

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, April 15, 1999** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 99/04/15

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

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

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

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

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very special group of officials with us today representing nine regional Legislatures in Siberia and the Russian national government. Seated in the Speaker's gallery we have Speakers and Deputy Speakers from many of the regional governments in Siberia including our sister provinces of Tyumen, Khanty-Mansiy, Yamalo-Nenets, and the Sakha republic. The delegation members are visiting Alberta under the Canadian International Development Agency funded project entitled Canada/Russia parliamentary program. Mr. Speaker, I was delighted to be able to join with you today at lunch in the Carillon Room to discuss some of the aspects of our government and how our government operates.

While in Alberta the delegation members are examining our policies and a variety of issues relating to aboriginal self-government, Alberta's oil and gas regulatory regime, and the role and responsibilities of municipal governments in relation to the provincial government. This visit is an important part of a much larger program of exchanges between Alberta and Russia. In recent years a number of members of this Legislature have visited Russia, and many Russian delegations have visited here. These visits and exchanges all serve to increase our understanding of Russia as an important partner for Canada and for Alberta. I'd like to take this opportunity to wish our visitors a very successful and memorable trip to Alberta. I hope it won't be their last.

We have with us Anatoliy Amosov, Speaker of the Legislative Suglan of Evenk Autonomous Okrug; Andrei Artyukhov, Speaker of the state Duma of Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug; Igor Marov, Deputy Speaker of Tyumen Oblast; Vasiliy Nechayev, Deputy Speaker of the Okrug Duma of Taimyr; Nikolai Solomov, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Legislative Assembly of the republic of Sakha; Vladimir Torlopov, Speaker of the State Council of the republic of Komi and the head of the delegation; and Pyotr Volostrigov, Deputy Speaker of the Okrug Duma of Khanty-Mansiy Autonomous Okrug. With those Speakers and Deputy Speakers one member was not able to be with us this afternoon due to illness: Deputy Speaker Vyacheslav Filatov, the Deputy Speaker of the House of the Republic, Legislative Assembly of the republic of Sakha.

With the Speakers and Deputy Speakers are Viktor Mitin, head of section of the Secretariat of the Speaker of the Federation Council; Viktor Matsievskiy, officer of the permanent staff of the Committee on the North and Small-Numbered Peoples; and with the Canada/Russian parliamentary program, Richard Colvin, head of the

Moscow office; Peter Dobell, the founding director; and Geoff Dubrow, program director; and with them is their interpreter, Vladimir Fotinov.

I'd like them to rise now and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, we have with us in your gallery today two distinguished visitors representing the Alberta-Northwest Territories Command of the Royal Canadian Legion. As all members know, the Legion is active in communities throughout this province. Legionnaires have proven time and again their profound commitment to our country and its democratic institutions both in time of war and in time of peace.

Last year the Legion gave this Assembly the new Black Rod, which we use whenever His Honour enters this Chamber. This year the Legion is giving us another gift. The Alberta-Northwest Territories Command has committed to funding as an annual event the new Mr. Speaker's Alberta Youth Parliament, which formally kicked off at noon today with lunch in the pedway and concludes tomorrow with an all-day session of the Legislative Assembly of Rupertland.

I'd ask all Members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in recognizing His Honour the Honourable Tom Barton, the Lieutenant Governor of the fictitious province of Rupertland, and his wife, Sunny. In real life Tom is the president of the Alberta-Northwest Territories Command of the Royal Canadian Legion. Tom and Sunny are now standing, so I'd ask members to give them the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present a petition signed by constituents of Edmonton-Centre. They are asking that the Legislative Assembly ensure that all residents requiring long term care are able to access this service in an equitable manner within the publicly funded system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table these petitions: 91 names from the SOS group. They are asking the government

to increase funding of children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of 63 Albertans urging the government

to increase funding of children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table a petition from 65 citizens from the Hinton area. That's in addition to the one I filed the other day, the SOS petition.

We the undersigned . . . petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to increase support for children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. I'd like the petition that I filed the other day, a week and a half ago, read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to increase support for children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday on AISH now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to hold widespread public hearings involving as many existing clients as want to be heard before making any changes to the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped program.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first two are letters that I have written to the Minister of Family and Social Services. The first one relates to a tabling that he made earlier this week, and upon analysis of that response, we find that there is only a 21 percent support rate for asset testing.

The second tabling is in relation to documents tabled in the Legislature yesterday citing support, again, for the AISH changes. On further analysis, four of the letters tabled opposed or held reservations about asset testing.

The third is a report released today by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. The report is titled Edmonton Children Hungry: another 28,000 at risk of hunger or malnutrition. It urges the government to re-examine the welfare rates in this province.

Thank you.

1:40

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, today I'm pleased to file an information bulletin on behalf of Alberta Community Development and the Wild Rose Foundation acknowledging National Volunteer Week, which will be celebrated across Alberta and Canada from April 18 to 24.

I'm also filing copies of letters I sent to Mr. Eric Newell of Syncrude Canada, Dr. Phil Stepney and his staff at the Provincial Museum, and the advisory committee for the Syncrude gallery. Congratulations are in order as the Syncrude Gallery of Aboriginal Culture at the Provincial Museum has been named the best indoor attraction in Alberta by Attractions Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MS EVANS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to table five copies of a document highlighting Alberta Municipal Affairs' initiatives relative to the homeless in Calgary. We are working closely with the city of Calgary stakeholders, including the Homeless Foundation, and recently we've given \$50,000 to the city for the new Sunalta shelter.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. These are two letters sent on August 14, 1998. Firstly, to Bud McCaig, chair of the Calgary regional health authority, as he then was.

The second is to the hon. Minister of Health. This was after abandoned mental health records were found at the former Bow Valley centre site. I asked the minister: what steps is he "taking to ensure that all seventeen health regions respect the privacy of personal health data."

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I would like to table with the Assembly five copies of the final report of health summit '99, Think about Health. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in arranging for and making this particular very important conference a success. In particular, I'd like to thank the delegates, those people who expressed their interest as observers, and all those thousands of Albertans that responded to the questionnaire and responded in writing and verbally to the concerns raised at the summit.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister responsible for science, research, and information technology.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the spirit of goodwill, openness, and transparency and quick turnaround that is the hallmark of this government, I'm pleased to table five copies of the response to Motion for a Return 107.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings to make, both related to Bill 20. They protest and request the minister to remove any proposed action on the Board of Reference. I've received over a hundred communications in my constituency office. One letter is from a constituent, and the other one is from a constituent in the constituency of Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MS BARRETT: I also have two tablings, Mr. Speaker. First, five copies of a letter that I sent to the assistant registrar of the College of Physicians and Surgeons on April 8, 1999, with respect to nonhospital surgical facilities in which I argue no further work needs to be done given the results of the health summit.

The other one -- there's a covering letter from 1997 on top of it. The essential part of this filing is the 1996 signed agreement between the federal government and the province of Alberta entitled Public/Private Health Services: The Alberta Approach, in which four of those principles promote for-profit health care facilities.

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

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings this

afternoon. These tablings indicate where perhaps there could be improvement in turnaround time on behalf of this government. The first is a letter from Charles Inkster to the Liberal caucus that details what occurred at a meeting with the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake on February 19, 1999, wherein they were promised that they would have "uncontaminated water delivered to the residents," and the number one project would be "to get all people off arsenic water." He indicates that he has not heard a word so far and is waiting for results.

The second letter is from Connie Axel, also to the Liberal caucus, wherein she indicates that she has heard a big fat nothing with regards to these same situations.

The third is a letter from Sally Ann Ulfsten, of the Stop and Tell Our Politicians Society, wherein she indicates that on October 17, 1997, Imperial Oil notified Alberta public health of the presence of arsenic . . .

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I've assumed that you've tabled it now.

Look; hon. members, the purpose of Tabling Returns and Reports is to quickly get to the point. Now, there have been explanations given by members of Executive Council with respect to this. There are explanations given by other members with respect to this. Let's get this process going. The tablings are quick.

There's also another alternative that this Assembly agreed to by way of Standing Orders: to utilize the office of the Clerk. That's something one would ask hon. members to consider as well.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports
(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: . . . notified Alberta public health of the presence of arsenic and that this is "a public health responsibility under legislation."

My last tabling is a report submitted to the Stop and Tell Our Politicians Society . . .

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Clerk, let's carry on with the Routine.
Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, earlier today I mentioned that the Royal Canadian Legion was giving the Assembly another gift; namely, the new Mr. Speaker's Alberta Youth Parliament. That gift isn't just an idea any longer. Today in our galleries we have 83 grade 10 students from across Alberta, each one representing one of our constituencies. They are now members of the Legislative Assembly of Rupertland and will participate in their model parliament in this Chamber tomorrow. We have 14 grade 10 social studies teachers who are here to participate in the teachers' component of this program. With them are approximately 20 members of the Royal Canadian Legion and four members of the teacher advisory committee, who helped put this program together. I should add that thanks to the support of CFRN television, Access Network, and Alberta Education, the proceedings of the model parliament will be televised on Access from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 3:30 p.m. tomorrow, and of course the galleries here will be open to the public at all times as well. I'd ask all of these guests to please stand and be recognized with the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly today a group of visitors from my constituency, from the La Crete public school, as a matter of fact. They've traveled a long ways to come down and see how things go on in the Legislature here today. There are actually 45 down here, but they're going to be split into two groups I understand. About half of them are in the -- I'm not even sure if they're in either or both galleries. But they're accompanied by teachers Roger Clarke, Herman Steuernagel, Margaret Fehr, and Jim Driedger, and parents Ed and Kathy Krahn, Herman and Marie Neustaeter, Ruth Unger, and Alma Dyck. I'd like to ask them all to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you the second group this week that has been here from my constituency. I have the pleasure of introducing 23 junior high students from Rolling Hills school. They are accompanied by teachers Sue Chomistek and Maureen Powell, as well as parent helpers Judy Sereda, Lynn Lester, Karen Kristianson, and Susan Gutfriend. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period
1:50

THE SPEAKER: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Health Summit Report

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the health summit report indicates that Albertans support a publicly administered, publicly funded health care system with equal access for all. They also asked for a comprehensive plan, continued feedback, and a strong mission statement with vision for our health care system. My questions are to the Acting Premier. Will the government commit to the summit's call for a mission statement for our health care so that Albertans will know what they can expect from their public health care system?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, this government has always been very committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act, very committed to the delivery of the best, most efficient health system possible for the residents of this province.

Mr. Speaker, the Health minister has commented on how the summit recommendations would be handled, and I would ask that the Health minister refresh members' memories on that now.

MR. JONSON: If I might supplement briefly, Mr. Speaker. Recommendation 2 from the summit report, which is perhaps what the hon. member across the way is referring to, says that "government should continue to support a comprehensive publicly funded and publicly administered health care system." As stated very effectively and thoroughly by the Premier and by myself as minister on behalf of government we certainly agree with that recommendation.

Secondly, with respect to the area of comprehensiveness, which I think was a part of what was involved in this first question, we in Alberta have a range of publicly funded services in our health care system which is equal to or in excess of every other province and territory, Mr. Speaker, and we certainly want to be able to maintain that standing.

Thank you.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of recommendation 1 the report lists 15 different ideas and visions, and in recommendation 1 it asks that they be implemented. That's what I was talking about.

My second question, Mr. Speaker: will the government commit to implementing the forum on health planning?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, if I just might respond to part of the preamble, which wasn't related to the question. I'm always sensitive to not wanting to make my answers too long, but if you look at recommendation 1, which outlines the -- and, yes, I acknowledge it as certainly being a very, very important recommendation where they outline basic values and principles.

But just to be speedy this afternoon, I would like to take one, for instance: there should be a principle adhered to by government, backed, championed, part of our vision, which deals with teamwork. Just a couple of days ago, Mr. Speaker, we had the tabling of the Health Professions Act in this Assembly, which is I think a major step forward in bringing together the professions of this province under a common legislative framework and advocating co-operation.

So certainly we're on track, but we take this reinforcement very seriously, Mr. Speaker.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, one of 15 is not bad.

My third question is: will the government act on the recommendations that the long-term care committee complete its review quickly and deal with the needs of Albertans for more a diversified, flexible, long-term care system?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, it has been very clear from the beginning that when we established the long-term care committee, we wanted to make sure -- because I'm sure members across the way are very interested in this too -- that there would be a very thorough and in-depth look at the future health needs of our aging population. That particular report will be completed in November, and the overall recommendations will certainly receive a priority consideration from government.

However, Mr. Speaker, in recognizing the importance of providing a quality health care system for our aging population, we have in this year's business plan, this year's budget taken a number of initiatives with respect to our overall aging population and their health care needs, a priority on certain things with respect to long-term care, particularly the additional coverage of pharmaceuticals in the home with respect to palliative care situations.

So, yes, it's certainly welcome to see in the summit report those types of recommendations.

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

School Board Finances

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education has reported to the Assembly that only four school boards in the province have accumulated deficits, yet day after day there are reports of additional school boards going into debt. My questions are to the Minister of Education. We know that there are only four boards with accumulated deficits, but how many school boards will have operating deficits this year?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'll be happy to look into that for the hon. member, but he is correct that only four of the 60 school boards have accumulated deficits. We always work with the school boards to

ensure that they have plans in place to deal with both accumulated deficits as well as operating deficits; for example, the school board in Grande Yellowhead. We think that there are some good people involved with that board both at the trustee level and at the administration level. They're working with Department of Education officials to deal with their particular situation as it relates to the operating deficit that they have.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: can the minister advise what his department is projecting as the total deficit for all school boards this coming year?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it would be difficult to do that right now because various school boards are currently in the process of assembling their budgets for the school year that will commence in September of 1999. It will depend on a number of different factors, so there is not sufficient information at this time.

Of course, the hon. member knows that school boards do report back at the end of their school years, at the end of their fiscal years, and they provide audited financial statements as part of their accountability in reporting to the government. So, Mr. Speaker, upon the conclusion of the fiscal year, we'll be able to then tally up what the end result is.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that school boards covered last year's operating deficits and are now covering this year's operating deficits by transferring reserve funds, what are they going to do next year?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is the purpose of putting together a reserve fund. The hon. member knows that there have been school boards that have accumulated operating reserves over the years and that they are using those moneys to deal with some of the fiscal pressures that they have to deal with. The government has responded by providing increased funding, and many members of this Assembly will know that the operating grant for schools and the basic instruction grant rate will go up by 7 percent over the next three years; that is just for instruction: 3 percent this year, 2 percent the year after, and 2 percent the year after that.

So, Mr. Speaker, from the government's perspective we are dealing with two things. One is that we are investing money in education in a manner that is going to meet the needs of school boards, and two, for those school boards that are having difficulties, we of course have some flexibility to work with them to ensure that they have put proper fiscal plans in place to ensure that they do not spend more resources than are allocated.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Child Hunger

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After years of procrastination, in fact almost a decade, the government finally acknowledged two months ago that it would implement the U.N. convention on the rights of the child. Article 27 of that convention requires the government to "in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing." Yet according to the very best evidence we have in this province, we have 45,000 children in Calgary, 40,000 children in Edmonton who don't have enough food to eat on a regular basis. My question is to the minister responsible for children's services. The question is simply this: is it the position of her government that having enough food to eat is a basic right of every Alberta child?

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to thank the member for the question, because when we're talking about poverty, we're talking about the whole family, and when we're talking about the whole family, we're talking about the whole community, and when we're talking about what we should do for children and families in the community, it means that we must look at what needs to be done at the community level.

One of the areas I want to talk about, Mr. Speaker, is the children's initiative and the redesign process. When you have 12,000 people who have been involved in looking at how they can become partners in this whole process of making sure that children and families are safe and that children can have the food that they require and they can have the services necessary in the community, it is the community who will make that decision. With the process that we have, the 18 authorities that we've appointed, they will be part and parcel of the decision-making relative to what we should do regarding poverty and how we deal with that specific issue. I think it's important when we're talking about it from a government perspective that, yes, we have processes in place to be able to deal with that issue.

2:00

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd go back to the same minister and say: deflection, abdication.

The question is: is it the position of this government, yes or no, that having enough food to eat is a basic right of every Alberta child? That's the question, Madam Minister.

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government's position -- and I'll ask the Minister of Family and Social Services to supplement this, in terms of what the government's position is relative to this -- is to be able to give the responsibility and the authority to the community members and the families who are the decision-makers for children, and for those that do need it, we are there to be able to ensure that there are certain structures in place. One of the structures, Mr. Speaker, is the children's services initiative, the 18 authorities who have been allowed to be able to take on responsibility and authority.

I know that the Minister of Family and Social Services will want to supplement this as that falls right within his jurisdiction.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd first of all like to address the basic premise that the question was geared upon, that being that there were 44,000 and 48,000 children respectively that were hungry in Edmonton and Calgary. First of all, the first thing I would like to do is draw the Assembly's attention to a study that was put out by the Forum on Child & Family Statistics, which is by the federal government. It states that in 1994 3 percent of all children lived in households reporting that sometimes or often they did not have enough to eat, down from 5 percent. That ended up to be 57,000 in Canada. In Canada.

The hon. member asks a good question: what about the Alberta study? If I may, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to address it on about three different areas. First of all, what the Edmonton social planning sector study has said is that the average two-bedroom apartment rents for \$585, and that's one of the premises that they based the study on. I have a copy of the *Edmonton Journal* ads here, and if I may, I'll just read some for you.

THE SPEAKER: That's okay, hon. minister. Please. We're not going to turn the question period into debate time.

Quickly, third question.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm going back to the minister with designated responsibility for children in this province. Why are the nutrition needs of so many children not being met simply because they happen to live in a lone-parent family, a recent immigrant family, or happen to be in a family that's dependent on social assistance? Why is that, Madam Minister?

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I don't think that's the information. It's not true in terms of what the minister has indicated. I want to just talk about that, because I think it's important when we're looking at what it is that we're trying to do as a government.

As a government we have tried to make sure that whatever we have to put in place is going to be available for the people, the children of this province, and the communities within the province of Alberta. We need to be able to allow the communities to take control and authority over their children and over the structures that are required to make sure that we have healthy children in this province.

One of the things that I want to talk about is the 18 regions we've appointed. Those 18 regions are at various responsibility stages. They'll be taking on and assuming those responsibilities. They will be looking at how they can work to reduce any of the single-parent family situations that the member has indicated. They will be looking at how they can deal with family violence.

Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about poverty, it means that it takes into consideration everything that happens at the community level. It's not only one group of people. It is the whole community. When the whole community is involved, we see some changes.

Private Health Services

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, the health summit report . . . [interjections] Did I miss something?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, you have the floor. Would you proceed?

MS BARRETT: Sure. Yeah. The health summit report sent the following message to this government in strong and unequivocal terms, and I'll even quote: "We want a publicly funded and publicly administered comprehensive health care system and we want it there when we need it." The overwhelming sentiment from that weekend's activity was that the public does not want for-profit hospitals. Given the report, I'd like to ask the Health minister why it is that his government will not enact legislation that outright bans for-profit hospitals.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to repeat, since I believe it is basically the same question, what I have already indicated this afternoon, that recommendation 2 indicates that "government should continue to support" - it's acknowledged that we do support now -- "a comprehensive publicly funded and publicly administered health care system." It is perhaps presumptuous on my part to the writers of the report and the people who had input to it, but we have consistently maintained as a government -- so I think we can say that that particular recommendation is accepted -- that that is our position as government, and we've followed through on that.

Mr. Speaker, that's the position of government. It's verified by the extensive input provided to the overall health summit exercise. It's a recommendation there, and we agree with it.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, as proof of this stated commit-

ment, then, and in keeping with the recommendations of the health summit, will the government now rescind and repudiate the 12 key principles that it signed onto with the federal government in July of 1996 which are a virtual road map for privatizing health care delivery in Alberta? Prove it. Will you rip it up?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in this Assembly the Liberal opposition across the way and the New Democratic opposition have advocated that we should be working co-operatively with the federal government to implement the principles of the Canada Health Act, and we have done so. Why should we tear up an agreement with the federal government, particularly -- this is not a good piece of evidence or reason for doing it, but just let me refer to the fact that it seems that the opposition have been supportive of the work done by the Liberal government in Ottawa and the principles that were agreed to. We're following those principles, Mr. Speaker.

MS BARRETT: I don't like this one at all, Mr. Speaker.

Why is the government opening the door to two-tier health care by opening the door for wanna-be for-profit hospitals like HRG to market hip replacements for people who are willing to pay for them privately, which is specifically allowed by principle 11 of this so-called Alberta approach to health care signed with the feds?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the principle she is referring to in that document -- and I think we're talking about the same document -- is reflective of the Canada Health Act. In the Canada Health Act there is a specific reference to Workers' Compensation Boards across the province or that particular function of government as being exempt from the normal provisions or the other provisions of the Canada Health Act.

This is a piece of national legislation. I think there is a certain amount of -- is "hypocrisy" unparliamentary, Mr. Speaker? There's some inconsistency in the position taken by the New Democratic Party, because over and over again in this Assembly they have indicated to us that we should be endorsing and adhering to the principles of the Canada Health Act. That's what the Canada Health Act says. That's what this document deals with.

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

Seniors' Programs

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors' organizations face many challenges these days. As an example, Kerby Centre in Calgary is developing housing strategies that address both low-income housing shortages and a unique project to look at shelter needs for victims of elder abuse. However, the shortage of housing for low-income seniors together with the impact of such things as market value assessment is problematic for seniors in my constituency, and we will be addressing that on May 1 at The Good Companions in a town hall meeting. My questions are to the Municipal Affairs minister. What steps is the minister taking to meet the housing problems facing seniors in our communities?

2:10

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, earlier today I tabled a document indicating that just recently we provided \$50,000 for Sunalta, which is part of the contribution that we are making. In fact this government provided over a million dollars through regular programs, not the \$2 million for the Homeless Foundation, but through regular programs to assist people that are homeless. We've provided \$10,000 for a registry for homeless people in Calgary and, further to

that, 10 additional rent supplement designations to assist the action by churches together with social services. We provided \$965,000 for Calgary last year through a reallocation of funding which canceled all their subsidy agreements and enabled them to spend additional funds on social housing. We've added 40 rent supplement units to the city's secondary suites project.

Through the work that we're doing with the Salvation Army and also through the Homeless Foundation, through the work that we intend to do with the other hon. members, from the MLAs in Calgary to working with the city of Calgary and the housing management bodies, we are doing a number of initiatives.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you. My supplemental to the same minister: is there any opportunity for the minister to address specifically tax relief measures?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we have been in constant communication with the city of Calgary. As yet we have no data about what the needs actually are from seniors, but it's my understanding that the Minister of Community Development does have funds available for special-needs circumstances. She may wish to supplement.

MRS. BURGNER: My second supplemental is to the Minister of Community Development responsible for seniors' issues. What steps are being taken to address the seniors' needs when they are faced with increased taxes and fixed incomes?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there is a number of things. The first I would want to comment on is the Alberta seniors' benefit program, because certainly my department and I and many members of the Assembly are also aware that there are pressures on seniors. In fact it was raised in the reporting of my estimates the other night. The Alberta seniors' benefit program, though, does provide some monthly cash benefits to seniors, and it does have a housing component as part of the benefit. There is for renters a cash component of their benefit; for homeowners there is a cash component.

We also offer the special-needs assistance program, and this is most important for members to communicate to their seniors. This allows up to \$5,000 in a calendar year to help meet emergent needs. That can be sudden rent increases, as are indicated here when we have a very, very vibrant and growing and aggressive economy. Mr. Speaker, they can also apply if they need help with a damage deposit if they are moving from one housing area to another.

I certainly urge all MLAs in this Assembly to become very much aware of the 1-800 number, and I'll remind them: it's 1-800-642-3853. Tell your seniors to call that number. We have nine centres across this province, one in Edmonton and in Calgary and seven other places, that are storefront. Seniors can go there. Each MLA should be aware of where those are. In fact if seniors cannot, because of transportation circumstances or their own mobility, go to those offices, our staff will attend to the seniors in their homes.

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

Calgary Regional Health Authority

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two weeks ago the Minister of Health said that there were really no major concerns with the Calgary regional health authority, yet this week he replaced the chair of the board with the Premier's Mr. Fix-it, former Treasurer, Jim Dinning. My questions are to the Minister of Health. What

happened within the last two weeks to wake this government up to the fact that there are problems with the Calgary regional health authority?

MR. JONSON: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I think that we should both check *Hansard*, but the question as I recall it was a question relative to the fact that there had been a comprehensive administrative and organizational review of the regional health authority. If my memory serves me correctly, I indicated to the Assembly that this particular action was appropriate, that the recommendations of the report would be considered very seriously, that the overall report had been conducted in a very thorough fashion. In that report there were major needs, major problems and issues identified with respect to the overall operation of the Calgary regional health authority. I as Minister of Health fulfilled what I regarded as my responsibility, and that is I moved to work with the situation there in Calgary and make the appropriate changes with respect to leadership of the Calgary regional health authority board.

I would also just like to point something out here, because I think it's very important, and that is that the former chairman, Dr. Morgan, was the person who initiated the review. He has been very constructive in my view, in fact very professional in his position with respect to this transition.

MS LEIBOVICI: Given that the report was very vague in defining what the problem is, can the minister tell us: exactly what is the problem in Calgary? Is it a lack of beds? Is it a lack of funding? Communications? Organization? What is the problem?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the report is a public document. It deals with very significant issues. The report is made in a constructive way, which I think is understandable for a report which is done by a very credible external firm, but it is very clear in terms of major issues dealing with the governance and the overall administration of the regional health authority, which was a set of conclusions that they reached after very extensive consultation and interviews, interviews I recall being recorded of over 500 people in different sectors of the health care system.

So it is, I think, Mr. Speaker, a very thorough report, a very thorough analysis, and given the recommendations and findings of the report, we had to take those seriously.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will Mr. Dinning's appointment lead to favouritism over other regional health authorities in this province as a result of Mr. Dinning's close political ties to the Premier and this government?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker.

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

Health Summit Report

(continued)

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Often my constituents in St. Albert have said to me that they support a very strong, publicly funded health care system. They said that when I held a mini health summit, and I understand from the report that was issued this morning and is now published on the web site and the Internet that that is also what collectively the health summit for the province said. Obviously my question is to the Minister of Health. Would the minister tell us what I can tell my constituents as to how they can

add their voice in a continued fashion to the report that came from the health summit today, and is there a process in place whereby they can continue to add to our deliberations?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the report of the health summit was released very soon after its receipt, in fact, due to some vagaries of what is called the Internet, about 5 this morning, which was a little bit earlier than we anticipated. Nevertheless, the report is now, as we indicated, a public document. It will be widely circulated. I would urge all members of the Assembly to make it available to their constituents, and we will be very interested in, we will seriously consider the responses that come to ourselves as representatives to the recommendations of the report.

There are many avenues, Mr. Speaker, of communicating views on the report. There is the electronic communications system, I guess you'd call it, but phone calls, letters, face-to-face discussion are certainly welcome on the recommendations of the report.

2:20

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, since the citizens and voters of St. Albert clearly indicated last election that they didn't want to vote Liberal, I would like to indicate to them . . . [interjections]

My first supplemental is again to the Minister of Health. That question is with respect to one of the recommendations that I understand again came out of the health summit with regard to support for pharmaceuticals for those in need. I would like to ask the Minister of Health if he could tell us if he has in place any plans in order to look at the issue of extended benefits and help for pharmaceutical costs?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there is located in this report a significant number of recommendations. There is a number that we are already acting upon, a number that in my personal opinion I think are worthy of support. The one with respect to pharmaceuticals is one that, in part, we are already acting upon in that in the current business plan of Alberta Health we are extending -- and I won't go through the whole list -- pharmaceutical coverage for instance to palliative care patients that was not there before.

However, I would have to say, Mr. Speaker, that at least at this point in time I do not endorse in a very general way the idea of a pharmaceutical plan that is totally publicly funded. We do need to examine the experiences of other provinces. We do need to take the recommendations seriously. But I think there is a tremendous potential cost, and we have to balance that against its effectiveness and the ability of the health care system to pay.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

MRS. SLOAN: It is clear, Mr. Speaker, that this government's intent all along was to disable AISH by imposing employability and asset testing. Now it appears that the government is prepared to determine the entitlements of the vulnerable in Alberta on the basis of what they think taxpayers will swallow. My questions are to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Given that the definition and nature of assets can be changed, according to the act, by regulations, what guarantees does the minister give that changes won't be made willy-nilly behind closed doors, cutting more people off the AISH caseload?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I haven't heard the term willy-nilly for quite a while.

First of all, I'm sure -- well maybe I shouldn't say that. I think that the hon. member can read the bill that is before her. What is

included in the legislation is \$100,000 asset testing, Mr. Speaker. Also included in the legislation -- I'm not talking regulation; I'm talking legislation. The primary residence of the AISH recipient is excluded from an asset test. The primary vehicle is excluded from an asset test. That is in the legislation.

The hon. member has asked me: can it not be changed willy-nilly? They're the ones that are harping at us for not putting stuff in legislation so that regulation can potentially be changed. That is in the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, what is also in the legislation is that this AISH Act must be looked at in five years. We cannot change the \$100,000 limit unless it's brought before this Legislative Assembly. We cannot change the principal residence unless it's brought before this Assembly. I hate to break it to the hon. member, but it is in the legislation.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why, then, were provisions not made in the legislation to index assets for cost of living and inflation?

DR. OBERG: The reason that it was not indexed -- first of all, \$100,000 is a lot of money. I just had a question from the opposition where they're complaining about child poverty, saying 45,000 people are poor. A hundred thousand dollars: perhaps that's their definition of poverty; perhaps that's their definition of poor. If you don't have a hundred thousand dollars in the bank, you're poor. Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of people on this side that are poor as well.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How will the legislation apply to the three millionaires the minister is certain exist?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, approximately two weeks ago I had asked for an apology from the hon. member. Seeing that I have not received that apology to date, I will not be answering that question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. [interjections]

Health Summit Report

(continued)

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater has the floor.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the final report on the health summit, recommendation 28 says:

Government should ensure that there is sufficient funding available to support and sustain a comprehensive publicly funded health system. Funding for health should not be at the expense of other priority areas including education, social services and infrastructure.

My question is to the Minister of Health. Is this government prepared to respond to this recommendation?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this particular recommendation is a very important one. In my view and as I think the report reflects, the people attending the health summit have expectations for the health care system. They had a number of recommendations as to how it could be improved. They want it to be as comprehensive a health care system as possible but also as effective and efficient as possible.

They did recognize, Mr. Speaker, that there is a limit. They indicated that there should not be expenditure in health at the expense of other very major and important programs such as

education. I won't go down the rest of the list. So I think the challenge for government is already recognized. It's a matter of finding a right and fair balance in terms of the way we construct our business plans and budget.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question, also my final one, is also to the Minister of Health. Will this government be able to sustain such increases in the new millennium if we were to do that?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe the current business plan, which has built into it a significant increase this year and in the two out years over the next three-year period, is sustainable. Of course, it is always vulnerable because of our dependence, but decreasing dependence, upon oil and gas revenue. Beyond that it'll be a matter of working with Albertans to recognize their priorities and, as I've said before, establish the right balance in terms of the amount of resources going to health.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Pine Shake Roofing

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Municipal Affairs was gracious enough to offer to provide more details about her department's involvement in the pine shake scandal in the early 1990s. I know I speak for all members of the Assembly and all Albertans when I say that we are anxiously awaiting these details and expect them to be tabled next week. The minister was also good enough to clear up the contradictory statements of the Minister of Labour by confirming that indeed the departments of Labour and Environmental Protection are both involved in the testing of pine shakes. My questions today are again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs in the hope that she can provide us with even more information. My first question is: why didn't the consumer affairs division take steps to warn consumers about the fungus problem as soon as the government became aware of it?

Thank you.

2:30

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, there has been a FOIP request for the information, and in consumer affairs there is some work being done to gather all of the data. When we have available information, we will table it. I am not committing to the time line the hon. member has suggested. When I'm satisfied that we have all the appropriate information, it will be tabled in the House.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What is the consumer affairs division's role in this whole issue if not to warn consumers about problems as soon as possible?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the labour code affecting the issue that we have been discussing, the issue of pine shakes, has been the one that has administered the construction material, the construction industry issues.

I indicated previously that I'd table any available information about any role that we have had. I do not have that information today, Mr. Speaker, and I will provide it when available.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a big difference between the labour code and the building code.

My third question is also to the minister. Will the minister be taking steps to compensate municipalities that are taking a tax hit by devaluing homes roofed with this shoddy product, a product that this government actively promoted and enthusiastically authorized?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, first I must correct that I mistakenly stated the labour code when I ought to have stated the building code in the previous response.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is well aware that assessors in various places in the province, beginning with Strathcona county, have evaluated the circumstance and have made judgments based on their evaluation of the market value as impacted by pine shakes that are not working.

Further to anything that would be useful for the hon. member, I'll defer to the Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Very quickly, there is an obligation for us to deal with the usual inaccurate preamble that the member makes in responding to getting out the information as soon as the Department of Labour found out there was in fact anything occurring with the pine shakes. But most importantly this member has asked 39 questions, and not once has he either stated in this House or walked outside of this House and said: this is the Liberal position on pine shakes; we should give away \$300 million in compensation. We should be able to listen to this position. Why won't they stand up and talk to that? [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Okay. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Health Summit Report

(continued)

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have now heard, as the Minister of Health has mentioned, that the final report and recommendations of the health summit that was held a couple of months ago are in, and we've also heard comments from the minister that the recommendations of this summit will serve as the basis for much of the future planning of our health care system. [interjections] One of the concerns raised by several of my constituents, however . . .

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills has the floor.

MR. MARZ: One of the concerns raised by several of my constituents, however, is that the summit was limited to only 200 people and that many individuals who wanted to be involved could not be accommodated. My question is to the Minister of Health. Can the minister advise how the recommendations of the health summit can serve as a basis for our health system of the future when only 200 Albertans were involved in the summit?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would like to assure the hon. member and all hon. members of the Assembly that the report of the health summit represents the input, the letters, the phone calls, the contacts through the electronic media, and so forth that came in from the public of this province in addition of course to the, yes, more intensive involvement of those people taking part in the summit.

I would also like to indicate that while we have to be somewhat mindful of the amount of paper that we print in this regard, there are separate supplementary documents to the actual report, Mr. Speaker, which put together the responses received from the different cohorts that were sampled in this regard. In other words, there's a document

which summarizes the results of the opinion poll. There's a document which summarizes the responses coming in from the individuals that the hon. questioner has spoken so well on behalf of. There is a document which is exclusive to the actual health summit, but overall we have the recommendations here.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the Minister of Health. If, as the minister says, these recommendations of the health summit represent the view of many Albertans, is the minister now going to make these recommendations available to all of those people who made submissions, and is there any opportunity for further input?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly it's very important that the results of the summit be widely publicized. I'm sure that we can count upon our associates in the media to report accurately and comprehensively the recommendations of the report, but in addition to that we will disseminate widely across the province the report and the background material to the report. It's going to be widely circulated.

The other thing, though, Mr. Speaker, is that we're all individuals here who represent our constituents. The invitation is open to have people look at the recommendations of the report, to respond to us as their representatives. We will be inviting people to contact Alberta Health to give their views on the recommendations of the report. So it's going to be an ongoing process, as it always is with respect to such an important topic as health care in this province and the desire of everybody to improve our health care system in the future.

MR. MARZ: Thank you. My final question is to the same minister. Will the minister commit to this Assembly that the recommendations that have been received will be taken seriously by government and acted upon?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, they will be, yes, taken seriously. In terms of the second question, I have to be candid and indicate that I think there are three categories of recommendations, and this is my view as minister just at this point in time, very early on in the process of assessing the report. There are certain recommendations that are already being acted upon, but the report gives us the direction, the encouragement to act upon these things with more vigour and effectiveness. There is a second category of recommendations which I think again will probably receive support quite quickly.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'll be quite candid about it, quite frank about it. In my judgment there will be recommendations that it will probably not be possible to implement in whole or in part. Just to illustrate it, there are certain recommendations that conflict with other recommendations. For instance, we cannot have everything that people may desire covered in a public health care system. There have to be certain priorities chosen. Consequently, there will have to be an ongoing consideration and discussion of what is possible, what achieves the right balance within the health care system.

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

Peavine Métis Settlement

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In November of 1998 a PricewaterhouseCoopers report on the Peavine Métis settlement review made a strong recommendation for accountability and internal control for the council. A recent commissioner's directive

recommended that the total compensation received by each councillor should not exceed \$50,000 a year.

The commissioner also indicated that the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs endorsed the directives and that the minister expects the council to adhere to them. My questions are to the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs. What action has the minister taken on the recommendations of the PricewaterhouseCoopers' report and the commissioner's directive?

2:40

MR. HANCOCK: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important question because it highlights the fact that we have been constantly reviewing and over the course of the last year have done specific reviews of the administration of all the Métis settlements and the councils there. Those reviews have resulted in us having reports back. I then personally met with each of the councils, in particular with the Peavine council, and as a result of those meetings turned the responsibility back where it was, to the councils, to deal with any concerns that were raised in those reports. I asked them to come up with a corrective action plan, to share both the report and the corrective action plan with their communities, and to be responsible to their community members for the items outlined in the reports and the corrective action plans.

I should mention, Mr. Speaker, that there are many, many positive things happening on Métis settlements right across the province, on the eight Métis settlements that there are. The reports that were done focused on what needed to be improved, but they shouldn't be taken as a condemnation of the Métis settlements or the Métis settlement governments. There are many, many positive things happening.

With respect to Peavine specifically, I met with the council. I considered very seriously whether the council should be replaced, because there were very serious concerns with respect to that council. There were very serious concerns with respect to the amount of remuneration that was being paid to councillors. Instead of replacing the council, I elected to put in place through the commissioner directives, specifically directives relating to remuneration of council members.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the same minister. Given that Peavine council last week voted themselves a raise to \$62,000 per year against the recommendations of the commissioner, how is this consistent with the action plan taken by the minister?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, if in fact that's what they did -- and I'll verify that -- then it would be inconsistent with the action taken, and we'll have to determine what our next course of action might be, which could well include, as I've indicated to the members of the Peavine council in the past, using my authority under the act to replace the council. That would be the ultimate. I'm not saying that that's what we'll do, but once we look at the situation, I'll take the recommendation from the commissioner and deal with that particular question.

MS OLSEN: My final question to the same minister: can the minister guarantee that any decision made in relation to the dismissal of the Peavine council will not be influenced either directly or indirectly by any other cabinet ministers?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, no, Mr. Speaker. Of course any decisions I take are influenced by input from all sorts of places including, very appropriately, from my cabinet colleagues.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call on the first of three hon. members today for Members' Statements. We'll proceed in this order: the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler. In the interim, might we have the okay to proceed with introductions?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

MR. FRIEDEL: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier that the group of students from La Crête was in here in two groups. I'm not sure if they're in the members' gallery behind me. If not, they've come and gone, but for the record I'd still like to introduce the second portion of the group from the La Crête public school. Since I read the names of the parents and teachers that were accompanying them before, that would be already on the record.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, this afternoon we also had a representative group of young people from the Milo community school in the riding of Little Bow who were in this afternoon and unfortunately could not be introduced because of the routine mechanism.

Let's now proceed with Members' Statements. We'll proceed with the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

head: Members' Statements

RCMP March West

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Monday in this Assembly I recognized the work of Community Development, with the assistance of Public Works, in promoting our history, particularly as it pertains to this summer's celebrations of the 125 years of RCMP service to Canadians.

The history is truly interesting, and this year all western Canadians, and Albertans in particular, can experience the purpose, the thrill, and the hardships endured on the 800-mile trek by those first North-West Mounted Police by participating in the re-enactment of the March West. They can do that by either riding a portion of the trek or assisting the riders at celebrations throughout their communities so it will show appreciation for our heritage.

They came to Alberta to make it a safer place to grow, and that purpose spread to all of Canada as our country grew. These celebrations give us an opportunity to express our thanks to present and former members for keeping our streets and highways safe for all. They have an excellent reputation in international relationships and law enforcement, and their scarlet tunics are a tourist delight, as they have put Canada on the map with that unique identity. Members' work both on and off duty has benefited people in our communities from our youths right up to our seniors.

So I urge all Albertans to use this celebration this summer to acknowledge the RCMP for their work and dedication to making society better, the very reason for which they were formed 125 years ago.

If anyone requires more information on the March West, please call 1-800-575-9600. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Workplace Fatalities

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a problem in Alberta that is reaching staggering proportions, a problem that is destroying families, robbing children of parents, robbing parents of sons and daughters, and cutting short the lives of Albertans, who have so much to live for. This problem is 100 percent preventable.

I am speaking of fatal workplace accidents. It seems that a week doesn't go by in Alberta when we don't read about another person killed on the job. There is no doubt about increased economic activity, and it leads to more potential accidents, but this should not be a reason to stop looking at ways to make our system better. The occupational health and safety system administered by the Department of Labour is not working. Something has to change.

The Alberta Liberal caucus is not the only group pointing out the problems. In a letter to the hon. Minister of Labour and copied to me, a University of Alberta professor researching OH and S standards states: in my observation, the Occupational Health and Safety Act for Alberta is inadequate to deal with the occupational health and safety problems of Alberta workers.

A good first step would be for the government to immediately make a policy that a fatality inquiry must be conducted every time an Albertan dies while on the job. This would give family and friends of the victim the assurance that the proper authorities will get to the bottom of the issue as quickly as possible. It may also lead to clear conclusions about why the person was killed and hopefully prevent any more fatal accidents.

One accident in particular comes to mind. Two people were killed and a third was seriously injured last year when workers in Calgary encountered an overhead 8,000-volt line while moving a 32-foot high mobile scaffold which did not meet OH and S regulations. When a power line is shorted out, power is automatically restored within seconds. After this unfortunate accident a complete discussion is needed for safety improvements to the electrical system. The power lines we need to discuss in particular. Those that feed industrial and residential areas should be fused, and the policy for restoring power should be revised. This is just one example of the proactive steps the government could take to improve occupational health and safety.

I urge the government to study this issue and implement the necessary changes as soon as possible, and hopefully fatal accidents by electrocution will be reduced.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Volunteerism

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to rise to talk about Volunteer Week, which will run from April 18 to 24. Every year people across Canada take the time to recognize the efforts of thousands of people who give freely of their time and expertise to make a big difference in their own communities. The purpose of this week is to increase awareness of the role that volunteers play in life across the province and around the world. From community sports teams to the local library, from helping those with special needs to working with seniors, volunteers provide a wide variety of services that touch the lives of thousands and thousands of people every day.

As Albertans we certainly have something to celebrate next week. With its tremendous volunteer base and hundreds of nonprofit volunteer groups across this province, volunteering is something we do and do very well. Alberta has gained a reputation worldwide for its outstanding volunteers and their many contributions.

2:50

Last year Edmonton was fortunate to be the first Canadian city to host the International Association for Volunteer Effort world

conference. At this conference 2,500 delegates from 85 countries discussed the many issues facing the world's volunteers as we enter the 21st century. The legacy of this conference is very strong, Mr. Speaker. The conference strengthened and rejuvenated volunteers here in Edmonton, from the province, and around the world.

As MLA for Lacombe-Stettler and as chair of the Community Lottery Program Secretariat I am fortunate to see much of the wonderful work done by Alberta volunteers. Much of the success of the community lottery board grant program is due to the contribution of Alberta's 88 volunteer boards. These volunteers give freely of their time to make a difference in their communities. They receive applications and make granting decisions by selecting projects that enrich the quality of life and add value to their communities. They do this without remuneration and have earned the thanks of this Assembly and all Albertans.

I would also like to recognize the excellent work done by the Wild Rose Foundation. Through this lottery-funded foundation the government of Alberta provides \$6.6 million annually to volunteer, not-for-profit groups.

I encourage all members of this Assembly to thank a volunteer next week.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, perhaps we might revert to this introduction by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for your indulgence. It's a real pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a group from the Milo community school in Milo, Alberta. It's their very first time ever to the Legislative Assembly. With the 17 students today we have eight different parent helpers: Wendy Vannatta, Wendy Hingley, Penny Heather, Sharleen Bushell, Laurie Umscheid, Blayne Sukut, Al Wiens. And of special interest to you, Mr. Speaker, is their teacher, Sharon Cockwill, a Steinbring, who was from one of the terrific ridings, Barrhead-Westlock, but along with her family and husband has been in the other terrific riding of Little Bow for a number of years. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Projected Government Business

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 7(5) I would like to ask the minister the projected business for next week.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to outline the tentative agenda for next week in the House.

On Monday, April 19, under Government Bills and Orders for second reading, by way of notice to the House, Bill Pr. 1, National Bond Insurance Corporation Act, and Bill Pr. 3, Consumers Insurance Company Act, will be up for second reading immediately after Orders of the Day. Then under second reading of Government Bills and Orders: Bill 29, Securities Amendment Act; Bill 25, Insurance Act; and Bill 32, Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Amendment Act, 1999. Thereafter, if time permits, as

per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders and Committee of Supply, the lottery fund. Following that, should it be dealt with on a timely basis, in the evening we would be requesting unanimous consent of the House to revert to Introduction of Bills for the introduction of the Appropriation Act, Bill 33.

At 4:30 on Tuesday under Government Bills and Orders for second reading: Bill 27, Regulated Forestry Profession Act; Bill 23, Pharmacy and Drug Act; Bill 30, Employment Pension Plans Amendment Act; Bill 31, Agricultural Dispositions Statutes Amendment Act; and as per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. for second reading: Bill 33, Appropriation Act, 1999. Under Committee of the Whole: bills 18, 14, 17, and 21. Time permitting, under second reading we may proceed to Bill 20 and Bill 33.

On Wednesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders and Committee of the Whole: Bill 33, Appropriation Act; Bill 16, Bill 15, and as per the Order Paper. Under second reading perhaps Bill 20, School Amendment Act.

On Thursday, April 22, 1999, under Government Bills and Orders for third reading: Bill 33, Appropriation Act. Under second reading: bills 23, 20, 24, 25, 22, 32, and thereafter as per the Order Paper.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today under 23(h) and (i), and I would ask your indulgence a little bit. In tablings today the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview tabled a response to a tabling that I had tabled last week. As that response is directed directly to me, I feel that it does make allegations against another by stating that I am tabling wrong information.

Mr. Speaker, what this document states is that for the asset testing of \$100,000, only 21 percent of the responses were in favour of it. When you actually look at the document I tabled, it is very clear that of 1,010 recipients, 1,010 callers that called on our line, 210 of them commented on the asset testing of the \$100,000 limit. It's quite obvious by the tabling I had made that the other 800 did not comment on that. Of the 210 who commented, 95 percent of them were in favour of asset testing at a \$100,000 limit.

The reason I am asking the point of order is that I believe that it does "impute false [and] unavowed motives," as stated under 23(i), by putting forward wrong information. Because this is directed directly to me -- in the legislation I realize there is nothing that keeps the opposition from tabling false information. I realize that. But, Mr. Speaker, this is directed directly towards me, so I would ask you for a ruling on this.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on this point of order.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The minister cites 23(h), (i), and (j) and makes the assumption that the tabling was personally directed as an attack on his credibility, and of course that's not the case. What we have here is the minister trying to put forward the best possible spin or the best possible light on a very controversial subject. He produced some documents that he claims backed up his point, and my colleague produced an analysis of those documents which I think would be contrary to the minister's point.

Of course, it is parliamentary tradition that we take members at their word. I believe that the minister believes what he has presented to the House, just as I believe my colleague is true and honest in her belief, in her interpretation of what those documents meant. This isn't a personal issue. It is, of course, a substantial public policy

issue, but it clearly does not violate the tabling, and the contrary interpretation clearly does not violate Standing Orders in either sections 23(h),(i), or (j). It is a disagreement, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, what is important during tablings, which is part of our Routine, during Tabling Returns and Reports -- there was an interjection by the Speaker earlier today with respect to this matter. I would like to read into the record at this point in time paragraph 1 of *Beauchesne*. This is number 1:

The principles of Canadian parliamentary law are:

To protect a minority and restrain the improvidence or tyranny of a majority; to secure the transaction of public business in an orderly manner; to enable every Member to express opinions within limits necessary to preserve decorum and prevent an unnecessary waste of time; to give abundant opportunity for the consideration of every measure, and to prevent any legislative action being taken upon sudden impulse.

The one section in here, "prevent an unnecessary waste of time," is the one that I wanted to highlight at this particular point in time.

Secondly, citations were given by the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services with respect to Standing Order 23(h),(i), and I believe (j) as well.

One of the key things about Alberta is that our Assembly is rather permissive with respect to tablings, rather permissive. But the traditional rule with respect to tablings is that they are tabled without comment. Now, unfortunately the chair cannot just look at one member or two members but must look at a whole series of members with respect to the liberties taken with respect to comments. And I really do believe that a lot of these interjections by way of points of order would not be there if there were no editorial comments provided with tablings.

3:00

Now, I made a comment earlier today and I'll make a comment again today with a plea to all members to recognize that in the future there may very well be some interjections by the chair that would prohibit these tablings if people want to go on with lengthy explanations with it. If an hon. member chooses to make a tabling, fine. Members of Executive Council should not use the opportunity under tablings to provide in essence mini ministerial statements or anything along those lines. They should be done very clearly and clinically.

To the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services, the chair is in a position not even to know what is being tabled; it does not have the benefit. There are some jurisdictions where tablings in fact have to go to another office before they're allowed to be tabled in the Assembly. That would probably be not in the best keeping with the openness and the tradition of this Assembly, but it is an option that various House leaders might want to discuss in the future if, in fact, we don't abide by the general tradition with respect to tablings of matters and reports.

So I gather there was a clarification here but will rule that there is not a point of order based on the premise that, one, the chair would have to view that the intent of all hon. members is of the highest degree of integrity. Sometimes, unfortunately, you have two variances of opinion, with both people saying it's blue when actually everybody knows it's black. But in this case we'll accept that point of order.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

head: Lottery Fund Estimates 1999-2000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to welcome everyone to the

Committee of Supply as we deal with the lottery fund estimates this afternoon. With that, I would call on the Minister of Economic Development, responsible for lotteries and gaming.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I'm very pleased to be back debating the budget documents in Committee of Supply, this time to present the documents and the overview for the lottery funds for this fiscal year.

Revenues from lotteries are placed in the Alberta lottery fund by the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. These revenues are generated from gaming activities such as VLTs, ticket lotteries, and casino gaming terminals. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission oversees the Alberta lottery fund at the direction of the government of Alberta. Estimated revenues for fiscal 2000 are \$769.5 million. This is consistent with our fiscal 1999 estimates. This year we expect to earn \$484 million from VLTs, \$136.5 million from slot machines, \$147 million from ticket lottery sales, \$2 million in interest, and it brings our total to \$769.5 million.

How are these funds allocated? Well, in Budget '99 we introduced a new system for allocating lottery funds. In July of last year the government accepted in principle all eight recommendations of the Lotteries and Gaming Summit report from 1998. One of the recommendations was that gaming and lottery profits are not to be directed to the general revenue fund. The second one was that all gaming and lottery profits are to be directed to supporting charitable and not-for-profit government initiatives.

As a result, lottery profits will no longer go to the general revenue fund. Instead, all revenues will go directly to charitable and specific not-for-profit government initiatives as identified through the government's business planning process. This year the entire \$769.5 million in lottery fund revenues will be allocated to these various types of initiatives.

The new budget process for allocating lottery funds achieves a number of things. First, it maintains a separation between the lottery fund and other government revenues. It also ensures that lottery funds are used for a wide range of projects that benefit Albertans and are not for ongoing essential government programs. It also fits in with the government's overall bottom line, and it does not create an administrative structure or new bureaucracy. This system is designed to be highly accountable, clearly specifying allocations for all lottery revenues.

How it works. All lottery revenue spending for approved projects will be allocated to block categories according to the type of program involved. Funding for approved projects then flows to the relevant ministries as revenue. The ministries will then either fund projects directly or distribute the money to the agency responsible for the project. This year payments are made to seven categories: first, community and municipal development initiatives; second, agricultural and economic initiatives; third, education initiatives; fourth, health initiatives; fifth, scientific and energy initiatives; sixth, the lottery fund administration; and finally, the seventh, debt repayment.

All of the lottery funding requests have been included in the business plan for the department identified in the lottery fund summary of payments. Madam Chairman, any questions related to these individual projects should have been asked at the time the individual departments were reviewed. These expenditures are the responsibility of the minister for that department. However, if there are any questions directly related to those projects, I will undertake to co-ordinate the responses for those questions from the ministers in question. I will, as I have in the past, undertake to review *Hansard* and to respond promptly to any questions that may not be answered here today.

So, first of all, community and municipal development initiatives. Payments are made to various foundations, agencies, and programs that support the arts, sports, recreation, historical resources, and municipal enhancement programs. This year \$226.4 million will go to these initiatives, up from \$138.2 million last year. This is an increase of almost \$100 million. Funding includes \$50.8 million for the community lottery board program and \$25 million for the community facility enhancement program. This popular program provides matching funds to communities for the construction, renovation, or redevelopment of community public-use facilities. The \$25 million allocated this year is part of a three-year program; \$75 million is committed in that program.

Also, \$1.5 million in funding has been allocated to create a Gaming Research Institute. This is in direct response to the lotteries and gaming summit recommendation calling for more concrete research on gaming issues. As well, AADAC will receive an increase of approximately \$400,000 to enhance its services for problem gamblers' programs. There is also funding for projects in the areas of Environmental Protection, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, Municipal Affairs, and Public Works, Supply and Services. These projects have been recommended by the ministers responsible for those departments.

3:10

Secondly, agricultural and economic initiatives. These grants are directed towards improved agricultural awareness, research, and services and onetime economic initiatives. This year we will spend \$189.6 million on these initiatives as compared to \$168.1 million in the previous year.

Thirdly, education initiatives. Grants total \$154.6 million for a variety of educational projects including infrastructure support, school construction and renewal, school technology upgrading, learning television, and athletic scholarships.

Fourth, health initiatives. These projects respond to expressed health and wellness needs that are considered to be in the public interest. Total funding for health initiatives in fiscal 2000 is \$87.3 million. This is up from \$16.3 million last year. Sixty million dollars is committed to the construction and upgrading of health facilities. This year \$7.3 million has been allocated for advanced medical equipment purchases. Alberta Wellnet will receive \$15 million in funding, and \$4 million has been committed to the health authorities innovation fund. One million dollars has been committed to the fetal alcohol initiative.

Fifth, scientific and energy initiatives. In this area \$40.5 million dollars is being allocated. The majority, about 80 percent, will go to strategic research initiatives.

Lottery fund administration grant: \$53 million has been allocated to the costs of the operations of ticket and electronic gaming activities in the province.

Finally, number seven, debt repayment: \$18.2 million will go to debt repayment.

As can you see, Madam Chairman, we have clearly delivered on the commitment to create a new system of allocating lottery funds to provide more money for research, prevention, and treatment of gambling problems and to continue lottery funding for community-based programs.

Madam Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to provide these opening remarks, and I look forward to hearing comments from the hon. members and to answering any of their questions regarding these estimates.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I want to start by kind of giving an idea of the framework we intend to follow. We have lottery funding of course this afternoon and again on Monday evening. Now, a number of our members will be addressing their concerns with lottery funding and the lottery budget. There will be questions, and the minister has acknowledged that she will attempt to co-ordinate questions asked of the ministers that receive lottery funding. Because of the budget process, of course, that opportunity was not always given in the budget process itself.

I did have the opportunity to direct questions to the Minister of Energy, who was very forthright in his response. He was inclined to agree with my question: is that an appropriate use of lottery dollars, to fund his particular department? I asked the same question of the minister for science and technology. He was a little more flippant in his response; nevertheless, he did respond. But there are others that have not had the opportunity to respond, and members will be asking those questions. Even though they may not have the opportunity to respond this afternoon, if at the very least they could respond in written form, it would be appreciated.

Now, we have a number of written questions that I will be sending over to the minister. She was very, very good about supplying the answers to the 49 questions we asked during the Gaming and Liquor Commission budget. These are different questions. They're not the same ones over, and there are fewer. Now, I'm sending them over as a courtesy but at the same time acknowledging that there may be members of this caucus that may read some of those questions into the record, may want to elaborate on the questions. But to avoid duplication and make it easier for the minister, if she has the ones that have been prepared in writing, it would, I think, give her the ability to respond that much quicker.

Now, when I look at the whole concept of lotteries and going back to 1989 when I was first here, I can remember it wasn't that long after that that lottery funds sort of became an issue. At first the concept was very clear: lottery dollars were used for community, nonprofit funding. The community facilities enhancement program was sort of the big one at the time. There were controversies. There was the infamous Samsonite personalized briefcases and such. There were questions asked by the opposition about lottery dollars being used as a slush fund and government members having the ability to screen applications within their ridings and veto them if necessary. The Auditor General consistently recommended that lottery dollars go in general revenues and not be used as a slush fund.

Now, the first taste of wealth in terms of the government's ability to sense what I would call a cash cow came when the minister responsible for lotteries at that particular time, who I believe was -- I can't remember -- possibly also the Minister of Economic Development, actually transferred \$25,000 into general revenue, because that was sort of a surplus after giving money to the Wild Rose Foundation, the Stampede board, the Northlands board, and the community facilities enhancement. A big, big deal was made out of that \$25,000.

We look at the picture today. We're talking in terms of a figure close to \$700 million, and portions of it are allocated in different fashions. It's a totally different ball game than it was years ago. It now constitutes double the revenue, by my understanding, that oil royalties pay within the province. It represents -- what? -- 3 percent of the government's revenues and has become a very, very lucrative avenue for the government. So it becomes much more difficult to deal with these matters.

Of course, there are community concerns. The community has expressed concerns. The amount of gambling that is occurring: is it to the detriment of the community or to the benefit of the commu-

nity? Many, many communities felt it was to the detriment, that it was a drain on their local economy. They were saying that they did not want to see millions and millions of dollars drained out of their community and, in return, get a few dollars back. Now, I look at those communities that outright told the government to remove the machines in response to their promise, what I call the seven-day commitment, upon receipt of the appropriate question or resolution from the municipality backed up with a plebiscite, although a plebiscite was not necessary. Of course, in Wood Buffalo it has gone on for close to 24 months now, and those machines still are there.

The Premier has repeatedly stated that he is going to bring forward legislation to deal with that matter. One of the questions I would ask the minister to respond to, which is not in the written questions and that I did intend to ask during question period but had to strike because it would conflict with the fact that lotteries budgeting is up today, is: when is that legislation forthcoming? Is that legislation going to deal with the question of retroactivity in the sense that a number of municipalities have already submitted the appropriate resolutions, have submitted the appropriate results of plebiscites?

Now, is there a way of doing it? I think the legal beagles can find a way. One way for the minister to do it, I would think, is to simply transfer that responsibility to the elected municipal council. Allow the elected municipal council to pass a motion that they want the machines removed, period, and not have to get a petition, not have to have it go to a plebiscite. Just allow them the same ability we give ourselves in terms of decision-making. If the city of Edmonton deems that they don't want the VLTs, let them pass a resolution and remove the VLTs. It's not too likely that would happen in Edmonton or Calgary, that the majority of people would vote to have them removed. However, there are still those communities that want them out.

So this government has an obligation to come up with appropriate legislation to correct the mismanagement of this whole subject in the past. It's got to be done quickly. Otherwise, it's very, very unfair to those municipalities that were given a promise, those citizens, those Albertans, that were promised that within seven days the machines would be removed.

3:20

Now let's look at gambling and the amount of dollars involved in such and exactly what's happened here in the province. Let me make it very, very clear. This caucus has never gone on record as saying that we oppose gambling per se. The Vote on Terminals organization never went on record as saying that they opposed gambling per se. We recognize that there's always an element of gambling. People want to go to bingos. Others go to the racetrack. I've been seen at Northlands myself. I don't think there's a greater sport than watching two Thoroughbreds race down the track towards the finish line, other than Wayne Gretzky shooting all those pucks in during the middle '80s for the Oilers. That is a tremendous sport. It's not that damaging. There is the odd person that may go a little overboard, but we recognize in this caucus that there's always going to be a tendency for a number of Albertans to want to find ways to gamble: the 6/49, the scratch and win, the odd trip to Vegas. That we accept.

I'll even go on record as saying that the concept of the nonprofit casinos I think is great. I was involved in organizing a number of nonprofit casinos in the early '70s, and they provided very, very lucrative dollars for nonprofit groups. In three weekends in a row we raised \$120,000 net, and that went to nonprofit groups that were working to improve the lifestyles of persons with disabilities at that particular time.

I have had the opportunity to tour the nonprofit casinos in the city. I recognize that from the tables about 50 percent goes to nonprofit groups. The government takes very little from that aspect of gambling, and I hope they will continue to recognize that the nonprofit groups are entitled to those profits they get from the tables.

The other aspect of the nonprofit casinos, of course, is the slot machines, which will number in some casinos in the neighbourhood of 400; 15 percent of those proceeds go to nonprofit organizations. That can mean \$12,000 to \$14,000 to a nonprofit group over a two-day casino. The operator also gets 15 percent, and there are some questions now being raised by operators as to whether that's sufficient, whether that's a sufficient share. Some nonprofit groups are saying that possibly they should be entitled to a bit more than 15 percent. The benefit of the nonprofit casinos is that it's a controlled environment where the emphasis is on sort of a sport. Gambling is a recreation. Gambling is a pastime.

It's not like going into a bar where somebody may consume too much alcohol, start playing the VLTs. Some of these bars -- I went one day into a bar on the north side just to check it out. I don't even want to name the bar, but it's the type of bar that members of this House, I would venture to say, would not go in. It was a Saturday afternoon, and I was appalled at the people in there that were drinking and gambling, drinking to the point that they couldn't read what was happening on the machines, and they were plunking money in. That to me is wrong: to intentionally place those machines in facilities where you're trying to capture dollars from the gamblers. They're not even gamblers; they're just innocent people that have gone into a bar.

If you had them in a controlled environment like the nonprofit casinos on a reasonable scale, I think that's the ultimate solution that would satisfy most Albertans. Had we in the last plebiscite in the various municipalities given people three choices -- do you favour removing the VLTs from the bars and restricting them to nonprofit casinos, do you want the machines removed entirely from the province, or do you want them kept everywhere in the province like they are now? -- I would venture to say that 70 percent of Albertans would have voted to restrict them to the nonprofit casinos. Unfortunately, they weren't given that opportunity to vote because the plebiscites weren't drawn up to reflect that.

So I want to make it very, very clear that this caucus is not on some high horse saying: we oppose bingos, we oppose slot machines, and we oppose any form of gambling. Slot machines are, I believe, a lesser evil than the VLTs because they don't have the same so-called hypnotic effect that studies have shown the VLTs have.

During the opening of the casino downtown, the Baccarat I believe it's called, I attended as the representative of this caucus. The Premier was there, and the minister of lotteries at that particular time was there. I pointed out to somebody -- I said, "I'm going to show you how quickly these machines can gobble up 20 bucks." I put through \$20 as an experiment. Within two minutes it was gone. Unfortunately, one of the government members reported that to the *Alberta Report*, which I thought was a little . . . Anyway, I was just doing an experiment.

MRS. NELSON: That's a small example.

MR. WICKMAN: Very small. [interjection] It wasn't you exactly.

Anyway, the point that I'm trying to make, Madam Chairman, is that we accept the fact that there's always going to be a form of gambling in this province, but it has to be controlled.

I want to touch on the community lottery boards, which have been granted an additional \$50 million for the second year. The decision-making has been granted to the community boards, which is the way

it should be. I have no difficulty with that. However, along with that have to go appropriate guidelines to ensure that those dollars go to what the gaming summit recommended: nonprofit groups that are basically working in the community.

I look at the Calgary report, for example, and I see very worthwhile groups that fit that category. The Calgary Meals on Wheels, a very fitting organization to receive lottery dollars. The Calgary legal council, the Calgary Soccer Federation, the Calgary Society of Community Opportunities, the Calgary Status of Women Action Committee: those are all great.

However, there are some here that I wonder if they're simply a function of what the municipality should be providing out of normal budgeting. The Calgary Handi-Bus Association: unless I'm wrong, I read that as a direct arm of the city of Calgary. I could be wrong. We have the Calgary Police Service, the Calgary Public Library board, and so on; in other words, aspects of municipalities that have ways of raising dollars through taxation, whatever, that nonprofit groups don't have. So I kind of question: does that really meet the intent of what the gaming summit said when they said that these dollars should be used for nonprofit groups? By and large, the majority of the dollars, or a good portion of them, appears to be going towards municipalities. I don't fault the lottery boards for doing that. If they're not given guidelines to restrict them, then you can't blame them for doing it.

When I look at the whole allocation of lottery funding -- and the minister addressed it. We have to go back to when the Auditor General repeatedly recommended that it go to general revenue. Now we see the gaming summit recommending that it go to nonprofit, community-based groups. But we see what has really happened in a lot of cases: those dollars being transferred to departments like science and technology and so on and so forth. So I question that. Quite frankly, if the gaming summit delegates had known how those dollars were going to be handled, would they have in fact recommended that particular recommendation? Or would they have recommended that it go into general revenue and be used for the priorities of the day: health care, education -- who knows? -- whatever this Legislative Assembly would deem in the budgeting process to be the priorities of the day?

We talked about the gaming commission when that budget was up, so I don't want to go into great detail there other than to say that that commission has been given the responsibility of a mandate to oversee a great deal of money which is then transferred, of course, to the government. Nevertheless, they're responsible for raising those dollars through lotteries, and they have a fairly lucrative administrative budget that goes with it.

I want to look for a minute at the future of gambling in the province. As I've said, talking about slot machines, slot machines in the nonprofit casinos are welcomed by many groups. We've raised questions on it before. We've raised questions because there's no cap on the number. We don't want to see Alberta become a gambling mecca per se. There is no cap at the present time.

To say that lesser dollars are going into the VLTs but more dollars are going into the slot machines does not say that gambling is being minimized or that it's falling off in the province. I don't believe it is falling off. Madam Chairman, I toured the ABS casino on Argyll Road. They have approximately 400 machines. It's a beautiful facility. It's sort of like being in Las Vegas on the strip and going into a local casino. It's not much different than that. It's well built; it's comfortable. The people there were quite content. It was nice. We didn't see any bar people going around pushing drinks and that type of thing, and the people there didn't seem to be particularly hung up on it. They had a choice of machines. That's the type of gambling that should be allowed in this province, and it shouldn't go beyond that in terms of extending it to the hotels.

3:30

The minister can maybe clear this up. It has been repeatedly rumoured over the last few months that the government has a plan that somewhere down the road they're going to designate certain hotels to contain minicasinos. In other words, you wouldn't see every bar and every tavern in Edmonton have the right to apply for a licence. Well, maybe it's just a rumour, and I would like the minister to talk about that a bit.

I look at some of the recommendations that we've dealt with before, Madam Chairman. We've dealt with the recommendations of the Gordon report, for example. Some of them were fulfilled. I don't believe all of them were fulfilled. I recall a degree of testing being done on some of the VLTs, a very small degree. I don't really know what happened with that, because nothing ever seemed to come as a result of that. That was a commendable recommendation.

I think the report also recognized a need for additional resources for gambling addiction and such, and there has been some movement in that direction. Again, it's a question that the gambling summit also pointed to as well, and the minister has stated that about another \$400,000 is going towards AADAC to assist in that direction.

Other areas -- Texas is one -- allocate a certain percentage of gambling revenue towards the foundation for addictions. I believe in Texas it's 1 percent. Well, if it were 1 percent here in Alberta, we'd be looking at roughly \$7 million, which is considerably more than gambling is raising at the present time, and it has to be recognized.

The minister has talked about her involvement with addiction in the sense that she recognizes that it is a problem and is anxious to see something done. I concur with her on that. There are people out there that need help. There are people that become addicted to those machines. The minister has probably heard some of the same horror stories I've heard about broken homes, children going hungry, people on social assistance getting their cheque and blowing it in one day, even allegations that suicides have been committed as a result of that addiction. Those are heartbreaking. Those are very, very difficult to comprehend.

So the minister still has a lot of work to do in this particular direction. We can't just sit back and say that everything was resolved during the last municipal elections because the votes weren't always that close, Madam Chairman. There are still those municipalities that are saying -- Edmonton: what was it? Less than one-half of 1 percent voted to remove the machines. It kind of tempered things for a while, but I would say that as time goes on, it's going to kind of rise again. People are going to start to question: do we need widespread gambling?

At this point I'm going to conclude and maybe speak later, depending on my caucus colleagues.

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I thought it was appropriate to take a few minutes as the chairman of AADAC to speak to the lottery estimates that have come forward in our budget. I think it's interesting to note to colleagues in the Assembly that there's been an 11 percent increase in the contributions from the lottery fund to AADAC from the 1998-99 budget year to the 1999-2000. This increase is quite significant, and it's much appreciated.

Let me first respond a little bit to the comments that were made. When the mandate review was done for AADAC a few years ago under the able chairmanship of the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow and problem gambling was added to our responsibilities, there was a commitment to allocate funding through the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission through lottery funding to support this. They

have always been very, very effective in meeting our needs and planning our dollar requests and evaluating them. So for your reference, there's been a \$347,000 increase in lottery funding. It's specifically targeted to problem-gambling initiatives.

I wanted to say on behalf of AADAC that we recognize that this is a serious addiction, and there's a lot of work being done to help meet this problem need. I would like to take a few seconds to acknowledge the work of our staff in area offices, too, who have incorporated this initiative in the work that they do. These initiatives will include increased effort in the area of education and prevention, including new materials for elementary and junior high youths. There are two new TV ads and material for the workplace. There's material for seniors as well as interprovincial consultation on youth and gambling. So I can assure the hon. member that the money is targeted and meeting the needs of problem gambling.

In addition, the funding will support these new initiatives and will enable us to enhance some of the ongoing treatment programs that we have, including our intensive day treatment program. It's important to note that AADAC has based its funding requests for problem gambling on the projected needs of Albertans, and the total budget for the 1999-2000 estimates is \$3,395,000.

Let me just highlight, because some of the comments that were made by my hon. colleague referenced: was there an actual response to the gaming summit? The issues that have been addressed in the public forum, whether that's through plebiscite or as a result of community interest in VLTs: has that actually been incorporated into our funding allocations? I will say that as a result of the Alberta Lotteries and Gaming Summit that was held in Medicine Hat, a significant recommendation was made, "that the amount and public visibility of gambling addiction prevention and treatment programs be increased." These dollars are specifically targeted to honour that recommendation that came out of the Medicine Hat summit. To this end AADAC will be taking a lead role in co-operation with the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission and the Alberta Racing Corporation to develop strategies to respond to recommendation 6 and to increase the amount and public visibility of addiction prevention and treatment programs.

Under the area of prevention, hon. members, I'd like to identify that we have the responsibility to raise public awareness of problem gambling and services, and to this end we've developed and are distributing print materials to gaming venues and providing information through departmental newsletters. We develop and distribute poster materials to all physicians in Alberta. This is an important consideration because addiction issues are often dealt with with the family physician, so we are incorporating them into our strategies. We also have developed television ads and newspapers ads in both urban and rural newspapers.

To raise youth awareness about problem gambling and services, we've developed -- and I'm sure my colleagues are aware -- over 138 theatre presentations that have taken place across this province dedicated to students in grades 4 through 6. We have also put together a youth web page on the AADAC web site, and we're also consistently delivering educational sessions to schools and communities across this province.

For those communities that are looking at increasing their awareness, we have also undertaken to fund 18 community projects across the province.

As for industry awareness -- and in all reality, we do need a partnership with the industry -- we have met with them on a few occasions to look at that partnership. We also have, as you are well aware, an interagency component of AADAC, a response to problem gambling, of which the industry and the hotel association are members. So we deliver service intervention and education sessions

through the Alberta Hotel Association, and we distribute intervention materials to all gambling venues.

With respect to treatment, Madam Chairman, we continue with our 24-hour, 1-800 help line for problem gambling. We provide outpatient and nonresidential inpatient intensive treatment, where numbers warrant, for problem gamblers across the province. We provide inpatient treatment for problem gamblers at four locations across the province with specific programs for women and aboriginal people. We develop youth intervention and treatment resources, and in fact we are piloting a gambling decision program in Alberta in partnership with the Capital health authority. This initiative with the support of the Capital region is much appreciated and is targeted to give us some very good data as well as to treat some highly needed community need.

We also provide and facilitate training for individuals who are treating problem gambling clients through workshops, network sessions, and the use of treatment and resource materials.

I suppose I understand that there is a sense that the response to the Medicine Hat summit or indeed, Madam Chairman, to your own gaming review has gone unattended, but these significant dollars that have been allocated through the lottery estimates to AADAC and its programs are not there by happenstance. They're there because of significant work that's been done and a real commitment of this government to respond to those issues.

So I would just conclude with those comments, Madam Chairman. If for any reason there is some sense that your own individual constituencies are not aware of these programs and services or would like more information, as chairman of AADAC, please don't hesitate to contact our offices.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

3:40

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity today to speak to lottery fund estimates. I believe I've asked this question before, and I know the minister spoke a bit about it today. Lottery dollars are distributed according to projects that are approved. So are there criteria for those projects? Does the government do a poll to see what the hot issues are in Alberta and say: "Okay; we've got to address more money to infrastructure dollars," or "Education is becoming a hot-button issue; let's put some money there." Or is it a minister who is a very good lobbyist and says: if we don't do something with science, research, and technology, we're going to be laughed at?

So that mystery of how lottery dollars get approved and what projects get approved: I don't see it as planned. I see it as ad hoc, as to: what are the issues of the day? I can appreciate that the budget process has changed and that items are now identified as to where lottery dollars are spent. I appreciate that that clarity has happened so that we do know where those lottery dollars have gone, and I think that's good. But I still think there's a feeling out in Alberta that this tends to be a bit of a slush fund. If it isn't, I think it has to be very clearly stated how projects are brought forward, how they are prioritized, how they are approved. I know the minister has said that projects get approved -- I'd like to know how they even get to the table. Just start with that.

When out talking to different municipalities and actually to some hotel owners, they have said, "Why doesn't the VLT money that comes out of our community come directly back to our community?" "Because the government gets it," is the real thing. Face it; it would be an awful lot of money, and a lot of the projects that the government prioritizes couldn't be addressed.

MRS. NELSON: Who should get it?

MRS. SOETAERT: Pardon me? The minister is asking me questions. After the next election she'll be able to do that. I'm not saying who should do it. If she really wants my suggestions, I'll give them. But it is my opportunity right now to ask those questions, and I'd appreciate that.

They have said that it should come back to the community. The reality is that I have concerns over how it would be spent back in the communities, because some would have more and some would have less and all that issue. However, there is a concern that a lot of money is leaving communities in gambling dollars, and it's not coming back to the community. Certainly municipalities dealing with road construction right now are very frustrated with the lack of funds to properly finish secondary highways, to properly join communities so that economic development can prosper.

They've asked me: is the budget set? I said: well, we're almost finished the budget process, but the reality is that this government, being a great government for a little supplemental here or there, when there's a hot spot, they'll get money for it. It usually tends to be out of lottery funds because that's always the flexible fund. So I never discourage them from asking. They have every right to ask for more money. But I also think it's a poor way of planning.

I would like to speak for a minute about community lottery boards. I have seen some great work done in communities on those. What I heard this week from some elected municipal officials -- some of them felt that as we're downsizing government and trying to be more efficient in government, why would another level of bureaucracy be created? [interjection] It's a good thing I have a loud, clear voice.

I think that was a fair question. They wanted to know why they couldn't be the administrators of those lottery dollars. In a way, I felt they had a good argument, especially if maybe those lottery dollars had some guidelines that it had to go to arts and sports, et cetera, but if it went right to a municipal program, it may end up right into roads again and forget those finer community projects. So that was the debate around that, and it was interesting, the different opinions on that. They were upset, though, with the administrative costs of doing it, and then that issue got partially resolved.

Now, lottery dollars fund AADAC, which in itself is a bit of an irony. So AADAC is funded through lottery dollars, yet when there seems to be an issue within AADAC, the response from the minister tends to be: that's AADAC's issue to deal with, not mine; I'm the minister. The specific concern I have with AADAC is that we fund those programs, yet the minister backs away and says: I'm not responsible for them.

One of the issues lately under AADAC: Economic Development within AADAC. There were people from Poundmaker's Lodge that came to see me. I brought their concern to the floor of the Leg., and there was a commitment made by the board to meet with the staff. The board did not meet with the staff. More staff members were fired. I'm not taking sides on this and I don't expect the minister to either, but I do expect her to have some responsibility. If we are funding AADAC and there's an issue percolating out there -- I don't want the credibility of Poundmaker being in jeopardy -- I would like that issue addressed. So within AADAC and those lottery dollars I think we also have a responsibility to make sure, when there's a concern, that the minister does get involved. So that was my concern under AADAC.

Interestingly -- and I'm sure it's a dilemma the minister thinks about -- when we have sections of society who have an adversity to using gambling dollars to fund projects, as was the case with the Catholic church in Calgary who returned lottery dollars, when there

is an adversity of different sections of the population to using gambling dollars on a project, when you put those programs in Health and Education and Energy and all the other departments, are you ever questioned on that? People don't realize, maybe, that lottery dollars are going to basic programs. I find that interesting. They're given out of lottery dollars, and I know that some organizations are very much against using lottery dollars, yet they're now funding core programs in Education and Health. Absolutely. So I ask the minister if there have been concerns about that.

MRS. NELSON: No.

MRS. SOETAERT: I also want to ask a bit about the lottery machines. Now, I was in this Assembly when the present Minister of Energy was responsible for lotteries, I believe, and he committed that there would be no more than I think it was 6,000 VLT machines in the province. I'd like to know where we're at now. What's the future plan? [interjection] She's a little bit anxious. You know what? It's nice to know that you value my questions, and I appreciate that.

I would like to know, then, if casinos can gain more VLTs. There seem to be more VLTs all over the place.

3:50

MR. BONNER: Slot machines.

MRS. SOETAERT: Slot machines, yes. For me, I have a higher level of comfort seeing them in the casinos rather than out in the communities, where I think they're very available to sometimes very vulnerable people. I know we've seen in some of our -- and maybe it's because when you're in rural Alberta, you know the people who are going to those machines and losing their homes and losing their families and their savings. So it tends to be more of an issue in smaller towns and communities, when you recognize the person going to the local hotel and putting loonie after loonie after loonie in. I would wonder if the minister is even considering the idea of just putting VLTs in casinos.

Now, I understand the issue with maybe far northern places who don't have casinos. What do we do then? Put them in bingo halls? There are bingo halls. But the reality is that the availability of them does affect the addiction to them, and that causes me concern. I don't know; to just blindly accept that they will proliferate all over the province has me a little bit . . .

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, excuse me a moment. It seems to me the sound level in here is escalating. It's very, very difficult, I know, for the chair to hear the speaker and, I'm sure, for the minister to hear as well. Could I ask those of you that really want a conversation to go out on the patio -- I understand it's beautiful out there -- and probably resume your conversation there, please.

Also, I will remind members that even in committee stage we must sit down in the Assembly. There's only one person standing, and that is the person that is speaking.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much.

Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: Just a question now. As I understand it, the administration cost of all this is about \$53 million. That's quite a chunk of coin on the \$770 million. Is there a goal or a cap to that

administration cost? Would you mind providing a breakdown of that \$53 million? I'd like to know how it was broken down.

I guess when the total budget is half from gambling dollars, it must be an interesting process to figure out where those dollars are going to go. It also makes me a little leery that our biggest revenue is now gambling dollars.

MRS. NELSON: That's not true.

MRS. SOETAERT: You'll have a chance to respond.

That to me is not an economic development plan: to increase gambling in this province. So I have some concerns about that.

I know there are several other people who want to ask questions. I'm hoping I may have a chance to speak again later. My final question. If in the course of the year this government finally realizes that children are crowded into classrooms and there aren't enough long-term beds, just one example of many, will there be probably interim supply funded through lottery dollars that will address those shortages? It would be hopefully before September so that school boards can do some planning.

You know, there was a onetime injection into infrastructure, a onetime injection into health. Maybe this'll be a onetime injection to make sure that school boards don't have to lay off staff so that our children aren't crowded into classrooms. I guess maybe this is one of the ways projects get approved, by lobbying for them. So I would humbly submit that I'm using this forum to lobby for some dollars going to education programming for September.

DR. TAYLOR: Come on over here. Then you can lobby from inside.

MRS. SOETAERT: When I'm over there, that person will be over here.

Thank you very much, Madam Chairman, for the opportunity to speak to the estimates today.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I thought I'd respond to some of the questions, before other speakers come in, from the standpoint that I want to make some clarification to some of the comments that have come from the opposition.

First of all, as near as I can remember, the opposition has complained bitterly about not knowing the breakdown of the lottery fund revenues and complained bitterly that those funds were transferred from Alberta gaming and liquor control to the general revenue and went into this big, dark black hole, the government revenue pot, and they never saw again where the dollars went. That theme was carried forward to the gaming summit last year, and that's why the presentation and the split-out of the dollars is as it is today. This isn't because this was a fun exercise or something that someone stayed awake at night dreaming up. This was because this is in response to the concern that those dollars just came in and went into the big black hole of government.

We keep saying this, but particularly the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert just doesn't seem to get it: this funding is not going into ongoing program funding for any of our core programs. [interjection] And she's still yapping instead of listening. Now, pay attention. Let's pay attention to this. If you read the book, pages 108 and 109, you can see the initiatives clearly where these dollars are being allocated. Go to your book; read your budget book.

You also made the comment that this was one of the largest sources of revenue for the government. Please read the budget.

Read the budget. This tells you the income statement. Start with revenue from corporate taxes, revenue from personal taxes, royalty incomes. Go down the list and see where it fits, and then you'll have an idea. This is not the biggest source of revenue for the government; trust me. The presentation that is here is very important.

Now, how do they get into these lists? Well, every department through its business planning process identifies core programming and programs that are onetime funding. They go through a planning process at the standing policy committees and present business plans. The minister responsible for lotteries does not make the determination as to what is being applied for or what comes in through the process. That is done through a long business planning process, is viewed through the standing policy committees, and once it goes through there, it goes through the Treasury Board process. This funding presentation and approval is no different from any other departmental funding process. It follows the same type of procedure, and in fact the programs that are here are part of it.

Because the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert seems to think that this is not worthy and that these are programs that are slush funds, Madam Chairman, I thought that just for clarity, so that there's clarity for her benefit, I'd like to -- she's not listening again -- go down through what the funding is for.

Under the heading Community and Municipal Development Initiatives, the Foundation for the Arts is going to receive \$21,104,000. The Historical Resources Foundation will receive \$5,913,000. The Wild Rose Foundation will receive \$6,600,000. The human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund will receive \$1,062,000. Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation will receive \$14,885,000. Community lottery program grants will be \$50,800,000. The 2001 World Championships in Athletics will receive \$19 million this fiscal year. The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission will receive \$27,875,000, and special services for problem gamblers will receive an additional \$3,395,000.

4:00

Community facility enhancement program will receive \$25 million. The Gaming Research Institute will receive \$1.5 million.

Under Environmental Protection the water management and erosion control program will receive \$2,940,000. The natural resources service area will receive \$15 million.

Under Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, Métis settlements governance will receive \$11,300,000.

Under Municipal Affairs, the Municipal 2000 sponsorship will receive \$10 million.

Under Public Works, upgrading of seniors' lodges will receive \$10 million.

The Agricultural Research Institute will receive \$8 million; rural development services, \$9 million; irrigation rehabilitation, \$17,200,000; municipal wastewater, \$5 million; rural agricultural societies, \$8,280,000. Other agricultural initiatives will receive \$2,950,000.

Under Economic Development, my department, Kangwon International Travel Exposition '99, the world tourism conference, \$500,000; other major fairs and exhibitions that we travel to, \$3,050,000; the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, \$7,100,000; Edmonton Northlands, \$7,100,000. The Calgary Trade and Convention Centre will receive \$9 million this year. Other initiatives are \$3.6 million.

Under Environmental Protection again, the fire-related reforestation, \$17 million.

Under Public Works, the construction and upgrading of water infrastructure, \$20 million.

Under the agricultural and economic initiatives, continued, the north/south trade corridor highway infrastructure, \$65 million; in Calgary, Deerfoot Trail and 96th Avenue NE, \$6,700,000.

Under education initiatives, athletic scholarships, \$1,500,000; infrastructure support, \$30 million; learning television, \$3,129,000; school construction and renewals, \$100 million; school technology upgrading, \$20 million.

Under health initiatives, advanced medical equipment, \$7,300,000; Calgary regional health authority laboratory facility and the Alberta Wellnet, \$15 million; Alberta health authorities innovation fund, \$4 million; fetal alcohol initiative, \$1 million; construction and upgrading of health facilities, \$60 million.

Under Energy, royalty and related information system, \$8,200,000.

Under science, research, and information technology, strategic research initiatives, \$31,500,000; Science Alberta Foundation, \$750,000.

The administration of lottery funds, \$53 million; debt retirement, \$18,196,000.

That is not anything that is a slush fund, as has been accused by the opposition. These projects are clearly going back to the community, and the community is receiving the benefit of lottery dollars. This was a request that came from the people. Now, the opposition has complained for years that they didn't know where the money was going. This is where it's going. This is what you asked for. This is what you've got. This has taken a lot of work and a lot of effort by all of the ministries involved in this allocation. It has gone through the business planning process and clearly has been worked into their business plans. You should have debated it when those ministries were here for their business plans. You didn't.

MR. WICKMAN: We didn't have time, Pat. The budget process is flawed.

MRS. NELSON: Now, don't whine anymore. You've got two days now to complain and put it on the record. So you can get back in and do a little more.

Let's clearly have the facts at hand, that this is all laid out for you. So you can go back and tell people that these dollars are going back into their communities.

With that, Madam Chairman, I'll let another speaker come in.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It is once again a pleasure to rise to . . .

MR. WICKMAN: You got a standing ovation, Lance.

MR. WHITE: They're sitting. No, they didn't get that carried away. And now they're leaving. A great audience that claps and leaves.

Madam Chairman, with the limited time available I should like to address some of the questions that I have and that have been put to me by members of my constituency and members, generally, of the voting public.

The minister is quite right. On the dissemination of these funds this side did want to have a look at where they went. She's quite right that there's a great deal of work in deciding how the funds are disseminated amongst the departments and how the special projects and capital works and the like in every department will be split up. That is all well and good, except that the fundamental issue of these funds and how they're generated is still a problem for this member

and still a problem for about half the population of this province. Yes, it's true that a vote was taken, but I'm sure that the public -- and I've tried it on for size -- are not aware that in the generation of these funds, which, I might add, are generated just internally, moneys are just moving in this economy. There's no wealth created anywhere. This is just money in transfer, as in a tax, from the population to the government.

I'm sure that the public would not be aware of the relative size of the income. Madam Chairman, this is some twice the amount of conventional oil. Now, generally in this province most of the population believes that this province gains a great deal of the wealth from the production of natural resources, the refinement and the marketing of those resources abroad.

[Mr. Clegg in the chair]

Conventional oil produces, to my reckoning, a net of \$346 million a year for the treasury. Now, \$346 million is nothing to be sneezed at, although it's way down from what it has been in the past. But it pales by comparison to those funds that are generated from this account. Recognize that conventional oil -- this is the net amount -- is actually producing something of value to this world. It actually makes the wheels go round many a place in this world, not just in this province. Recognize, too, that the generation of revenue through, in this particular case, gambling is oftentimes simply taking those dollars from the pockets of those who can least afford it, although I'll give it to the other side that it's by their own free will that these moneys are expended and put into the machines and the pull tickets or all the other methods of gambling. This money simply circulates.

Now, this particular member does not contribute to that tax. I do the best I can for my family to limit the amount of taxes that are paid. This would be one way that it's easily done for me. But for a lot of other people it's not quite that easy. They get caught up in trying to make back what they've lost or in trying to somehow set their family up or somehow make amends for the money that they are not making at the job. They get caught up in these machines, and quite frankly they become addicted.

There are, of course, some funds expended from this account. Of the \$769.5 million netted on the revenue side, there are \$3.395 million spent in aid of these problem gamblers. Now, that is a paltry sum, to say the least. That is so small, it falls off the scale of reason to spend these funds. In my figures -- I worked it out a while back -- it is about \$35 for every expected problem gambler there is in this province. As a member earlier said, on these machines in two minutes or less -- well, actually by his calculations it took two minutes to do \$20. So four minutes of play would eat up that \$35 for that individual problem gambler. This member believes that governments are at least partly responsible for introduction of this problem in our society and therefore should be responsible for curing some of the problems it has caused. The \$3.395 million simply doesn't make it.

4:10

There's another fund. Quite frankly, not being that familiar with this department anymore, I don't know where it goes. There's a \$1.5 million gambling research fund. If I have seen the product of this research, then I don't recall it. I certainly don't recall anything being tabled in this House that would indicate that there's some value received. But if there is value received -- and I truly hope there is -- it is still a minuscule amount to be spending on research when the damage that is inflicted upon society by this form of revenue generation is painfully obvious.

I'd like to move on to another area in the expenditures category that is of embarrassment to at least one minister in this government, and that's the Minister of Energy. He is given some \$8.2 million from this fund for the updating of some computer equipment in aid of keeping track of gas and oil revenues. Regardless of what the purpose is or if it's a special purpose, it's still revenue in a revenue-generating industry. That \$8.2 million contributes to the net figure that I spoke of earlier, of the conventional oil, of \$346 million. For a province that generates income on the basis of selling natural resources, to have the selling of those natural resources subsidized by gambling revenue is less than reasonable. Certainly accounting principles would say: if you're going to have some income-generating units, then let them stand alone; let us all understand exactly from where that money comes. That clearly is not the case in this expenditure.

Quite frankly, it disappoints this member a great deal that a government would even consider spending lottery funds in the oil business. Certainly the oil and gas business would be embarrassed if it was pointed out to them that gambling dollars were going into their end of revenue generation for this province and the building of the economic development of this province. It certainly would embarrass them no end.

Now, there are other areas of the expenditure that concern me but none so much as that. It embarrasses me and I know that my wife is embarrassed, being a former schoolteacher and having two children in high school at the moment, that there's almost, I believe, \$200 million going into education from the expenditures of this particular fund. That really is hard to fathom. It can't be \$2 billion; I must have the wrong page located here, I'm sure. I'm looking for the lottery expenditures by department. Bear with me, Mr. Chairman; I'll find it.

Now, we have that the expenditures going into education are \$154 million. That certainly is spread out through upgrading technology, a special project which, I suspect, is going to be an ongoing expense because certainly you don't stop buying computers in this day and age. They're outmoded so quickly that they must be replenished and resupplied each and every year.

There's \$100 million going off to school construction and renewal. Well, there was a day when we could tell exactly where those funds came from, and it is embarrassing for educators, I'm sure, to believe that some of the funds that they are expending in aid of educating the children in their charge in their school comes from this revenue source. It certainly wouldn't be something that they would like to explain on behalf of the government to the children, how the funds came about.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I would think there are a number of other areas that would concern certainly my family in the way of expenditures in the area of health. All the expenditures in the overall budget as they relate to health may or may not be expended well. That's not the point of the discussion here today. But coming from the revenue side, if you tell someone that their Alberta health care is being covered by inflicting some of this damage on individual families, on individuals that are spending money in gambling and therefore leaving some of it in the way of tax to the province, they would be embarrassed, and quite frankly it would be hard for them to understand how a government could in fact inflict this damage, on the one hand, and spend very, very little in the way of reparation of that damage.

There are some areas that traditionally it would be reasonable to spend these gambling revenue moneys on, and I would expect they would be things like community development, in the way of the Foundation for the Arts, the Historical Resources Foundation, the Wild Rose Foundation, and all of those areas where the expenditure

of public funds is in fact optional when it comes to government operation. Yes, they are most desirable, and yes, those are the areas where one would think it would be almost mandatory to have the quality of life one requires. But certainly with the ebb and flow of gambling dollars -- well, it seems to be only the ebb over the last five years; the flow may occur at some point; that's the downturn -- those are the areas where one would think that the expenditures could be curtailed without damaging the fundamental fabric of this society.

I would think another area where it would not be reasonable to expend these funds is on environmental protection. Environmental protection, in this member's view, is the stewardship, the husbandry, if you will, of the natural resources of this province. They absolutely must be funded, so they should not be funded from a source that can rise and fall with the fad of the day, if you will.

Quite frankly, I don't know what the Kangwon International Travel Exposition is. I assume that it has some economic benefit, because it is under the Economic Development department. I would assume that those are the kinds of things where this member would say: yes, those are the kinds of expenditures that should be reasonably funded from this source.

Fire-related reforestation is a strange, strange, strange expenditure of gambling funds. Think for a moment. Here the slot machines are going into planting trees in an area that has been burnt out for the future economic development of this part of the world. It is not reasonable to expect that these revenues are going to be there all the time. Therefore, expenditures in these areas are absolutely ludicrous.

4:20

Expenditures in municipal waste. To say that these are onetime expenditures in dealing with municipal waste, as though municipal waste is about to stop next year, is not reasonable at all.

The Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, Edmonton Northlands, and the convention centre in Calgary: yes, I would think those are all expenditures that could be reasonably taken from this fund. They are not absolutely fundamentally necessary to fund for the absolute bottom line of what would be required of a government. The expenditures could expand and contract, depending on the economic health of a province.

Quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, I have many, many things to say, but the time being limited today, I should like to take my seat and allow some other member to voice their opinion on the lottery funds and the summary of payments.

Thanks.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to speak a bit. There were some questions that were raised by the minister and by others that prompt me to say a few more words. One of the areas that I missed out on in my initial discussions deals with the bingo industry. Although we talked about it at some length during the budget for the Gaming and Liquor Commission, there are still some unresolved questions about the bingo industry.

The minister responsible for lotteries has received a great number of pieces of correspondence dealing with the nonprofit groups and their dissatisfaction as to what's happening with these regulations. There still is a lot of confusion, whatever you want to call it, because some of those same letters I've received copies of. With some of those letters, the groups have said: don't publicize our names; we don't want to harm our relationship with the government. I've also spoken with the chairman of the Federation of Alberta Bingo Associations. There is some confusion. The minister will say that

the changes that had occurred back in January have been rescinded. A number of them were rescinded, the controversial ones. Then the minister will go on to say that the other ones were kind of welcomed by the federation, by the nonprofit groups. That's not what I'm hearing at all. I'm still hearing that there's a great, great deal of concern and that these nonprofit groups want a better handle on exactly what's happening.

We have to look at the bingo industry from the point of view of being something that's driven totally by nonprofit groups, which is good. Virtually every dollar raised in the bingo industry goes to nonprofit groups. These are the types of nonprofit groups that are pure community nonprofit groups, like minor hockey and cultural activities, not with some of it going to municipalities or to agencies that would normally be an arm of a municipality. It's pure community benefits. We see trade-offs within there which allow some people who have very, very limited incomes to volunteer in exchange for certain benefits, like having certain fees waived so their children can enroll in a particular program. These are things that are very, very precious to those volunteers, and we have to continue to recognize that we depend on those volunteers to a very, very great extent.

It has been said in this House on many occasions by the Premier himself that we call upon the community to fill in the gaps because of the budget cuts and that. In other words, we expect the community to do more, but we can't ask them to do more with less. But they are doing more with less, because they're faced with the competition, of course, that they have from other forms of gambling that the government controls, where the government gets the revenues, such as the VLTs. People only have a certain amount of dollars to gamble with, whether it be in the form of VLTs, nonprofit casinos, horse racing, 6/49, bingos, whatever. There are only so many gambling dollars out there, and when a portion of it is being drained to go into government programs, then of course that makes it that much more difficult for the nonprofit groups.

Mr. Chairman, if you ever go through West Edmonton Mall, for example -- I call that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark's mall, because quite often she has been accused of being the wonder woman who has made that mall happen for whatever reason. Anyhow, sometimes you go through there and you may see six or seven different cars on display by nonprofit groups, many of them groups that I can identify with, the Handicapped Housing Society, so on and so forth. You talk to those individual ticket sellers. They find it a lot more difficult to hustle those tickets today than we were able to, say, 15 or 20 years ago. That's because of that competition. What I'm trying to say here is we've got to make it as easy as possible for those nonprofit groups to benefit to the maximum when it comes to things like the bingos and satisfying those volunteers and recognizing their needs and not making life more difficult for them.

Now, I have high hopes that this review committee is going to do some great things, but so far -- and I think the minister will confirm that her office continues to receive letters from numerous groups. There have been letters I've received from organizations in the Member for Edmonton-Calder's riding. I'm sure the same thing would happen with the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I know I did speak on bingos during the gaming commission thing, but it's a point that has to be stressed, so I sort of stress it.

I kept my comments short recognizing that other members wanted to speak on this whole subject of lotteries. The minister has risen up and has spoken and talked in terms of identifying specifically where these dollars go. They go to Health. They go to Education. They go to Public Works to provide \$10 million for seniors' housing. If we were to take away the lottery dollars that go to science and technology, the minister quite frankly wouldn't have a portfolio left,

because he wouldn't have any dollars left to carry on because so much of it comes from lotteries.

The question we have to ask ourselves when it comes to this type of funding for the core services -- and when I say "core services," I'm talking specifically about health, specifically about education -- what would happen if suddenly the well went dry? What would happen if Albertans rose and said, "We simply don't want that amount of gambling anymore," and they did plebiscites, whatever, voted to oust a great deal of the gambling or if Albertans took it upon themselves to lessen their amount of gambling? In other words, I'm saying that when we form the type of dependency on gambling revenues that we now have in our core services like education and health, it becomes a bit scary to me. We've talked in this House, Mr. Chairman, in terms of what's happened with the health care system, and we try and pump it up with some lottery dollars.

Now, the lottery dollars being taken away would make things even more difficult. The minister can argue that these are unique projects, but a lot of it, like the seniors' housing, the \$10 million -- if it wasn't done by lottery funds, are we saying that we would not build seniors' housing anymore?

MRS. NELSON: Where would we get the money from?

MR. WICKMAN: Where would we get the money from? Well, that's the responsibility government has, quite frankly: where do we get the money from? Opposition has the privilege of asking the questions. We don't have to come up with the answers. At the conclusion of this term, quite frankly, we may be placed in that position where we have to come up with the answers, and then the members over there will be asking the questions. Now, wouldn't that be a turn of events? This caucus would come up with the dollars, and we wouldn't do it by putting in VLT machines.

4:30

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Where?

MR. WICKMAN: Well, you've got to ask that question of our Treasury critic, not me. [interjections] He's the appropriate one to answer it.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Order. Would the two hon. ministers just calm it there in the front and let the hon. member make his remarks.

MR. WICKMAN: I'm simply responsible for being the critic of lotteries, and I can't take on other areas like Treasury. Besides, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora does such a good job of it. Why would I want to encroach on that territory? He has the answers, except he's keeping them to himself for now. You know, election time is coming. We don't give everything out in one shot. You don't unload the rifle in one shot.

Now, two other areas. There are members here that want to speak. Now I want to get really, really serious about it. Mr. Chairman, to the minister: why not consider revolutionizing the whole gambling industry here in Alberta? Why not look at a system of nonprofit casinos in compatible places in Alberta and do away with the VLTs in the hotels? Make it respectable. Make it the type of industry that people will go to, like they do at the racetrack. It's sort of a sport. It's a social evening. I've gone to the racetrack, as I said earlier, where we've had supper, when I've had relatives in from Ontario. Unfortunately, some of those same relatives get caught up and want to go visit the VLTs, and I say: that's going too far. But they have been known to sneak off to the slot machines there at Northlands,

which isn't so bad. At least the dollars are going in a different direction.

To the minister: why not come up with a plan that recognizes there is a compromise position that would give dollars to the nonprofit groups, would give some dollars to government, would satisfy, I would say, the vast majority of Albertans, would be more compatible for the province, would take away this image that we're trying to gouge people for their dollars through a method that I think is just totally, totally so wrong? You know, I just think it's so wrong that we put the VLTs in these bars with one objective: to try and grab as much money as possible without any thought to the consequences.

The last point I want to raise. The minister used the term "slush fund." Now, you can call it a slush fund; you can call it whatever. The Auditor General has recommended that these dollars go to general revenues. The government has used an approach where they have this pot of money, and they're targeting \$10 million over here, so much money to health care, so much money to science and technology. That's not coming here for debate before the fact. It's in the budget, and we know it's going to be done. Now, if that's not a slush fund, I don't know what you'd call it. The government does have the prerogative of determining the use of these dollars. To me that is a slush fund. Maybe I shouldn't use the term "slush fund." Maybe I should use the term: some disposable windfall that is out there that government can call the shots at.

Mr. Chairman, I could go on actually for days and days on this topic, and I'm sure the minister could as well.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, do. We want to listen to you.

MR. WICKMAN: Other people, though, want to speak, and I've got to show some due respect. Our critic of Treasury, who knows what he'll come up with? Our Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, our Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, they're all here and anxious to speak. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar hasn't spoken yet. So, on that note, I've got to conclude and let the next speaker up.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to enter debate on the first day of lottery estimates. I've always felt that this has been a heavily restricted debate. The lottery fund has been very controversial in this province for some time, and the more the lottery fund grows, I think the more questions people have about it, and they're legitimate questions. Actually I want to say that I think this minister has been pretty forthcoming and has been trying to answer some questions, a little resistant to some of the good ideas that come from the opposition but actually a little forthcoming.

The amount of the lottery fund expenditure that we're talking about this year is about \$770 million, which I think is a tremendous amount of money. It's three-quarters of a billion dollars. Of course, if you put it another way, it would finance about one and two-thirds West Edmonton Malls at the going rate of government involvement in that kind of an enterprise. Another way to look at it, Mr. Chairman, is that it's worth about \$25 an Albertan. So the real question that we have to ask ourselves is: is the government making the best use? Are we getting the best value for this money? If each one of my constituents was asked to cast a vote for how they would spend their \$25, would this spending reflect what their choices may be? I'm not sure that we have the ability to answer that question with the information that we're provided.

I'm very disappointed, actually, in one thing, and that is the way in which the lottery fund estimates are now integrated into the

estimates of the major departments. I've often thought that if we saw the lottery fund expenditures presented on more of a line-by-line, department-by-department basis, we'd get a much better sense of where the money was going. There would be more accountability, and we'd be able to answer that question, the question being: is each one of my constituents getting their \$25 worth? But now that I see the way the government has moved those expenditures into the budget, into the line-by-line, I have some of the concerns that my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford was just expressing. [interjection]

The minister poses the rhetorical question about whether I like it or not. My rhetorical response is: I'm still wondering. The reason why I'm still wondering is that on the one hand the detail appeals to me, but the real issue is: how do we know what's been replaced? We don't have any real comparison because the accounts were changed this year in two regards. We have the integration of the lottery expenditures, but we've also got the consolidated vote this year for the first time. It's very difficult to see, you know, what's been maybe replaced or what's been set aside. So when the question is asked, "Would we build seniors' housing?" and the response is, "Well, where would the money come from?" we don't know. So it would be helpful to get some more of that detail, and maybe that means a one-year sort of transition supplementary statement for the lottery fund. That would be helpful.

Now, the minister talked in her opening remarks about the allocation to block categories, the seven categories. I would be very curious to know about those categories. I'm certain that there was lots of debate about what to call the categories, whose department was going to fall under what category, and all of the arm wrestling that must have gone on. I have asked before under other circumstances but I'm not asking right now for cabinet secrets. But what I would like to see and what I think Albertans would like to see is maybe some of the rationale. I'm sure that it's sound, and I'm sure that it would be in everybody's best interest to present some of the rationale for the seven categories: how they're constructed and then the relative weighting.

Now, we could do it sort of backwards. We could fill in the blanks, because we could go through all of the department budgets and then look at the way that it's been broken out, because it's presented in the big budget book on pages 108 and 109. It's broken out showing where the seven categories are. But even given that, sometimes a health initiative looks surprisingly like an education initiative and sometimes an education initiative looks surprisingly like a social services initiative. So it would just be nice to see some of the notes that went into those allocations and then the relative weighting that government put on the seven categories.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Now, the seventh category, the debt repayment one, is of particular interest to me. This is probably one of those areas where there's a clear division between the government and the Official Opposition. I have criticized this government for not being the most complete in their presentation of budget and spending plans and revenue projections in the past, because it has been my assertion that the government, aside from the cushion that's been built into budgets over the last few years, has quite on purpose created budgets that understate revenues, overstate expenditures, create bigger surpluses. That tied to the legislative imperative to put money towards debt repayment has created a circumstance where the government can brag about balancing the budget and paying off the debt at an accelerated rate.

I don't think that's been the most honest or the most fair way to

present the budget. In fact, I think it's been a little artificial. Of course, that is the point of demarcation between the Official Opposition and the government, because the government of course would argue that they have done a wonderful job of doing those budget presentations and that it's really a mark of their good management and stewardship that we've been able to pay off the debt at the rate we have. I don't think that's necessarily the case. We don't need to debate that today.

4:40

But it does make me curious about this seventh category, the 18 million plus dollars that's going towards debt repayment. This \$18.2 million is a curious figure. It's very much a residual figure. I'm sure the Minister of Environmental Protection could have used some of that \$18 million for Environmental Protection programs and services. I'm certain that the Minister of Health could have used some of that \$18 million to provide enhanced health care services for Albertans. I'm certain the Minister of Social Services, et cetera.

So given that we know the requests of the lottery fund far exceed the amount of money that's available for expenditure in the lottery fund, how was it decided that \$18.2 million would be left over? How exactly did we arrive at that as the right figure? Is it just that only so much was going to be put into each one of those other categories? I mean, was there a cap set in the other six categories? Is it because we're trying to level off expectations? Maybe we're only expecting \$750 million a year into the lottery fund, so when we have this additional, let's say, \$20 million, we'll just pull it out and put it towards debt repayment. It's really not clear to me how we arrive at that figure.

I would make this further observation, and I'm making this very much as a personal observation. Alberta is blessed with a robust economy. Now, there are some segments of our economy that are not doing so well right now, particularly in any of those commodity-based businesses, agriculture and oil. But that being said, Alberta is in relative terms doing fairly well, and because we've been doing fairly well over the last several years, we've been able to pay off the province's debt at an accelerated pace. In fact, we are more than a decade ahead of the government's own projections.

Now, given that we are so far ahead on debt repayment and given that the Treasurer has already speculated that we will be able to eliminate and retire that debt entirely by the end of this fiscal period, it seems to me that this additional \$18.2 million wouldn't be critical to achieving that goal. On the other hand, this \$18.2 million would be critical to perhaps achieving some other goals. Maybe it would be critical to opening up more early intervention spaces for young people to get rid of the waiting list in places like the Mayfield early intervention program in my constituency. Maybe it would be critical in terms of opening up more long-term care beds, of which I understand the city of Calgary is short about 300. Maybe that \$18.2 million would be critical in reducing classroom size or getting rid of the rodents that infest some of the rural schools that have been discussed in this Assembly. So maybe that \$18.2 million could be put to immediate, very good use.

Certainly onetime funding, all consistent with the priorities of the lottery fund, would have a far more direct impact on the lives of Albertans than by taking this residual amount, this little bit of money that's left over, and then saying: well, I know what; we'll just put it into the category for debt repayment. I would want the minister to explain exactly how it is that it was arrived at by government that this was the best use of this \$18.2 million and why it is that we don't see that money being used for onetime necessary expenditures, the way the bulk of the fund is.

I have a couple of other concerns, Madam Chairman. I guess I

can summarize it best by talking about a recent experience to do with lottery expenditures in the health care field. The Calgary regional health authority has been in desperate need of upgrading its medical laboratory. In the last fiscal period they were fortunate to get the ear of government and be able to receive lottery funds to provide enough revenue to build a new lab. That's not a bad thing. Calgary needs the lab. The workers in that medical laboratory I think were working under very onerous conditions. I'm not being critical about the expenditure, but I'm using it as an example because that money was allocated outside of the normal process. That money came after the books were theoretically closed. After the other health authorities had already put in all of their requests for lottery funds and after all of the allocation decisions were made, Calgary for some reason was able to come back to the table and access those dollars.

Now, I know that the Minister of Health knows that the other 16 regional health authorities would have priorities for lottery revenue spending, that each one of those other 16 health authorities, many of whom are running deficits, if they had known that it was open to them to come back after the process, would have come back with their own want list, their own need list for lottery funds. I use that as an example to state a more general concern. How do we know in this Assembly that the spending priorities that have been agreed to by government truly reflect the needs that are evidenced in the communities when the process can be changed at the last minute?

Accountability really requires that we put into place a series of checks and balances so that everybody is treated the same, so that there truly is equality in how requests for lottery expenditures are treated, so that any health authority or any other group, any other government department, any other organization that's funded under Economic Development, such as Calgary Stampede or Edmonton Northlands, any of the foundations, whether it be the Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation or the Wild Rose Foundation, all know that they're all being treated the same and that nobody, because they managed to get the ear of somebody, is going to be treated special or is going to be treated differently.

Unfortunately, I can't give my constituents that assurance simply because of the behaviour of government that I've witnessed. I used the health example. I could have used others. It's not necessarily because I think the spending decisions are poor or are wrong minded. It's simply that I can't tell my constituents that everybody has been treated with fairness.

I would call upon the government to make the process manifestly clear to all and ensure that the process is followed rigorously and that anybody who after that cries foul or cites abuse can be straightened out quickly. We could show them. We could say: "No. Here's the published process. Here's what we did. There was no variation. Everything is aboveboard." I would really like for us to get to that stage with the lottery fund. We're probably closer to that than we have been in the past, but we're not there yet. If the government is open to that kind of a suggestion, I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford and other members here would love to engage in a dialogue on the kinds of things that we could do to make it just that much more transparent and that much more clear.

Madam Chairman, with those comments to the minister -- and I don't know whether she's going to take the time to respond to some of them now or not -- I'll simply yield the floor and will follow the rest of the debate.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

4:50

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I, too, have a

few comments and questions for the minister regarding the lottery fund and the estimates.

First I have a few questions about the Historical Resources Foundation. Last year whenever I was traveling up to Lac La Biche, I went to the mission house. It had been a few years since I had been to the mission house. It's very important in Lac La Biche because we just celebrated the 200th anniversary of the settlement there. The mission house I thought could use a little bit of improvement. It was quite a tourist attraction, but I think we really need to furnish it in the period. If you look at northeastern Alberta as a destination -- and I know many people from the city go up there for recreational purposes. But I was astonished at the condition of the mission house. If it fits the criteria of the Historical Resources Foundation, I would like to see the continuous improvement of the building until it is outfitted completely in the period, say 1799, whenever it was at its zenith, when it started. I was up there doing some field research on the inadequate testing of the pine shake when I went there. I decided to take my children there, and I would like to see the government continue to improve the mission house.

Also this morning I listened with keen interest to the hon. Minister of Community Development. She was preparing, along with the Premier's wife, Mrs. Klein, getting ready for our centennial year in 2005. I would encourage her to make sure that there are many public buildings throughout the province, besides the Jubilee auditoriums in both Calgary and Edmonton, that are going to receive facelifts. It will be very important, because perhaps in another 100 years someone else will gather in that same building and plan for the 200th anniversary of this fine province.

It's interesting on how this lottery fund has changed the province, the amount of money that comes into the government through lotteries, through gambling. Twenty years ago if you, Madam Minister, had stopped someone on the street and said, "Do you think this is the way things are going to be in Alberta? I'm going to fast-forward us 20 years," I don't know if they would believe you or not that this much gambling would be going on in the province. But the bulk of profits from the government's gambling businesses are transferred into a fund separate from the general revenue fund, and this is where we get this lottery fund. People would be amazed at, not only this government, governments across the country, every level, how reliant they now are on lottery funds.

When the Conservative government first got into the gambling business, it was under the understanding that all the money would be used for arts, multicultural, sport and recreation programs. As gambling revenues grew, this government realized what a cash cow gambling could become, and this is where I get back to this interview in the street 20 years ago. Albertans would be astonished, because despite the damage done to individual families and communities -- this is the point of the astonishment. We know that there are troubles. We know that people have problems, and we've got to do our best to see that these people can return and have a normal life.

I saw with interest a television program on the very subject of a problem gambler, and this particular gentleman was quite a prosperous person. He had several businesses, he had a healthy lifestyle, he had a happy, contented family life, and he ran into the VLT. He started putting money in casually, and it grew to the point where he lost his business, he lost his family home, and he lost his family. It was about a 10-minute production piece, and I watched it with astonishment. I thought to myself: how many others are there like this gentleman that we don't know about? And we have no way of knowing. We have no way of knowing until they approach -- I believe the organization is called Gamblers Anonymous. This is eventually where this individual sought help. Fortunately I believe they were able to help him out, and now he is continuing with his life.

But consequently general revenue funding for departments and programs was reduced and lottery funding took its place. Groups receiving grants were never consulted about whether or not they wanted to be funded from gambling proceeds. In fact, many protested that they wanted to continue to receive money from the general revenue fund, not the lottery fund. In fact, I had an organization in my constituency come to me and ask me about CFEP. They wanted to put an elevator in a building, and they were opposed to any sort of funding coming from gambling revenues. They decided that they would not take any of this money, so it slowed down the project, but they are slowly raising the money through other means. They have a real problem with accepting money for their organization from any gambling proceeds.

Now, for the first time we are seeing considerable chunks of what were formerly core government programs and functions being funded solely from unstable, unpredictable, arguably tainted gambling profits. The government claims the use of these funds in this way is consistent with the public interest by supporting quality of life, wellness, and community involvement.

Now, I have a few questions for the minister, and if she could answer them in due time, well, that's fine. I can certainly wait. But I have several questions, the first one being: how does this government justify funding basic health and education programs directly from gambling profits?

Another question that I would have for the hon. minister is: are there any intentions to reduce the administrative costs of \$53 million on \$770 million? Is there any target or goal with respect to this ratio of administration costs to revenue? If so, what is it? Are there any thoughts to a cap on administrative costs? Could the minister please provide a breakdown of that \$53 million?

Why are total revenues for 1999-2000 unchanged from 1998-99 given the increasing number of slot machines? How many casino slot machines are to be purchased for summer fairs with the \$2.7 million indicated by the AGLC? How will they be distributed? How much profit will they generate? How will the profits from those slot machines be distributed? Is CGT testing through summer fairs similar to the process used to create a demand for and a deployment of the VLTs provincewide?

Another question I have: why are core public goods and services being funded specifically out of the government's gambling business profits? Another question that follows certainly from that one is: what happens to this funding in these core areas when gambling proceeds go to heck? What is the contingency plan in Health and Education if this occurs? Is there any program that this government would fund with the proceeds from its gambling businesses?

5:00

Why has the government ignored most of the lottery fund reforms recommended by the office of the Auditor General over the last five years? Which of the Auditor General's reports have been implemented, and what is the time line for implementing the remainder of these recommendations? Has any consideration been given to simply putting the government's gambling business profits into the general revenue fund so that it is treated like other sources of government revenue and so that its collection and expenditure receives the full oversight and consideration of the people's elected representatives of the Legislative Assembly?

Given that this government has lost control of its gambling business subsidiary, the AGLC, and given that this revenue generator is now responsible for funding substantial core government services, when does the government plan to resume control so Alberta's elected representatives can set policy governing revenues for key areas instead of a board of political appointees? What are the goals and performance measures with respect to the lottery fund and its administration? Are they simply those applied to the Alberta

Gaming and Liquor Commission with respect to collection, distribution, and efficiency?

Now that the lottery fund is being used to fund core government services, will there be a direction to the AGLC to maximize the returns from the government's gambling businesses to provide more money for core public services? By tying core public services to government's gambling business profits, is it the goal of the government to entrench public acceptance of gambling? Is the implicit threat here that if the public tries to rid itself of gambling, it will in the process decrease funds available for core public services?

Are there any plans being considered for many casinos based in hotels? If so, can the hon. minister please provide the details to us. Are there any projections with these plans as to how much more revenue those minicasinos might add to the lottery fund? Can the minister provide an update on the plans for and time lines with respect to aboriginal gambling plans?

Given that the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission seemed unable or unwilling to share the exact number of casino gaming terminals in operation when its estimates were discussed, can the minister provide that information regarding the CGT total as of April 1, 1999? Given that the AGLC seemed unable or unwilling to make a firm commitment to providing accurate information in a timely fashion to the elected representatives of the people of Alberta, will the minister provide direction to the commission, or is this yet one more example where this government has lost control over this entity?

My final question, Madam Chairperson, is: given that the gaming summit called for more gaming and gambling information to be provided to the public in an accurate and timely fashion, how are the minister and the AGLC implementing and conforming to meet this recommendation? What concrete changes will the public and the public's elected representatives see?

With those questions, if the minister can in due time answer those, Madam Chairperson, at this moment I would like to adjourn debate.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has moved that we now adjourn debate. Does the Assembly concur?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I move that the committee do now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. CLEGG: Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the lottery fund estimates 1999-2000, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does everybody concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've had a good productive week. I think all members have been successful in getting a lot of work done this week, and in respect of the fact that we all have a number of students to visit with and they're going to

be wanting to get in and use the Assembly tomorrow, I would move that the Assembly now adjourn and reconvene at 1:30 on Monday.

[At 5:08 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]