups are organized and ready to go April 1, because \$50 million has been designated in this year's budget to this program.

I will be pleased to answer questions later on. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, for the five and a half minutes remaining.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll just highlight the 1998-99 AADAC estimates. We have had an increase of \$2 million in our budget this year, and that represents a 6.8 percent increase overall. This revenue increase: \$0.7 million comes from general revenues, which is to recognize our volume and the increased services which we're providing. We also have an increase of 33 percent, allowing us \$0.75 million for our Alberta liquor and gaming services to deal with problem gambling.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Finally, AADAC's own revenue generation has increased with

an addition of 43 percent, or \$0.6 million, which are funds that we have secured through the United Nations drug control program for the delivery of a major international youth conference in Banff this spring.

In addition, we have had major commitments for AADAC in this business plan to increase our services to problem gamblers, to maintain a priority focus on our youth, and to increase our support for community programs.

Just to highlight, Madam Chairman, the increased services to problem gamblers will supply us with additional funding for research and treatment to broaden our array of services that we already have developed. In addition, we will be implementing a specific women's program at the Villa Recovery Centre for Women in Calgary and will provide some in-patient and intensive nonresidential treatment programs that are available in the province, and we will enhance that.

We're also looking at developing on the prevention side some work on the Internet, awareness through the media on problem gambling and gambling-related youth issues. We are looking at developing an interactive CD-ROM for use in schools, and we have very much confidence in the process that we're looking at for our young people. We'll also be completing a replication of our 1993 adult prevalence study, and as I've mentioned before in the House, research on addiction issues is a priority for AADAC. We will also continue our training to provide advance direction for our addiction counselors in this particular field. We're hosting an Alberta conference in 1998, cohosting with Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and we also continue to work with the hotel and restaurant association on early intervention issues and knowledge of problem gambling.

Our significant focus on youth, Madam Chairman, is something that should not be underscored. I've mentioned the United Nations drug control program. We're hosting a conference in Banff with 22 countries, with young people representing a number of issues and programs with respect to youth addictions. We are under contract with the United Nations for that, and we have in training 49 youth delegates, 10 adults drawn from across the province, and 35 youth being selected from within Alberta.

I want to just focus on our fetal alcohol syndrome initiative, that we're doing together with the Minister of Family and Social Services, and AADAC's work with the co-ordination of children's services, shared with the minister without portfolio, the Hon. Pearl Calahasen.

Lastly, I want to just acknowledge the increased support to our communities. A major partner in our communities receive grants to about 25 percent community agencies, and I'm pleased that we were able to increase by 5 percent manpower funding announced earlier by government and effective January 1 of this year.

I firmly support the work that AADAC has done, and I'll appreciate the support for our budget in estimates this afternoon.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak about the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. I've certainly enjoyed learning in the past 10 months about seniors' issues and the role that the council plays with seniors in the province. I have met with numerous seniors' groups across the province, and I certainly have appreciated the openness which seniors have demonstrated in sharing their issues and concerns.

Especially I'd like to say that I enjoyed spending time at the Hinton Good Companions club, ably co-ordinated by the MLA for West Yellowhead; also with the St. Albert Senior Citizens Club, co-ordinated through the MLA for St. Albert; Calgary Jewish Family Services; and the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society and its services to immigrant seniors. Those are just a few of the many organizations that we've seen.

Mainly I'm really happy to report that many of the concerns seniors have raised with the council have been acknowledged by the government and are currently under review. A significant number of these issues are currently being reviewed by the long-term care review committee, on which I am participating with my colleague the MLA for Redwater. Issues such as concerns with early discharge and the linkage between health and housing are but a few of the issues that we're addressing. The results of this work will be presented to the Minister of Health in the fall of this year.

Under the leadership of the Minister of Community Development the continuing review of and reinvestment in income support programs has definitely increased the number of people who receive benefits. This has definitely helped seniors across the province and has reduced the concerns presented to the council.

We've spent a lot of time this past year reviewing our mandate, developing a more focused approach, and listening to and gathering input from seniors. We have changed our structure so that we're more defined to include seven regions in the province. Council members are more responsible now for the interests and concerns of seniors from their region. The council . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry to interrupt, but the 20 minutes is up. The way it will work: they will certainly be allowed, and we'll be able to come back to this side again.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I won't say whose fault it is that all this happened.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chairman. To start today, I would like to thank the Minister of Community Development for her prompt reply to the questions that I did ask in estimates and also the thoroughness with which she supplied those answers. It was very much appreciated, and I thank you.

I left off in estimates, Madam Chairman, talking at that particular time on how skyrocketing rental rates in our fast-growing communities here in Alberta have put an incredible amount of pressure on our seniors. Continuing along the same lines, Albertans are going to be assessed the education tax, and it's going to be on the assessed value of their homes. Now, I do have a couple of examples here. These are from Jasper, which is in a unique position in the province, as are those homeowners in Banff. Because of the limited growth in those communities and the great desire of people to live there, their homes are valued much higher than any others in the province.

This particular example I have here is a house at 812 Tonquin Street in Jasper. It's a home I'm very familiar with; I spent many hours in this particular home as a youth. This year in taxes this senior is paying \$1,380, and this is a senior in her 80s. Comparable taxes for the same size of home in Drayton Valley is \$522, in Hinton \$508, and so on. So this is an example in Jasper where the education portion of their taxes, which certainly are going to

go up even more, will ultimately drive this senior out of her home. From your discussion with seniors, I would like to know if there is any consideration as to how these people in Banff and Jasper, the seniors in those communities, are going to have these issues addressed.

3:10

Here's another home in Jasper. Just so people can appreciate what these people have to go through, the estimated total tax on this home – and again, it's a 30-year-old, 1,300 square foot bungalow – in the year 2000 is \$5,780. If we look at Edson and Hinton, which are comparable communities apart from this being in a national park, their projected taxes are less than half, in the neighbourhood of \$2,400. So there are just tremendous problems that our seniors in Banff and Jasper are going to be facing.

I was wondering as well – I've brought this question up in the House before, and I've also had many phone calls from seniors – about the Premier's comments that he would rebate millions of dollars in taxes . . .

MRS. McCLELLAN: Fourteen.

MR. BONNER: Yeah, 14 per year. It's now approximately three years, and I'm just wondering if you could provide us with an update on whether the Premier has indicated he will be giving those seniors a rebate or not, please. That is another question that I have.

Another question I have come out of estimates. You'd indicated, I believe, that the average age in our lodges has grown to 85. There's certainly a number of seniors in these lodges that are in extremely good shape and function very well at 85. But some of the comments that I've been getting are that one of the reasons we've had this sudden increase from 75 to 85 in the lodges is that for many of these seniors there's no other place for them to go. Our nursing homes are filled, and there's just not enough long-term care. So our lodges are fulfilling a different role than they used to. The level of work they are doing, as far as long-term care, is certainly much greater than it was just a few years ago. Again, if you could indicate if that is indeed true and what is going to happen there.

Another question I do have for the minister is one in regards to assisted living. Are these seniors going to have more of an opportunity to live in facilities where there'll be more assisted living? It is a tremendous intermediate step. If it is going to be available, will there be government funding for it? If there is government funding for it, will it just be for construction, will it just be for operating, or would it be for both parts, as I've indicated in this particular example?

Now then, when we were talking in estimates, I was looking at program 4, services to seniors. I would like to continue with my questions, and this next section will be on the business plan summary. One goal of the business plan summary was to

ensure seniors have access to the supports they need to live in a secure and dignified way as independent and contributing members of society.

I know that in the minister's travels around the province and her frequent meetings with seniors, she knows there is no group of people in this province that are more independent, that are proud, that have great desires to live independently. They certainly do enjoy their dignity. Last year we had a goal:

to ensure lower income seniors receive the income support for which they are eligible, and government policies effectively anticipate the needs of seniors.

We have indicated that there are some pressure points presently. Are these goals being met? Particularly, one we've mentioned already, Madam Minister, is the rapid increases in rents and taxes that many of our seniors are facing.

Another question, as well, on your business plan summary: when you say that they "have access to the supports they need," what other publicly funded supports are you referring to? Again, what does "secure and dignified" mean? When will seniors be able to live in provincially regulated and monitored private homes? Is this not one way of assuring those seniors that they will live with some security and dignity?

Again, in the private group homes: what methods are we going to use or are there anticipated methods to supervise homes where seniors live where there are three or less of them?

My next question: what is being done to alleviate the shortage of long-term care facilities where they are needed? We all know that family, church, and friends are probably the most important supports for the well-being of a parent or a spouse or a grandparent, yet more and more we see seniors being torn away from these supports because they don't have easy access to long-term care facilities. What are the plans to address this particular situation?

Under major strategies, one of the goals of the government was to "improve delivery of information, benefits and protection to seniors in a multi-stakeholder environment." Again referring to last year's strategy: "coordinate the government-wide approach to planning for seniors' programs and policies." Has this been done? Is this a fait accompli? Is it all done? Given the decentralization of services, we do require a great deal of co-ordination. I'm certain you are working on it. Could you tell us how that is progressing?

Now, I know that the federal and provincial governments are presently working on memorandums of understanding where we will have the sharing of a certain portion of tax claims between the various levels of government. When will this one-step process take place where upon completion of their income tax you will have access or have permission to use the information on there to determine whether they get the ASB or whether they perhaps qualify for other provincial programs? How expansive is the regional access for seniors now? How many centres are up, in which communities, at what cost? How many staff are they running with?

Another question I had: what exactly is "a multi-stakeholder environment"? Is this anticipating more privatization of the services for seniors like home care, seniors' boarding houses, or as I mentioned earlier, even other programs such as assisted living for seniors?

Continuing under major strategies, one of our major strategies here is to "improve delivery of information, benefits and protection to seniors in a multi-stakeholder environment." Again, we do have many, many comments which are taking place, and we do get phone calls about elder abuse, not only financial but physical abuse of these people. They are a very, very proud group of people. One of the hardest things that they would ever have to do is pick up the phone and call to indicate that one of their children or a spouse they've been married to for many years has abused them in any way. Again, what programs or what increased number of programs are we doing to combat elder abuse?

3:20

Along the same lines, Madam Minister, a problem far too often associated with elder abuse are elders or seniors that turn to liquor, alcohol abuse, in order to try and hide from their problems. Again, these are questions I would like answered. How is

information, first of all, going to get out to these people? How are they going to access it? What programs do we have in place to help them along these lines?

Under your business plan summary our goal was to “develop a government-wide response to deal with the effects of an aging population on provincial programs and services.” We certainly are having an increase in seniors in the province, somewhere in the neighbourhood of 9,000 per year. These are not only our homegrown Albertans, but they also include a number of seniors that are moving in with their families, who are making a mass migration to Alberta because of the great benefits that our boom times have to all people. So we do have challenges of an ever increasing senior population.

I'm glad to see that there will be co-ordination of provincial programs and services. Specifically which departments will be involved with the provincial programs and services? Is there a time line when seniors will know of this co-ordination? Who other than provincial government officials will be involved?

I do again have to compliment you on the work you're presently doing with the various stakeholders in our seniors population and the consultations you are having in regards to them. On which programs and services do you anticipate the greatest effects from an aging population? Health care and the social housing components of Municipal Affairs seem the most obvious, but which others do you plan to involve?

A further question on your business plan summary. What has happened with respect to your seniors abuse initiative? We do have the development of a hot line. I know that everybody will agree that as we do get an increase in the senior population, there certainly will be an increase in the abuse to this particular group. If we do not provide the facilities to take care of these people, then of course family members will be forced to look after relatives because the government programs and supports will not be there.

My last question as far as this particular goal in your business plan summary is: how many calls are being received by the seniors' abuse hot line? What mechanisms are in place to ensure that the hot line is able to direct help and resources to those seniors who are being abused?

Another goal in the business plan:

Work with other provincial government departments to implement legislation that impacts seniors, including taking a lead role in the Protection for Persons in Care Act and assisting with the Personal Directives Act.

When will we be able to provide minimal provincial standards and inspection systems for those seniors who live in private group homes with fewer than four residents? There is a problem here in that there is presently no supervision. Do we have, again, a time line when we will be able to have some program in place to look after these types of private group homes or some type of inspection for these private group homes?

A second question in regards to this particular goal: why have seniors been excluded from early drafts of the domestic violence legislation? As money becomes tighter and as more and more seniors are forced to live with their children or their grandchildren or with brothers or sisters, will we not see more and more violence against seniors? Could the minister assure seniors that there will be protection for them with the domestic violence act when the act is finally put forward?

Again to the minister. Two years ago we were going to “investigate options for the regulation of residential care.” That was a highlight. What has happened to this initiative? Is this no longer a priority for seniors? Could you please give us an update

in regards to investigation options for the regulation of residential care? Now, this again is a priority in that skyrocketing rental rates and property taxes are forcing seniors out of their homes, and the abdication of this government for responsibility to provide social housing is something that we certainly must turn around so that our seniors do have affordable and safe places to live. The Seniors Advisory Council had advocated regulation of residential care for years. When will these recommendations be acted on, and when will these voices be heard in regards to this?

Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Madam Chairman, I'm going to just take a moment to answer a few of the questions. I'll ask my colleague the chairman of the Seniors Advisory Council to deal with a couple of areas that the member referred to. As I have committed to do in the past, for the areas that I'm not able to touch on, because we don't want to take up all of the time today, I will respond in detail in writing after. I know that I'll have to review *Hansard* to make sure that I didn't miss a number of the points anyway.

Some of the area of discussion around the costs to seniors, whether it's property tax, increased utility costs, those areas are of concern and interest to seniors. We must remember that the tax rebate that was in place before for seniors was rolled into the Alberta seniors' benefit program, so those dollars did go in there. In fact, I find that in sitting down with seniors and working through this, those seniors who have a lower income are today actually getting more dollars than they were under the old program. The difficulty is in the way it comes. Of course, your tax bill comes once a year, and you really feel that impact. So we've been looking at that and working with seniors and with some communities and saying: let's look at monthly payments and setting up schedules for people to alleviate that.

3:30

One of the areas, though, that I think is important for me to comment on, as I've said to the hon. member, is that we are going to be doing a review of the overall impact of our aging population on government programs and policies. We hope to announce just how that process will work very shortly. The area of housing, long-term care, that the member alluded to, is part of that, and the hon. Minister of Health has initiated that part of the review under the leadership of the Member for Redwater, and of course that will feed into the process. The same with the housing issues that are there. Much of the housing is in the Department of Municipal Affairs, so that will be a part of it. So it's really important that we look at this overall impact.

Today the way we can respond to seniors – and I think we have responded very successfully to seniors – is through the special needs assistance program. I will say again today that this is one of the most positive, successful programs that we have initiated. Why? Because it was developed in consultation with seniors. We sat down with the interagency council, and many times when we were looking at the cumulative impact of changes to seniors' programs, a number of the leaders in the seniors areas – and I hesitate to mention any because there are many, but Mr. Neil Reimer has worked very hard in this area, Dave Conroy, Jerry Pitts, Hazel Wilson. There are just so many of them that have reached out to their communities; the folks at the Kerby Centre, Noreen Mahoney there. They've all talked to seniors and fed the information back to us. They said there was a real concern that a senior might have an emergency that they couldn't respond to.

I mentioned in estimates the other evening – and I think it bears

repeating – that when we were designing the program, I challenged my department to answer this question for me: if there is a senior whose furnace goes down at 4 o'clock in the afternoon on the 23rd of December, on a Friday, and it's 40 below, what do they do? Well, the answer was that they could apply to the special needs assistance program. My question was then: when would they get a response? The answer was: it could be as long as six to eight weeks to process an application. My department and I all realized that this simply wouldn't do. So we put in place a process through that program where our regional people, our staff people, can respond right now. In fact, as I mentioned the other night, we had something like that happen almost to a T. The dates were different, but it actually happened, and within – I believe it was two hours; do I see some nods up there? Within two hours that was responded to. That's the way a program for special needs for seniors has to work, and that's the way it is working.

I'm sure you've had letters and calls and comments. I know I sure have, and it makes me feel good that we listened to seniors. They told us their concerns, and we were able to respond.

We're doing the same thing with our regional offices or our seniors' centres. Again I have to look for a nod. I think we have 11 up and running. I might be wrong; maybe it's 12. But it's right around there. They're around the province, and I have to tell you that the seniors really like them. They can come in and sit down with our staff. I get very good comments about my regional staff from the seniors: they're kind, they're compassionate, they're understanding, they take the time to listen, and they can do it privately. Seniors are no different than any of us in this Assembly. We do not want to stand at a counter and explain our private and personal concerns to somebody with everyone else looking on. That's what I talk about: being treated with dignity and with compassion. So it's working extremely well. I've had an opportunity to visit a number of them, and I hope to get to them all.

What seniors don't like is phoning and getting an automated – and I don't like it either. You know, I don't like, "Push 1 if you want this, or push 2 if you want that." By the time you get through the menu, you have forgotten what you really wanted, and then you have to go back through it all. So we said: no, that is not going to happen with Alberta seniors. Our 1-800 line is answered by real people.

If you ever get a chance, maybe talk to them a little bit ahead if you want to see that actual operation. I was over to take the 500,000th call on that line, and I can tell you it was a surprised senior. "This is the minister." It was sort of like, "Right." When I said, "If you'd stay on the line, my staff would want to talk to you after," then there was really a "Right," from the sound of it. I did receive a letter from that senior afterwards. It was really quite a unique experience. If you could witness the people actually in action – you have to remember, if you visit there, that it would be kind of monitored because these are private calls. But you should just see how that centre works and how kind and thoughtful the people are who work in that area. If you ever want to give some accolades to people who are public servants – and they should get some once in awhile – find some for the seniors' division, because they're wonderful over there. They really are.

I want to tell you about a number of new housing initiatives, but a bunch of them . . .

MR. MITCHELL: Teachers should get accolades too.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Sure, they should.

MR. MITCHELL: And nurses.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Absolutely.

MR. MITCHELL: And lawyers.

MRS. McCLELLAN: The odd one.

I want to talk about some new housing initiatives. You know, you have a lot of them in Edmonton, and I can tell you that Alberta is in the leadership position of new housing and innovative housing initiatives. There is a new one that is just going to open in Edmonton in the next months, and I can't remember if it's Kensington – I got it right: Kensington Village. There's Canterbury Court; of course it's in existence. There's Wedman House, which is a type of assisted living. I can tell you that when Wedman House opened, which is operated by the Good Samaritans, it was a first in Alberta and, as far as I know, a first in Canada. So really we are leading in that area. It doesn't mean we can't do better, learn more.

Do you know how those things are happening? They are actually sitting down with seniors or to-be seniors, like some of us, and saying, "What kind of housing is appropriate and meets your needs?" Then you design it for that. Isn't that clever, that you would actually design it for the person who's going to live in it? I thought it a novel and new idea, and we should do that. It is happening, and it's really happening through some of our very good nonprofit groups and it's happening with the private sector.

Medicine Hat is another area that has a very high seniors population, and the choices in housing there now are incredible. But we have to look at our own housing and talk about how appropriate it is for today. I think the important thing is that we continue to dialogue with seniors and that we continue to improve our programs for seniors to meet the seniors' needs of today and tomorrow, and that's what I think we're moving into now.

I want to ask the Member for Calgary-West, the chairman of the Seniors Advisory Council, just to comment a little bit about that consultation, because some of the areas that you have mentioned are areas that have been identified to me through the interagency council – we're going to have a new name there, but I'll use that name for now – and what the Seniors Advisory Council initiatives are for consulting with seniors in those really important areas. I know you have a lot of other questions, but I want my colleague to make a few comments, and I want to make sure other members can get in.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

3:40

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to carry on from my little talk earlier. I certainly benefited from the questions that were posed from across the way a few minutes ago.

I certainly agree with the minister that dialogue and communication with seniors is very important. I also have realized that we should not only ask for their issues and concerns, but we should be asking them for input – what works well, what new ideas they have, or what new programs they have tried or seen – ask in a proactive sense, and be willing to incorporate these ideas. I know that in the work that I have been doing now with the hon. Member for Redwater with the long-term care review, we have been doing that. We're just starting, really, on this process. I

think we should invite seniors to be involved in a more innovative, creative way. Everything is not only driven by concerns and issues. We know basically what some of these issues are.

I want to just make one comment on information and then get on to some issues that we will be looking at. I would say that at the annual information workers' workshop, the one that we held in '97, we had over 170 participants, and they were frontline workers with seniors. They benefited by up-to-date, accurate information on programs on issues for seniors. So I think, again, that the continual information and availability of information for seniors is very important.

We are also going to be embracing, all of us, I hope, the International Year of Older Persons in 1999. With Senior Citizens' Week coming up, and going on into '99, we definitely have identified a number of areas that we're going to do research in, and there may be some partnership programs on some of this.

Definitely a few of the ministers touched on housing. Again, with the long-term care review we're looking at options in housing for seniors. You mentioned assisted living, hon. member. I have to say that I feel the best experiences in life are the ones that are personal, that we've lived ourselves. I think the maximum learning comes from those. Tomorrow I'm going to be in Calgary moving my mother into a new assisted-living home, and I've gone through the multitude of steps that it takes when you find out your rented building has been sold to be condominiumized, the trauma that you go through. Where do you go? Can you finance it, and how? I think there are probably a number of senior citizens out there similar to her. You know how their beliefs are: "I pocket this all away. This is for my family; it's not for me to touch. I might take some interest earned." But you can make that money work for you, and if you have to purchase your own assisted-living environment and home, this will provide you with a better lifestyle. Do you maybe know what I'm saying with that approach? I think that private industry should be encouraged to develop more of these types of accommodations for seniors that can afford them.

I know there's a concern with seniors who are living in their own homes and want to stay there and are living on a fixed income. As property values increase, they have a problem with paying their taxes. But they also have other concerns such as regular maintenance. I'm not talking about emergency maintenance but regular. I know that in this committee we are talking about community-based approaches to help seniors stay in their own homes as long as they possibly can.

Aging in place or, as I've mentioned, assisted living. I think there are some partnerships out there, in Edmonton and Calgary in particular, but we are looking for models around the province that are successful, and those are the ones that we will encourage in the future.

There are many other issues, and I look to next year studying a number of seniors' issues: financial advice to seniors; transportation has been identified as another concern. Again, that more affects the home-based or the seniors that are living in rental facilities.

I also look to encouraging seniors to help us come up with some creative solutions. Last night I was reading about NEST. Have you heard of that in Edmonton, the North Edmonton Seniors Transportation? They were given some seed money from the Capital health authority. It's seniors working together but also with the community.

I know that Mrs. McClellan referred to the impact on aging study, which I think will be very important on a long-range basis.

The federal seniors' benefit – the legislation isn't introduced. The Seniors Advisory Council plans to do research material on that and then from there advise seniors as to the choices that they will have to make, in particular – we call them soon-to-be seniors – the baby boomers.

Basically, for the Seniors Advisory Council we have decided that next year we really need to focus on moving around the province, increasing the groups of seniors that we meet with. Again, as I've mentioned, I think we should be asking them to give us their ideas as to what to do.

Just for information, for the other side probably more than anyone, our budget is unchanged from the current year's budget. We plan to continue, as I said, with moving around the province, with educational initiatives. For instance, last year we funded the first National Aboriginal Symposium on Aging here in Edmonton, and we were certainly happy with the results of that.

Before I leave, I would like to thank Dave Arsenault, who is the general manager for the Seniors Advisory Council of Alberta, and Carole Ching, the co-ordinator, who gives us a lot of support. I know that for me as an MLA I have many other responsibilities, so I certainly appreciate that and also the department's seniors' programs. I would also like to publicly thank the members of the Seniors Advisory Council. These members are people of our province who live throughout the province.

MR. CARDINAL: Like Glen Clegg.

MS KRYCZKA: Like Glen Clegg, yes. Some are almost as far away as Glen Clegg, but they travel to wherever the meetings are. They're very committed to their jobs and concerned about seniors' issues.

I just want to again state that I look forward to working next year with this group and to studying seniors' issues in more depth and coming up with some solutions along with my MLA friend here from Redwater. I know we have lots of challenges, but I think there are opportunities ahead of us to solve the problems that we have heard in the last while.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd just remind members that we don't use proper names. We do address people by either their ministry or their constituency.

The hon. leader of the ND opposition and hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Chairman – Madam Chairman, pardon me. I do it all the time; don't I? But I won't say your name.

A couple of observations first. Number one is under arts and libraries. This is line item 2.1.2. You'll see the figure of, let's call it, \$1.9 million compared to last year's budget, which was nearly \$2.3 million. I can't understand why that amount is down. Of course it constitutes an increase over the worst of the cutting years, but what concerns me – and there is no breakdown. I know it says that there's \$53.2 million going for arts, heritage development, recreation, sport, and volunteer services. I don't understand why funding for the arts, in particular, is down as drastically as it has been over the last five years. [interjection] Oh, sorry: page 79 and page 72; page 72 for the figures and page 79 for the Community Development business summary.

This is an industry that for every dollar of public money put into it generates more than three dollars in revenue for the

government. I will just give you a contrast here. We know that one of the most heavily subsidized industries in Canada is agriculture. I'm not going to blame this government, because it was the Trudeau government that insisted upon what they called the cheap food policy. They initiated it. I disagreed with it as an economist, and I still disagree with it. I'm not blaming this government, because all of the provincial governments are pretty well forced into lockstep on this issue. Just have a look at page 47 of the budget for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; support for production, processing and marketing: 35 and a half million dollars. Then you go to page 51, agriculture insurance and lending assistance, and you've got \$156 million. Well, that's nothing – I mean that's an awful lot of money compared to the money that's going into the arts. I don't understand, considering the economic generator that the arts have demonstrated themselves to be, why we – you guys, the government – are so tight-fisted on this matter.

3:50

In program 2 back on page 72, the human rights and citizenship component we see is down from \$2.69 million – let's call it \$2.7 million – to \$2.18 million, and I'll round that up to \$2.2 million. That's a significant drop. I suspect what it means is that less time and effort is being devoted to issues related to human rights. All the boards and commissions that we used to have that stood as independents are now rolled into the one, and I'm not convinced Albertans are well served by that kind of funding decrease.

The only other thing that I would like to mention has to do with the seniors' benefit. Well, first of all, I don't understand why, if the government is willing to start spending a little bit more money, as it is when you look at the financial assistance – last year it was budgeted at \$184 million; it's up to \$186 million. It's a tiny amount. However, what I don't understand is why the Alberta Council on Aging is not being funded. I mean, that organization did phenomenal work, continues to do phenomenal work, and instead of dedicating their time to doing that work, they're having to do fund-raising so that they can get their newsletter out. That to me is a pity.

On the seniors' benefit, the ASB, page 74, I see what was budgeted last year is \$135.5 million. We're down to \$133 million. I also don't understand that, when you consider that seniors – if you want to isolate a demographic that took the biggest cut in program support, it was the seniors. I heard the Minister of Community Development say: well, you know, don't worry about the homeowner tax relief that we used to have; we rolled it into ASB. I was pleased to hear her say that she's working on maybe providing some kind of monthly support so that you don't get, you know, stuck with one gigantic bill once a year from your municipality, but I have a hard time swallowing that.

When I look at the figures that the ACA gave me last year – and I referred to them I think last year – it looked to me like the total package of benefits for seniors had decreased by a total of 30 percent. That does not impress me. These are the people who built the province. They're still paying their taxes if they've got earnings that get to that level. I'm very dubious about Bill 22, which I won't talk about because we're in estimates, but I certainly don't want to see them having to start paying health care premiums if they qualify for the Alberta seniors' benefit program.

Finally, I would like to say on the special-needs assistance operations that I was delighted to hear the Community Development minister's response on how those things are handled: putting a real priority on that program and on personalized service and

immediate service, and no phone message that says, you know, that if you want help here dial 1, if you want help in another area dial 2, et cetera, et cetera, and otherwise we're just going to leave you on ignore. That's what my mom used to call it. She used to say: Pam, they put me on ignore. I loved it. [interjection] Now, you watch out, you FIGA – you're not a FIGA minister anymore. Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs minister, I'll save some comments for you.

I just remembered one more thing about seniors that I wanted to mention. I have a lot of confidence, by the way, in the Minister of Community Development. I've worked with her on issues for many years. She was always ready. If I didn't like something she was doing when she was Health minister, she was always ready to come out in the back and talk it over with me. You know, we got along very well. I was her critic for several years, and we're still friends. Isn't that something? We're still friends, and I was her critic.

I do have one concern that the member responsible for the seniors – whatever it is. I can't get my reading glasses on fast enough, folks. I'm a soon to be a senior I reckon. I had to go to bifocal glasses and reading glasses when I'm wearing my contacts. It's the group homes the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry talked about, and that was the group homes for seniors. Not only are they unregulated if they have four beds or less, but I am aware of a situation which I would like the government to investigate. If you can give me a square answer on it, I'll privately give you the name of the company. I don't want to say it on the record.

One outfit operates a group home for up to six seniors. They pay the approximately \$840 a month that they would be paying in any of the long-term care facilities; that's standard. Then on top of that they're paying \$500 a month for what are supposed to be medical benefits. There is no nurse on staff in the daytime. The woman who owns this operation is a nurse. She goes out and works in the daytime. She comes home at 6 o'clock at night and she's there. It's her home; of course she's there. But she's not actually working unless somebody needs medical attention. They say: well, you know, if anybody needs medical attention, we can call and get that. Yeah. Well, anybody can call 911. I'd like to know what this extra \$500 a month is for, and I will slip across in a minute and give the name to the minister.

Thank you very much.

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

Sorry. Go ahead, hon. Minister.

MRS. McCLELLAN: I just have two or three or four really quickly, because there were some direct questions on budget element 2.1.2. Some of those changes are simply a reallocation of dollars. For example, each area is contributing to the *Connections* magazine. As you know, we have one magazine. Most of you have read *Connections*. You know it's a pretty good – I think excellent – magazine actually. Each area contributes to that, whether you're in seniors or libraries or different areas, so there have been some transfers there. Some of the dollars were transferred to the field offices. As we indicated, we want to make those field offices user friendly. We want to make them warm people places. So there was a transfer there.

Human rights and citizenship. Of course you know there was an amalgamation of services there. I'm pleased to tell you that in fact it gives more service, particularly to human rights. It's a better division of staff, where if they are needed in one area, they

can be there, and if they aren't, then they do their other work. So it was a better alignment of staff, and it has given I think up to eight more persons for, say, the human rights area when they need them. You know, we've been fighting with keeping our waiting times down, so that made some changes there.

The seniors' benefit grant, although it looks like it's down, is not down because of any reduction in dollars in the program. It is down because the seniors who are accessing the program, the new seniors that are coming on, frankly are more affluent in many cases than seniors were years ago, so there isn't the draw on the program. The benefits have stayed the same, the criteria have stayed the same, but it is needs based and it is income tested. And I will remind all hon. members that it is not asset tested, nor would I ever recommend that it would be, because I think it's important that seniors have their homes and are able to stay in them.

If you look a little further, then you will see that the special-needs assistance program was at \$5 million. Our estimate is that we will spend \$10 million on it this year, and we're looking at \$7 million next year. So there has been a reallocation of some dollars. It's not that we have less; it's just that we've moved them around to have that flexibility. Again, I think the special-needs assistance program has performed very, very well. If hon. members have any ideas as to how we can make it perform better, I'm happy to hear those.

On the regulation of group homes I think you make some very good points. Where you run into the issue and the debate and the dialogue on that is those homes that are under four. I think there's a line that you have to watch, where you do have the opportunity to make sure that they are at a level and yet do not infringe on people's personal ability to make decisions for themselves as to their choice of homes.

I think that's one that we need to have more dialogue on. It's one where the Seniors Advisory Council is definitely talking with seniors and others. It's an area that will be discussed when we look at the overall impact of our aging population and new housing opportunities for seniors. I think it's a very good point: how do you protect those who are vulnerable and need that protection and not infringe on their right to make their own choice as to where they live and how and what they pay? That's where you run into that difficulty under four.

Those were just some of the highlights that I wanted to cover. I would appreciate getting that name from the hon. member. I know there are some other points that I didn't hit, and I will answer those in detail in written form.

4:00

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Well, Madam Minister, we meet again. And I'm pleased that we meet again, because I found it really distressing that the opposition members only had 48 minutes in our last meeting to debate the entire budget of \$350 million, I think it is, which is truly a travesty in my opinion.

Since I had the opportunity to debate estimates 10 days ago, I have been able to meet with some of the professional arts groups in Calgary, and I've certainly heard from some of the Edmonton groups and sports and recreation groups as well. I will thank the minister for the prompt response to some of my questions. I'll be going over those that were not answered and bringing up a few new points that have been brought forward to me.

My overriding concern with the estimates from this department and with past annual reports is a lack of accountability and a lack of information. I believe that the money to the groups that are responsible for producing the arts and culture, sports and recreation, and a number of other quality of life activities in this province is being reduced. I'm having a hard time finding that out. I can see the minister looking at me with a perplexed look. Frankly, when I look at these budget estimates and I get a five-line description and out of any of those five lines they break down to no more than six subsections, this is not information. I have groups phoning me from all over Alberta asking for information on how this department works. They don't understand it. They're asking department staff, and I don't know whether department staff can't or won't give them the information.

By the way, I'm aware that department staff have joined us here today. I would like to thank the staff for the hard work that they do. I know they're under tremendous pressure in a lot of areas. I know their hearts are in the right place and they're working hard on behalf of these groups, and I do appreciate it. Nonetheless, I set the bar high here, and I'm not backing down on that one.

So out of these five lines that I mentioned in the budget under programs 1 through 5, these five lines represent all of the amateur sports in the province, sports games, recreation, arts and culture, both amateur and professional, historical sites and resources, libraries, museums, professional archives, volunteers, multiculturalism, women's issues, human rights, the community lottery boards, AADAC, and seniors. In addition, the Wild Rose Foundation; Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation; Alberta Foundation for the Arts; Alberta Historical Resources Foundation; human rights, citizenship and multiculturalism education fund. That's an awful lot of groups to be under here, and essentially they represent all of the quality of life in this province. I will certainly agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands that not enough money is in this department considering what they are giving us. We know how important it is. When companies are choosing whether to make Alberta their home, when people are trying to decide whether to move here and make Alberta their home, they look for quality of life. I feel very strongly that we are not funding any of these groups well enough.

[Mrs. Laing in the chair]

The community groups are quite clear with me that they cannot get the information. When annual reports are requested from the department, including a request from this hon. member for the annual report, they are given only section 1 of volume 1 of the annual report and not volume 2. I'd like an answer as to why that's happening, and if it's an oversight, could I request that that be dealt with. I note that by statute the annual reports for all of the foundations are to be tabled, including financial reports. What we have now is the consolidated report, which is really not giving very much information if someone is trying to answer their own questions. If I could make a suggestion to the minister: people would be less likely to be suspicious that there are dark doings going on in that department if they could just get the information.

Yes, there's eye-rolling from the minister, but I am passing on information in a genuine way from community groups who've contacted me who cannot figure out what is going on and cannot get the information to deal with it. If this is open and accountable government, then let's have it. We should be able to just have that information out there for people to be able to answer their own questions, rather than developing suspicions when they can't get the information.

Some questions from the Edmonton community that have come

up. They have always been told that there was \$16.1 million in there for AFA. Recently they're being told that there's \$15.3 million for AFA. The obvious question is: why the difference? They're, of course, very concerned about that and would like to know from the minister why they are now being told different amounts of money.

In the Calgary community the big question of the day was: given the responses from the Auditor General recently about his desire to have audits required from any group at all that is receiving government money, including grant money, will there be money forthcoming from the department or perhaps the Auditor General or any other department that is going to compensate these groups if they have to pay for an audit? Many of them are small groups. They cannot afford the anywhere from \$3,000 to \$6,000 that is an average amount for a professional audit to be done on them. In some cases it could totally negate the grant they're receiving for their operating grant, and in other cases it would make a significant dint in it. So if this is going to be required and it's coming down the line, then what assistance will be given? I don't think you can put them in that position.

A couple of other questions. What's happening with the current Percy Page Centre staff? Where will they be in the future? What is happening with the Calgary office? Also, a note from a member of a group that's in the Percy Page Centre that they're getting a little tired of musical consultants. By my count this particular group has now gone through one, two, three, four different consultants in about a 14-month period. We know that the department staff are the ones who help groups fill out their operating grant. If you do a good operating grant and it's presented well, obviously you're going to be looked upon with more favour, and these staff are no longer available. I mean, these people don't even seem to know who their current consultant is. I don't know why this fast shuffle is going on. This would be specifically under the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation.

Another question. The Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation spent a great deal of money renovating the Percy Page Centre in order to bring the staff in. Then the staff were moved over to the Standard Life building. So far, only two people have been moved. Why was the money spent on the renovation in both areas for two staff to be moved?

4:10

I understand that the sports and recreation groups have been told that they will be on status quo for their grants for the next three years. In going through the annual reports, I notice that they in fact had a cut between '96 and '97, so I'm confirming that the status quo is the 1997 figure, which will continue for the next three years.

I had mentioned before an explanation on why, when groups that are in the Percy Page Centre had a 20 percent reduction – 5 percent one year, 10 percent, and then 5 percent – imposed on them, they were told at the time that this was initiated in order to be able to install sports games personnel. I think some of those groups are wondering why the recreation groups were required to take a cut to accommodate sports games personnel. If the minister could give me a response on that.

I have some questions based on the responses that I got from the minister. Again I'm still trying to figure out where the money saved has actually gone, because it doesn't look to me like it's actually going into the grants that go out into the community organizations that provide the activities for people. It looks to me like the foundations are in fact paying for the staff in the depart-

ment, which is not my understanding of the deal. If I am reading this wrong, please, please, oh minister, enlighten me. I would love to hear a different answer, because that's not the one I'm getting out of this. This is where the frustration is. If we could just get the straight answers on this, then the suspicion wouldn't be mounting. But it sure looks to me like any money that was saved from any consolidation, when you follow it through, the staff are transferred into the department – and most of the foundations had very little staff to begin with. The staff had been transferred into the department, and then they're being billed. In effect, the foundation is paying back the expenses of the staff people now in the department.

So we have a limited amount of lottery funds that are going into these lottery foundations. Those grants are to go out into the community to pay for the activities. We're essentially having the administration money siphoned off that going to pay for this staff. I can't get the answer, Madam Minister, so I would sure love to have it. A lot of people would be reassured by that one. I'd like to see it in black and white, please.

In one of your responses to me in response to question 10 – and here's where you can clarify perhaps – it's saying that there's money to cover the integration of foundation technical staff into the department. Foundation technical staff moving into the department. Two sentences later it says that an agreement has been made for the reimbursement of these expenses from the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation to the department. It sure sounds to me like the foundation is paying for staff that are now inside the department. That would be using lottery funds, which are supposed to be used by these groups, to pay for staff that are now in the department. That's my concern. I think I'm seeing that lottery money is subsidizing the Department of Community Development. Okay?

A second example. Ah, yes. Community lottery boards, VLT money. Hmm. According to the answers, the way I'm reading them here, indeed the \$1 million that was to pay for administration or the \$1 million administration fee that went along with the \$50 million for the community lottery boards – again, my understanding was that that money was from VLT proceeds, video lottery terminal proceeds, and that money was to go out into the community. It was not to be paying the department to do something. My reading of this is that out of that extra million dollars, there's \$275,000 for the new community lottery boards program. This will pay for additional PSC cheque processing costs and accounts payable and audit staff. There will be an increase of five full-time employees related to these functions. It sure sounds to me like the money from the VLT fund, which was supposed to be going into the community, is now paying for staff, and \$275,000 is a lot of bananas to pay for somebody to cut the cheques, especially when the community groups were asking for that money.

I'm glad the minister finds this amusing. I'm sure she will share the joke with me.

MRS. McCLELLAN: I actually will tell you how amused I am in about six minutes.

MS BLAKEMAN: Great. I am looking forward to it. All I'm asking for is the information. If we just could have had it in the first place instead of a five-line explanation, we'd all be a lot happier, Madam Minister. All we're asking for is information. So if your response is less than happy about asking for information, I guess that tells us something too.

I notice that I had asked a question about the municipal recreation/tourism areas operating grant. It's now funded from a surplus of the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. I'm wondering why there's a surplus in the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. Given that the groups had to take a 5 percent, 10 percent, and 5 percent cut, why does this foundation have a surplus? Why wasn't that surplus used to fund these organizations?

On to women's issues. I see the response from the minister and I understand what she's telling me, but I still think there's money that needs to be going directly into assisting the status of women in this province. The minister was able to identify \$23,000 of grant money, most of it from the multiculturalism and citizenship education fund, but we know that whenever women's issues and status of women issues are rolled underneath another division, they are subrogated. They disappear, and specific funding does not come to them.

And \$23,000 for women's programs in the province of Alberta is a pittance. It doesn't even have to be cash money. It could be support. It could be lobbying. It could be advocacy. It could be information. Where's the support for any kind of gender-specific employment training for women? Where's the support for women specifically as part of the family when we look at domestic violence? Where is the support for midwifery services being included under health care? Where is the support for women with mental health problems? A huge problem, and women's mental health problems are different. Where is the support for minimum wage and all of the other poverty issues that are affecting women so dramatically in this province? What's been said to me is that there's a lack of government recognition that every piece of legislation affects men and women differently, and I don't see the gender analysis. If it's being done, it is not being shared. Please share that with the community. They need the information. Where is the support for women with children and their child care concerns? Where's the support for women with disabilities?

I have a specific question. Has the department changed its policy or its priority on funding amateur and professional groups? The question has to do with why a group was recently told they would do better on their grant application if they didn't include the professional artists' fees. The organization ended up thinking that somehow this was going to work against them, if they admitted they had professional artists and paid professional artists' fees. Has there been a department change? Is there a priority now on amateur arts organizations as compared to professional arts organizations? If I could get an explanation from the minister on that one.

To wrap up – and I understand the minister will elucidate and illuminate shortly – a huge concern about accountability, and I share that concern. We cannot get information. When we ask for the annual report, we only get one-half of it. We don't get the finances. Nothing is showing in here. Certainly those quality of life groups do not feel supported by this minister. Now, she will say not the groups she's heard from. But I've got to tell you, I'm hearing from more and more groups every time, and I'm trying to work with the minister here to make this whole area better for the people in Alberta.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I'll express a real concern that we are choking off those quality of life organizations in this province. I know that it's difficult to look at increased support in these areas when we're having such

a crisis in health care and education and a number of other areas. But, you know, one of these days we will get those areas under control, and when we turn around and almost nothing is left in any of those quality of life areas, we're not going to be very happy puppies here and we're not going to be able to entice the kind of value-added manufacturing and diversified economy that I keep hearing we want to see in this province.

Those are the questions that I have at this time. We have the rest of the afternoon, so hopefully I'll be able to get up with more of my questions. I'll look forward to the minister's response.

Thank you.

4:20

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would ask for unanimous consent for recognition of two constituents.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Could I have unanimous consent of the committee to revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, hon. member.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's my pleasure today to rise and recognize two constituents from my constituency of Fort McMurray. We have seated in the public gallery this afternoon Robert Ladouceur,* a Rotary exchange student who's on his way to Red Deer for a leadership convention with his mother, Linda. They are very active in their community. They have risen already, and I'd ask that we extend a very warm greeting from the members of this Assembly.

Thank you.

head: **Main Estimates 1998-99**

Community Development (*continued*)

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Madam Chairman, I had intended to allow another member to speak, but I think we need to clarify a few things here. I really am quite surprised at the last 20 minutes of discussion. I am surprised to hear that a member in this Assembly can't get information from my department or that community groups cannot get information from my department.

I know that we get many written requests. I've had as many as 400, I think, in the last year, and every one of them has been responded to. My staff and I went to considerable effort to get the answers to as many of the questions as we possibly could from our estimates last week in the members' hands before today so they could get them back and review them. I think that speaks to this department's commitment to sharing information.

What really shocks me is that a member in this Assembly will tell me that they can't get answers, and I have not had a phone call from that member, I have not had a note from that member identifying a group that's having a problem. That to me is very, very serious. I can't believe that. I have worked with members across the floor in this House for years, and I have never

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

experienced that. If a member has had a problem or if a group identifies one, they've sent me a note and we've dealt with it. I can't believe that members are actually getting this kind of query, this kind of concern, and they are not sharing it with the minister. I absolutely cannot believe that. The reports are there for the asking.

I'm going back to my files to see where you have requested, hon. member, volume 2 of an annual report, and I sure hope I find that request because I've been told today that you couldn't get it. Maybe you could find the copy of the letter to me requesting it. I am absolutely surprised.

I will make a little trip over to Percy Page – and I know my department is listening – and I'll sit down with these sports associations collectively. I meet with them individually often and I haven't heard this. I hope there aren't two sets of messages, one for the minister and the department and one for somebody else, because I haven't heard this.

The Percy Page building is occupied by our sports associations, and frankly they tell me they appreciate that accommodation. The Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services houses our sports associations. We provide dollars for them to have staff there. We don't hire their staff for them. We give them the money and say: you hire the staff that's most useful to you. Now, if you're telling me that our associations don't like that situation, then I want to have some specifics from those groups that are saying that, because I guess we could change that arrangement. But my understanding is that the folks at Percy Page like it there. They like having the assistance from this government for our nonprofessional sports organizations, and they like the autonomy of being able to hire their own staff. We can certainly revisit that, but I will be asking them exactly who identified that problem with this hon. member and if they're dissatisfied with what's happening. Yes, there were some changes made in where staff were located. That is strictly for efficiency.

If the hon. member had really listened closely at the last estimates, she would have understood that \$1.5 million in savings from those amalgamations are going directly back to those very community groups that this hon. member says aren't getting enough money. In sitting here now, I can understand why this hon. member doesn't know the answers obviously. The discussion has been held, the minister is attempting to answer, and the hon. member I don't think is paying very close attention, if any.

Anyway, I'll repeat it one more time for her benefit. Through these savings \$1.5 million, which were spent on inefficient administration before, from those foundations are going directly back to the communities, \$1.5 million additional savings.

The Member for Lacombe-Stettler is chairing the lottery program secretariat. The chairs of all those foundations came together, and they designed the human resource component. It wasn't the Department of Community Development that designed that; it was the boards themselves. Now, I think this may be a strange phenomena to the opposition, that we would give decision-making to someone else rather than have everything controlled by us, but you know, they made good decisions. By those good decisions they lowered the administrative costs of one foundation that was at about 7 and a half percent down to about 3 percent. So they're all running at about 3 percent. There's one at 2 and a half percent. That's a responsible use of the money, because where do those dollars go? They go to the community groups.

The other is the appalling lack of understanding of the community lottery board program. Hon. Chairman, I thought the Member for Lacombe-Stettler explained that in depth. The

commitment of this government was to give \$50 million of video lottery terminal money to the communities. Consultation again with municipalities suggested that some costs were going to be high. They identified them, not me.

Cheque writing: now, the hon. member thinks that cheque writing is cheap, but write 20,000 cheques and find out what the cost is if you think we charge too much. Audit: they told us that reporting and tracking would be onerous for them, so we said, okay, we'll take that responsibility. Developing their own advertising, their own brochures, and all of that information would be costly for them, so we did it, made it available. I had copies at the last estimates for any hon. member to look at, and they can be used generically in any community. So we took that on.

That million dollars is not out of the \$50 million. That is over and above. That is money that this government has committed to administration in that program. So the \$50 million, frankly, hon. member, is going to the communities that it was committed to. I absolutely cannot understand why this is difficult to understand.

MRTA. Why did the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation have a surplus? Well, frankly, something that might be difficult to understand across there: good management. It was not that the money wasn't spent when it was needed. It was because money was spent as it was needed, not just to get rid of it. We should be applauding those groups that hold a surplus, not suggesting there's something wrong.

We talked about accountability. I believe that the Auditor General understands the need for accountability. I believe that the Auditor General also understands community organizations, and I do not think that the Auditor General is going to ask us to put onerous audit necessity on small programs. I think they will work with us. As I said, we're going to do the audit for community lottery boards. We've had an excellent working relationship with the Auditor General, and I think we will achieve an audit principle, as we have to this point. Each group is asked to have their annual statements audited, but they're not asked to hire a professional auditor, and I don't believe that this government is going to ask a group that gets a \$500 grant to hire a professional auditor. Is there any common sense left on that side of the room at all? I'm not sure.

4:30

Madam Chairman, the last thing that really offends me in this discussion is the comment – and I paraphrase: I want to work with the minister. I wrote it down because it was such an interesting comment when again I am still waiting for this member to raise some of those concerns other than in estimates in this House. I'm here every day. I believe she is. We have pages that will deliver notes; you don't have to worry about an interoffice memo. If your colleagues, hon. member, tell you that I don't respond when I'm asked for assistance or for answers to questions, I'll be very surprised, and I'm frankly surprised that you haven't figured that out yet, at this stage.

Some of the concerns that were raised there with no specifics, simply innuendo – some groups tell me, some say this, some say that – aren't very helpful. Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands raised a specific concern and said: I will get you the name. I have that name now, and that was about 15 minutes ago. If community groups have been asking these questions for over a year and those requests for information have not been passed on, I am very concerned. I will be talking to these associations and asking them specifically which ones are raising them and where the areas are, because we can respond to them.

Lastly, a really quick answer; \$16.1 million is in the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. Maybe just reading the budget and trying to sort through those pages will be a good exercise, and I invite you to do that.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. There are some issues that I would like to focus on other than some exchange that perhaps needs to take place outside of estimates. A couple of things. I want to ask the minister some questions about lottery dollars and the community lottery boards. This question has been raised to me, and I just didn't have the information to answer it. Can communities that receive lottery funding accumulate the funding year over year, or does it all have to be spent in the year in which it's allocated? I'm seeing some indications from the minister and some of her colleagues that the answer is that the money all has to be spent in the year in which it's allocated or within two years. I'm wondering: upon special application, could communities – and if it's not your policy right now, would you consider making it your policy? – accumulate the money for an identified special project? One of the special projects that I'm thinking of in particular is the trimunicipality complex that's been proposed by Spruce Grove, Parkland county, and Stony Plain.

MRS. McCLELLAN: I met with them yesterday.

MR. SAPERS: You met with them yesterday. Okay. I'd be curious to know whether that kind of thing is possible.

Although I was just a little bit knocked off my game by some of the exchange, I wanted to say something to the minister about the letters that have been sent to Alberta athletes that have participated in various games. This is the first time that I can recall getting copied on what I believe is every bit of correspondence that has gone to a constituent of mine who has participated in representing Alberta. I appreciate that. I appreciate two things. I appreciate the minister taking the trouble to write my constituents and congratulate them, and I appreciate the minister letting me know that that's happened.

[Mrs. Laing in the chair]

I have another question about the seniors' benefit, and I was listening when the minister was talking about the Alberta special-needs benefit for seniors. I think the minister and I have crossed swords on this issue once or twice. I will say this: it's better now than it has been. The process is smoother and cleaner. But what happens in my constituency is this: every time I put out a newsletter that reminds my constituents that there is a special-needs benefit or every time I go on my tour of the lodges in my constituency, I get a barrage of phone calls requesting applications. The consistent message that I'm hearing is: how come we never heard about this before?

If that cuts to my quick, I can imagine how it must cut to the minister's quick. Clearly something needs to be done to make sure that every senior in this province knows that they have this benefit which they can apply for. I would encourage the minister to be just as aggressive as she can be in communicating this benefit. I have assisted I think hundreds of seniors, as the minister knows, through my office to apply for these. I note that the speed at which the applications are being reviewed has increased, and the approval rate has increased. I still take some issue with the approval rate. It's not high enough, and I still think

that some of the paperwork – are you listening, Julian? – is a little burdensome for some of our seniors. If you can't reduce the application requirements, could you increase the support in the department to help walk seniors through the process? I think the balance isn't quite right there.

My favourite reading in all the business plans is what the ministers include as the highlights. I wanted to ask about some of the highlights that are pages 78 and 79 of the budget book.

Hosting the International Association of Volunteer Efforts 1998 Conference in Edmonton: I am very proud that Edmonton will be the host city for this international conference. I know that the Wild Rose Foundation will be very much involved with this, but I'm wondering if the minister can tell the Assembly if there's going to be some lasting impact both in terms of programs or services and also budget implications. Other jurisdictions that have hosted this international conference – as I understand it, there has been a legacy from the conference, and I'm wondering what that legacy will be for Alberta and in particular for Edmonton.

The highlight that mentions the youth-at-risk programs in concert with Alberta Justice, children's services, and AADAC really caught my attention. I know the minister has heard my queries in question period recently regarding early intervention Head Start programs. There is a split jurisdiction in the province over who's responsible for children at risk. I'm very happy that a number of ministries have built the issue of children at risk into their business plans, but I am less happy that this is appearing to look like a defusing of responsibility as opposed to a co-ordination of effort. Maybe the minister responsible for children's services is supposed to be the anchor that ties it down or the rope that binds it together.

I would like to hear from the minister some chapter and verse on specifically what this minister is doing to integrate the youth-at-risk programs and the support that's coming out of her department. How can we ensure that the few dollars that are available aren't going to be overadministered? I guess that's probably the best way that I can put it. What I'm beginning to hear from the volunteers and the advisory groups and the actual program providers is that they're getting very mixed messages about where to go, who to talk to, what the approval steps are. And if they have new ideas, where do they pitch them?

4:40

Well, one of the programs that's got an application pending – and they asked me not to reveal who it is; I think you'll understand that – put it this way. They said that, you know, they're really frustrated. They're a pretty small shop. They crank out a good proposal. They do their homework. They do their meetings, and they're told: “Well, gee, this really should have gone someplace else.” So it's: “Well, can't you just pass the information along?” “Well, no. It's got to be cranked out again because there's a different set of sort of application criteria.” So that's a concern.

The other one that I wanted to ask you about in your highlights is the \$32.2 million for treatment and education regarding alcohol, drug, and gambling addictions. If you look at the consolidated income statement of the department, you note that there's about \$32 million in, \$32 million out for AADAC. I believe about two-thirds of it is represented as an interministerial transfer. So it just goes from your budget directly over to AADAC, and then about \$10 million or close to it is raised other ways. AADAC receives other revenues.

We have heard in this Assembly frankly frightening statistics regarding the increase in young people smoking. We have

discussed in this Assembly the nature of gambling addiction in this province. We have had questions regarding minors involved in gaming activities of one sort or another, and we are certainly all, all too familiar with the problems of alcoholism in many communities and throughout this province. If there was one thing that I would have hoped and expected the minister to have emphasized more strongly in her budget, it would have been support to AADAC. It would have been specifically strong evidence of the government matching words to deeds about dealing in a significant way with those addictions.

I'm going to say something that may come back to haunt me in the context of, you know, spend, spend, spend. Madam Minister, they're kicking me in the shins at this point. I don't think it's an overstatement that we couldn't spend too much if we knew those dollars were going to have the effect that we want. I don't think any person in this Assembly would say that it's too much to spend if we knew that the program was going to have the impact. You know, I don't want this to be that partisan debate about VLTs, not VLTs. We've got gaming and we've got gaming addicts. While we may disagree about whether VLTs play a role in that or how much of a role, I think we do agree that we could do more about that form of addiction and that there probably is a government obligation to do so. That obligation has been recognized, but maybe you could tell us what your longer term vision is on how that obligation will be operationalized this year and the next year and the coming years.

The \$14.2 million on library grants is I believe a very modest increase. Have I got that right? It represents a modest increase over last year? My understanding is that library utilization has never been higher across the province than it is right now, and there's a huge technology cost to libraries across the province, because the nature of the borrower and the kinds of materials they're after is dramatically changing. We've seen the government make commitments to health authorities for technology costs and to school boards for technology costs and to advanced education institutions for onetime technology costs, getting year 2000 compliant and making sure that we're all up and running, you know, on the information highway and all of those other things.

Madam Minister, are you satisfied that the government is making enough money available to the libraries throughout this province to upgrade to the same extent, and what have you heard from libraries and library boards in this regard? The message I've been receiving is that they can't keep pace with the cost of technology, but the public is increasingly putting more and more and more demands on them to have this access available. I would hate to see the numbers over the next couple of years start trending the other way in library utilization. I think libraries are a precious community resource. My children and myself certainly make good use of the Edmonton system. I just wonder whether this modest increase is enough, particularly in the light of what may be considered some onetime costs that libraries across the province have to absorb.

The last highlight that I wanted to comment on, Madam Minister, is the \$3.4 million that's mentioned for human rights complaint investigation and resolution. The backlog is better than it has been, but it's not gone, and the investigators are all local heroes. I hope to see lots of the performance bonus money that the government has made available spent on the employees in your department and through some of the commissions and boards, because I think so highly of them. I would encourage the managers to take advantage of the performance dollars that are being made available.

But recognizing these people for the hard work they've done

and recognizing them for, as I say, the somewhat heroic efforts they've made should not in any way let the government off the hook for what I believe to be an underfunded human rights investigation and resolution system in this province. I think we have enough evidence now that the volume of complaints will be consistent enough that this system needs more people, it needs more funding. Albertans should have a right to expect more timely resolution and more thorough investigation.

I've heard the argument, you know, about what this jurisdiction spends versus what other jurisdictions spend, but I think we can progress past that argument. As I say, the evidence is pretty clear. The volume is relatively high and relatively stable. The process has been streamlined a fair bit. You're aware of the political dissatisfaction that this side of the House has expressed with the change in the structure of the commission and the role of the commission. As much as I want to have that debate again, I don't want to have that debate right now in estimates. What I want to say is that given that it has been the policy of the government to structure it in this way, could we please see a few more dollars and a few more people put into that system so that Albertans will get the kind of human rights process that I think they so rightly deserve?

Those are my questions for you, Madam Minister, and thank you for listening.

4:50

MRS. McCLELLAN: I'm going to be quite succinct on this. I appreciate the hon. member's comments, and I'm going to ask the Member for Lacombe-Stettler to comment on the specific question on the community lottery boards in just a moment.

I appreciate your comments on the seniors' benefit and the special-needs program. I am with you on the frustration with communication, and my staff and my department, we all are. We've been working really hard with the Interagency Council, with Kerby Centre, and in fact I am having a meeting very shortly with Mr. Reimer to continue this discussion. We all want to get the information to seniors, and what really concerns us is: what about those seniors we're missing, and how do we make sure that every senior knows? So I encourage some of my colleagues across the way to not just let seniors know when there's something wrong or perceived to be wrong out there – there's a real fast reaction on that one – but help us, as I know many of you do, in communicating the programs that are available for seniors.

I encourage you all to remind them about the storefronts. The Edmonton storefront is used quite extensively. We've made it convenient. You know, it was all redesigned to be more convenient, more accessible. The 1-800 number is used quite extensively. We do try very hard. If a senior absolutely can't get to a storefront or has difficulty with the phone information, we can have somebody go and visit them in their home and help them. We do provide that service. Obviously you can't go visit every one, but there are people who for many reasons are housebound or have difficulties, maybe with language or something. So we do have people that go and do that. We'd be happy to let you know how they can access those services if you don't have that information.

We're working hard on reducing the paperwork. Changes we made to the program a year ago helped us a lot. There were so many different criteria. We reduced them by about 35, 40 percent or something at that time, and it would be nice to reduce it more. We are trying to get it down but then still satisfy the Auditor General, who is our master.

Programs for youth. This is an area that I am very keen on and

so is the Minister of Justice, and we hope that we'll have some more information for you. For youth at risk our leaders programs are working really well. We have the leaders for tomorrow program with the aboriginal communities. I had a visit with a group of people that are out in that program, and if you don't totally understand what it is, it's really using sports and culture to give young people in an area – in many of these cases they're remote areas, aboriginal communities – a chance to learn, to experience sports or culture. It does a lot for them: self-esteem, personal growth, and so on. These are just great young people who go into a community and stay there for a couple of months and set up a program. They try to set up a program that isn't costly or doesn't require equipment that they can't afford. We're really pleased with that. So I think we've something to build on there and will continue to work on it.

The Member for Calgary-Currie will talk about specifics in AADAC treatment programs. I want to remind the hon. member that moneys for gaming addictions come directly from the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, and they are exactly what AADAC asks for. The \$700,000 increase they got this year is what AADAC identified. It isn't a matter of negotiation. The commitment was made to AADAC that the response would be there – this is a new area, relatively – and that they would get the dollars they required, and those were transferred directly over.

Libraries. I love to talk about libraries. I'm like you; I think they're the lifeblood of our communities. I was pleased this year to be able to modestly increase dollars for libraries in response to what library communities told me. They wanted their money to come up to – instead of using 1991 population figures, use 1997, and we were able to do that. I want to point out while I'm saying that that obviously there will be some that will go up because their population has increased, and there will be some that will have somewhat of a decrease because there are areas where our population goes down. We've said that we're not going to impose that decrease this year. We think we can manage that, and this will give those libraries a chance to adjust how they do business. With this we're also able to find some dollars to complete the systems, and we know that the systems can help our libraries to provide services more efficiently. So they will have a year before they adjust. Now, the ones that get an increase are going to get the money, so they will be happy.

The technology electronic hookup is the \$1.4 million. Of course that's identified over four years, and it is what we estimate is required for that electronic hookup, which will help a lot.

In dollars we are modest supporters of libraries. The municipalities contribute significantly. But I think every one of us should ask this question. You know, we talk about library fees, and then you go in a library and see what services are there. And we complain – we tend to – about library fees. I know communities where their library fee is 5 bucks – that's a pack of cigarettes – and that 5 bucks is for the whole year. I buy books, pocket-books quite a bit and hard covers, but a pocketbook costs me 10 bucks, and I can read two, three a week. That's much more than my library card would be.

MR. SAPERS: And a much better analogy for me than a pack of cigarettes.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, it's true. For many people that's really what that means. If I buy three or four books, I've paid my library fees. Plus all of the services that are in there – our libraries are such a repository and distributor of information now

with Internet services, with digital services. They're wonderful places, and we should support them.

Some issues on the human rights/citizenship area. The amalgamations that we made there did give more staff, and I'm completely with you on this. We want that backlog to continue to come down. The Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* has raised with me at estimates and at other times in conversation some concern with performance measures and how we achieve our satisfaction rating, and we're certainly taking that under advisement and looking at it.

I'd like to ask the Member for *Lacombe-Stettler* to comment on lottery boards and the Member for *Calgary-Cross* to comment on the citizenship/human rights education side briefly, and that will still allow time for your hon. colleague to get in some more.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you very much, hon. minister. Just very quickly. When we were consulting with Albertans, the focus for this type of grant was to help smaller community organizations and associations, so I have to remind the hon. members that this has been designed to do that very thing. It's the group that might need \$500, \$700. All of the foundations are staying in place, and I think they've done over the years a very exceptional job of grant disbursements for their various mandates and with their criteria. Those will stay in place as will something like the community facility enhancement grant program, which is a capital type of grant program for some larger projects. The reason why this program was designed so that the grant funds would basically be expended in one year was for that very purpose.

Now, within the handbook that I certainly want the members opposite to be aware of – I'm sure you received one. There's a 32-page community lottery board grant program handbook that went out probably three weeks ago that will be used by the community lottery boards. [interjection] I thought you were getting one, and I will check on that, because it's a very useful document and spells out very concisely what's involved in this program. It reads: community lottery grant recipients must expend all grant funds on the approved project within a two-year period from the date the community lottery grant funds are paid. So once they're paid to them, they can have up to two years to use it. Any interest earned on that must go to the project and cannot be used for administration. It must be part and parcel of the project. The reason why that is in place, as I said, is to help smaller groups and organizations that need the money for a given project at a particular time, not to bank the money. That was not the intent of the program.

5:00

Something I do have to say, too, having worked with the foundations, is that the \$1.5 million that has been saved by the work that has been done in co-ordinating and working co-operatively with the foundations has been, as the minister said, returned to grant disbursement. I really challenge anyone to talk to any one of the five foundation chairs. We have been working on this for quite some time and have made great inroads. I believe there's been an awful lot of overlap and duplication that's been done away with. I think they've certainly come together and worked on the common good, on what is common to each and every foundation, yet have been able to maintain their particular mandates, criteria, and their independence. I worked with them on a co-ordinating council, and I think it is important that everyone is at the table to hear what the differences are between them and how they can work together for the common good of Albertans, Alberta communities and groups and associations that very much need this money.

Thank you very much. If you haven't received a copy of the handbook, please let me know, and I'll ensure that you get one.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased just to say a few words about the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund, and I'm going to be very brief because there is such little time allotted. I know that there were five of us speaking to the various issues in Community Development today.

I'd like to begin by thanking the staff member who I've seen waiting very patiently throughout the afternoon, Marie Riddle, who's the director of human rights and citizenship for the branch, and the staff for the hard work that they've contributed to the department and to Albertans while I've been chairman with this committee.

I'd also like to thank people that are on our advisory council to the minister. Those people are Carrielynn Lamouche of Gift Lake, Bohdan Medwidsky of Edmonton, Alison Redford of Calgary, Catherine Smith of Medicine Hat, and Ross Watson of Cochrane. Along with them is, of course, Charlach Mackintosh, the chief commissioner of the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. They work very hard on advising the minister as to what the needs are in the Alberta community in this whole area of human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism.

Just briefly, Madam Chairman, the education fund, as you heard earlier, was created by section 13 of the act to ensure that dollars are available for the very important task of providing education programs and services. I think it's really important that you understand that in 1998-99 the fund's going to contain \$1.187 million, which is the same as the figure for the previous fiscal year. I'm also pleased that we've been able to maintain this level of funding, because there's wide agreement that the best way to go about reducing discrimination and fostering equality is of course through education.

Seven hundred and fifty-one thousand dollars of the money available in the fund was allotted for financial assistance to community groups and organizations that wished to develop educational programs. To give you an example of some of the projects - I know the minister alluded to some of those earlier, as well as other members who have spoken previously - that we've funded in the past year, I'd like to list a few of the projects just to show you the variety of excellence and also the creative projects that have been made possible. They include the Calgary Jewish Centre receiving \$6,700 for a symposium on human rights, racism, and intolerance issues presented in the context of information from survivors of the Holocaust. As well, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind received \$17,000 to develop materials to assist employers in their efforts to hire and retain visually impaired workers.

I know we heard earlier about some of the women's issues from the Member for Edmonton-Centre, feeling that women's issues weren't being funded prudently within this area, but they are. I'll name a few of those. The Kinette Club of Cochrane received \$2,232 for a women's conference on the issues of racism, equity, isolation, violence, and social justice. Also, the Indo-Canadian Women's Association received \$9,000 for a survey of new Canadians to determine what human rights information is presently being accessed and to determine what the level of knowledge about human rights law is with the target population. The Hunting Hills High School Support Society received \$2,350 for a project on sexual stereotyping. The Parkland Community

Education Society received \$7,000 for a project on sexual stereotyping. The Métis Settlements General Council received \$22,800 to produce three videos that highlight cultural and personal barriers to Métis participation in Alberta society.

Madam Chairman, in 1998-99, as well, \$399,000 was allocated for the purpose of the ministry staff on behalf of the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission to put towards education programs and services. I'll name two of the plans, because I know we have an hon. member here who would like to speak as well. The staff will develop and distribute a variety of new print and audiovisual resources on the protected grounds and areas under the act. For example, a videotape, audiotape, and instructor's guide on gender discrimination is planned, and the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission web site will be further developed so that Albertans have a ready source for human rights and diversity information.

Having said that, I'm going to close, Madam Chairman. I know that I heard earlier here that members from the opposite side felt that Albertans weren't being heard by the Community Development department, and I can tell you that I invite each and every one of you to come and attend one of our meetings. I've never had a request from any member of the opposite side, Madam Minister, ever, for information that was discussed earlier here in the Legislature. If you do, certainly contact Marie Riddle or myself, and we would be more than pleased to provide that information to you.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: We have three minutes left of this time slot. Can you be quick? We have Edmonton-Mill Creek waiting very patiently here.

Go ahead. Three minutes.

MRS. BURGNER: I just want to acknowledge the comments that were made by the hon. member. In the business plan I think you'll find that the priorities in AADAC really do deal with some prevention issues. I just want to focus particularly on our youth for a minute. We are partnered - and I mentioned this in my opening comments - in a fetal alcohol syndrome program which is co-ordinated across three and four departments in order to address that very, very serious issue and try to get to the root of some of those problems. We are also looking at youth in transition, which is the next phase for our young people. While it seems sort of nebulous, it's not. It's really strategically targeted across ministries to work with our young people.

I want to emphasize this. You're very correct about identifying that alcoholism is by far and away the largest and most serious addiction problem we have, not so much just because of the consumption of alcohol but where this shows up in our Justice department, in our Family and Social Services, in Education, in Health. I thank the hon. member for raising it as an issue, but it is our priority.

With respect to problem gambling, et cetera, I think the minister identified that we do receive from AGLC the funding we request. People have asked: if 5 percent of the province have a problem with gambling, why don't we have 5 percent of the revenues from VLTs? The reality is that we can't treat clients until they present themselves, so the focus that we are working on is education and research. I think I mentioned some of the things we're doing particularly with the young people with the CD-ROM and better media awareness, et cetera.

Just to conclude, Madam Chairman, the focus is on prevention,

good research, and going at the problem where it exists, most often with our children.

Thank you for your comments.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Thanks for being succinct.

Edmonton-Mill Creek.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I rise to speak to the estimates of one of my all-time favourite departments in government, because it is this Department of Community Development that provides that extra spark that makes the world go round out there. Once we get past the guarantees in health care and education and the social programs, which are critical to our very well-being, nothing is more important than quality-of-life portfolios like Community Development. For it is in this department that we have things like arts and culture, libraries, the historical sites, the various aspects of multiculturalism. Of course we've rolled other things into it now, I realize, like seniors' benefits and AADAC and the Wild Rose Foundation and so on. To speak to the heart of the arts and culture industry is indeed a pleasure, and I've taken every opportunity to do that, and I will do so again today.

5:10

Before I get into some of the specifics, however, I want to thank the Minister of Community Development for some excellent work that she has done with respect to my constituents. It takes the form usually of correspondence that she personally takes the time to send and congratulate particularly our younger athletes who are involved in things like the Summer Games or the Olympics or whatever it may have been. She has done something that I have never really been the receiver of before, and that is send me CCs of this correspondence. I truly, truly do appreciate that, and I just wanted the minister to know. I had some similar experiences when she was Minister of Health when I had some difficulties, and I just wanted to go on record as thanking her and acknowledging her and at the same time her hardworking staff. I know how hard they work because – well, I used to be there; didn't I? I appreciate them being there.

In any event, I want to comment on some specific highlights that I particularly enjoyed reading about. One of them has to do with the youth at risk program, and I'll look forward to reading more about that as more information comes out. I thought that was an excellent initiative to take on on one side of the equation and then juxtaposing that with and against the aging population on the other, where I see she has some programs aimed as well. That, I thought, was worthy of mention.

However, the two most outstanding programs beyond those to me are indeed the initiative to complete the regionalization of our library systems – and I have some specific comments I hope to get to a little later with respect to the funding that may or may not be allocated there – and the other program is certainly the tremendous excitement, hon. minister, that's building around our hosting of the international association of volunteers, which I believe is a conference being held here this summer; isn't it? I congratulate you on that initiative as well as the hardworking folks at the Wild Rose Foundation. I know that they're at the heart of that, and as you know, hon. minister, I know several of the members of the group there. I want to just extend my congratulations in advance and my thanks to them for having gone out into the wide world and secured that conference for Edmonton and for our province. I'm really looking forward to it. So thank you for that.

Now, I want to jump into just a couple of technical questions,

if I might, Madam Chairman, and that is with reference to page 72 of the budget, program 2.1.2, which is the operating expense side of arts and libraries. You may have been asked this already once before; I'm not sure. I note that there's a drop in the anticipated expenditure there. I assume that that slack has been taken up somewhere else, but I wouldn't mind a comment on that one, please. Also, some breakdown between the arts component versus the libraries component would be helpful to this member.

Similarly, I want to sort of juxtapose, to use the same word twice this afternoon, that set of figures with what's happening in sport and recreation, where in actual fact we see a significant increase, from \$1,074,000 to \$1,705,000. I would go a long way to support initiatives with respect to sport and recreation, but I always have a concern when I see, on the same page at least, something that tends to not provide the same sort of support in the arts and libraries sector. So I wouldn't mind a comment on what the difference there may be.

Madam Chairman, the other aspect that I want to ask about in a general sense is with respect to the municipal recreation/tourism area. You will recall, hon. minister, that a few years ago we started phasing out some of these local campgrounds, the local parks, and things. Now I see that we have nothing whatsoever budgeted anymore with respect to municipal recreation/tourism areas operating grants. I just wonder: has that program now been completed and totally phased out, or has some of it been finished and privatized? An answer to that would be appreciated. I haven't followed this issue closely now for about a year and a half, so I'm not quite as in touch as I would like to be.

Now, another thing I wanted to comment on was on page 73. I note that there are some significant differences in operating expenses projected for certain of the historic sites and areas. While I see, I think, most of them going up, I think the one that is going up the least amount is the one in your own area. I thought: there's a lady exercising some restraint. It's the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology. I thought that was a kind of interesting little kudo for you there, hon. minister.

I wanted some specific answers to these questions. There are a number of ramifications that we've experienced with respect to the introduction of user fees and gate fees or increases to gate admissions at our various historic sites, be they Stephansson House or Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump or the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village or our interpretive centres in Crowsnest Pass or Fort McMurray or wherever. I would like a specific comment from the minister at some point, and we can do this by follow-up in writing or a phone call or whatever. I'm just generally interested in the impact on attendance. I note that we're down about 100,000 in some areas on attendance, and I just wonder: is that as a result of user fees, and more specifically, is it as a result of the introduction of some new user fees over the last couple of years on children? We never used to charge for the kids. Now it seems to me that we are, perhaps not in all cases and perhaps not at all sites.

The other interesting thing to me, Madam Minister, would be some sort of a breakdown between the attendance at these sites by resident Albertans versus out-of-province visitors. I'd sure like to see a schematic on that just to see where we're going. Where I'm coming from there is that I think tourism is vital to this province, and if user fees are getting in the way of that tourism or of people coming here and not enjoying to the fullest benefit some of the cultural attractions we have, then perhaps we should visit and debate that issue.

The other aspect in general with respect to historic sites and

interpretive centres and so on speaks directly to infrastructure costs. Now, I don't know and I have no way of knowing whether what we've got in here, Madam Minister, is enough, too much, too little, too far, too fast, too wide, too deep. What I'm concerned about in infrastructure on all of these centres – and I think I've visited just about every one of them at least once or twice over the last four years, and I enjoy them a great deal. My points are with respect to three areas. One would be maintenance, which, to be clear, is just your general upkeep. The other one would be upgrades. That's improvements, not just maintenance but actual improvements. The third would be expansions and/or new projects that are coming on to perhaps include a wider array of our history. I'm a very proud Albertan, and every time we have a chance to share that with others, I think we should take advantage of doing that.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I want to move to another area, and that is the issue of the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. Now, I recall a debate in this House several years ago with respect to the issue of MLAs sitting on some of these boards, and I'm not sure if I didn't see a piece of legislation this year that now removes that. I wonder if the minister would comment to me on what the thinking was. I think I was pretty clear at the time I spoke that I didn't believe it was the role of MLAs to sit on those foundations because they're intended to be arm's length. They truly are. I thought there might be the potential for awkwardness or conflict if we had MLAs. So I'd like a comment from the minister on what the thinking behind that was. While not wanting to overly anticipate the debate that will be held and take place when the bill is actually arrived at but having this opportunity, I thought I would pose that question to the minister.

5:20

I want to turn to 2.1.6, which is volunteer services, to jump back, hon. minister. I note that there's a significant increase in the expenditures for volunteer services under the management and operations portfolio of the department, where we're going from about \$219,000 up to \$652,000. That may have been asked before, and if I'm duplicating, I apologize. But it caught my attention, and I wanted a little more information.

Another point that I want to touch on with respect to libraries I believe has been touched on and alluded to earlier by other speakers. It's the entire issue of compliance, which is on everybody's mind right now. I'm sure the minister must have a plan in that respect, but I'd sure like to know a little bit more about it. I'm a tremendous library enthusiast, as are my children and my wife and so on, and I'm very concerned about compliance for the year 2000 and how the libraries are going to cope with that.

Time is running here, so I'll speed up. I had some other questions I wanted to ask with respect to the talking books program. Do you remember that? Now, I don't know what we've done about that, but it seems to me that it was phased out or it was reduced or whatever it was that happened. I've just forgotten now, but I wanted to have the minister explain what's happened with that program.

Another interesting aspect is with respect to multicultural centres. I noted somewhere as I was reading through that I think we're down to three multicultural centres. I believe we at one time had four or five or more of them. There's been a decision taken somewhat recently to curtail funding to the multicultural centres. I would like an explanation as to why, other than the

dollars that would be saved obviously. I think these multicultural centres, Madam Minister – and I hope you'll agree – have provided a tremendous function. Now, if it's the case that the original functions for which they were designed have been fulfilled – in other words, if their mandate has been accomplished and therefore the department feels it necessary to phase them out – then kindly explain that. I would suggest, however, that the role of these multicultural centres may, on the other hand, never be fully accomplished because they do a lot more than simply provide a meeting place where people who are concerned about multiculturalism can gather.

I know here in Edmonton we had the multicultural centre at McKay Avenue school, which I was strongly involved with, and subsequently it got moved to Cromdale school – is it? – out in the east end. They do so much more now to help new immigrants than they've ever done, to help with the acclimatization and give them a level of comfort: translation services, assisting the young children, young mothers, and so on who are from different cultures. That entire role of acclimatization is very critical. Similarly, Cronquist House I believe in Red Deer had tremendously active programs. The Calgary Multicultural Centre did likewise. The Stony Plain multicultural centre had a number of excellent initiatives and perhaps still does. I want to know if the minister thinks that they can in fact survive on their own. Or are they taking significant reductions in staffing and materials, programming costs, to in fact facilitate the chop in funding?

I want to turn quickly to the community lottery boards for a moment. I received a communiqué from a former member of this House, Mr. Len Bracko, who represented St. Albert. His question has partly been answered, and that is with respect to moneys that we're going to be paying out with respect to the \$50 million that's been allocated. I noted with interest your answer that they have up to two years to spend that money, but the question that Mr. Bracko wished to pose and he posed to city council in fact was whether it would be possible to roll those moneys into an endowment fund. Endowment is obviously longer than two years, and what I would suggest you might want to look at in case you're interested in it, Madam Chairman – let's say we put some guidelines around it. Let's say we put some reporting mechanisms around it. Let's say that we offer them five years within which to report and have expended those moneys. I think there should be some capability at least with respect to the aspect of endowments.

I'm running out of time rapidly. I'll conclude with one final comment, and that's with respect to the Blue Cross exemptions program, which is referred to somewhere in the ministry's business plan. I have a constituent who desperately wants to know whether or not the minister could bring us up to speed with the latest list she might have of what it is that is now exempted or not exempted from Blue Cross. His concern was a particular cough syrup, which to us may sound somewhat routine, but to this constituent it's a matter of constant consumption by prescription. It's unfortunately been removed, so he no longer receives assistance for it.

I'll come back another time, Madam Chairman, to speak about the cuts that have been made at the Good Samaritan home in my riding. There's tremendous concerns about that area as well as the Allen Gray and Ritchie Pioneer Place.

I note now that it's approaching our adjourning hour, so with that I will stop and allow the Government House Leader to do his function.

Thank you.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Madam Chairman, very good comments and questions, and I will respond in detail in writing, as has been my practice.

I can give the hon. member a breakdown of attendance: in province, out of province, out of country. I think it's important. We have to do that. I wanted to mention how wonderful the friends organizations are to those centres, and that is one reason that we've been able to manage so well.

You're right; the legislation is there to remove the MLA from one board. The other questions I will bring to you.

Madam Chairman, if it's in order, I would move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Community Development, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[At 5:29 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

