

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 13, 1999** 8:00 p.m.

Date: 99/04/13

head: Committee of Supply
[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. For the benefit of those in the galleries we would explain that this is the informal part of the Legislative Assembly. Hon. members in fact do not sit in their own seats. Some do, but others are free to move around, take off their jackets. Instead of just water they can have juice or coffee as well. It tends to be a little less formal, although I try and get them to stick by the rule that we only have one person standing and talking at a time.

Before we begin, may we briefly revert to the Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

head: Introduction of Guests

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly this evening the 5th LDS Edmonton Cubs, who have joined us for some time. As I introduce them, it will be a trip down memory lane for all of us who have read the *Jungle Book* because those are their cub pack names.

We have here tonight the group leaders: Kathy McManus, or Akela; Walter Fischer, or Baloo; David van der Leek, or Shere Khan; and Marcus Hume, as Bagheera. The students with them are Duncan, Luke, Seth, Evan, Justin H., Justin M., Jevin, Wally, Clinton, Jason, Spencer, Christopher, Dieter, Nelson, and Hugh. Now, these Cub pack members are members of my constituency, but they are also members of the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Creek's, who is unable to be here this evening but asked me to pass on the warmest regards to all of you on his behalf. So please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Main Estimates 1999-2000

Environmental Protection

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll call on the hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to report on the meeting of the designated supply subcommittee on Environmental Protection. We met and had a very good meeting on March 25 at 6 o'clock. Good questions were asked by the members of both the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party and by our government. Essentially at this particular point in time I want to report that there were staff there from the minister of the environment's department -- the deputy minister and assistant deputy ministers as well as assistant deputy ministers of forestry, public lands, the director of financial services, and the director of protected areas -- to help in answering questions, and the members of the opposition had the opportunity to ask many questions on the budget estimates.

Now, I'd like to thank members from both sides of the House for

their co-operation in making this meeting run very efficiently. I was pleased to say that we were able to conclude in a two and a half hour period, I believe the only subcommittee that was able to do that, but with some very good questions asked.

The minister outlined some of the business plan changes that will be taking place. Specifically, there will be approximately a \$2.94 million provision for the Alberta waste management and control program in addition to an existing budget of \$2.65 million. Two million dollars will be added as a new dedicated revenue to support park operations. Also, \$700,000 will be put toward a dedicated revenue for the spatial data warehouse. There will be an additional provision of \$2 million for the ministry's regulatory processes. Also, \$17 million will be added as an additional provision for fire reclamation.

A final change that the minister outlined dealt with the \$45 million increase for nominal sum disposals. He did indicate appropriately that these items are simply the values of lands or properties which the department will be turning over either through transfer or sale to municipalities in working in partnership with municipalities across the province.

Overall, these changes result in a \$72 million increase when compared to the 1998-99 estimate, and the total estimate for the '99-2000 year is \$363.72 million for the ministry.

Essentially, Alberta Environmental Protection's business plan is consistent with the government's core business plan of people, prosperity, preservation. Pertaining to that, I want to say that under goal 1, people, Alberta Environmental Protection will continue to produce

educational information and/or programs on topics such as climate change, forest management, forest fire prevention, biodiversity, water quality, and protected areas.

Environmental Protection will continue to participate in the sustainable communities initiative, which has been led by the minister and which "helps increase the capacity of community members to maintain environmentally, economically and socially healthy communities." They will also maintain telephone hotlines so that the public will be able to continue to share their input directly with department officials.

Under item 2, prosperity, the department will continue to develop a "government-wide sustainable resource and environmental management strategy for the Athabasca Oil Sands." As well, Environmental Protection will administer "public land and forest resources in consultation with Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, and Energy," and they will work in partnership with Economic Development so that the province's forest resources are managed in a sustainable manner. In addition, they will "promote and support sustainable natural resource-based activities associated with Alberta's water, fish, wildlife and park resources."

Finally, the third goal in relation to their budget is that of preservation. In order to achieve this goal, there are eight key points. Just very briefly I will say that Environmental Protection will "continue to develop and improve guidelines, standards and Codes of Practice to protect Alberta's air, water and ground water quality," one of the highest standards in our country. Environmental Protection will continue to work with industry to "minimize production of hazardous waste," and ensure that it's properly treated and disposed of. Environmental Protection will continue to "support research in priority areas (such as air, land, water, climate change, sustainable ecosystems, environmental assessment, and regulatory systems.)"

And the last five. They will continue to "prepare management and recovery plans for fish and wildlife species of concern"; will pass "the consolidated Natural Heritage Act, and develop related regulations and a policy foundation document"; will "provide

effective forest fire detection programs and wildfire suppression activities"; and "will monitor and control forest pests and disease, and manage problem wildlife." Finally, Alberta Environmental Protection will "establish acceptable levels of protection for natural resources and ecosystems."

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to thank Minister Lund, his officials, and the members of both sides of the House for a very informative session, very good questions. In his address to the province Premier Klein said that we must strike the right balance between fiscal responsibility and quality of life in Alberta. That is something that my colleague from Innisfail clearly agrees with, and the steps outlined in this year's business plan for Environmental Protection provide that balance for the people of Alberta.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There's just going to be a couple of questions here, and they're relating to the water problems we have throughout the province and to water management. That is, in the increase of the \$5 million from lotteries I just wonder: what is the increase for? Is the development of water management a requirement of the Water Act? What is the time schedule for development of these plans, and how will the public be involved?

Now, over the last few months or the last year traveling around the province, we do have the concerns coming out of Cold Lake. The question there is: why did Alberta Environmental Protection take so long to get monitoring under way? Will the area monitored be extended until the boundaries of high arsenic are found? What is being done to ensure that people in the area have pure water to drink? This is the most important thing that I think any Albertan should be asking for.

I've had a number of phone calls in the last couple of weeks around intensive livestock operations. On this particular item I'd like to know from the minister -- and I think the answer has to come from the environment department or, other than that, from agriculture. Last year's study on the impact of agricultural practices on water quality in Alberta shows a high level of contamination in streams adjacent to livestock operations. This is not intensive livestock operations necessarily but in most cases it is, and we're seeing that more and more throughout the province.

8:10

Now, the phone calls that I've been getting are around what Alberta Environmental Protection is doing to prevent contamination. It seems that Alberta Agriculture is taking the lead role in the revision of the code of practice for the management of livestock operations, but at the same time, the agriculture department has forestalled this study for another year, and that is actually too bad. I'd like to refer to a large feedlot that is being set up around the St. Michael's area, where in the last week there have been cats in there opening up dugouts and rerouting the stream into these dugouts. It seems that if the water runs through it, it's going to go through the other side as an overflow. At the same time, the farmers that have been in there for a number of years are concerned with the fact of what is going to be running out of the site in springtime down to where they have been farming. The Lamont site is one that I like to bring up and put forward.

At this time, Mr. Chairman, I will sit down, take my leave, and hopefully we can get some answers from the minister.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to respond

to the environmental estimates. Because we have only 20 minutes to respond to the questions that were asked, I'll have to run through a number of issues quite quickly.

First of all, I would like to say that this is my favourite part of the budget process, the kind of process that we have always entered into in Environmental Protection, where we ask a question and the minister and his staff respond. I think that is the most effective budget debate process we have in this Assembly, and I hope that when the House leaders get together they seriously consider taking that model and applying it to all of the different ministries. It certainly gives us the best information, and it puts us in a position where we have an opportunity to get to know some of the staff as well and get to a level of detail in asking questions that we wouldn't otherwise achieve.

Having said that, I have a few concerns with some of the answers that we got. I got the transcripts of our budgetary process yesterday and had an opportunity to review them. When we were in the process, I thought that perhaps this year the presentation of some of my questions was a little unclear, because I got some quite vague answers and not the level of detail that I have seen in prior years. I thought that perhaps for next year I would come a little better prepared with detail to get specific answers. But when I reviewed the transcripts, I see that in fact that wasn't the case. I think the questions were quite clear and quite well laid out, and we just simply didn't get any sort of depth of answer this year. So we'll be pursuing a number of those answers that we did receive in more detail over the coming 12 months, because certainly the presentation that we made I think is a level of detail that anyone who works in the environmental protection field knows about and should be able to give us some information on.

So I don't know what the distracting factor was this year, Mr. Chairman, so that we couldn't get a great many answers, but I'm hoping that we can get that cleared up, particularly around cumulative impact. That is an area that Alberta needs to be focusing on with greater detail in the coming future. I think we have in the history of the globe many examples where we have failed to strike a sustainable balance between material demands and the environmental long-term health of land and communities.

If you just want to take a global perspective for a minute, think about what has happened on the continent of Africa. We know that now it has very few trees, many droughts, that people live in drastic poverty. Why? That used to be a very lush land with lots of rivers, lots of trees, lots of grasslands, a multitude of animals, the ability for large populations to sustain themselves with grazing and all kinds of other types of economic development and agricultural land use.

Because of improper management over time we now see a situation where we're faced with desertlike conditions and huge drought conditions. If we here in Alberta don't take a long-term view of how to sustain the balance between the material demands and the needs of the community from the ground perspective, from the perspective of the animals, and from the perspective of the people, within one or two centuries we'll be faced with the same prospect there. If the government doesn't take a look at the long-term prosperity of Alberta, not just for this generation or the next one but for the second and third and fourth ones, for the generation when the grandchildren of these young Cubs that we have in our gallery tonight inherit this province, what's it going to look like?

We always think the biodiversity changes in a community take a long, long time to happen. Well, Mr. Chairman, that isn't true. It can happen very quickly. In a 50-year time period you can go from a very vibrant land use to something that is arid and desertlike, just like that. It doesn't take very long at all. So it is very important for the government at this time, for Environmental Protection to take a

look at those kinds of land uses, the competing demands that we have right now, and start to allocate them now for future generations.

That's what cumulative impact does. It takes any new development that's coming into an area and assesses the impact it has in conjunction with everything else that is happening in the area at the current time and then projects what kinds of pressure that new development is going to have on the area for some time in the future, not six months or a year but five or 10 or 15 or 25 years. That's really sustainable development, behaviour that is taken a look at, that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to also meet their own needs, and I don't think that's happening in this province at this time, Mr. Chairman.

Environmental Protection has a focus of mitigating all damages once you allow economic use into an area. So if that means more gas wells, if that means more forestry companies moving in, if that means more transportation corridors, what ends up getting sacrificed? The land, the corridors that are there for the animals and the wildlife.

How do we know that we have a problem right now? I think we know that we have a problem in many, many different ways. Everybody in this province knows that gas flaring is an issue. People have heard about what's happening in northern Alberta. People are so upset there that they're resorting to actual criminal acts in order to draw attention to the situation. Is it a problem? Well, it must be a problem if we take a look at the facts. The facts are that people are fighting back on the issue, that we are seeing deformities in cattle. We're seeing different kinds of long-term impacts on wildlife.

What kind of long-term impacts? If you go up into northern Alberta now and you talk to people who live and work on the land, people like trappers or guides in the area, people who have lived in the area for long periods of time, they will tell you that we have lots of problems with the wildlife. We have birds that are acting outside of the normal range of behaviour for birds. At this time of year when it's getting warmer, the birds are still fluffed up like they would be in 20- or 40-below weather. They are fighting with each other as species when they should be compatible. They're literally dropping dead out of trees, Mr. Chairman. That's not normal behaviour.

What about the moose? This year there's a problem with the moose in terms of tick infestations. Fish and wildlife will tell us that these kinds of infestations are cyclical, that this is a time period in the cycle of a moose when there are greater tick infestations, and that they will cause the moose problems. But the problem with the moose is that normally they have the natural abilities to fight back against aggressive tick infestations. Their immune system is such that the ticks ultimately leave. Some moose die but not in great numbers. This year we're literally having the moose fall over dead, Mr. Chairman. Why is that? They don't have the immune systems to be able to combat the tick infestations. Well, something's going wrong in the environment to cause that. [interjections]

I see that we have some colleagues that are very interested in this debate. I think that they should travel up to the Peace country and start to talk to some of the people, talk to the fish and wildlife people and say: what is causing these problems? These are things that we need to be addressing. They're really not being addressed at this level. Right now everybody is just laughing them off. They're saying that they aren't big problems. Well, I think that when birds fall dead out of trees and when moose cannot combat normal cyclical tick infestations, we have some kind of a problem.

8:20

What is happening in the north country to the air and the water and the grass that those moose are eating? What's happening up

there? What's causing this problem to happen? Those are the kinds of things that cumulative impact would find out. If the government were to aggressively address these issues in a proactive fashion as they're happening, before they happen, and monitor them as they go along rather than waiting for the moose and the birds to fall over dead, that would be a good idea.

Have we had a problem like this before? Yes. In this province we have had a problem with the fish. This minister knows that we have had quite a long history in the last seven or eight years with the fish populations in this province being reduced. Why? Because we didn't manage them properly in the past. Is the minister taking action now? Yes, he is. Is he doing some of the right things? Yes, he is. But why did it take so long for him to address them? Why have we had to decimate a commercial fishing industry in this province? Why is it that we have a catch-and-release policy almost exclusively throughout the province now rather than people who go fishing being able to come home with the fish that they catch? It's because the province reacted to a problem rather than proactively finding solutions. So those are the kinds of issues where I think we should be seeing some leadership from our government.

MRS. NELSON: What's the solution?

MS CARLSON: What's the solution? The solution is to be proactive, not reactive. The solution is to identify what the problems are, and the first way to do that is to assess the cumulative impact of all the industries in this province on the wildlife, on the land and come to the solutions there. Those are the keys to finding all of the answers, as the Minister of Economic Development, who is so eager to enter into this debate, would like to see happen.

So those are a few key points that I would like to leave the minister with at this time. I cannot pursue them in any greater detail because I need to introduce an amendment. I have an amendment that I believe is at the table. Mr. Chairman, you have the amendment before you? At this time I would like to move that this amendment be put under consideration. While it is being distributed to the members, I will read it out. I move that

the estimates for the standing policy committee on sustainable development and environmental protection under reference 1.0.6 of the 1999-2000 estimates of the Department of Environment Protection be reduced by \$73,000 so that the operating expense and capital investment to be voted is \$355,462,000.

Now, why would we be bringing forward this amendment? Well, Mr. Chairman, standing policy committees are not all-party committees as we see them in other . . .

MRS. NELSON: Because you were told to do it. You were told to do it; that's why.

MS CARLSON: No, it isn't because I was told to do it. It is because it's the right thing to do in this instance.

Absolutely. There is no way that the people of this province should be paying, Mr. Chairman, for the food and beverages of the government members who are part of this committee, for the convention fees that are in this budget, which totals \$73,000 a year, for something that is really an internal strategy committee of the government.

If the standing policy committees were committees that were all-party committees as we see in other provinces, where people who come to make representation to them could make representation to everyone who represents the people in this province, then we'd think that those standing policy committees would be functional and would be actually serving a purpose that meets the needs of the people. When they are simply used, as they are in this case, as

internal strategy committees, they don't serve that purpose. We think that \$73,000 in this particular area spent solely on meals and convention fees for those policy committee members is not a good use of the taxpayers' dollars in this province. Therefore we are asking that these dollars be removed from this budget.

In fact, it has been our proposal for many years and I believe a good proposal and one that is adopted by many other provinces, that these standing policy committees be all-party committees where people who came to make presentations to them would in fact be making them to all parties who are represented in the Legislature so that everybody has an opportunity to hear what it is that people are asking for throughout their province. I am not saying that there should be dollars attached to those committees.

DR. TAYLOR: Don Tannas doesn't want to go hungry at those meetings.

MS CARLSON: Then he can pack his lunch and so should you. That would be a proper use of taxpayer dollars.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would invite all of these front-bench cabinet ministers who've been so vocal to stand up and put their comments on the record so that the people in this province know how they feel they can justify this \$73,000.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood. [interjection] I know that the hon. member invited you, but we do have an agreement. Either we keep to the agreement or we don't. The agreement that I have in front of me is that we have 20 minutes for the opposition to respond and not the minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, just want to support this amendment. I think that if the standing policy committees served . . . [interjection] You know, Mr. Chairman, it's really tough to hear over the Minister of Economic Development over there.

The whole standing policy committee notion, in my view, revolves around and was designed for the lobbyists to come forward to the government and put their positions on the table and make their requests. That's why in fact I have a lot of difficulty with this. The fact that it's a \$73,000 travel, food, and beverage budget for the standing policy committees when those chairs already get cars and \$15,000 extra a year -- I think that that's quite generous. If you're going to have a committee and you have a budget of \$73,000, then it should be used wisely, and I'm not sure that this is one of those wise ways.

You know, the government wants to be a leader. Well, here you go. Here's an opportunity to be a leader and get rid of this gross expenditure that is put forward to the population, to Albertans. In fact, you know what, Mr. Chairman? If all of these committees in fact got rid of their food and beverage budget, you know what? One of these \$73,000 would pay a policeman for a year. How many standing policy committees are there? They would pay a couple more policemen for a year on the street. So I think there are some ways and means to use that money that's going to benefit Albertans far better than having the lobbyists come in and have dinner with the MLAs to put forward their positions.

I support this. I challenge the government members to have the wherewithal to get up and support this as well. Thank you.

[Motion on amendment lost]

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and

proposed estimates for the Department of Environmental Protection, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$355,535,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Municipal Affairs

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll first of all call on the chair, the hon. Member for Wainwright.

8:30

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The designated supply committee on Municipal Affairs met to consider the ministry's estimates on Monday, March 29, 1999. It is my pleasure to report to the Committee of Supply on our deliberations. The Minister of Municipal Affairs gave a good overview of the estimates, and all of the members had a good chance to ask questions. The minister committed to table the answers to these questions in the Assembly, and she also encouraged the members to bring specific concerns to her attention.

The new three-year business plans for the department laid out the road map for Alberta Municipal Affairs. To achieve the goals set out in the business plan, Municipal Affairs will work together in partnership with the province's 362 municipalities, 148 housing management bodies, 228 registry agents, and numerous community-based groups that deliver programs on behalf of the minister. I would like to say that the goals and the objectives and the performance measures of the ministry reflect and support the overall goals of the government in striking the right balance.

Although the minister and her department did an excellent job in presenting her estimates and things went quite well, I was extremely disappointed in our Liberal opposition's questions. They asked dozens of questions that were answered in the business plans and in the budget documents that were sitting right in front of them at the table. I would hope that this was just an oversight. I know it likely wouldn't happen again, but it would be nice for it to be corrected for another year. I say that in all sincerity for our committee to function properly.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, if you'd address the chair as opposed to those who are near and dear.

MR. FISCHER: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman.

I don't think that it's fair to the department to rewrite whole books, that are sitting there in front of them, to answer those questions. In order for our committee to be productive -- a year ago our committee was very productive. I thought it went extremely well, and this year was a disappointment.

With that, that is my report. Thank you.

MR. GIBBONS: I find the preliminary item somewhat insulting, to the point that maybe the member would like to point out how many of them were in there and how many weren't. I thank the minister

and the members from her department that came in there, even if the chairman feels as if he wanted to be there an hour and wanted to leave and go somewhere else. We still haven't had the answers for the questions, Madam Minister. For the questions that we asked that particular day, there's nothing substantial yet. There's nothing in my hands saying that questions that weren't in the book have been answered. So maybe next time around I'll ask the chairman for some other positives instead of negatives and whatever, instead of playing his one-string guitar, that he's been playing with this government for a number of years.

The reduction of the provincial funding commitment to our local governments has resulted in increasing constraints being placed on our local authorities to provide a resource needed to respond to the pressures of growth. Now, this member happens to be sitting out in the country, and he must listen to the odd person. He must go to the odd function, where he must hear something. Local governments have had little choice but to respond to provincial funding reductions by imposing new property and business taxes, new increases to user fees and licences, or reducing the level of service available to people in our communities.

In a submission to the Alberta growth summit in July '97, the city of Calgary and many other cities around the province said: is this province actually listening to us? The city of Calgary cited the following effects to the service quality level from the provincial downloading. The number of people considered completely homeless in Calgary increased by almost 40 percent between '94 and '97, and that number is increasing. If the chairman of that committee would read Meeting Critical Needs for Affordable Housing in Calgary instead of the puffball questions that were put by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek today, maybe he wouldn't be standing up with his hand-noted information and chastising us.

Demands on services at the Calgary Drop-in Centre doubled between '92 and '96, with the centre having the capacity for less than 60 percent of its ongoing daily demands. What has the response of the Alberta government been to the challenge to the opportunity for growth as we move into the 21st century? Unfortunately, they seem to believe that with a little pressure-point funding and some onetime infrastructure grants, the hidden deficit within the physical human infrastructure system can be patched over. I hope the chairman of that committee is listening to this. But onetime infrastructure grants and pressure-point funding do not deal with fundamental issues, which is the development of appropriate funding by the government regime for local authorities that is stable, predictable, and reflects priorities emerging from our communities.

The Premier a couple of weeks ago in supplementary supply challenged our researcher to come over and look at some information, because our researcher just happens to outdo about 500 employees on the Treasury side. In Calgary, under infrastructure, there's 41 percent that is their concern, and that is a major, major concern. If we can't ask questions in committee around infrastructure problems, maybe Wainwright might just fall off the map of Alberta.

Other things that happen throughout the province. In total, Calgary mentioned, infrastructure was 60 percent. What infrastructure is the main objective over there? They're saying that sitting in their cars is a major, major issue, trying to get to and from work. Maybe that isn't the same problem in Wainwright, because they're probably losing population with the type of things that are being said here.

Now, the minister said the other day in a question that I had that maybe I should be asking her questions ahead of time. On the vital statistics item that was submitted on December 29, 1998, I've had a number of concerns from people on their birth and getting the birth

certificates for their children. It is almost a task that they're concerned with.

Back to the committee report from Calgary, Meeting Critical Needs for Affordable Housing. The minister did have a symposium last year. Under that symposium I thought that maybe besides having puffball questions coming today in this House, we would have had some substantial information there and some help for Calgary. Calgary's report came out at the same time, one month after the symposium, July 16, and they're still wondering when they're going to get answers, just like I am from the Committee of Supply, as the chairman probably hasn't produced any questions on it.

MR. BONNER: They were too tough.

MR. GIBBONS: They were too tough for you.

Another question I'd like to ask is around natural gas marketers. Is the licence going to be given back to the marketer after the suspension?

Maybe I'll just keep asking questions here, because it seems to bother somebody that I asked too many before.

This government has created one of the largest infrastructure deficits in Canada by its six-year policy of downloading -- what I call the one-string guitar, that the chairman has played with them -- on the municipal local governments between '92 and '97, and in '98-99 it keeps going on, because there was nothing in this actual new budget that is actually helping the municipalities.

8:40

The provincial transfer to local governments fell by nearly \$390 million, or 46 percent, the second-largest decline among all Canadian provinces. The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association reflected on this reality and has offered some recommendations to address the Alberta infrastructure deficit. When does the government plan to introduce a legislative framework giving the municipalities access to stable and long-term planning? Maybe the chairman will look at my private member's motion, Motion 541, and see how he votes on it. I know he'll vote against it anyway. [interjection] That could be, but I'll keep bringing it forward. We'll just keep getting out there and pushing this to all the municipalities, and maybe Albertans will start looking somewhere else for once.

What plan does the government have to work with municipalities to clarify the roles and responsibilities between governments? Is the government giving any consideration to the AUMA recommendation for creation of a provincial/municipal charter and improved relations and communication? How will providing up to \$540 million of interest relief on a \$1 billion Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation loan assist in a stable and predictable funding base for municipalities? I wonder if the chairman understands that one, because I didn't get an answer before in this House. How will the recommendations before the province to share up to 40 percent of the \$400 million in principal repayment of Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation loans assist in the stable, predictable funding base for municipalities?

Mr. Chairman, I don't usually stand up and talk forever, but when provocative statements are being said, I think I will be standing up and talking. You know, we asked questions around the education tax review committee. The Calgary corridor, the people in there, and the MLAs representing those people -- I do feel sorry for them, because they're taking the heat every day. As far as market value assessment, market value assessment goes a long ways, but I do believe that something has to come out of the tax review, and I hope that the members taking part in that will come with something that makes sense.

Which one of the educational committee recommendations will be

implemented in the current year that came out of the past one, that the Premier didn't know anything about, to reduce the educational tax burden of the residential property owners? Is the government still looking at phasing out the education tax on residential properties and funding the residential portion from the general revenue? Which provincial grant programs, Municipal Affairs or Transportation, will the government eliminate when they reduce the residential tax?

Mr. Chairman, at this time I'll sit down, but when provocative statements are being said, that's when you'll see me stand up and say them back.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of questions that I'd like to put forward to the minister. Those questions are in relation to the downloading of funding to the municipalities in relation to municipal policing. In this province we have a number of municipal police agencies that police larger centres, and one of the things that doesn't happen anymore is that there used to be a municipal police grant. That grant has gone by the wayside. It doesn't exist anymore.

In fact, in '92-93 I believe the grant was worth about \$32 million. If we adjust it for population and inflation today, it would run about \$37 million. Then it was divided amongst the policing agencies, so you saw the larger centres getting roughly \$10 million and the smaller agencies then splitting the rest of the pot. Well, that doesn't happen anymore, and one thing I've noticed, Mr. Chairman, in this Legislature is that we have been passing an awful lot of legislation that requires police involvement.

In fact, we have bills before us that are going to require a greater resource in terms of time and money from the police, yet the government doesn't seem to think that along with those increased responsibilities and creating new laws there should come an increase in funding. I recognize that resources are finite, but we also have to recognize that policing is not an area where you're going to make a lot of money or any money for that matter.

The whole notion that the municipalities are totally responsible for their policing dollars certainly has value in the fact that it's the local government that makes the decisions. However, the funding dollars that used to go to the local governments have been cut out of the picture. So in that respect it makes the decision far more difficult for local governments to determine where the money, one, is going to come from and, two, how it is going to be fair. Is it police and fire that should get the money or is it transportation or is it planning and development? Where does that limited resource go?

I think it's very important to note that there's a big gap, and I'm wondering if the Minister of Municipal Affairs is considering that when she's developing her budget. I guess if we want to have all these great things, and you want to pass all this legislation and you want to make the police accountable, then you're going to have to do something about helping them be more effective by putting more funding into the system. That's a responsibility I feel -- in fact many Albertans feel that's a responsibility of this government, and to see a mere, I believe it was, 4 or 8 percent increase to provincial policing doesn't go very far when you consider the population. Towns like Strathmore, Alberta, have seen a population increase of 2,000 residents, yet we don't see a corresponding increase for the level of service provided not just by police but by other different services.

So given that, I think the minister should reassess her budget and look at ways of helping the communities, look at ways of doing business smarter with the policing agencies. It's not just a Department of Justice issue. It is a municipal issue, and it does fall within that area of responsibility.

I'm also wondering if the minister has any comments in relation to the levels of policing that she expects in the communities around this province. Decisions are made at a ministerial level that may impact another ministerial area of responsibility, and those ministers don't necessarily know what's happening or what's going on.

One of those issues that I can think of off the top of my head is the issue around the justices of the peace that falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Justice. The Minister of Justice is totally responsible for that, yet municipalities are up in arms because they now don't have any local JPs that could deal with policing problems and deal with the bad guys in an expedient way. Therefore, the local police members are spending more time in the office writing up paper as opposed to out on the street doing the job that Albertans expect them to do. So, in fact, there are many crossovers, and I think the Minister of Municipal Affairs would do well to sit down and look at those particular issues.

8:50

Another one of the issues that I'm still concerned about, that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has alluded to, is the affordable housing initiative. We have in my constituency a great number of folks that require affordable housing and in that respect safe, affordable housing. I'm hoping that the minister, through all of her reports and the task forces and the committees and all of those kinds of things that have spent endless amounts of money at the taxpayers' expense thus far, will be coming up with some solutions very quickly that will in fact assist us with that issue. In this particular city, in Calgary, Brooks, Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, you name it, there are these problems. So I'm hoping that we see some funding allocated somewhere along the line for those kinds of issues.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat, and I'm hoping that the minister will be able to respond to some of those issues at some point in the future. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and the proposed estimates for the Department of Municipal Affairs, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$259,026,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Transportation and Utilities

THE CHAIRMAN: Just to review the rules again, because we've gone from designated supply subcommittees to subcommittees coming back to the Chamber. The agreement is 20 minutes by the minister, 20 minutes by the opposition, five minutes by the third party.

Okay. The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I again appreciated the opportunities of dialoguing with the various members of the House: my colleagues, members of the Official Opposition, and members of the opposition. I tried to answer most of the questions

the last evening. In order to save time, we'd agreed that for the last three speakers I would table the answers. That would be my intention tonight, then, for the sake of saving time. I'll table the answers rather than spend 20 minutes going through them, if that's acceptable.

What I also will commit to is: any new questions that come forward tonight we will respond to in a written fashion, if that's acceptable, and that will allow the opposition the full 20 minutes for asking questions. So with that, I'll table those questions which I wasn't able to answer the last session, and I will listen to the questions that come forward now. If they are fewer than 20 minutes, I'll try and answer them. If they're at the full 20 minutes, then I commit to responding to them in written form.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed presumably by Calgary-Buffalo.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As you can see, we're eager to get our questions on the record here for the minister. I just have a couple of quick questions.

Mr. Minister, as you know, I spent last weekend in the Grande Prairie area, and some of the questions and issues that were brought forward were transportation issues. I'm wondering if at some point in the future you can tell us what your policy is going to be for those lumber trucks up there on those highways. As I understand it, there are winter weights now for some of those trucks carrying trees, and there's been some concern that carrying heavier loads in the winter is not the safest thing to be doing and that we should have a uniform kind of weight on those trucks all year long and that you are in the position of addressing that now. So if you could let members of the Assembly know where you're going with that issue.

I'd like a little more background on that if I could, because I don't have much of a history of it. How did it happen in the first place that there were two different weight classes for the trucks? What would be the considerations that you're using to change those at this time? Why just for the trees? Is there some inconsistency there in terms of the different weights that are allowed to be hauled on the roads?

Also an issue up there is the condition of the roads, particularly those running from the B.C. side into Alberta, into Grande Prairie specifically, so the east/west corridors. Are there any plans there for improving or widening those roads in the near future? If you could just give us an update on that, I would appreciate it.

That concludes my questions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to bring a couple of comments and questions forward, more of an inquiry to the minister, and see what kind of feedback he can provide in relation to the disaster services branch. I brought up a question during question period -- I think it was earlier this session or last session -- in relation to the vital points program. The vital points program is a program that is probably not even in a maintenance mode right now at the federal level. It was actually run by Emergency Preparedness Canada. What that program was designed to do was to give a risk factor to all of Alberta's large utilities and oil and gas compressor stations and those kinds of things.

When that came back, sort of to my mind, was during all of this so-called ecoterrorism that was going on in the province. I wondered at that time if we hadn't fallen away from a program that had some value at some point and what was the potential of one, if the program is not dead, sort of looking at the merits of the program in relation to all of those facilities that in fact are important to this province.

I remember during the Gulf war there was a need for us as oil and gas corporate security consultants involved in doing the risk analysis to just sort of make sure that this was top of mind for us and the RCMP. What in fact would happen was that in a time when there was a threat to the province, be it war or be it a civil disobedience or something like that, then in fact the government would respond. There were two components to this program. There was the federal aspect of the program where the RCMP did the threat assessments and the physical security assessments. There was another component of it, and that was the provincial responsibility, and again it was more or less to give a threat assessment.

I can think of some large compressor stations in this province that have four or five jet engines and are pushing just trillions of cubic metres of gas through them where any vandalism, any terrorist activity, any of those kinds of things would be a real threat to this province, because those particular companies have such an investment here, and not only that, the explosive nature of the product and those kinds of things. Some of the factors that were weighed in making those assessments were things like the importance of the particular system to the province, to the country, and to the company itself. Also, risk response: how long would it take an emergency response team to get out to the site, be it the RCMP, local emergency services people, trained emergency response teams from the plants, the oil and gas companies themselves? Looking at those kinds of things.

9:00

It just became sort of topical when all of this was happening, and I'm wondering if we shouldn't be looking if not at activating that program, certainly at the value it had for the province. Something like that, if people knew to a certain level that that kind of thing existed and the oil gas companies were taking care of those things themselves along with the government, then they might have felt less risk, less vulnerability in the environments that they were in the north. So I'd just like to see us at least reassess whether or not it's worth getting back into, whether or not there's a different way of delivering that particular program.

So I would leave that with the minister, and hope he can get back with some insights for me. Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much. A couple of questions to the minister. Firstly, I appreciate the courtesy. He sent me a letter listing transportation projects planned for the city of Calgary, and I appreciated that. It was useful seeing a summary of those projects. I also wanted to applaud the minister for announcing the \$6.7 million grant for the extension of 96th Avenue. You know, the Calgary Airport Authority is one of the most dynamic, exciting enterprises in the province, and the way they're leveraging and adding value to what exists in Calgary and southern Alberta and building on that deserves the kind of support they're getting from the minister. So congratulations to the minister for supporting that.

A major problem though. When I look at the KPMG report that talked about funding to the big cities, what we find is that the additional money the minister talked about the other day that's gone back into Calgary in particular -- in effect, if you look at the money that was taken out over the last five years, really all those dollars have done is largely brought us back to the point where we were before. He and I had this exchange I think a year ago. The \$65 million you're spending on the north/south trade corridor -- and the Deerfoot extension I understand is part of that system. We still have major transportation problems. For example, we still don't have an

east/west bypass in terms of the city of Calgary. We still have huge volumes of truck traffic, tourist traffic on 16th Avenue. I can't think of another major city on the continent that would funnel all of that traffic, so much of it, through 16th Avenue. So I'd say, Mr. Minister, that the Deerfoot extension announcement, as I'm sure you've been told, is not the top priority of the city of Calgary.

I think if it means some delay -- the north/south corridor was by 2007 or whatever the target date. If we don't look after moving people and trucks and so on around the city of Calgary in an efficient fashion, it doesn't matter what we do with that north/south corridor. A lot of that is going to generate in Calgary or dead-end in Calgary, and we've got to be able to improve our transportation systems there. Maybe it means some trade-offs in terms of delaying completion of the north/south corridor and some recommitment of dollars. The \$65 per capita, which I think is what's being spent in the big centres, sounds like a lot of money, but when you look at the enormous cost involved in elevated roads and that sort of thing, certainly in Calgary it doesn't go very far.

So I once again take up my annual urging of the minister of transportation, who has shown himself so responsive in so many other areas, to focus in terms of some of the other projects which are much higher on the city of Calgary's list than the Deerfoot extension. I'm interested in seeing that.

So a good move on 96th Avenue, some very positive steps in some other areas of his department, but we continue to have some fairly significant problems with inner-city traffic in Calgary. Mr. Minister, if we can't move people around the city of Calgary, that's going to handicap us, it's going to slow our growth, and we all need that growth. This province needs that growth.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks, Mr. Minister, for making some answers available to us and for your courtesy throughout this process. I wanted to ask you a couple of questions that flow from my reading of your business plan under the title Our Core Businesses and Programs. In particular, I'm looking at the item that speaks of "efficient multi-modal transportation influencing national and international policy in rail, air, passenger, ports/marine operations, and border crossing services." That's a big package. I have a couple of questions that flow out of that.

Number one. I'm looking at air service. Of course, being an Edmontonian, I'm always interested in airport services and what's going on with our airport. Recently there's been resurrected some debate about the wisdom of consolidated passenger services at our International Airport. I don't want to enter into that debate here but simply to say: where is your department in terms of looking at the province of Alberta as a whole and where it fits into the nation of Canada, the North American continent, and then international movement of people and goods via air? Have you done some medium-range and long-range planning? Has that been informed by some of the debate right here in this city regarding the Edmonton Regional Airports Authority's medium- and long-term strategies for growth?

Another question I have about the co-ordination is: with the changing air travel patterns, the changing behaviour of businesses and recreational travelers, what kind of process are you using to keep on top of the changing patterns? Are you doing surveys? Are you relying on industry information? Are you gathering some information and some data independent of industry? How often are you asking the questions about air service needs for Albertans? I'd be interested to know.

That sort of flows into my next set of questions, Mr. Minister. Recently, as you know, the Minister of Municipal Affairs hosted a forum on regional services and regionalization and how the municipalities surrounding Edmonton can work together. Part of that process was to look at what may be possible 30 or 40 years out. It was a very long-range envisioning process and one that I think is a very worthwhile debate to enter into. While we're asking local municipalities to engage in a long-term envisioning process 30 or 40 years out in terms of what they would like to do, where they'd like to be, what services they'd like to have or share, own, or buy, how they want to relate to one another, and how their corporate relationship will mesh with where the province is going, I'm wondering whether or not the provincial departments that have that direct interface with municipal governments have engaged in the same long-term envisioning process. Have they shared that?

9:10

So when you're asking a municipality to sit down and talk about sharing services for road maintenance, sharing services for construction and other infrastructure needs, planning new ways of partnering, you're asking those municipalities to do that in a context that hasn't been very stable lately. I'm trying not to make that a negative or a positive thing. It hasn't been very stable lately for the municipalities. I'm wondering whether the same questions that the government is asking of these municipal governments, the provincial government has asked of itself. Has it put a parallel vision in place when it comes to Transportation and Utilities for the municipal governments to reflect on as they're answering the questions that have been posed to them through Municipal Affairs? It seems to me that that would be very helpful.

I think everybody will realize that when you're talking about planning three or four decades down the road, it's not a matter of hitting the bull's-eye; it's a matter of at least knowing in what direction the target lies. I'm not asking you that so we can say: oh, yeah, well, where's the straight line between today and that goal or that target 30 years out? I'm simply asking because I think it only makes sense. If we're trying to find new efficiencies and new partnerships and new relationships for municipalities -- and part of that is this need for long-term strategic thinking -- the province should be right there working with them, putting its own plans and its own goals forward to be part of that mix. If you could help me understand how that process is working -- and I see you nodding in the affirmative, and I feel good about that -- then I would find that very helpful.

Those are the comments that I wanted to get into the record. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Transportation and Utilities, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$868,450,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Community Development

THE CHAIRMAN: Are we agreed that we continue the rule of 20-25?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Good.

The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Over the course of two different occasions we've had the opportunity to debate this department. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Currie, chairman of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission; the Member for Calgary-Cross, chairman of the Advisory Committee on the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund; the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, chairman of the Community Lottery Program Secretariat; and the Member for Calgary-West, chairman of the Seniors Advisory Council, for their input to the discussion. I made an attempt over this time to answer members' questions. I've gone over the questions that were asked over the two periods to see if we had missed any.

We've highlighted a number of areas. The one area I wanted to just mention very briefly is the seniors' symposium that is planned for this fall -- there's considerable interest in that -- just to tell members that as the plans unfold for that, we will certainly share those plans with you. The location hasn't been defined for sure yet. We have to look at travel and ease of access for people to come to it, but the Member for Calgary-West and the Member for Leduc will certainly be assisting in making those plans, and we will keep you apprised of the developments as they occur.

The other thing I wanted to mention that I think I neglected to mention is the electronic hookup with our libraries, which we're quite proud of. By the end of March two years from now we will have a true electronic library network. Libraries in virtually all of our communities will have their own community web sites. I think that's quite wonderful. I also want to commend the Alberta Library, which is the provincewide consortium of public and private libraries, Industry Canada, the western economic partnership agreement, and a number of private-sector companies that have come together to meet the challenges of making sure that in this fast world of information sharing we can be on the cutting edge in that area.

There is one other that I'm not sure I highlighted. It's a millennium project that our department is hosting. The Provincial Museum of Alberta is planning the major exhibition called Jesus through the Centuries, that will open in our province next year. It's a non-denominational look at the cultural and social impact of Jesus as he is seen throughout the year. This, I must say, is a very ambitious undertaking, but I have no doubt that the Provincial Museum will have great success with this, as they have already demonstrated to us in the Syncrude Gallery of Aboriginal Culture.

We are trying very hard in this department to strike the right balance, to be there for support to the community. I do want to tell all members on all sides of this House that we appreciate the input that we receive from members and will continue to try to respond to you as you bring your issues to us.

With that, my thanks to my colleagues. We'll review your comments tonight, and we will follow up as quickly as we can with the responses to any further queries that you might have.

Thank you very much.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have to arm wrestle to get up. There are so many people eager to speak to this.

I'd like to commend the minister and the staff of Community Development. The minister and her staff have set the bar very high with the turnaround time on the written responses to any questions that were given to her that she was not able to respond to on the spot. That's a one-week turnaround. That's very helpful particularly because we had the Community Development debate in two installments, and we were able to get responses back. Even more impressive was that after the second debate one week later I had all of the written responses to that. I commend the minister for that. I think she has set a fine example for all the other members on the front bench, and I look to them to follow her fine example.

There is one other area that I omitted to ask for details on, so I will impose on the minister and her staff once again. I'm sure she will not fail me. That is, if I could get a detailed breakdown of the capital investment money and what particular projects that's going for. I noticed as I went through the highlights looking to see if there was anything there that was noted as being particularly a capital cost, the one thing that caught my eye was the feasibility plans for expanding the Provincial Museum of Alberta. I don't know if that's under the capital investment costs. I'm wondering if there has been any money set aside to begin construction or renovation or anything else on the Provincial Museum.

I'm aware at the same time that there are two other important facilities to Albertans that are in line either before or after the Provincial Museum, and those are the Jubilee auditoria, both the southern and northern, one in Calgary and one in Edmonton, and also of course the Provincial Archives. Now, we've been led to believe that's a few more years down the road, but frankly all capital cost large buildings are.

9:20

I had had someone make an inquiry to me if there was any money in the works as far as capital investment for the Provincial Museum, so if I could just get a breakdown. I believe \$110,000 is what's listed: \$60,000 under seniors perhaps -- I've now lost my page -- and \$50,000 under the department itself. Ministry support services is \$50,000, and services to seniors, vote 4, is \$60,000, for a total of \$110,000. I am assuming that I am looking in the right place, and that is all of the capital investment costs that exist for the department. Yes, I'm pretty sure about that. If the minister would be so kind as to give me the detailed breakdown of what that is, I'd appreciate it.

Having arm wrestled to get first in line to be able to ask that one other question, I will now give way to my colleagues who were so eager to be able to get in a few more comments. Thank you very much.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, thank you for your letter of March 22, 1999. I always appreciate your customary efficiency in responding to questions.

Now, I've got a couple of things I wanted to ask. I didn't hear in the course of the estimates debate a discussion of the Western Heritage Centre. This is the centre that had an enormously difficult time getting funding to get started, and I remember my colleague the former Member for Calgary-North West often questioned its feasibility. It's true in this province. I come from Drumheller, a place of one of the most successful -- what do we call them? -- heritage sites, huge tourist facilities. Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. I mean, there are some wonderful facilities. But I wonder if

the apparent Midas touch that the minister and her predecessor brought to designating, supporting these things left them or if they lost it when it came to the Western Heritage Centre.

The attendance has been strikingly disappointing, strikingly low, far below projections, and maybe when compared with the huge success of Drumheller, Head-Smashed-In and some of the other ones, it looks worse off. There's more money going in there, Madam Minister, but what sort of analysis has been done? It looks like this time the critics may have got it right. The competition is stiff between Stampede and the federal -- what is it? -- Bar U Ranch and Heritage Ranch. There are other facilities offering similar western experiences for tourists, and I'd like to know what sort of feasibility studies have been done around the Western Heritage Centre specifically because I don't find here how much money has gone into that, what the projections are. What are the targets in terms of attendance and attendance-generated revenue?

Now, another concern. I spend a lot of time talking to people who work in agencies and in services providing assistance to developmentally disabled Albertans. The Protection for Persons in Care Act has been contentious from the time it was proclaimed. I hear rumours that there's an act coming in to amend it, if not in this session, soon. There are people in the field, there are social workers, there are people working with developmentally disabled persons, working with seniors who have been told or have been led to believe that there's going to be legislative change around the statute. So would the minister be good enough to share those plans with us?

Also, I didn't ask the question, but have we got a detailed analysis of the number and types of concerns that have come in? The minister will be aware that the Kerby Centre initiative in terms of the home for abused seniors is, I understand, ready to open. Maybe I'll see her at the opening and welcome her again to Calgary-Buffalo. It puts me in mind of the important issues around protection for persons in care, so I'm really keenly interested in finding out how that act is working, what problems have been identified, and what specific plans the minister or her department has developed to address them.

I also represent a constituency if not with the highest concentration of low-income seniors in Alberta, one of the highest concentrations. Well, my colleague from Edmonton-Centre may want to quarrel with me. I said: if not "one of the highest concentrations" of low-income seniors. I think what I continue to hear is that in a very low vacancy rate market like the city of Calgary -- and the Minister of Municipal Affairs knows this very well -- the one group that's probably most adversely affected is seniors. I'm not talking about seniors who are in a lodge or a nursing home or in a medical facility. I'm talking about the widow who lives on the second or third floor of a walk-up apartment in Connaught or Sunalta and who phones my office or comes down to my office to tell me that she can't afford medication because all her money's going to rent or that she can't afford another thing.

This is a big issue. It ultimately is not going to be solved until we have an adequate supply of affordable housing. But, Madam Minister, beyond all of the explanations from your colleague in Municipal Affairs and what the Calgary Apartment Association tells me, that it could be worse, that it's going to get better, the reality for that woman in that walk-up apartment is that it's immediate; it's a huge impact. Short of addressing additional funding in the special-needs assistance, I don't know precisely what the solution is. I just am telling you that there's got to be a better solution.

My best estimates are that we're not going to see for at least two more years. It'll be another 20, 24 months before we have a significant additional supply of affordable, low-cost housing somewhere proximate to downtown Calgary. You know, this isn't

a new observation. To a senior who's living downtown for a host of reasons, it's not a lot of help to say: you go practically out to Okotoks or Cochrane, and you know, there's a development there and you can move in. Her doctor is downtown. The stores are downtown. She doesn't drive. Her friends are downtown. The Kerby Centre is downtown. The Golden Age Club is downtown. It makes sense. There are other seniors there. She shouldn't have to move to the fringes of the community to try and find a place to live.

Madam Minister, you may say that that's not all your problem, and you're right; it isn't. It's all of our problem. But this is the one chance I get every year to remind you and your colleague in Municipal Affairs that the problem isn't getting better. I see it in my constituency office just daily, and it's frustrating. I can burn out a lot of good, competent constituency administrators who run out of places to refer these people who are in just this sort of impasse. Anyway, it's an ongoing problem, and I continue to press you for solutions.

The senior citizens' symposium you talked about brings up a concern I'd raised before. You have come back and told me that I'm -- you put it of course in your usual tactful fashion -- missing the boat here in terms of the independence of your facilitators. Well, Madam Minister, if you really believe that "the facilitators have no stake in the outcome and the content," that "their only concern is that the process is open, fair and allows all ideas to be considered," that "in no way" do these facilitators "compromise the independence of a summit" -- I don't know whether I told her about the Member for Redwater, the long-term care review. In Calgary there was a session a lot of seniors came to. It was facilitated by somebody from the Department of Community Development. I recognized this individual from one of the summits. You had all these seniors there, and they were talking about what was going to be required in terms of long-term care needs, health needs, and so on. I will never forget the facilitator from your department. I said: we have three issues we're going to address today. She had the flip chart. I don't remember what the first one was, but the second item was what's not working now for seniors, words to that effect. I thought: well, that's pretty important, because a lot of these seniors are less interested about designing programs and accommodation and services for a 50 year old like me to be able to enjoy in 20 years. They want to know what's going to happen in the next six months, 16 months.

9:30

What happened is the facilitator from your department very smoothly -- we went through the historical review, and then she got to the second question. She said: I'm not really sure that's very helpful; we're going to move to the third one; we're going to do the long-range planning thing. I remember -- and maybe I mentioned this to the minister -- the seniors at the table I was at said: why is it we wouldn't identify the things that aren't working well for seniors right now? It made me think. It's one of the reasons why I continue to disagree with the Member for Redwater.

The reality is that on that long-term care review, Madam Minister -- and you know it -- the consultation was done with seniors' advocacy groups, it was done with the regional health authorities, it was done with professionals, and it was finished before November of 1998. The additional delay in that report is frankly a manufactured delay, and it has to do with all kinds of things. It has nothing to do with an early report. I know that the recommendation internally is to increase the \$3,000 limit available for home care assistance for a senior who needs that care. We need an interim report on that.

Now, you're not the Health minister anymore. You're not even chairing the long-term care review, but if you're not the advocate,

Madam Minister, through the chair, for the 300,000 seniors in this province, who else is going to be? I know the opposition is happy to fill that role, but in your caucus who's going to be the champion for that? So I have that concern.

If the minister really believes "it is the chairs, not facilitators, who determine the nature, direction, specific topics, and final processes of summits," then she hasn't spent enough time around facilitators. I used to do mediation as part of my family law practice. A good mediator or facilitator has enormous influence over the shape, the pace, the style, and the conclusion. It's naive in the extreme I think, with respect, Madam Minister, to think otherwise.

I'll move in one other direction altogether. There is a very large seniors' organization in my constituency that operates out of the Kerby Centre. When the Kerby Centre speaks, I usually pay close attention, and I'd encourage the minister to do that too. They represent a lot of very active, thoughtful, engaged seniors. [interjections] Well, did she see my smiling face in the Kerby Centre? Mr. Chairman, I'm being diverted by the minister. She is so good. She is so good at distracting an earnest questioner.

Okay; let me move quickly. The point is simply this. How is it that the Kerby Centre comes to the Friends of Medicare forum and says:

Many necessary drugs have been removed from the Alberta Blue Cross approved drug list and many new improved drugs are not covered. Low income seniors are facing a grave dilemma -- should they buy food or have a prescription filled and a visit to the dentist is way down the list.

We see a provision here that says:

Seniors are finding the funding for dental care inadequate and as a result are doing without. Lack of tooth care affects your ability to eat, which in turn affects your health and sense of well being. The numbers of seniors not visiting a dentist on a yearly basis is on the increase,

and then a concern that "the lack of support staff in nursing homes is creating serious situations for the frail elderly who have no voice and fear to complain." Madam Minister, these are concerns that I encourage you to take to heart.

The other thing that I want to address. Having a parent with Alzheimer's has been an amazing discovery to me, because I've spent a great deal of time looking at the care for dementia patients in this province. I have to say, Madam Minister, that in terms of the standards and regulations, in terms of the staffing ratio, in terms of the availability of exercise facilities, the restrictions on the use of restraints, whether they're chemical restraints or physical restraints, the concerns are very, very significant.

I attended a conference -- and I think there was one of your colleagues there as well -- at the Alzheimer Society in Calgary. They held a function, and I'm surprised at how many U.S. jurisdictions have developed very sophisticated instruments, very sophisticated pieces of legislation to ensure that there are higher standards of training, higher standards of care. This is not in any sense a criticism of the people that are providing care now. Often you have a staff working with dementia patients who give truly 110 percent, but it's in many cases operators of these facilities who allow unacceptable staff ratios, inadequately trained people. Why is that? Partly because salaries are low, so you're not attracting people who have the kind of training that's required to deal with patients with dementia. So, Madam, Minister, a lot we can do in that respect, and I'm hopeful for a better outcome in 2000.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Community Development, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$312,490,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Science, Research and Information Technology

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call upon the hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DOERKSEN: Use the whole 20 minutes.

DR. TAYLOR: People are encouraging me already to take the 20 minutes. I probably won't. I'll probably be relatively brief.

I just want to respond. Last time when we were up -- I can't remember the exact date when I was up -- they had some questions that I didn't have time to answer, so I would just like to provide some answers to some of those questions and then talk briefly in a general sense about the direction I see.

Edmonton-Glenora asked a question about access to capital. I recognize that access to capital is a problem in this province. We are a province with 9 percent of the population, almost 15 percent of the economy of Canada, and only 3 percent of venture capital in this country. That says to me that something isn't right when an economy as powerful as we are can only attract 3 percent of the venture capital in this country in spite of the growth in our economy and in spite of the good things that are happening in our economy. A member asked about that.

I see that as an important issue, and I hope to deal with this issue. It's going to be one of our goals this year to investigate this issue: why do we only have 3 percent of the capital when we're 9 percent of the population and anywhere from 13 to 15 percent of the economy? It's a serious issue. I've met with a number of companies, young companies just starting. It does hamper their development in this province. It doesn't hurt established companies, but it certainly is hampering the development of the young, highly entrepreneurial knowledge-based companies. So it's an issue we need to look at as a government, and I'm in the process of trying to access some information. I'm going to meet with a few of these venture capitalists some time within the next two months so I understand their issues. Quite frankly, I don't really understand their issues. I've got to get a good understanding of those issues and then come back and talk to some people in the Department of Treasury and understand their issues, because we do invest as a province.

9:40

We invest a fund of about \$32 billion in various enterprises handled by money managers, and certainly some of that fund will be invested in venture capital funds, but they are all outside the province. So I need to gain a better understanding of that and then see if we can work on something inside this province to encourage investments on a level playing field, not favouring any company but just opening it up and saying: you know, Alberta venture capital companies can compete with this just like B.C. venture capital companies can, and if they're the winners, they're the winners. So

I think it's an important issue. It was a good question, and we will deal with it over the next year. Whether we'll get anything done or not is another issue, but we're certainly going to make an attempt to deal with it.

The next question from Edmonton-Glenora that I didn't have time to answer was -- I think the direct quote is: what's going on with TRILabs? That's quite a broad question. I will try to answer it very specifically. The first thing is that we have a contract with TRILabs in which we supply TRILabs with \$1.5 million a year for the next five years. The return on that investment to the province has been exceptional. For \$1.5 million their return investment ratio -- this is actual dollars from outside the Alberta government -- is 6.8. So for \$1.5 million, multiply that by 6.8 and you get TRILabs' return to the government. Once again, it points out the necessity of government stepping up to the plate and providing some of the seed funding, because you can get this huge ratio with it. That is, quite frankly, 6.8 for every dollar we invest TRILabs gets. That's a much better ratio than we got even with our science and research fund, and we thought we were doing very well when we did the investment with the science and research fund when our ratio was, I believe, 4.35 or 4.4 to 1. So I think that's significant.

Some other questions. Of course, TRILabs is developing highly qualified personnel. There are going to be 22 full-time researchers in Alberta this next year and 37 students, and this is where TRILabs really helps us in Alberta. It takes these graduate students, these highly trained people, and works in co-operative programs. They will have 37 graduate students working with TRILabs in Alberta alone next year. So I think that's particularly important. As well, they are estimating 56 technology disclosures and 13 patents filed in Alberta from just TRILabs alone. So I think that answers the member's question as to what's happening with TRILabs.

Lethbridge-East also asked a couple of questions. He was concerned about the allocations in the budget when our bill was not proclaimed, Bill 14 that was passed last year but was not proclaimed, and to just reassure that member, the bill actually was proclaimed on April 1 of this year. So that member can be assured that everything is legal and aboveboard and being handled in an appropriate manner.

The other comment from the Member for Lethbridge-East, a good, excellent comment, was putting "partnering" into the mission statement. That's a very excellent suggestion. We should have thought of it ourselves, but it's one of the reasons you have some people on the other side. They occasionally come up with some good suggestions, and I'd like to congratulate the member for that. So we will include that. We will change our mission statement and include that. I would particularly invite the members for Edmonton-Glenora and Lethbridge-East to have an open communication process with me -- my door is open to them and perhaps some others of the Liberal caucus -- and an open and honest working relationship. Some others I might have to screen, but these members make good suggestions, and I would encourage them to keep making the good suggestions that they've made.

I would just like to talk a little bit about what I see as a bit of a vision of where we need to go, certainly in R and D and with this group that I'm heading. I think as a province, as I've said before, we are less than 3 million people. There are more than 4 million people in greater Toronto. So we have to be very particular. We have to specify areas we're going to be good at and then be the best in the world in those areas.

There are three particular areas that we're going to really focus on in the next several years with our funds. If you have funds, you can drive issues, so we can drive some of the research programs by supplying funds in appropriate ways. There are three particular areas we want to talk about in the next couple of years. One is the

information/communications technology area. There is a huge opportunity for Alberta in this area. We have a very strong base. We have Nortel in Calgary. We have good researchers in both Calgary and Edmonton. To strengthen that base, the minister of advanced ed has committed \$51 million to put into those programs at universities.

What I'm going to do to encourage that and support the minister of advanced ed is that we're going to create a centre of excellence in information/communications technology in this province. This centre of excellence will cost somewhere between \$10 million and \$15 million to run, and we will do it in partnership with the private sector and educational institutions. We are committed to doing that. In fact, we are just in the process of receiving a proposal from one of the universities that co-ordinates all universities in this area. I don't know how soon we'll have it off the ground. I don't know if we'll have it in time for September; probably not, but we're moving very strongly in that way. What we will do then, once we have that established, is go out and hire three to five very strategic, key people in the world. One of the areas that's really going to be part of this is nanotechnology. We're going to go out and hire some key people in nanotechnology. We're going to hire some of the world leaders.

I don't think I've had my 20 minutes yet, Mr. Chairman, but I can see you are anxious for me to move along, so I'll move along.

We're going to work in this area in a very strong way and encourage development. This is one area, as I say, where we have a strong base.

Briefly let me talk about the two other areas where we're going to work very strongly. One is the area of biomedical or biotechnology. We've got a strong base in biotechnology. We need to develop some infrastructure here in Alberta, and we're going to start working on that over the period of the next year to two years. ARC has a very strong biotechnology base already, some very good facilities that can be built on and developed.

The third area that we're going to develop and work on, very clearly because it's fundamental to our economy, is the area of climate change. We'll establish a major research project in the next several years on this whole area of climate change.

Somebody just passed me a sign that says two minutes. I think I actually have about 10 minutes.

We will develop research in these three key areas in this province. We will drive the research with our dollars. And when you've got almost \$100 million over a three-year span, you have some power to drive research.

So I thank the members for their comments. Once again, my door is open, and I encourage you to have an open dialogue with me on these issues and help us on these issues.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much. Mr. Chairman, I don't want the thousands of Albertans who are going to be reading tonight's *Hansard* to get the sense that this is just a mutual admiration society, that everything's all rosy, but I will say that it's been quite a pleasure working with the minister and his staff over this last year. I found this minister to be very responsive to questions and not the least bit defensive about the questions when they come. He has been honest in either providing answers or saying: that's an issue that's a little out of bounds, and you can't take it any further. That doesn't mean that we agree on everything, but certainly the basis of the dialogue is there, and that's, after all, what this job is all about.

9:50

Mr. Minister, the last comments that you made about the \$100 million and driving research actually fit directly into a theme that I

want to pursue a little bit tonight, and I'll use the opportunity of this being estimates debate to pursue the theme. It really could be considered more general debate, but it does flow from your mission statement in your business plan and hence how you operationalize that mission through the allocation of dollars in your department.

The theme really is one about the degree to which it is appropriate for government to be driving research. You know, on the one hand, I can be critical and say: where's the plan? Where are the priorities? What are you doing in terms of Internet? What are you doing in terms of directed environmental impact research? What are you doing in terms of longitudinal studies of intensive livestock operations, et cetera, et cetera? There's just a whole bunch of targeted research where I could be standing here and pounding on the table saying: "You're not doing enough. It's not focused enough. We need answers. These are issues that are going to affect us and generations to come."

On the other hand, I could make the argument, Mr. Minister, that there is a real danger to government setting and then driving the research agenda. There are examples of governments all over the world and throughout history who have abused that power, who have politicized research, who have politicized science. Some of the most barbarous acts of mankind have happened as a result of the politicization of a scientific agenda. So I am very, very cautious as I ask you to provide this Assembly with a greater sense of certainty and direction about where it is that government is taking the science, research, and information technology agenda in this province, because I am mindful of the dangers of government dominating the research agenda.

I guess I would ask you, Mr. Minister: what kind of feedback are you getting? How are you going to deal with that tension that I just described? How are you going to ensure that while the government's aims are being pursued, the line isn't crossed and we're not stifling initiative; that we are not catering to simply a corporate agenda; that we are not catering to simply a political agenda but in fact are encouraging the pursuit of knowledge, the creation of knowledge; that we are pursuing basic science research for the sheer potential of what that may bring; that we will have before us an array of modalities that will allow knowledge to be created that will eventually benefit Albertans and perhaps people far outside of this province as well; but that we won't be driven towards ensuring within any political time frame that that knowledge is necessarily seen as being capitalized on, that we won't be so shortsighted in our pursuit of a research agenda that we will only allow the full-fledged development of those ideas or techniques or technologies that we believe have an immediate payoff?

So, Mr. Minister, I'm asking for more evidence in your business plan of a much longer term world view of made-in-Alberta science and research. I guess that's asking for quite a bit, but it's a critically important point, and it's not simply a responsibility of your department. I would see that your colleagues in Advanced Education, in Health, in Education, in Agriculture, and in Environmental Protection also have a responsibility. But the way I understand the structure now, while they may have some responsibility to ensure what happens within their own departments, Mr. Minister, it falls to you to make sure the vision is governmentwide.

I think it falls to you to make sure that the research community in this province, in fact in this country and throughout the continent, understands and trusts and believes that Alberta is open for research initiatives and is open in terms of whatever government support is available, regardless of whether there is a perceived immediate payoff, as long as the research notions are based on good science and good reason and have the potential to advance our understanding in

whatever the area of pursuit is. So, Mr. Minister, if you can provide me in 50 words or less with your answer to that, your assurance in that regard, I might be persuaded to vote for even more of an appropriation for your department than what it is you're asking for.

I want to thank you again for your co-operation and for your rapt attention during these remarks.

THE CHAIRMAN: Having considered the business plan and the estimates for the department, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Operating Expenses \$62,546,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Clegg in the chair]

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 30, 2000, for the departments and purposes indicated.

Department of Environmental Protection: \$355,535,000 for operating expense and capital investment.

Municipal Affairs: \$259,026,000 for operating expense and capital investment.

Transportation and Utilities: \$868,450,000 for operating expense and capital investment.

Community Development: \$312,490,000 for operating expense and capital investment.

Department of science, research, and information technology: \$62,546,000 for operating expense.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of Supply on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to table copies of documents tabled during Committee of Supply this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: All those in favour of the report, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, if any, say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Carried.

head: Government Bills and Orders
 head: Second Reading

10:00 **Bill 23**
Pharmacy and Drug Act

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 23, the Pharmacy and Drug Act.

The Pharmacy and Drug Act is a companion document to the Health Professions Act, being brought forward by Alberta Labour. The reason this act was drafted is really quite straightforward. When the Health Professions Act was being drafted, it became obvious that certain provisions in the Pharmaceutical Profession Act were inappropriate for inclusion under the Health Professions Act.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The result is that the provisions in the Pharmaceutical Profession Act relating to the licensing and operation of pharmacies and the scheduling of drugs will now be contained in the bill we are debating today, the Pharmacy and Drug Act, and provisions for professional conduct and competency of pharmacists will be contained in the Health Professions Act. So the Pharmacy and Drug Act is a new act but made up of provisions firmly contained in the Pharmaceutical Profession Act.

There are a few minor policy changes that are contained in the Pharmacy and Drug Act, and I'd like to speak to each of these briefly. First, there are some changes to the administrative processes. The Alberta Pharmaceutical Association will administer both the Pharmacy and Drug Act and the regulations related to the practice of pharmacy under the Health Professions Act, so it is necessary that both acts can be similarly administered. The main link between the two acts is through the complaint and discipline process, section 22 of the act, and therefore changes have been made to ensure the structures mesh accordingly. The Pharmacy and Drug Act clearly defines how orders can be made pursuant to either the Health Professions Act and/or the Pharmacy and Drug Act.

Second, there is a simpler and more timely process for amending lists of regulated drugs. This places the process for adding, deleting, and moving drugs between categories and the lists of drugs themselves under ministerial regulation. Currently whenever a drug is moved between schedules, a legislative amendment is required. This is a slow and cumbersome process that involves technical expertise. The new Pharmacy and Drug Act allows ministerial regulations to be developed which will avoid the need for legislative amendment and allow us to implement a more flexible system for scheduling drugs.

Third, since pharmacies are not required to be certified in Alberta, the provisions relating to this have been removed in the Pharmacy and Drug Act.

Fourth, a number of detailed provisions around pharmacy management have been moved to regulation or standards as appropriate.

Fifth, the Alberta Pharmaceutical Association has been given new authority to make regulations concerning satellite and specialized pharmacy services. Satellite pharmacies are small pharmacies established by licensed pharmacies to provide services to remote areas. Since these are not full-fledged pharmacies, they require special controls and standards. Specialized pharmacy services are special procedures that require controlled conditions, equipment, et cetera, that our existing legislation did not clearly provide for.

The regulation of drugs and pharmacies in Alberta is critical to ensuring the health and safety of the public and to control costs. That is the purpose of the Pharmacy and Drug Act. The proposed

policy changes that I've just outlined for you are intended to streamline the regulation of pharmacies while maintaining public safety. I welcome further debate on Bill 23.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane has moved that we adjourn debate on Bill 23. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried.

Bill 30
Employment Pension Plans Amendment Act, 1999

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 30, the Employment Pension Plans Amendment Act, 1999.

The Employment Pension Plans Amendment Act, 1999, protects employees in Alberta by setting standards for the benefits and funding of private-sector pension plans sponsored by their employers. The fundamental objective of the act is to help safeguard pensions from undue loss and to ensure employees and employers are treated equitably.

When the EPPA was passed in 1986, it reflected the most modern standards of that time for pension plans. In the 13 years since then the basic principles behind the act have not changed. Proper funding of pensions remains critical, but society and the Alberta business sector have continued to evolve, and there have been legislative changes in other Canadian jurisdictions in the past decade. We are responding to these developments in Bill 30. The concept of a pension as a reward for long service is gradually being replaced by the concept that a pension is a form of deferred compensation earned as the employee moves through his or her career. The full value of the pension should be recognized and made available to the member, a surviving spouse, or other heirs if the member does not live long enough to enjoy the pension benefits.

The working world has gone through many changes for both employees and employers. Employees want portability and an array of pension choices. Employers need to be able to react to a changing business environment and have a workforce that expands and contracts with the demands of the marketplace. Employer-sponsored pensions are a provincial responsibility except in federally regulated industries such as banking and telecommunications. There is an equivalent to the EPPA in all provinces and in the federal government.

Many of our largest employers have employees in several provinces and are required to meet those provinces' standards as well as our own. These plan administrators are calling for greater harmonization of the rules among jurisdictions.

Clearly, with all of these changes it was time to revisit the EPPA. In the summer of 1998 Alberta Labour circulated a discussion paper to all employers sponsoring pension plans registered in Alberta. In addition, the paper was distributed to two standing advisory committees, to the superintendent of pensions, to pension industry groups, actuarial and legal firms, financial institutions, other Alberta government departments, pension regulators across Canada, and individual Albertans who had expressed an interest in the issues.

Alberta Labour has a tradition of forming partnerships with private-sector organizations in the areas that it regulates. The bill is the result of another successful partnership, involving pension plan sponsors, their professional advisors, and the superintendent's office. With all parties working towards the common goals of assisting employees to save for their retirement and safeguarding their pensions, we have a piece of legislation that is both responsive and effective.

I'd like to outline the main proposals in Bill 30, but first a few words about how the changes will be implemented. Many of the changes will come into effect on proclamation, but the key minimum benefit standard changes will be effective from January 1, 2000. Pension plans that need to make amendments to incorporate the new standards will have until July 1, 2000, to submit their planned amendments to the superintendent for approval.

Now to the highlights of Bill 30. On the benefits side, the two main changes are to the vesting rules and preretirement death benefits. The standard since 1987 has been that the right to a pension vests when an employee has been continuously employed for five years. This bill implements a new standard: vesting after two years of continuous plan membership. The new standard is commonly used across Canada. Similarly, there's been a trend in other Canadian jurisdictions to enhance preretirement death benefits and to equalize the treatment of spouses and, where there is no spouse, other beneficiaries.

Bill 30 reflects this trend in that the full commuted value of the pension earned by the member will be paid to a spouse or, if there is no spouse, to another beneficiary or to the estate. A new category of pension plans, which we are calling multi-unit plans, is being created in the act in response to private- and public-sector developments. Multi-unit plans have more than one employer participating, but they are not like specified multi-employer pension plans, which are collectively bargained. In most respects multi-unit plans are like regular single-employer plans. A multi-unit plan could be established by a group of employers who are involved in a joint venture or who are in the same business, such as several franchisees connected to a franchiser.

Bill 30 for the first time sets out rules for pension division on marriage breakdown. It gives nonmember spouses the right to have their share of the pension transferred to them at the time of the divorce rather than forcing them to wait until the member receives a pension or other benefit. This act makes locking in rules more flexible. Locking in ensures that the member's pension money will be used to provide retirement income for the lives of the member and spouse, even if the member leaves the employer before retiring and has the money transferred to a locked-in retirement account, or a LIRA. With this bill pension plans, LIRAs, and retirement income arrangements will be required to give members the option of unlocking small amounts of money. The regulation will permit owners of LIRAs who have permanently left Canada to unlock their funds. The regulation will also give owners of retirement income arrangements more flexibility to vary the amounts they withdraw every year after retirement. However, the basic principle, that the retirement income stream is to last for the owner's lifetime, will not change.

10:10

A new option will be available for employers who want to offer employees phased-in retirement. If a plan has this feature, the employee can withdraw a lump sum from the pension plan to compensate partially for the loss of salary due to a reduced work-week.

The act amends the definition of spouse. The old definition identified the spouse based simply on cohabitation. A married spouse of long duration was no longer considered a spouse as of the moment of separation. A common-law relationship was not recognized until after three years of cohabitation. The new definition recognizes a married spouse for a three-year period after separation, providing better protection for them.

The common-law spouse definition does contain the words "of the opposite sex". However, I want to assure Members of the Legislative Assembly that pension plans may offer spousal benefits to same-sex partners. This legislation reflects the government's commitment not to prevent employers from providing same-sex spousal benefits. The question is whether plan sponsors should be forced to provide these benefits. From our perspective this matter is best addressed by employers when determining their employees' benefits needs or through the collective bargaining process.

The issue of same-sex spouse, as you know, will be subject to further review by the government. The review will include the provision of benefits for common-law and same-sex couples as well as the consideration of the registered domestic partnership concept. In the meantime, I repeat: this legislation does not prevent a pension plan from offering benefits to same-sex, common-law spouses. The definition of spouse in the act is the minimum standard, but a plan may be more generous by broadening the definition of spouse.

In summary, we continue to uphold the sound principles on which the Employment Pension Plans Act is based, protecting employees' pension benefits and maintaining a fair system for all. We have amended the act to respond to changes in the pension and financial sectors and to changes in both the workforce and our global marketplace in the last 13 years. Bill 30 has been successfully renewed through public consultation with employers who sponsor pension plans, consultants, financial institutions, and other interested Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I move that we adjourn debate.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane has moved that we adjourn debate on Bill 30. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Carried.

[At 10:14 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

