

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 30, 1999** 8:00 p.m.

Date: 99/11/30

[The Speaker in the chair in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Government Motions

Adjournment of Session

23. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the fall sitting of the Third Session of the 24th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

[Debate adjourned November 29: Mr. White speaking]

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you. [some applause] I'm informed that I have only three minutes left, and that was the reason for the round of applause from a member on this side of the House, Calgary-North West.

As you will recall, I was in full flight and having a very good time and wondering why we could not have a complete debate in this House, particularly in the area that I am quite familiar with, oil and gas, and on the royalties that accrue to the citizens of Alberta through their government.

Economic rent is not a difficult concept to understand certainly, and it would have been nice to have that concept fully explored and explained to the Members of the Legislative Assembly and, hopefully, to the members of the public. I understand that there is only so much one can squeeze out of the resource development in this province, and sooner or later you get to the point where you're closing off any further development, which is obviously not the object of any government's exercise, of course. On the other hand, there have been times and there are times right now where there is room on the margin for considerably greater return. That is the area that we should probably be discussing.

The owner of the resource, the people of the province of Alberta, asks and contracts with private corporations to take the risk to discover and to bring that production on-line, whether it be gas or oil or coal or tar sands, for that matter. The economic rent is the difference between the amount realized in the open market for that product and all the costs, including an allowance for risk and a reasonable amount for what would normally be called profit, which has to be. Capital would not flow if that were not the case.

Now, that margin is what we're talking about. Those that are in this Legislature should know what that current value of rent is and the difference in the cost of production on both the oil side and the gas side. We all know that we're \$26, \$27 for Texas crude at this point, but we don't know the average economic rent on that. That's the kind of thing that should be discussed in this House. I have very little difficulty understanding how other systems work, and they actually get some of that discussion done in what's called committee. I don't expect all people here to understand that.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll thank you for the time, and I will take my seat. I'm not voting for this.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make a few comments on this motion brought forward by the government. This Legislative Assembly, let's face it, is noted for two things when we compare it to other Legislative Assemblies across Canada. One is the short period of time, the limited number of days, that this House meets. I would venture to say that we probably hold the record in Canada, and it's not a record to be proud of. If we compare ourselves to other provinces, like our neighbours Saskatchewan and B.C., I would venture to say that they sit not only equal to us but add another 50 percent, and possibly even longer than that.

We as opposition, in particular, I think really get hit because we don't have the same opportunity as government in terms of being able to pass orders in council and special warrants – what? – \$1.6 billion worth of special warrants. We don't have that. What we have are constituency offices, where people come to us . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford does have the floor, and the chair would like to hear what he has to say.

MR. WICKMAN: We do have constituency offices, where people come to us and ask us to be their voice. They ask us to be their voice in the Legislative Assembly. They want to be heard, and even if some of you may not be aware, there are residents within your constituency that will come to us because they know that we as opposition can raise those questions. It's very, very difficult for a private member to raise a very, very critical matter to a cabinet minister. It just is not proper procedure, as far as I can see sitting on this side of the House.

So constituents come to us, and in Edmonton-Rutherford, for example, I've had them coming from various parts of the city and people phoning from outside of the province, from some of the areas in rural Alberta. They'll say: why can't you in opposition raise this? We say: well, we only expect a limited number of days, and already the government has indicated that they want to proceed with adjourning the session, when we've just barely gotten into it. We explain the predicament we're in, and people quite frankly have a difficult time understanding why there is such a reluctance on the part of government to sit for more time and be accountable for their areas.

When people come into my constituency office, they're particularly concerned now with health care. They see a real threat in terms of privatization of the health care system, and they want answers. They say: "You as my MLA have an obligation to seek those answers. You have an obligation to raise those questions in the Legislative Assembly, and we want to see a copy of *Hansard* to see how the government or the Premier or the minister responsible responded to those questions."

If we look at each member of the opposition, if we start to tell the number of constituents that have sent us letters, that have phoned us, that have come into the constituency office who want us to hammer away, to continue to hammer away at the threat to health care, it would amount to hundreds and hundreds and hundreds. Even if I looked at the number of calls that came from outside so-called opposition constituencies, I would venture to say there that we're again talking in terms of hundreds, because our correspondence requesting us to hammer away at these issues in the Legislative Assembly comes from all parts of the province. They don't just come from Edmonton. They don't just come from Calgary or from Lethbridge or Spruce Grove or a portion of St. Albert and so on and so forth. They come from all parts of the province.

Also, Mr. Speaker, when I go to visit the schools, teachers in

particular want to see questions on education raised. They want us to question the lack of limits on the ratio between teachers and students. As we go visit the schools, teachers will ask us to raise the question of the deterioration of some of the schools. When I go to my schools in Edmonton-Rutherford, I go to Richard Secord, for example. Teachers will point out to me that roughly half of the students that come to that particular school are bused from outside of the riding, basically south of 23rd Avenue. I think the member would agree with me that because of the lack of a school facility in that particular area, they're bused over. The teachers express that concern. When I ask even the grade 6 students what the most important thing is to them and to their parents, they say without question: health care and education. They see us as being their voice. They see us as being the ones able to express their concerns.

Also, being the critic for lotteries, I have a great number of people come in and ask me when I am going to raise some questions about VLTs, when I am going to raise questions about what's happening with the bingo regulations, the new rules, and about the increases, dramatic increases, in the number of slot machines in the nonprofit casinos that we see. I've had calls from people asking me: is there any truth to the speculation that the casino in the West Edmonton Mall, for example, is looking for new additional space because they want an additional 600 machines? I don't know. I can't answer that question because I haven't had the opportunity to ask the minister responsible for lotteries those types of questions. We're very limited in the number of questions that we can ask, and of course government members tend to take longer than they have to in replying, simply to stall the 50 minutes, to deprive us of the opportunity to ask those questions.

8:10

I read the other day in one of the reports coming down that there's an adjustment now in the anticipated revenues from gambling, an additional projected increase of \$25 million. I'd like to know: is this \$25 million coming from slot machines? Is it coming from VLTs in the hotels? Where is this additional \$25 million coming from, and who is spending that additional \$25 million on top of the dollars that are being spent?

The other day we saw in the newspaper about the expected applications that will be coming forward in a relatively short period of time for casinos on four reserves run by aboriginal people. Again, there are questions there. Are they going to be subject to the same rules as the nonprofit casinos, or are they going to have total control over the funds? These are the types of questions that I would like to have answered. More and more there are members in our caucus, I know, particularly those that represent older neighbourhoods, that are questioned about social services, like poverty, the number of children that go to school hungry. We haven't been able to address those particular questions in the House.

The WCB review. That's another area that is coming under criticism. I get stopped every day coming over here by a fellow holding a sign dealing with the WCB. He says: when are you guys going to ask some questions about the WCB? Every day I hear it from him, and you probably hear it from him too, but none of us has had the opportunity yet to ask questions on the WCB.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to belabour the point, but to the opposition this is our classic opportunity to raise issues, to represent those Albertans that don't agree with the government's position on a number of issues, which tend to be increasing in terms of numbers, from what I can gather in my particular constituency and from people who phone from other parts of the province. So while the government is sitting back with a motion to adjourn on the Order Paper, we as the opposition are forced to kind of sit back and say:

how can we possibly achieve in such a short period of time asking the questions that have to be asked in this House?

Unfortunately, health care is taking up a great deal of time. Unfortunately, health care is taking up a great number of questions. But the government has brought that on themselves, because people are saying: we want you in the opposition to continue to hammer away at government about the health care cuts, about the threatened privatization. They want to know what the future of health care is in this province. It's difficult to answer because there are still many, many questions that have to be asked.

Mr. Speaker, I sit back and I think: why is there an urgency to want to close debate? Why is there an urgency to want to get out probably sometime next week? There's no reason that the session couldn't, say, adjourn a week before Christmas. I don't mean adjourn the entire session; I mean, just adjourn and then carry on. We see the federal government probably sitting six or seven months of the year, probably eight months. We sit, if you would total it up, probably no more than four months a year. When you look at that four months, you have to realize that each week consists of only four days. So if you were to break it down to the number of hours that we actually sit here, again I would venture to say that we would be the lowest in Canada. That, of course, is coupled by the government strategy in terms of forcing debate to come to a halt on those pieces of legislation we would like to continue to debate. Of course, it really does limit our opportunity to ask questions on the vital concerns that many, many Albertans, a growing number of Albertans, continue to express to us.

So on that note, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to adjourn my comments. Again, I want to reinforce that I simply cannot support a motion at this time that would allow the government to adjourn the House tomorrow, the day after, or the day after that. We should get through the debate, the supplementary budgets we're dealing with, and at the appropriate time, when we've had the full chance to debate the various pieces of legislation we have in front of us and ask the questions on the vital concerns, that's when we should talk about adjourning. To talk about adjourning now is totally premature.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I always hesitate to debate adjournment motions, because it really should just be a perfunctory thing. We see a motion on the agenda; we know that at some point we're going to adjourn. Of course, the government would like to see the motion voted on in the House and passed so that it's always there, you know, sort of a finger on the hair trigger so that they can pull the trigger and adjourn anytime it suits them. I understand that; that's part of the process.

I find myself not able to withstand the temptation to talk about what is passing for democracy and parliamentary process and parliamentary debate today in Alberta. I think that an adjournment motion being put on the Order Paper at this time by this government with the issues that are facing the taxpayers of the province these days is not just premature, as my colleague for Edmonton-Rutherford says, but perhaps even bordering on irresponsible.

The government by their own admission have initiated a national debate on health care. Mr. Speaker, I don't know whether you saw the cover of *Time* magazine, but I'm sure we're going to hear about it again and again and again, that the latest edition of *Time* magazine has a little banner right across the top of it that says: Ralph Klein on private health care. You open up *Time* magazine and there's an article penned by the Premier, at least it's over his name, and the opening line – and I'm paraphrasing because I don't have it in front

of me – says words to the effect of: the government of Alberta has initiated a national debate on health care.

Now, if the government of Alberta on purpose initiated this national debate, it makes me wonder why they don't want to have that debate here in this House. We don't have a health care bill to debate. What we have is a paid television address to reflect upon and then a five-page policy statement that was issued and then the constant repetition of some carefully crafted words in question period. So we don't have any part of that national debate that the Alberta government, it says, has initiated. Now, I would like to see that debate before this House adjourns for Christmas, Mr. Speaker. I think that that would be very important and an issue the importance of which is not lost on my constituents, who are, after all, the reason why I am here.

Mr. Speaker, there's another issue that concerns me these days in this Assembly, and it happened just a couple of days ago during tablings when members of the Official Opposition were quite responsibly tabling letters from their constituents expressing their concern about the government's plans for health care. At that time the Premier yelled across the floor: "You want letters, eh? You want to table letters? Well, I'll table lots of letters. I'll stop the whole process." I think he said: we'll spend all day tabling letters, if that's what you want.

I thought about how odd that was, that in this place where we're all sent to represent our constituents, the Premier somehow would take offence at the notion that we were doing just that, bringing their correspondence into this Chamber and putting it on the record and making it part of the legacy of this Assembly, that the Premier would somehow think that that was inappropriate and that he would use that process of tabling, that time-honoured process of tabling documents and reports as some kind of a threat or a club to further stifle debate in this Chamber. Now, I will hasten to add that the Premier hasn't followed through on that threat, but of course the threat hangs heavy. Once you utter those kinds of words, Mr. Speaker, you can't take them back. They're there. There on the record. They're there, and you can't take them back, no matter how much you might regret them.

Mr. Speaker, there's a third theme that I want to touch on in my brief comments tonight about my concerns for what's passing for democracy in parliamentary debate, and that's the extent to which I constantly hear members of the government denigrating this place, talking about the Legislature in dismissive terms, the Premier himself talking about why he has to get out of here, out of the Legislature and out of Edmonton, because he doesn't want to be subject to dome disease. We have the Treasurer talking so many times about the expense of running this Assembly, as though that cost was too much of a price to pay for democracy and free speech. We have the Premier and members of the government speculating that one of the problems we have is that we have just too many democratically elected MLAs in this Chamber, and that's why we should seek to spend less time here, reduce debate, and therefore somehow the world would be a better place.

8:20

I must say that I get very, very concerned and very fed up when I hear ministers of the Crown and particularly the Premier talking in such negative terms about positions that each and every one of us worked so hard to attain and made so many commitments not just to our campaign teams or to our parties but in fact made those commitments to the tens of thousands of electors in each one of our constituencies. So why is it that we would find the government on this refrain of trying to somehow sell short the privilege that we have been given by being elected to this Chamber? That distresses me,

and I think it does not serve the people of this province very well.

Mr. Speaker, there's a fourth issue, a fourth theme, that I want to address, and that's what I consider to be the degeneration of respect and comportment and decorum. I'm not talking about question period. I'm not talking about the give-and-take of debate or the cut and thrust of what happens during our daily visits in this Chamber. I'm talking about what happens also outside of the Assembly outside of the sitting times.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there are some terrific examples of co-operation and some terrific examples of the kind of behaviour that I think all of our electors would expect of us. Recently I had the experience of working with the Member for Calgary-Mountain View on a major piece of legislation, a very thin bill but a bill that would pave the way for the creation of a new junior stock exchange in Canada headquartered in Calgary. That member made it his business to make sure that the Official Opposition was informed about the process. We had a good exchange of questions and answers both inside and outside of debate, and co-operation was exhibited by parties on all sides, and it worked, I think, to the benefit of taxpayers.

I can think of the current Minister of Children's Services, particularly when she was Minister of Municipal Affairs, making an honest effort to inform the opposition about initiatives under her jurisdiction and inviting comment and, I believe, taking that comment to heart and acting on it to the best of her ability, given the constraints of what she may or may not be able to sell to her cabinet colleagues. I would expect that behaviour to continue. I would expect nothing less than that standard of behaviour from that member in her new responsibility as Children's Services minister. I know she's in the process of contracting out a review of the office of the Children's Advocate, and I know that part of that process is a real attempt to receive public input. I believe that minister. I take her at her word that she'll do that, and it will be fair and it will be thoughtful.

Mr. Speaker, as many examples as there are of co-operation, unfortunately there are more examples of obfuscation. There are more examples of the absolute opposite of co-operation. Just today the Privacy Commissioner issued a report. The report was very interesting to me in particular because it was an investigation of the Executive Council's refusal to release several documents that had been applied for under the freedom of information legislation.

Now, these documents have to do with the government's involvement with the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, and those very same documents were requested of the Premier and Executive Council. The Premier has said in this Chamber that he will hide nothing. The Treasurer has said that there will be no door closed, no drawer closed, yet when we made a simple request for the information, the information wasn't forthcoming. A freedom of information request for the information: the information is withheld because of cited exclusions in the legislation. Motions for returns are denied based on the same exclusions.

Lo and behold, Mr. Speaker, today the Privacy Commissioner issues a report saying that the exclusions didn't apply to three of the nine suppressed documents from 1993 and that, unbelievably, the exclusions don't apply to 25 of the 38 suppressed records from 1994. So another example of this government not living up to its obligation to share public information with the public.

Mr. Speaker, the Treasurer is the embodiment of this kind of difficulty. The Treasurer says: just pick up the phone and ask; just write me a letter. When you do that, you don't get the information. So what we see in this Chamber is a real lack of consistency between what several members of the government say and in fact what several members of the government do. The place to resolve those kinds of differences should be in here. There should be the opportu-

nities for us to interact, and we should be able to build on the positive occurrences that happen.

I was remiss, Mr. Speaker, when I was talking about the positive stuff, not to mention the Minister of Innovation and Science, who, again, I think has made every effort I could expect of him as his shadow minister, as his critic, to keep me and my caucus and my colleagues informed. He does that in a responsible way, and I think it serves the interests of the taxpayers when he does that.

Boy, I'll tell you. Try to get the same level of co-operation or information from the former minister of education, who's now the Minister of Environment; that is an exercise in frustration. That is a total exercise in frustration. I don't understand why there can't be some tuning up. I mean, I don't know whose responsibility it would be on the government side, Mr. Speaker; I don't know if it would be the whip's or the House leader's or the Premier's. Certainly somebody should be setting the tone and should be reminding all cabinet ministers, all ministers of the Crown, that their real purpose is to serve Albertans, not to serve their political interests.

So, Mr. Speaker, those themes that I've hit on concern me as we reflect on the government's haste to get out of this place and to see that an adjournment motion is on the books safely ready to be triggered so that question period can end and the public scrutiny that occurs while we're in session can end.

It's no coincidence, of course, that Public Accounts only meets while we're in session. Of course, Public Accounts is an opportunity to give a once-over to the spending record and accountability issues of the government, and fewer sitting days mean fewer opportunities for that committee to meet. I think that that is a very transparent move on the part of the government to limit accountability.

Mr. Speaker, it cannot be said that Albertans have suffered from the perfection of government over these last few years. That is a burden that Alberta taxpayers have not endured. While perfect government may be too much to ask for, at least we could ask for a government that was sincere about its job, understood the importance and the gravity with which it must conduct itself, and had respect for the process and for this place. That is the least, I think, that taxpayers deserve, and I don't think it is asking too much of the Premier and his cabinet colleagues to conduct themselves in that way.

It is inevitable that the government will be using its majority to ensure that this motion passes.

8:30

I know that the Government House Leader is going to enter debate, and no doubt he's going to regale us with some statistics about debate times and sitting days and those kinds of issues, and I will look forward to his participation in this debate. But, Mr. Speaker, I hope that he won't entirely miss the point of my remarks, and I hope that while they may not be addressed necessarily in the give and take of this debate, those members present will at least reflect upon them and appreciate them in the manner in which they offered. We're all here. We all have a job to do, and it's a matter of respecting that and, more than anything else, respecting the people that put us here.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader to close the debate.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's now 8:30 o'clock. This debate started Tuesday last. We spent an hour on it last Tuesday. We spent an hour this afternoon on it. We spent another half hour this evening on it. This is a simple administrative motion

to allow for the adjournment of the business of the House when the agenda has been completed. It's a simple administrative motion. In most cases a motion to adjourn is nondebatable, but because of the nature of our rules this motion is a debatable motion.

As I said, we've spent two and a half hours now on debate on this motion, and I have absolutely no objection to debate. Quite frankly, I listened to Edmonton-Glenora's comments, and I would just respond by saying that there probably is no one in this House with the possible exception of yourself, Mr. Speaker – and maybe I'm being presumptuous – who has more respect for parliamentary tradition and more appreciation for the Legislature and the job of the Legislature than myself. I've been involved in politics for some 30 years now. It's been a passion of mine. I've been elected since 1997, but I've been a passionate follower and participant in the political process since I was a young child. I've been through the whole process, and I think this House is the pinnacle in terms of governance and the parliamentary process. It's what causes all the rest of the process to happen.

But, Mr. Speaker, it would be wrong to suggest that the only place that any of the governance process happens is in this House. It happens because of the House, but it doesn't happen always and only in the House. It's also important that members be in their constituencies, be in the community, be across the province, as Edmonton-Manning said earlier in terms of going around the province and hearing what people have to say.

Let's examine this for a moment. I have been invited, as all members of the House have been invited by members of the opposition from time to time – not that it's their place to invite us – to participate in debate. Well, what I've listened to for the two and a half hours is people saying that because we're bringing in this motion, which, as I say, is a purely administrative motion in my view and one that we've brought in in my experience and presence in the House on the first available opportunity, usually the first Tuesday afternoon after the session starts – for the last three sessions that I've participated in, in both the spring and the fall in the last two years on the first Tuesday after the House comes in, we bring in this motion. Purely administrative. But what I hear from the opposition in terms of discussion on the motion is that they don't have time to participate in the debate. Two and a half hours now have been used on this debate, two and a half hours which could have been devoted to other issues, issues of importance to Albertans, issues like Bill 7, which was on the Order Paper for this afternoon. We could've spoken. [interjection]

Edmonton-Calder makes remarks to me which I can't hear, but let me quote Edmonton-Calder: the only tools of the opposition are "truth and time." It's a good thing they're not power tools; they'd be cutting off their fingers. They haven't used the first tool once that I've seen. The second tool is time, and true, that's a tool that the opposition has. The question is: are they using it wisely? We sit in this House, and I for one would like to be intellectually challenged by debate. I would like to hear some ideas. I would like to hear some ideas, but what do we hear? We hear the same speeches over and over again.

Now, every member has the right to speak, and I wouldn't deny that. Bill 38, for example: virtually every one of the members of the Liberal caucus spoke on Bill 38. And good for them. I wish they had said more than repeating the same comments over and over again. Each one of them addressed Bill 38 by bringing up litanies of the past, a past, Mr. Speaker, that they know very well, because I think they live in it. [interjections] And we should learn from our past.

I don't want to denigrate valid comments and valid debate that are brought to this House. I think this House needs better debate, and

more people should be encouraged to participate in debate. More people would, as I've indicated from time to time to members of the opposition, if we didn't have the spectre of every single member on the opposite side speaking on every single issue for as long as they can go without taking a breath. The debate this afternoon and last Tuesday has been totally frustrating, because we've spent a lot of time – two and a half hours is a lot of time – debating an administrative matter and hearing people tell us that they have no time to talk about the important issues that are before the House.

Edmonton-Norwood the other day alluded to how often this House sits, and Edmonton-Glenora invited me to bring in the statistics. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd love to bring in the statistics on this. In the first decade of operation – and I won't bore you with all of it – this House sat for two and a half hours a day. We now sit, as of last year – the last decade was 4.95 hours, close to five hours a day, and in the last two sessions, 1998 and 1999, we've sat for 5.9 and 5.99 hours per day, six hours a day. This House is now sitting 40 percent longer than it was in 1993, I think the year was. Forty percent longer. [interjections] That's a good thing. Some of my friends here say it's terrible, but that's only because they've had to endure such a terrible debate.

Let's look at 1998. We sat five days above the 20-year average in this House, five days longer than the 20-year average and six hours a day. So to take out into the public the concept that this House doesn't sit, that this House doesn't talk about the business of the people of Alberta is absolutely shameful and totally wrong.

Mr. Speaker, truth and time, the tools available to the opposition: I wish that we could get on with dealing with some more truths about what the people of Alberta think and feel and want, and I would hope that we'd be able to spend our time much more effectively than repetitive discussion to use up time.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to close debate on this particular motion and ask that the House get on with the useful examination of supplementary supply.

[Motion carried]

head: Committee of Supply
8:40

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

head: Supplementary Estimates 1999-2000

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. Unless there's some agreement to the contrary, we'd like to start with Government Services, and then we'll go to Innovation, then Agriculture, then Children's Services, and finally Justice.

Before we commence, we're going to have the hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The last shall go first and then last.

On Monday the hon. Treasurer tabled supplementary estimates for 1999-2000, and he's asked that I table on his behalf a replacement page for page 80. Page 80 contains supplementary background information which reconciles the transition of gross voted amounts from old to new departments. Unfortunately, due to a printing glitch, page 80 of the supplementary estimates is a repeat of page 82. This tabling does not affect the supplementary appropriations being considered by the House. Copies for hon. members are at the table or, hopefully, being distributed, and for the House records I now table five copies.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you for those comments and the explana-

tion. Hopefully, we'll all remind our colleagues who might be out having a coffee or something that this page should be inserted in their supplementary estimates book.

Government Services

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll call upon the hon. Minister of Government Services to begin this evening.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present the supplementary estimates and the request for \$1.276 million from this House. If hon. members will refer to their supplementary estimates book starting with page 31 and following through to page 35, I believe they will see that this is fairly straightforward.

Mr. Chairman, the funds that have been requested will be used to enhance and support changes to the registry systems, including the motor vehicles, vital statistics, land titles, and corporate registries. In land titles this funding will be used to undertake a technical assessment of proposals to redevelop the land titles system. This is the second phase of an integrated approach to systems development that will consider the individual business model, strategic goals such as a one-window service, and technological alternatives as a means of finding an optimum solution to some of the difficulties in long-range planning.

Vital statistics. Since its inception and the corporate registry system, a number of new enhancements to improve service delivery have been requested by private-sector service providers and stakeholders. Contingency funding is going to be used to accommodate these requests in addition to transforming the corporate registry documents into an electronic format.

Finally, there's a new interface. The Justice on-line information system is being designed by Justice and is expected to result in significant changes to what's called the Move system. These changes are needed to maintain compatibility between the two systems and to support system enhancements that enable registry agents to collect traffic fines.

It's fairly straightforward, Mr. Chairman. It's \$1.276 million, which has come from the contingency fund. We see this as a major step forward to improve on delivering services to the people of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do have a number of questions that I'd like to ask. I'm not sure if we're going to have the minister answer after or in writing. Can we clarify that? I'd like to make sure I get the questions put out. I'm not sure what the process will be.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Chairman, as in the past I'll be happy to answer those questions directly tonight, and those that I don't I will definitely get back to you very quickly with written answers.

MS OLSEN: Thank you.

Okay. To carry on, then, I'm referring to Budget '99: The Right Balance, restated government and ministry business plans. I would like to say probably rejigged instead of restated. I'd like to move to vote 3. If you refer to page 35 in Government Services, registries information and distribution, the supplementary estimate here is \$1.276 million. This is apparently "to provide funding for registry information system changes and enhancements." I'm asking: why

was this \$1.276 million not anticipated at the beginning of the fiscal year? When you're talking about information system needs and changes, you would think the government would have some notion of what they would want. I just find that a little bit disconcerting, given the issues that the Auditor General has raised in relation to registries and information and the entire fix that needed to happen there.

The other concern I have is: what area of registries is being affected? Land titles, foreign ownership of land, administration, corporate registry, vital statistics, motor vehicles? What is being affected by this particular information system? How will the \$1.276 million investment contribute to improve and increase access to registries' products and services? We know that the whole notion of privatizing was to give people increased access. How, then, is this amount of money, which is an awful lot of money to actually come back to the Legislature for in terms of an enhancement – I think it's absolutely ridiculous that there wasn't enough foresight put forward to begin with.

Let's not forget that we are looking at the Y2K issues. I guess I should ask that question, too, Madam Minister: if, in fact, the Y2K compliance for this particular department has been met, given the fact that you're asking for \$1.2 million for the information system.

I know that there was a miscellaneous statute brought forward that I subsequently rejected in relation to having fines paid at registry centres. So private businesses taking fines. That's another place for people who receive summonses to go and pay. I'm just wondering if that particular enhancement is going to allow for this particular effort to occur, if it were to occur. Or are you going to come back next year and ask for money to enhance this product that you're using in order to pay tickets and have that noted? What process is going to happen there? Are you looking forward to that, or do you know if that's going to occur? I think we need to have some idea if you've already decided that you're going to include that in your information system enhancements.

8:50

How many more customers will be processed in a working day and what improvement in the turnaround time is anticipated as a result of this money? I think that's a fair question.

How will this investment improve services provided by Alberta registries as it relates to cost competitiveness? That's fairly important, Madam Minister, because I think what we're looking at certainly is this government's notion that privatization is cheaper, so here's the opportunity to show us that.

Will this result in a reduction of registry fees, or will, in fact, this result in an increase of registry fees? Another \$1.2 million. How is that going to be recouped in the private sector? Somewhere that money has to be accounted for, so how do you anticipate doing that? Are you going to increase the fees to the consumer as a result of this new software package?

What are the projections? We've talked about growth in this province, and we can blame just about everything that's happening, from overloaded schools – we hear the government blaming growth: to the transportation issues, to the health care issues, it's growth. Maybe you can enlighten us, Madam Minister, as to the projections in the growth of transactions and the increase in the gross revenue from the sale of products and services that will result from this investment. That's very important. That tells us that you've had some forward thinking and that this \$1.2 million isn't just a big mistake that's happened here. I think we need to know that.

I am concerned, you know, with the notion – I'm going to come back to that, I think. Like I said, the hon. Minister of Justice brought forward a change that he'd like to see in relation to the ability to pay

fines at registry locations. My concern is: what kind of software package or data access will registries have in relation to ensuring that those fines are not still recorded as outstanding debts against somebody? My concern is somebody coming in, and having paid their fine, it's not recorded. The transaction hasn't occurred between registries and the government. Then we end up with somebody being arrested because he has some outstanding fine or something like that, or he doesn't get to renew his driver's licence, and then there's a big fight at registries over him or her having paid. That creates some concern for me, Madam Minister, so if you could maybe soothe my concern, that would be helpful.

What are the estimates on investment in registry systems over the next five years to support the growth of transactions and the increased revenue from the sale? What are the projections for transactions and increased revenue from the sale of products and services over the next five years?

If I can just ask: can the minister provide information on the steps that will be taken over the next five years to restructure registries and to redevelop the three mainframe application systems to keep pace with the changing market and volume demands? In pursuing that end, Madam Minister, are these systems proprietary? Are these designed to fit the needs of the consumer, and are they readily adaptable to change? Can you take the product and go back to the software designer and say: "Jeez, you know, we're not collecting all the information we need," or "This isn't working for us. This isn't an appropriate database." So how can you reassure consumers that you're walking down the right path in respect to this?

What private-sector partnerships are being explored by Alberta Registries to fund the re-engineering of motor vehicles, land titles, and the personal property systems?

Madam minister, we know that the Auditor General has made some comments over the past few years in relation to the privacy issues with registries, and maybe you would be able to help us by letting us know what has been done to date to achieve the outcomes desired by the Auditor General. We know that when the hon. Municipal Affairs minister was responsible for this portfolio, some work was done, but if you can soothe the conscience of consumers, that would be very helpful.

With that I will take my seat, and hopefully the minister can help us out with some answers.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, do you wish to respond or would you like to hear all the questions and then respond?

Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of questions. In the minister's opening comments she indicated that part of the appropriation was for the redevelopment of the land titles, and you referenced back to pages 128 and 129 of the restated government and ministry business plans. At the bottom of page 128 it indicates that one of the key strategies is to

- pursue leading edge redevelopment of the Alberta Land Titles System in a modular manner, pursuing partnership opportunities [et cetera].

Then it says:

The first year of the business plan will focus on defining redevelopment, scope and funding options. Implementation should commence in the second year of the business plan and be phased in over five years.

Then further down under Key Strategies it says:

- Complete the transition of Alberta On-Line to Internet access to facilitate a single point of electronic web-based access by subscribers to the Land Titles, Personal Property and Corporate Registry systems.

I would just be interested in learning what has happened since those plans were in place. I assume that they have the first phase, that they've been able to do that work at a faster rate than was anticipated when the business plan was formulated. I would be interested in finding out exactly what's happened. It's a huge area for the government to make changes in, and I think it's one that we want to be able to ensure that we can inform our constituents about in terms of what's happening.

The minister also mentioned in her opening remarks that there were going to be some attempts to improve service delivery with reference to vital statistics. I wondered if we could have some more specifics. Are there problems that have to be addressed? If so, what are those problems? How much is going to be incurred in trying to resolve those issues?

One of the other, I guess, comments I would have is the difficulty we have with the limited information in the estimates document and trying to go back and match that up with some of the initiatives that are in the business plan. I wondered if the government had considered making those linkages more obvious so that the dollars could be tracked. I know that's probably a difficult job, but I think it would make reading the estimates and understanding the reason the government sees the need to make the request at this time more evident to those of us who are trying to link the information in the business plan with what is being pursued there.

9:00

Those are my main questions, Mr. Chairman. I do have a rather minor question that I wouldn't mind having an answer from the minister on. I had a couple on social services come to me in my constituency office who were involved in divorce proceedings. The lawyer was accessing money from the registry, and even though I think the fee that they were talking about at the time was something like \$50 or \$75 – which doesn't sound like a lot to us but to people on social services it really was a lot – they thought that their ability to proceed with the divorce action was being impeded by those charges. I guess my question is: is there any way that those charges are ever waived? [interjection] I'm sorry; I don't know exactly. They said they'd been to the registry, found out the price, and had discontinued their action. Maybe I can get some more detail and send a note to the minister.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Madam Minister, just ever so briefly so that you can get some time to speak on the matter. The area of concern is motor vehicle registrations, two concerns there. What precisely do you mean to change? It's been in operation for a bit now. It gets jammed up now and again, but by and large the service seems to operate reasonably well, even though it's still my contention that the government takes the lion's share of the profit out of that business and the operator doesn't really make a whole lot. But it seems to be relatively competitive, so we'll let that be.

The other area of concern. I understand that \$5 from every vehicle that is registered, whether it be a motorcycle or a tandem tractor or trailer goes to what used to be called the uninsured motorist fund, I believe it was, and you'd administer it – not administer the fund but collect that fund. [interjection] That's not the case. The \$5 is not collected from each registration.

In any event, that's the extent of my questions in the limited time to deal with these matters. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much. There are some good questions that came out. As everyone knows, contracting out of the delivery of service to the private sector for registries has been one of the most successful stories that government and the people of Alberta have decided to do.

One of the best successes is measured by customer satisfaction. People today go in and are served and taken care of in short order, and their needs are met within their local community. In the olden days many of us will remember going down to the motor vehicles branch and sitting there for two or three hours to get a sticker to put on a licence plate, new licence plates, et cetera, and being frustrated standing in a lineup like – nothing against agriculture – a cattle trough and feeling that you really didn't count. Now you can go into your local registry, and if there are two or three people there, they'll probably offer you a cup of coffee and ask you to have a seat while they take care of the person in front of you. So delivery of service and servicing the people was first and foremost in the process.

But like all systems, as the demand on the system grows, so must the system. The system has now reached its capacity and is going to have to be enhanced and the software in order to make sure that we have that same level of service delivered to the customer, or we could slip back to the old ways of people being in lineups, et cetera. The system is maxed out.

We've made so many changes. Every time we make a change in this Legislature it impacts either vital statistics or registries, and that means that a costly upgrade to the system must take place to accommodate simple things such as dads that didn't pay their maintenance enforcement. Well, that was a major system upgrade that had to occur on the registry system to make sure that we could capture that and maintain it and then have a link back to the justice system to make sure that there was co-ordination there. So we've done a lot of piecemeal work on this system over the years. It's all been very, very well thought out and very good, but we've maxed the system out. So we've got to enhance it somewhat, streamline it, and pull it in so that we can deliver the same calibre of service that we have been used to and expect now to be there.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood asked me what this money was for. I thought I'd explained that it was to enhance and support these systems, including the motor vehicles, vital stats, land and corporate registry programs. What we're doing as a government right now – we've made a commitment so that we don't have departments going off half-baked trying to put system development and design in place without co-ordination. We're co-ordinating our system development through the Innovation and Science ministry so that we can have compatible systems, so we aren't going to have incompatibility, obsolescence built into the government systems through the province, because that really doesn't accomplish anything. It doesn't help when you have to make enhancements or you have to co-ordinate between departments.

The process of doing this enhancement has come from our stakeholders, not only from our registry agents but from the people who use the registries, whether they're corporate or individual. We're doing this in response to the stakeholder groups that have come to us and said: we need to have some sort of enhancement on these programs. We're finding even in our shop – we've gone in land, as an example, to a digitization process. Before, to get a survey plot plan of your house, you had to go to great lengths. Now you can go on the Net and through a digitized process pick that plot plan off in a digitized format, which can be used for your mortgage application, the sale of your property, the registration of your property.

It's simple. It's not the big concept where everyone had to go and get the Mylar and pull it out and lay the plan out. We've plotted the entire province. It's a phenomenal system. Actually, if anyone wants to see it, because it's really worth seeing if you're interested in technology, you can go over to the office and they'll take you on a tour. We used to store all of this stuff on fiche cards. We had millions, gazillions of these fiche cards. Now with putting them into the system, they are there for a permanent record and can be accessed by not only the government but by the public at large to come in and verify their own positions.

I think we have to keep up with this. We can't let the system and the records be destroyed. This is all in keeping, of course, with the creation of this department. The Premier in his announcement said that he wanted a one-window approach to access to services within government, and that included not only the land titles area and the registries but also being able to access information through it. This is all in keeping with that overall one-window approach to information and data.

9:10

So basically that's what we're doing. There's nothing special or secret or something that isn't pretty straightforward. These systems must be enhanced. They must be upgraded. We're in a position right now where we're able to make our case to Treasury Board and get some dollars allocated to do that enhancement. I think we would be negligent if we didn't move forward with this, because every year that we wait we get that much further behind. There are so many other pressures that sometimes you can get so far behind on your own systems that you never get caught up.

So we're doing a little bit at a time as we go along. There are a lot of other things that we need to do, which would require a substantial amount of additional dollars, which we can't have right now, but maybe down the road we will be able to, and I'll be able to come to you and ask for those extra dollars to really enhance this system and put it in as a state-of-the-art system down the road, again, coordinated with other departments. For the time being, this will get us to that next phase of redevelopment, which I think we must move forward on. If we delay, I think we'll be sorry.

So that's basically all it is in the three areas: the motor vehicles, the vital stats, and the land titles area. Maybe next year I'll have something further to report on the progress.

Thank you.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$1,276,000
--	-------------

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Innovation and Science

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll call on the hon. minister for his comments.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd refer the folks to page 52 in their supplementary estimates. That's the supplementary estimate that we're asking for. It's an estimate of \$2 million, so it's not a substantial amount of money in the grand scheme of things. In the grand scheme of things, Edmonton-Calder, in the total budget, of course, of the province it's not a big amount of money.

I think there are a couple of important issues here that I'd just like to talk very briefly about. The three issues that I want to talk about are what we're using the 2 million bucks for: information management standards, network strategy development, and single-point access for government electronic service delivery. So I'll just briefly talk about those three issues.

One of the things that, in my perspective, we need in government is common standards across government, common platforms, if I could call them that. This issue is being handled by the chief information officer, who's part of our work group. Essentially what we're looking at is – well, let me give you a very practical example. I believe we have four or five different e-mail platforms inside government, and some of these e-mail platforms can't talk to each other. Well the question is: why? So that's one of the issues. We have a whole series of different desktops across government, and these desktops can't talk to each other. So my question is: why do we not have desktops that can talk to each other? The Liberals can't talk to each other either, which is maybe fortunate for us. Sorry, Mr. Chairman.

We've got a number of issues to deal with, Mr. Chairman, in terms of standards and how we manage information technology in terms of common platforms. As we move to common platforms, it does a couple things. It makes our communication inside government much more efficient, but as well, it will lessen the cost of doing business, because then we can go to common contracts with common suppliers.

Now, as a larger issue of this, if we can get our government act together, then one might ask about the MUSH sector, for instance, as well. We have regional authorities with information systems that can't talk to each other, so as minister I really can't talk very much to these regional authorities and say, "You need to get your act together," until we as a government get our act together in terms of moving to common platforms.

So it is a big issue, this common platform issue, and it's something that the CIO is looking at. The first step he's taken is that this is the first year each department has to provide an information technology business plan. In the past that did not happen, and up until this year fewer than 50 percent of the departments were doing IT business plans. So we've required that. If you remember, several years ago we asked departments to do research business plans, and I can tell you quite frankly that the first year we got in the research business plans, they were not that effective and not that good. We've worked with the departments over the last several years. I can tell you right now that the research business plans are reviewed by a private-sector group, and this private-sector group is very complimentary now towards the research business plans developed by the various departments.

Now, the first set of information technology business plans: some were good, some were bad, some were adequate, some were inadequate. It gave us a starting place to work from. Each department, as you know, has a CIO, and they are all involved and report to the government CIO, the overall CIO. Our goal in this is to get departments to develop these IT business plans. Through that process we'll know what everybody is doing, because quite frankly, until this year and even right today we're not quite sure. As we develop these IT business plans, we'll know what various departments are doing. In that way we can move to common platforms and common standards across government.

Now, this is not something that's going to happen tomorrow or even next year. It is something that will happen over a number of years, three or four years I would think. We simply won't scrap existing technology to go to a common platform, because it would be too costly. As the existing technology becomes outdated, it will

give us opportunity to move to common platforms. So what part of this initial \$2 million is to do is to work with the various departments to come up with common platforms.

The second issue I'll mention briefly is the network strategy development. This is an issue, Mr. Chairman, that I feel very strongly about. If I look at what's around us, if I look at Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories, British Columbia, and Montana, they all have what I would call high speed, high band width access throughout the province. We as a province don't have that. We have that very much in the Edmonton-Calgary corridor, where it's easy, but if I might use Manyberries as an example, we don't have it in Manyberries. In fact, the principal from the school was just talking to me on the weekend and saying that he's got two people in Manyberries taking physics 20. Well, the whole school from grades 1 to 12 only has 77 kids. His question is, "How do we as a school teach physics 20 to these two people?" I said, "Well, why don't you hook up to a physics class in Foremost or in Medicine Hat and do it." He said, "Lorne, we don't have the technology."

MR. PASZKOWSKI: What about Manyberries?

DR. TAYLOR: I'm just talking about Manyberries, hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

So it would certainly be worth while if they could have that technology available, but it's not available right now. What I'm talking about in the broad sense is what I'm calling an integrated community network. This integrated community network would allow the connectivity right across this province from the north to the south so that it's in all public institutions. I would like to see it in schools, libraries, hospitals.

As well, I'm proposing that we would have what I might call a community kiosk. If you could not afford at your own place in a small community to have a computer, couldn't afford the hookup charges, you could go into what would be the community kiosk, book some time on it, and sit down there and do your thing, whatever you're doing, whether that be some kind of Internet search, some kind of research for a school project, or some kind of business search that you were interested in doing.

9:20

If we can work with companies to develop this integrated community network and do on it a provincial basis, then there is going to be real opportunity for Alberta to develop this system of communication – high speed, wide band width communication – right across this province in all the public institutions. It'll make a huge difference to the young people in Manyberries or Wainwright or any of these smaller communities outside the Edmonton-Calgary corridor.

Quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, the companies want to come in, and they want to work where the population is, so they come in and cherry-pick the most profitable areas. What we're going to be saying to the companies is: if you want to do business with this government, then how are we going to leverage our contracts so that you can do some good for Alberta? This \$10 million or \$20 million contract we are going to give whomever: what are you going to do for Alberta other than just come in and cherry-pick and take your profits and send them to Vancouver or the U.S. or Montreal or wherever you send your profits? Since Telus moved its head office to Vancouver, we have no head office of a telecommunications company in Alberta. Quite frankly, I'm not interested in companies just coming in and cherry-picking the most profitable areas in Alberta without providing service to areas that desperately need it. So this is one of the issues I'm dealing with: looking at contracts and leveraging these contracts so that these companies will provide.

I don't often congratulate the federal government, as you know,

Mr. Chairman, but I must say that our federal government has been very progressive in this. We're not sure of the exact amount yet, but I believe it'll be someplace between \$30 million and \$38 million available for us to help set up this integrated community network. We'll have to match it, of course. There has been no province, really, that has tried this on the basis that we're talking about. We've had communities that have become integrated communities. Grande Prairie would be a good example of one that has taken an initiative and gone forward with their own initiative. But we do not have a province in this country that has taken the initiative as a province and tried to turn the province into an integrated community network. Certainly these dollars that we're talking about here are to help us develop a strategy.

We've got a couple of projects going in various parts of the province, a couple of engineering studies, simply to look at, you know: is this feasible? I mean, maybe my dream of doing this is not feasible; I don't know. What I have in fact . . .

MR. PASZKOWSKI: By the time you're done, it's going to be old technology.

DR. TAYLOR: The hon. minister has suggested that when I'm done, it'll be old technology. I hope it won't be. If it takes that long, I won't be in politics anymore, Mr. Minister. I can see the Liberals are quite content about that, because they know that as long as I'm here, there's no Liberal ever coming out of southern Alberta. There never has been, I don't think, and probably never will be.

We need to move forward on this, Mr. Chairman, and get moving with this so that it isn't old technology by the time we do it. It's an interesting kind of project we're taking a look at and an interesting kind of strategy if we can first of all see if we can do it, and secondly, if we can physically do it, can we actually get the job done. I'm hoping that we can make some announcements, hopefully early in the next year, within six months, as to the direction we will be taking on this whole initiative, because it is a huge initiative.

Of course, this initiative fits in very nicely with the ICORE initiative that we introduced about a month ago, in which we are going to commit \$30 million to the development of an informatics circle of research excellence, which is essentially an information communications technology research centre of excellence. What the money will be spent for, of course, is to try to attract good researchers to Alberta so that they can do their research here.

This will not be an easy task, Mr. Chairman. It will be a huge challenge for us to do this. It's an extremely competitive area, and it will be very difficult to get these people in this area to even take a look at coming to Alberta. One of the things I've done to make that easier is appoint what we're calling the Premier's External Advisory Committee. This consists of – if I can remember all the names, I'll just give them to you. James Gosling is the vice-president of Sun Microsystems, an ex-Albertan and inventor of the Java language, very well-recognized in the IT area. He has agreed to advise me. In fact, James was just up; I met him just two weeks ago. We had a very good discussion.

Another guy is a guy by the name of Jozef Straus, who is the president of JDS Uniphase. It's an \$8 billion company. Although not a native Albertan, he has very warm feelings for Alberta. Just a little personal story about Jozef. He was on the run from the Commies in Czechoslovakia. Alberta was the only place that would accept him into a graduate program, so he came here and did his PhD here. He has very warm feelings.

Another guy that has agreed to help is John Roth, the president of Nortel Networks. It's a \$17 billion a year company. He's an ex-Albertan, grew up in Lethbridge. We're both roughly the same age.

MRS. SOETAERT: That old?

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, that old.

Although we didn't know it at the time, he played football for the LCI team in Lethbridge, and I played football for the Medicine Hat Redskins team in Medicine Hat. We would've played football against each other, which is kind of just an interesting personal history.

We have a number of other people of that stature who have agreed to advise. Richard Taylor, a Nobel laureate, has agreed to advise us. The final name is Fares Salloum, who is the worldwide vice-president of GTE. So we're going the right way in this integrated community network, Mr. Chairman. I could talk quite a while about this because I'm excited about this, but I see the opposition wants to ask me some questions.

The last point is the development of a single access point for government electronic service delivery, and we're working on that with the Government Services ministry. Of course, we really can't do that until we have this integrated community network, and we are working on that in conjunction and partnership with Government Services. At that stage I will quit, although I could talk much longer.

DR. MASSEY: Just a few comments and questions, Mr. Chairman. One of the questions I have: as interesting as the minister's comments and explanations were, it seems to me that everything he said, he must have known when the last business plan was drawn up. Surely cross-platform problems isn't something that has just arisen since the last business plan was created, and I think that same comment could be made for most of the other items that were listed by the minister. So the question, I think, remains: why do we have a request for a supplementary estimate here now, and why were those sums not included in the original business plan? I think that's a question that can be asked of not just this minister but a number of the other requests that we find in the supplementary estimates.

The ministry of Innovation and Science I think has been recognized for doing good work across the province, for putting a focus on innovation and science. I think those institutions that are involved in those activities applaud the enthusiasm that the minister brings to the department and its activities. I think it does raise some questions. One of the questions it raises – and it's not directly related to the supplementary requisition that's in front of us, but it is related to it – is the thinking behind the government's organization that put K to 12 and postsecondary education together in one department and then hives off research and innovation and science into a separate department. Now, I think a number of people have questioned the consistency of that thinking. Are they interested in integrating? If so, why the fragmentation?

9:30

The other concern is that a lot of the funds that are in this department would have normally been in postsecondary education, in advanced education and career development, and that this is really a way of micromanaging that money out of Edmonton. So I think it's a concern that deserves at least some explanation.

One of the other concerns, of course, is the impact of the funding through this department on the public research agenda, because the focus and the emphasis is certainly on gizmo research and commercialization, pay-off research in terms of producing a product. I'd be interested in the minister's observations in terms of what kind of impact that has had on other operations and other research activities in universities and colleges.

My question arises out of the observation of a constituent who had recently heard about the celebration of reaching a billion dollars'

worth of research fund-raising at one of our universities and made a point of phoning and saying that he was somewhat perplexed by institutions saying that they didn't have enough money to operate, to hire university staff, that institutions like the University of Calgary were 17th and 18th in the country in terms of remuneration to their academic staff, yet on the other hand they're being told that there's all this money for research. Somehow or other he couldn't put together those two pieces of information.

I guess those are really my observations. As I conclude, Mr. Chairman, I think that the department is a good department and that it does some good work. As I indicated, the minister's enthusiasm is certainly contagious, but it does raise some questions.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science to respond.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you. Briefly. Yes, I will be brief. The reason, Edmonton-Mill Woods, that the \$2 million was not included in the business plan for information technology issues was that when I did my business plan the first time, those issues were not part of my department. It wasn't until about six months ago, when we did the reorg, that all of the IT inside government came into this department. So I couldn't predict the need for the money for the standard-setting simply because that group of people, that part of government was in a separate division. It was part of public works, and it came over to us from public works. Until six months ago I didn't have it, so obviously because I didn't have it, I couldn't know what was necessary from my perspective that needed to be done.

K to 12 and advanced ed in one department I think is an issue that might be more appropriately answered by the Minister of Learning. Perhaps the chairman would give the Minister of Learning time to respond to that if that's appropriate. I don't know if it's appropriate in this forum or not.

I will say that we had a number of small research pots. I think this relates to your second question. The goal with research dollars is that we have to be strategic. In Alberta we have, say, 3 million people. We're competing on a world stage. Even if you compare us to the Canadian stage, greater Toronto has about 4 million people; Ontario has 31 universities, I believe. We have three universities and Athabasca, so say four universities. Athabasca is not a research university. The University of Lethbridge is an undergraduate university. Although they do research, it's not a central focus, whereas the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary are the two main research universities, as you know, in this province. So we have to focus our efforts. We can't be everything to everybody. If we're going to succeed, we've got to focus, and we've got to be the best in the world at what we do, and that won't be everything.

By putting all of these small research pots, all these different dollars into one pot, which we have, the total pot now is between \$90 million and \$100 million to support research, outside, you know, salaries and outside the grants that these people get from other granting agencies. Provincial government dollars to support research are in the neighbourhood of between \$90 million and \$100 million. By moving them all into one location, it allows us to focus, allows us to be strategic, allows us to look at developments and where we want to do our research.

You asked about commercialization. Certainly commercialization is an important issue. If you read what Paul Romer says, an American economist who will probably get a Nobel prize for his theories, and some of the other people, it's that universities need to be more focused on commercialization, but by the same token it is the government's fundamental responsibility to fund basic research.

I have no quibble with that at all, and I will stand up for the principle that we must fund basic research. I believe we do that through salary support and other issues that happen at the university.

As you know, a university professor – well, I don't know what they're teaching now. I never taught more than three hours a week when I was a professor. Maybe they teach up to nine hours a week now, but I would suspect that if you took the average, it would in the neighbourhood of probably six hours a week. At maximum a professor would probably teach nine hours a week. As a provincial government we support the salary. Whatever that salary of the professor is, he's supported for his nine hours a week of teaching time, and then the rest of the time that he works – and we all know they work hard.

MRS. SOETAERT: Or she.

DR. TAYLOR: He or she. The person.

MS OLSEN: We'll train you yet.

DR. TAYLOR: You'll train me yet. Thank you. It was the generic "he." He/she.

The rest of the time that we support their salary can certainly be in doing what I would identify as basic research.

It's my belief that if we create the research, if we cause good researchers to be here, then what will happen is that business will be here, because we know businesses are attracted to clusters of researchers. The Silicon Valley is an excellent example of that. You can look at Hewlett-Packard; you can look at Silicon Graphics. You can look at any number of companies down there that were clustered and came because of the researchers there, and then spun off the researchers that were there. Silicon Graphics is a good example. Twenty-five thousand people work for that company. It started in 1982 at Stanford University. So there's a real opportunity if we create the research here, create the high-quality research with top-quality researchers, then we will be able to get this spin-off, and industry will develop and grow around here. [interjections]

My colleagues are suggesting that we need some more opportunity for questions. I'm pleased to do that.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. The minister is so very enthusiastic. We see that and hear that all the time, and that's a good thing, although maybe he could translate his enthusiasm into some written responses so that we have some more opportunity to discuss things tonight.

9:40

The \$2 million being requested is of interest to me. It's of interest to me for several reasons. It may come as no surprise to members of the government that I may be calling for more spending. I'm not sure how the \$2 million was arrived at. I know how expensive it is to do network development, and I know how expensive it is to keep on top of the technology curve. I haven't heard the minister really talk about how the \$2 million figure was arrived at. It sounds like a good start. It doesn't sound like much more than that.

On the other hand, maybe he went into that cabinet meeting with another zero behind that figure and got beaten and bruised and bloodied and came out clutching onto what little bit he could, and maybe we should just therefore be grateful that the government is paying any attention to information technology needs and network strategy development. So I wouldn't mind just some explanation as

to how the \$2 million figure was arrived at and exactly what will be achieved. What are the deliverables on this 2 million bucks? It's a big mouthful that has been bitten off here in terms of

setting information management standards, network strategy development, and the development of a single access point for government electronic service delivery.

That single point of access alone, if it were to involve not just streamlining, co-ordinating, integrating all of the government web sites and other means of electronic communication but also providing opportunities for Albertans in every corner of the province the ability to access through government provided web site servers, et cetera – that in itself could cost far in excess of the \$2 million that's being requested in this estimate.

For some time it has occurred to me that one of the things that's missing in Alberta is a policy to back up the vision that's behind the Innovation and Science ministry. I have been impressed with the minister and the people that he has gathered around him and the private-sector participants providing advice to government, and I have been impressed with the discussions I've had with several members of the science and research community in this province and those involved in the ARC and with ASRA. I do believe that that vision, if not perfectly in focus, is at least in formation.

What I haven't seen backing that up is coherent policy, something that takes advantage of all of the advice and expertise, policy in terms of ensuring that we do have single-point access, policy in terms of ensuring that no Albertan is left out in the technological cold when it comes to the ability to communicate not just with government but, in fact, with other Albertans and with other human inhabitants around the globe. We are on the dawn of a whole new era in terms of personal communication where we're going to see e-mail replace snail mail, where we see the Internet being the new pony express, where, in fact, we're going to see trade and service provision keep on exploding through electronic provision means.

I would hope that at least part of this \$2 million will see more work on that coherent policy, that it'll be government wide, that as the minister now has responsibility for all the research functions of government – I encourage him to bring them all into his department. I know that there are some ministers that may still be clinging on to some of their research components. I think that it behooves the government to put the territorial nature of government departments aside and recognize the advantage that can be gained through integration and co-ordination.

So I hope that at least some of this \$2 million that is going towards setting information management standards will help develop that policy that will convince all government departments that it really is in their best interests to allow for this kind of convergence and as quickly as possible.

A lot of Alberta's future is bound up in how we take advantage of emerging technologies. Much of the 21st century is going to be all about how we relate to these new technologies and how we maintain human pursuits in the face of all of this high technology. In fact, it's like Toffler's high-touch, high-tech admonition to ensure that we don't lose the human side and we don't become masters to technology but instead we master technology so that it can serve us and our needs.

So I hope, again, that part of this network strategy development and development of a single access point for service delivery takes all of that into account and that we're not just simply pursuing technology for the sake of it but that we're in fact looking at ways that we can leverage technological achievement and advancement for the betterment of the people that we're supposed to be serving and representing.

So, Mr. Chairman, those are my comments on the supplemental

supply for Innovation and Science. I'm not opposed to the \$2 million request. I'd like to know how it was arrived at. I'd like some assurances about the progress on this integrated policy development, and I'd like to know specifically what the deliverables are that we can expect a year from now as a result of this \$2 million investment.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thanks. I just want to be very clear that \$2 million doesn't do any network development. It doesn't do any standards. It doesn't do anything with the single point access. It's simply going to tell us if these three things are, one, feasible and, two, how much they'll cost. So that's what it is. It's really money being spent on a feasibility study.

The achievables. I hope we'll be able to tell you in six months that it is feasible for us to do an integrated community network: this is how much it will cost, and this is when it'll be done. I hope we'll be able to tell you in six months or less that, yes, we can do cross-government standards: this is how much it'll cost, and this is when it'll be done. I hope we'll be able to tell you in six months on single point access that this is how much it'll cost, and this is when it'll be done. So very concrete achievables.

In regard to policy I think we have a very good policy, and everything we're doing in this whole area is following the policy of a document I tabled in the House about a year ago. It was our ICT strategy. If you remember, I tabled it on a disk. The first time the Speaker wouldn't accept it on the disk, and I had to bring it back in hard copy the next day. So if you check that document, which is also on our web site, you'll see that that is our statement of policy. There were four action items in that document. I won't go over them, but those are the four action items we're following up on.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the supplementary estimates for the Department of Innovation and Science, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Total Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$2,000,000
---	-------------

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call upon the hon. minister to make a few comments before questions.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to have the opportunity to briefly discuss the supplementary estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. You'll see that we are looking for \$390,000 for the rural ag societies. Now, this amount had been approved earlier coming out of the lottery funds. We also had \$3 million for the preservation of existing irrigation infrastructure, and that money was

coming out of the \$600 million under the infrastructure initiative announced in September. Also we need to obtain \$186,327,000 to address the changes that we made to the FIDP and also to accommodate the loan program that we announced in October.

9:50

Now, the loan program, of course, was one where we will see the interest for the program at 5 percent through the 12 years of the program, the lending period. The first two years the interest and the principle would be deferred and amortized over the remaining 10 years. That's how that program works.

Then we made four major changes to the existing FIDP, the farm income disaster program. They were the major announcements. I guess the major component of that one was allowing the applicant to use the best three out of five preceding years. We also changed the way NISA was handled. The change that we made fits the AIDA program. We made some changes to address the situation that we have with expanding farmers. Then, of course, the other big change that we made allows for the zeroing of the negative margins in the reference years, and that will really assist the people that are in a fourth year of disaster where they have no crop.

Now, I want to point out that because these are all disaster programs, they keep us in the green box as far as the WTO is concerned. Next year, of course, if there's not a disaster, there could still be access to the program, because the disasters that you've had one and two years back will greatly affect your income next year again. So we thought the more prudent way to go was to zero those margins as opposed to paying negative margins. The federal government changed their program so that they pay negative margins, but I think there's a real moral hazard in that one. Mind you, theirs is only for 1999. Ours is for succeeding years.

So if the hon. members across the way have any questions, I'd be only too happy to answer those.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to these supplementary estimates, and I have a few questions for the minister and an opportunity to state that one of my farm families won the farm family award this year, which I was at, and so was the minister. In fact, they're relatives of mine, the Sheehans. That was a nice place to see the minister at his finest, though he could work at some of the introductions, but we'll get to that another time. I want to speak specifically to supplementaries. And he knows well what I am talking about.

The rural ag societies, \$390,000. I realize that if you can't answer these tonight – whatever works is fine. Why is this money that was previously authorized as direct lottery payment now being transferred to budget? Is that a better way of tracking it so people know it is consistent? If you don't mind explaining that.

What was the amount for that was authorized for the ag societies? Is it just one project that received funding from the lottery fund directly? And when should it have gone via the budget?

Are there any other cases where ag societies get money directly from the lottery fund instead of through the budget process? Separate from CFEP because I know ag societies will apply for different lottery grants that way, but this seemed to be transferred. So if you wouldn't mind explaining that.

You mentioned the irrigation assistance program at the beginning. Would you mind explaining what it is specifically for? It seems that it's not the \$3 million that was announced on November 23 in the Alberta Infrastructure news release for Pine Coulee as that's included under the Infrastructure supplementary estimates. So would

you mind explaining where that is from? Which projects have been helped? Had requests been put in by irrigation districts? Is that how it works? Or are they supposed to finance their own infrastructure now? So I would ask: how are those priorities determined?

Vote 6.0.1, lending assistance. This was a huge problem last fall, as you well know. I'm sure farmers in your area, especially hog producers, had a difficult time, and I think the result of that has seen some changes in the FIDP, which I'm glad to see. I think we've lost some good farmers in the meanwhile, and that's too bad. To ask some specific questions about that, this lending assistance, is this money the extra amount it will cost the government to borrow money to lend to farmers under the new Alberta farm income disaster loan program announced October 14 that gives more flexible lending provisions?

I've had farmers tell me, too, though, that the lending just puts them further in debt. I don't know the answer to some of those dilemmas, but I'm sure you've heard it. I mean, even borrowing money at a low interest rate, sometimes you just dig a deeper and deeper hole, and maybe what we need are research assistance programs, some support to show farmers different programs, some diversity and other things. There are parts of our province that should look at different types of crops that can survive in maybe very wet seasons or vice versa, very dry seasons. So I'm wondering if there aren't some research initiatives there.

Back to lending assistance. Is this amount due to the fact that farmers can borrow without paying back any principal or interest for two years under the new scheme? Are they exempt from the interest and the principal for two years, or suddenly at two years do you put it all on? Are they exempt from that for two years, or is the interest added on anyway and then in two years they have to start paying what would have been? I'd appreciate clarification on that.

What is the total amount that the government expects to lend before the end of the fiscal year? Have you got a projection on what that's going to cost? How can the government know what the program will cost since farmers have until March 31, 2000, to submit a loan application for the new Alberta farm income disaster loan program? Will this be the budget up to March 2000? I don't see how you can have a prediction for the end of the year when they can still apply till March, so I'd appreciate clarification on that.

If the cost is nearly \$3 million for the '99-2000 fiscal year, what is the cost expected to be for the full two years for any moneys needed to be repaid, and how much does the government expect the total amount of lending to increase as a result of this program? This is something that I think the farmers have needed and wanted. Maybe the Member for Athabasca-Wabasca thinks it's funny that farmers are in trouble, but I happen to know that in his riding it's a serious problem.

I'd like to go on to the farm income disaster program, 6.0.2, \$183 million. Is this based on what the government thinks will be the difference between the old program and the revised rules that can apply back to the 1998-99 fiscal year? When the government announced its revised plans for the FIDP on October 10, is that when you made the variance in costs? Is that when you figured out what it's going to cost, what was going to be different when you made the change in five years over the two years? Have you figured out what it's going to cost, and is that what that is?

I know you mentioned this in your opening remarks, taking the best three years from the last five years and calculating the average for support levels – right? – was estimated to increase FIDP payments by \$60 million to \$80 million per year for the 1998-99 tax years. Does the government now have a better idea of how much this is going to be? Have you predicted that?

10:00

Another change: allowing farmers to omit their negative margins in their calculations. The government media release stated that this would increase costs by \$1 million to \$5 million and provide additional payments to between 400 and 2,000 applicants. This is a really wide range, between 400 and 2,000. Are you any closer right now to estimating the cost and the number of people that are going to apply? Have you calculated those current figures?

Does the government expect to pay out all the money for 1999-2000 fiscal year before March? I don't know how you can. According to your own figures in the release, one would expect the additional costs of the changes to FIDP to be between \$66 million and \$91 million for '98-99, yet the supplementary estimates are allocating about twice that much, suggesting that the amount allocated is for two years. How will you get this money paid out before March 31 when the final claim date is not until February 29? It just seems like a physical impossibility, unless that's a goal and you'll work towards it. I'm not quite sure how that's going to work.

I just have two more questions and concerns. Some time ago the federal government paid the province its share for the 1998-1999 FIDP. This was a contribution payable under the federal agricultural income disaster assistance program, AIDA. As the provincial government had already paid the farmers under FIDP, they decided to put the federal contribution into general revenue. I remember that well, and I remember our farmers asking: where's the federal money? You had put it into general revenue. It was said that they would allocate the federal money for value-added activities that would benefit agriculture in general in Alberta. Has this money now been allocated? What projects have benefited? How much has been paid out, and how much of the federal money has not yet been allocated?

You know, it's one thing to try to make political points against the feds or for the feds, but I know that this was money allocated to our province because of FIDP, and I would really love to see that clarification. I know my farmers in my area would appreciate knowing where it went.

My final question. Your ministry has changed in that agricultural research is now out of your department and into Innovation and Science. How has that worked? I've heard concerns that the focus in research is different than the focus for agricultural research. I'm wondering if that was a wise move, if it has worked very well. I would really appreciate your personal view on that: if you think it should be back in agriculture or if you think it's stronger where it is and an explanation of that, if you don't mind.

With those concerns, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to supplementary estimates. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. LUND: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. There were an awful lot of questions there and some of them very detailed. I may not be able to give you the precise numbers on some of them, but I can quickly run through the general questions, and we'll get the precise numbers to you.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

First of all, I've got to mention that I take great exception to the comment about my colleague from Athabasca, because the fact is that he was working very hard for his farmers in the area. He worked very hard with me in developing this program, and what he was doing was giving me some information and advice. It had nothing to do with laughing about the farmers in trouble, and I want

you to understand that. He's very, very sensitive. He's got a lot of farmers up there that were in a lot of trouble, and he's very appreciative of what we've managed to do.

The money for the ag societies was approved under lotteries, but all the money to the ag societies comes through this department, so it's necessary that we handle it this way. The ag societies do not get money except through our program. We allocate it. All of the ag societies around the province have the ability to apply for certain projects, and they do. So we hand those moneys out.

The irrigation money, the \$3 million. What happens is that each year we pay about \$17 million to the Irrigation Council for upgrading, and then it's distributed around in the irrigation districts. Now, the WID and the Bow River irrigation district are two irrigation districts that had fallen way behind in their infrastructure, so this \$3 million was direct money to those irrigation districts. It had nothing to do with Pine Coulee. There was no money there going to Pine Coulee.

You asked about how the priorities are established for the rehabilitation. Those are done by the irrigation districts through the Irrigation Council. We do not prioritize; the irrigation districts do it. The irrigation districts have to pay a fairly large portion of it, and the reason these two did get behind was partly because of the numbers of farmers involved and the rates they were able to charge. They weren't able to raise enough money.

The money needed for lending. I think you asked if the \$2,981,000 was the cost to government this fiscal year for the lending. It is. That's what it is. It's the actual cost. It's the forgiveness of the principal and interest this year and then the 5 percent that will be charged. You asked how the program works. They get a loan for 12 years. For the first two years there's no interest and/or principal that they have to pay at the time. It's added and amortized over the next 10 years.

MRS. SOETAERT: So they pay it but not in the first two years.

MR. LUND: They pay it, but they don't pay it in those first two years.

As far as other programs, we are encouraging the folks to take financial management tools. We talk about alternate crops, all those types of things.

Oh, one thing I should mention about the loans. Anyone that takes a loan must also take crop insurance for the term of the loans.

Then you got into the FIDP changes. I guess you were talking about how we estimated what the cost would be. Well, I can't give you the exact number that we estimated, how many loans, but we estimated, I think, a thousand loans at about \$40,000. I believe that was the number they used. It's a real difficult one, when you're starting a new program like this, just exactly how much. Now, you did ask later on, too, about whether we were getting more firm numbers. Yes, we are getting more firm numbers, but it's still very early. We're having difficulty yet. The number of applications that have come in for loans, the number that have been approved: under the FIDP changes of course those are just starting to come in now, so it's really hard to tell.

The cost, the \$2.9 million. That was for the first year. We estimate that the cost will be about \$5 million in succeeding years.

Now, the change to the three out of the five. You asked why such a wide spread in the estimate. Once again, it is extremely hard at that time. Now, we are getting firmer numbers because we've been able to go back into some of the applications and have some idea of what that's going to mean, but you've got to recognize that we still haven't got those applications using the three out of five. So it's still difficult to come up with the exact numbers.

10:10

I was trying to keep up to you and got: how long to pay out; explain how the financing works. I'm grasping at what it was you were talking about at that time.

While you're looking for that, then you asked about the money from the AIDA program last year. No, that money has not been spent, but it did not go to general revenue. We do have it available, and we will be starting to work on what programs it will be used for. It is our intent to use it, invest it so that it's used in the agricultural community for the long term. It won't be just handed out.

Then you asked how AARI is working. I believe it's working very well because they're able to bring together some more expertise out of the science and research component of that department to work with them on pure research.

Now, my notes aren't long enough here to find out what it was you were asking about, how the finance works. It was just before you got into the AIDA money.

MRS. SOETAERT: I just have one more question, if I can. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it was about how the deadline is March, yet people are applying till February 29.

MR. LUND: Okay, and you asked about whether we would be having all the payments out. No. The way the financing works – and you're right; it looks like it's a very large number in one year. The way the accounting is done and because we are covering '98-99, the books are closed on that year, so we have to include it in the '99-2000. Some of the payments will not occur until well into the year 2000, but we have to bring them back into this year. So when we get toward the end, it's an estimate of what that total number is going to be.

I must add just one more comment about the numbers. Actually, in this year for the old FIDP program, for the 1998-99 crop year we had estimated \$70 million. It's going to go much higher than that, and that's where the \$32 million comes from. We estimate that we're going to need \$102 million, not \$70 million. So a hundred for the changes in the new program for '98, a hundred for '99, plus 32 for the increase in the 1998 applications would apply in the '99 year.

MR. SAPERS: A couple of questions for the minister. I'm just trying to make sense out of the estimates that were presented to us and the erratum that was handed out at the beginning of tonight's little gathering. We're told that the erratum is a new page 80, which is the Reconciliation of Adjusted Gross Amounts. I look at the existing page 80 in that whole section, which talks about the reconciliation, and there is no other mention of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. So I'm wondering where this would have fit in with this reconciliation. I'm particularly puzzled by this, Mr. Minister, because when I look at the estimate as it's presented in your supplementary supply request on page 9 of the estimates, I see the total voted amount under the adjusted gross amount column is \$372,875,000. Have you found that on page 9 of the estimates, \$372,875,000? If I look at the sheet of corrections that was handed out, this new page 80, I note that for your department the adjusted gross amount is \$372,875,000, but it doesn't take into account the valuation adjustments and other provisions, which we're told is \$390 million, leaving a total voted and statutory amount of \$372,485,000.

So I'm just trying to get it clear why the reconciliation statement shows one figure but the total voted and statutory bottom line in the estimates is net of the valuation adjustments and other provisions. I'm just trying to follow the accounting.

MR. LUND: I'll try to explain it as I see it. Now, like you, I just got

this this evening. If you look at what it says here, it's a transfer that wasn't in the original back when the vote occurred. The transfer from the Department of Economic Development: that was AOC coming over. Then we transferred the AARI out to Innovation and Science. I believe that's what this is showing, that wasn't in the original, and it doesn't include what we're talking about here tonight.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Minister, thanks. The transfer from the Department of Economic Development, the amount just in excess of \$5.4 million, is in fact line item 5 on page 9. That is already accounted for. The transfer of the Agricultural Research Institute isn't anywhere that I can find in this initial list that is on page 9. But, Mr. Minister, even if you subtracted that figure from the 390, you'd get yet a third bottom line. You'd get a different figure again. So I'm not sure that the transfer to the Department of Innovation and Science, the removal of in excess of a million dollars from your budget for the Agricultural Research Institute, accounts for the difference between the bottom line of \$372,875,000 that's on the reconciliation document versus the bottom line that's in the estimate document. There's still that \$390,000 difference that is apparently accounted for through valuation adjustments and other provisions, but I would have expected to see that transfer over to the reconciliation.

MR. LUND: We'll have to get a further explanation because I haven't had a chance to study this. I'm not sure where it's all coming from.

MR. SAPERS: I appreciate that, and I hope you can do that before we vote. Through the chair, what I heard the minister say is that he can't do that tonight, and that's unfortunate because we're going to be asked to vote on this. I want to know whether we're being asked to vote on the figure that's on the new page 80 or the figure that's on page 9. I understand that the new request is for \$189,717,000, but I would hope there's an explanation for the difference in the two figures. You know, it's a \$390,000 difference, and I'd like to know what it is so that I know what it is I'm being asked to vote on.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

MR. LUND: Well, I don't have the expertise here to explain it exactly, but the 390, I suspect, in some of the accounting is similar to the number we're asking for for the rural ag societies. Now, I don't understand how they've accounted for them in this manner, but the number we would be voting on tonight is the supplementary appropriation of \$189 million. I'll have to add them up.

10:20

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, we're not voting tonight on the reconciliation, so perhaps we could have an undertaking, if that's agreeable to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, to give an explanation tomorrow or at your earliest ability to do so.

Is that acceptable?

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Thank you for that suggestion, Mr. Chairman. Through you I'd ask the minister then: when he's providing the explanation of that difference – and it could be a very simple one – would he also explain fully the point that he himself raised, which is the manner in which the transfer to the Department of Innovation and Science is handled? It doesn't appear in the department summary in the estimates, and it does appear, of course, on the reconciliation. If you could have that information provided, it would give me some comfort.

THE CHAIRMAN: Have we got agreement?

MR. LUND: Yes. Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the supplementary estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$189,717,000

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Children's Services

THE CHAIRMAN: We would call on the Minister of Children's Services to make opening comments.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I believe it's quite straightforward. The supplementary estimates begin on page 13 and end on page 17 of the estimates book. We are requesting the estimate of \$37 million, which is a 7.9 percent increase over the original base budget of \$466 million. The total of the \$37 million is comprised of \$13 million identified in the first quarter and \$24 million identified in the second quarter and announced last week.

Mr. Chairman, it is a simple explanation: it is a complex problem. We have a growing caseload, higher than we had anticipated. In fact, as I have pointed out in this House, we have grown from less than 8,000 in 1994-95 to 12,600 cases in child welfare. It is that that has almost exclusively provided such an additional burden for our 18 authorities. Part of our funding will assist the 18 authorities in completing their transition. It will also be useful to notice that we are reviewing the caseload, the circumstances that create the rising caseload, and the review of the Children's Advocate office will hopefully net out some benefit in the future as well.

Mr. Chairman, I would cite the forum for children in October, the first circle held October 5 and 6, where we had a thousand Albertans and over a hundred youth. We anticipate that a very small margin of this funding will be devoted to assisting in recommendations that may come from that forum in mid-January. We have some early support and prevention strategies affiliated with the additional growth in the numbers of children that we have profiled in the child welfare situation and also preventive medicine, if you will, for the other children that have in fact grown in some of our high-risk categories.

Mr. Chairman, while the emphasis on early support and prevention is there, we hope these supplementary estimates will be accepted, because, as we believe, everything stems from having strong children and strong families in safe communities.

I'd be prepared to answer questions or table any responses as the chair would allow.

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

MS OLSEN: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few questions. I first want to comment on page 16 of the supplementary estimates.

The reason for the estimate requested is "costs associated with caseloads that are increasing faster than anticipated." I guess that concerns me. It concerns me a great deal, Madam Minister, because I believe it was maybe a year ago that child welfare caseloads were increasing dramatically. At that time there was the notion that there was a correlation drawn between the reduction in the SFI and the increase in the child welfare caseloads. At that time the minister of the day, Minister Oberg, put some money into it. He said: well, we're going to try and fix it. Now we're at the same place, and now we're asking for \$36 million. I'm not sure that there is an adequate plan in place to address this issue. So I really have a lot of concerns about that whole planning process.

I have a number of questions that I'll just put forward to you, and then hopefully we can get some answers. Is this funding new money, or is it being transferred from another budget area? I think that's really important to know. How many additional children is this intended to assist and in what capacity? You talk about this being transitional funding during the first year of operation of the 18 authorities, but is it just going to caseloads? Why are the costs of services to individual clients rising so dramatically? What long-term research is proposed by the department to address this issue? This is not a new issue. This is absolutely not a new issue. It doesn't look like there's been any accountability attached to these rising costs. To what does the department attribute the increase in the caseloads and per client costs of service? Will this funding completely eliminate all the deficits in the child and family services authorities?

As you know, Madam Minister, we have the health authorities and we have the school boards that are running deficits. We have now seen the injection of cash to eliminate the health authority deficits. Is that happening here, or is the downloading onto these children's services authorities going to continue? How do you plan on assisting the authorities so that they don't have deficits and don't have to come crawling back, so that they can do some planning and it's not onetime funding? Onetime funding isn't good enough in these services. You have to be able to anticipate what the cost is going to be. Like I say, this is a long-term issue that hasn't been dealt with, and I need to see something from the government in that regard.

Will the budgeting process be redefined in order to ensure that the child and family service authorities do not run deficits in the future? Are we going to be, as I said before, coming back for supplementary estimates? Do you have any analysis already that talks about the increase in the child welfare caseloads? How did you get there before? How are you going to get out of the jam now? Will the government come back and state that they are reinvesting in child welfare? What about the Children's Advocate? Is any of this money going to the Children's Advocate office?

I'm going to suggest that the link is the reduction in funding available to families, and that's causing our child welfare caseloads to soar, unless you have something else to tell us about that.

We need to ensure that that this particular ministry is funded adequately. If the government is putting out goals such as supporting healthy communities; supporting families, guardians, and caregivers; supporting well-being and healthy development of children and youth; promoting advocacy for children, youth, and those at risk; and supporting high-quality and accountable services, I think the department is missing the boat on that. If you're going to put out goals to such, why are we still in the same problem? So what are we not achieving? There's got to be some sort of measurement at the end. I see that there are still some huge gaps, and I'm wondering what the minister plans to do about that.

Those are my questions, and hopefully we can get some response tonight. Thank you.

10:30

THE CHAIRMAN: Madam minister, just a question. Do you wish to wait for all of the questions to come in and then respond?

MS EVANS: It's at your pleasure.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, no, it's not at my pleasure. It's whichever way you wish.

The next on my list is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. No?

MRS. SOETAERT: If I may, Mr. Chairman.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: I just have one question for the minister. As I was working on agriculture, I haven't had the most opportunity to look at this. But one of the concerns that came from my riding was this whole boundary issue.

DR. MASSEY: And the need for coterminous boundaries.

MRS. SOETAERT: And the need for coterminous boundaries, which I understand is the intent. My riding in Spruce Grove and actually part of the Stony Plain area and I know the Gibbons/Bon Accord area have a lot of very good families who take in a lot of foster children, and often they come from the city. I'm really concerned that the whole tracking and funding issue with those children is going to be an issue. I'm wondering if this is addressed in the supplementary estimate. I don't want an area saying, "No, we don't want those kids because we're not getting the funding for them" when you know that they'd provide those services. That was one of the concerns I heard about funding with the boundary issue, and as much as I'd like to say that it's just an administrative boundary, it hasn't happened in health authorities. So I'm really hoping that won't be the case with children's services.

That was the main issue that I had that I was hoping would be addressed in these estimates. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We've a little trouble with our notes here. One of the questions we had was the question about the Children's Forum and the kind of follow-up there is going to be. Coming out of the forum we understood that there was going to be reporting back to the participants, but I guess the question is: what else is the intention in terms of the information that was gathered there?

Related to that question was the question of the growth summit and how the information from the forum was going to be integrated and used. A number of people said: well, we really have said all of this before at the growth summit, and now we're saying it again. I guess what people are asking for is some assurance that there's going to really be some action other than just reporting back to them what will really impact children's services.

The other question – and I apologize if it's been asked before. My notes did get a little scrambled here. That was the question of coterminous boundaries for health authorities and for children's services and for school districts. The concern being, for instance with the health initiative, that those jurisdictions don't match, so we have youngsters who are residing under the jurisdiction of three different authorities. Has there been any thought to try to sort that out in terms of delivering services to children?

I think the questions about the Children's Advocate have been asked. Again, a concern that the work of that advocate is as independent and free of government as it can possibly be to work in the interests of children.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll conclude.

MS LEIBOVICI: My comments will be brief as my colleagues have addressed a lot of the issues that I would have addressed. I have two quick questions to the minister. The first is with regard to ensuring that there is stable, adequate funding for early intervention programs. In particular, there's one that I have in mind. It's the one that is in my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora's riding, in Mayfield school, and it's a program that I am well aware of as well and that I know has had many difficulties over a number of years in maintaining the high quality of standards that they do with regard to the program.

The second issue that I would like some further information on is with regards to the DARE program, that I know all Members of this Legislative Assembly are aware of and are supportive of. My question is: right now under which ministry does the responsibility for that particular program fall? Does the provincial government see that there is a role for them to provide sustainable funding to the program so that, in fact, police officers and RCMP officers in this province can be trained to provide that program throughout the province? If members are not aware, there are right now wait lists in many communities across this province for DARE programs to be taught.

Unfortunately, what we are finding is that officers are having to fund-raise on their own time in order to provide the program. The fund-raising can take a variety of forms. It can be the more traditional forms of fund-raising that we know, whether it's casinos or bingos. It can also take forms such as waiting on tables to ensure that there are funds to provide that particular program. So if we would know which minister, it would be helpful in developing a proposal that perhaps the government could look at and put some of their surplus dollars towards. The costs, I am sure, would be small with regards to the advantages that accrue as a result of the DARE program.

Thank you very much. I look forward to your reply.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Before we ask the minister to answer the questions, I wonder if the committee would agree to a brief reversion to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

head: Introduction of Guests
10:40

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Chairman, I want to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly a very talented young man from Red Deer who's attending the University of Alberta in this fair city. He's sitting in the members' gallery. His name is Courtney Doerksen. I'm proud to say that he's my son and I'm very fond of him. I'd ask him to rise.

head: Supplementary Estimates 1998-99

Children's Services (continued)

THE CHAIRMAN: The Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to have a young son here to listen to the Children's Services supplementary estimates.

I'd like to comment, first of all, on the questions from the Member

for Edmonton-Norwood, and I most sincerely appreciate her genuine intent to make sure that we do things in the proper fashion. We've had a small discussion on this, and some of the challenges in Children's Services are significant enough to need all Albertans, and I'm particularly appreciative of that.

We have been planning, Mr. Chairman. A lot of planning has been going on with the authorities, but I would draw to your attention that the planning has been under the constraint of a year when a number of the authorities have only recently signed on to their agreements, have completed them. We have one group that has yet to complete their signing.

Is this new money? Yes, Mr. Chairman, it is new money. It is not a transfer from somebody else's department. It is not transitional funding in the capacity that it is very much something that we are relating to an existing number of caseloads that must be managed.

Why are the caseloads rising? It's certainly something that we want to find out about as well. We have almost completed the terms for the independent consultant for this review, noting that we have Treasury, we have authorities, we have two members of the public, and we have a number of other people that will be appointed to be a part of the caseload review. It is a North American phenomena. It is a failure of families. I sincerely believe it is a case where risk is certainly rising with no correlation in the manner of analyzing child poverty that we have been able to note. However, I am not at the same time saying that poverty is not an issue for children or for families.

The caseload costs seem to be rising as well because of the increasing complexity. The additional costs that are implied – with some of the consultants yesterday I was made aware that one of the groups has offered their services under a contract basis with a 50 percent increase, which will have a severe impact on some of our boards, in particular those with high, complex caseloads.

We are looking at a review of the funding model, not only the resource equalization model but the funding of the children and family service authorities themselves, with a view to making sure that those with current deficits will be accommodated not only in the review of the population but in some of the other capacities as well, taking a look at the needs that are both met and those that are unmet, as well as some of the practices of prudent fiscal management. But it is certainly not our intent to perpetuate deficits in the current authorities. Some of those, Mr. Chairman, have occurred where we've had an extraordinary high number of day care children coming into the system that have required subsidies. There will be more announcements on that later.

There's been a suggestion that we take a look at our processes – and we are – with the Children's Advocate. The review of that office I think will net a benefit to this Legislature. It has been 10 years since it has been in place. It's time to review it. It's most topical since we have the local authorities as a community extension and most topical since the office is currently constrained by rules which do not accommodate advocacy for children that are without the protection of child welfare in the system. That is something that has been cited by the advocate's office again and again.

To the hon. members on the other side I would just make a quick comment that it's very difficult for me to anticipate that there should be some allegation that the Children's Advocate is not impartial when in fact the reports have not been all that favourable and not that well received, so it would appear that they are indeed reporting unfettered by government intervention.

The comments about boundaries I think are very useful. We will be continually, with the authorities, reviewing those boundaries. But to the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert I would like to make the observation that the protocols on interauthority

transfers have been reviewed by the co-chairs, were completed last August, and the CEOs are currently reviewing them this November. We should get more information on that, but that has been something that has been cited as a problem, particularly with high-needs cases.

To the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on the forum follow-up we expect a full briefing to come back in the form of a report being prepared by Mrs. Klein and a number of representatives from the nongovernment steering committee reporting to participants and indeed to all Albertans. From the growth summit I can give you the assurance that people development was the topic and focus of the forum, and we continue to follow through with that. On early intervention programming we have targeted many of the dollars not only in the supplementary estimate but elsewhere that will be focusing on the needs for early family supports.

In terms of the DARE program it's my understanding that the Minister of Justice as well as a co-operating minister, the Minister of Learning, and indeed many, are involved in making sure that that program takes place where schools are willing to come forward, commit the parental volunteer support. In fact, where we have constables raising funds, they are doing so with families and parents who are doing that. I had the privilege of speaking at a recent DARE graduation last year. Integral to the program is the knowledge that the constables bring not only the issues related to drug and rehabilitation but the issues of the community itself, so they do get very much involved, as the families do, in the fund-raising.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that addresses the issues that have been raised this evening. I'd be prepared to provide any further detail at a later time.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the supplementary estimates for the Department of Children's Services, are you ready for the vote?

Agreed to:

Total Operating Expense	\$36,897,000
-------------------------	--------------

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Justice and Attorney General

THE CHAIRMAN: The next department is the department that we started first with the minister, and now it's last. Comments, Mr. Minister?

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be very brief. We're asking the Legislature to accommodate us in the vote of \$1 million tonight, and that \$1 million will be spent in the area of young offender services. The purpose of this supplementary estimate is that the federal government has made some funds available for the transition to the youth criminal justice act. In order to take advantage of that programming and those funds, we need to be able to spend them in provincially mandated programs. Those would have to be approved, of course, and the estimates for that would have to be approved by the Legislature.

So the supplementary estimate of \$1 million will be spent on youth justice programs corresponding with the federal programs under the youth criminal justice act, and they'll be used in programs such as custody to community transition in Edmonton and Calgary, onetime grants to youth justice committees, community support and surveillance programs, and other related initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, what we're trying to accomplish here in partner-

ship with the federal government is programming for young offenders and youth coming into contact with the system, recognizing that youth coming into contact with the system are going to be going back out into the community and we want them to be in the community as better contributors than when they came into contact with the system. Community-based justice is a very important concept, this is a very important program, and I'd ask for the support of the House.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a number of questions I'd like to ask, but I do have to comment on the fact that the Minister of Innovation and Science tonight and also the Minister of Justice have been complimentary to the federal government. I like to see credit where credit's due. Thank you very much.

I'm a little bit concerned. I know that the federal government has put forward some dollars. I'm wondering if these are matching dollars, so then you'll end up with \$2 million at your disposal. How much is the amount going to be? Why a million dollars? Why not \$2 million? Why not \$3 million? Why not \$500,000? What was the commitment that you're into the program for?

10:50

What specific programs will be enhanced? You talked a little bit about onetime grants to youth justice committees. There's a huge problem with youth justice committees in that they're always out looking for funding. We know that last year there was some concern they were going to get cut back here in the city from \$30,000 to \$5,000. We need to keep these programs going. If the government absolutely believes and is committed to restorative justice, then we have to fund these programs. We can't expect the entire world to volunteer for free. We need to see commitment on a long-term basis as opposed to just onetime funding here.

I have a concern with the support we're hearing from the government for restorative justice and entering into a funding model focused on community-based programs rather than custody for young offenders. We still hear the government, on the other hand, say, "We've still got to get those 10- and 11-year-olds covered off by the Young Offenders Act." I'm just wondering if the minister has thought about maybe using family group conferencing as an alternative. Because it's not court sanctioned for 10- and 11-year-olds, it doesn't have to be, but it sure can be an option. You can introduce it into the schools. If you know a young person who's 10 or 11 and has committed a crime, we don't have to go through the whole process, but we can address it in programs such as family group conferencing in a way that's not exposing them to the courts but maybe has some meaningful consequences in the end.

I also want to know if this new funding is going to provide more open custody facilities outside of the young offender centres. I'm concerned that we have open custody situations where kids are spending their open custody time incarcerated at the young offenders centres. We need to move those kids out to the community. Is this funding going to help do that?

How many of the initiatives from the justice summit regarding youth and the Young Offenders Act or the youth criminal justice act are going to be implemented? Is this money going to help go to those programs?

The Canadian Bar Association was attempting to have the ministers of Justice and education adopt a plan for schools to teach kids more about the justice system, not just criminal justice system but the civil side of it as well. What, in fact, has happened with that initiative? I know that Alberta apparently played a key role at the

time. The previous Minister of Justice and the previous minister of education were involved. What happened to that commitment? Is it going ahead; is it not going ahead? Will this money help that kind of endeavour?

Has the government committed to expanding the staff counsel program for young offenders, the legal aid commitment there? Is this program in Calgary now as well? Red Deer? Grande Prairie? What other centres are going to have the benefit of this program? What funding arrangements have been made?

I see a very good way to spend some of this money. We have the PCHIP bill, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution bill. There was a commitment at one time from Justice to be a partner. As of today, we know that Justice hasn't put any money into that. What is Justice doing in relation to that commitment, and can this dough help offset some of the issues associated with those young prostitutes? They're offenders. They're taken in, off the street. They're looking for some voluntary addictions programs for more of a long-term length. So what's the Department of Justice doing in that respect, Mr. Minister, and what commitments are you making to those kids?

How many programs are you going to be able to enhance with this dough in relation to behaviourally disordered youth incarcerated, already in the young offenders centres, and those identified as attention deficit or fetal alcohol effect or fetal alcohol syndrome that are already incarcerated? They are going to come back into the community, so what enhancement of programs is going to come out of that?

Now, my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark brought up to the Minister of Children's Services the DARE program. Well, we know that we got a letter back from the Department of Justice saying: hey, we have nothing to do with DARE. So who does? The Minister of Children's Services just said that that is a responsibility of Justice and others. Well, you know what? We have policemen out in the communities who are volunteering their time and taking their days off to go into the schools to teach the DARE program. It's a 17-week program. It's a full-semester program. That's a lot of time and commitment, and these folks are doing it for nothing. It compromises them. One, if they're not on duty, what about their costs associated with injuries and things like that? They have to go in uniform. That's part of the whole process. Who compensates them, or are we just going to take advantage of all the goodwill that they're out there providing for the community?

The RCMP desperately needs some funding for this endeavour. I think it doesn't just come out of Justice. It comes out of Children's Services. It comes out of the department of education. It comes out of Justice. But somebody needs to take responsibility for it and say: we're going to fund some of these programs. It's absolutely essential. You talk about the goals that you have in the department, and you need to stay committed to those through some funding.

I want the minister also to expand on the community surveillance programs for youth, to just elaborate a bit on what he's talking about. I am assuming that those are the SHOCAP kids, the serious habitual offenders, and that those kids are under the community surveillance programs. Those are the kids that are targeted, and that's kind of where the funding is going. What percentage is going to the SHOCAP kids? We know that they are 2 percent of all offenders, so I wouldn't want to see more money going to the serious habitual offenders, the young kids in the surveillance program, and not have enough go into programming for those kids that we know can make it and that just need a little bit of guidance when they come out of the institution.

Those are my comments at this point, and I appreciate the assistance of the minister.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of quick questions for the minister. To preface the questions, though, it's my understanding that the youth justice act is not yet law. The federal parliament hasn't passed it. Now, this creates some little concern because we know that the federal Minister of Justice has announced that there will be some matching funds available to implement programs that flow from this new federal law. But the new federal law isn't law yet, yet we see the province in this supplementary estimate requesting that we approve the expenditure of a million dollars which we're told will be offset by a contribution from the federal government once the law becomes law, which is kind of like: the cheque is in the mail.

My first question, therefore, is: can the minister tell us a little bit about the discussions he's had with his federal counterpart? Perhaps he may let us know that there has been no discussion other than the initial report that the new funding was going to be made available, and that's fine. I'm just curious about what discussions he's had with the federal government to ensure that in fact this funding is going to flow.

Number two. On the off chance that the act doesn't become law or isn't proclaimed in a timely manner – I seem to remember that with the Young Offenders Act there was a period of about two years between the date on which it was passed and then the proclamation date and then the full implementation date. If we see the same kind of phase again with the new federal initiative, I'm wondering what impact this will have on the program initiatives the provincial Minister of Justice was just talking about, initiatives which I support, but I'm just wondering what impact, if any, there will be.

11:00

I would like to encourage this minister and the government that he's part of to be proactive in the areas of community sanctions, community sentence management, and restorative justice. I would like to see an expansion, in fact, in those areas and probably an expansion that may cost in excess of the million dollars that's the subject of this supplementary estimate.

That brings me to my next question, which is: what exactly will this million dollars pay for? I mean, we've had the generalities, but specifically are we talking about training initiatives? Are we talking about funding community agencies under contract? Are we talking about expanding community corrections programs through Attorney General offices? Are we talking about all of that, none of that, something new and exciting that I haven't anticipated? I would like to see some specific deliverables attached to the million dollars. The initiative, as I say, is an initiative I want to support, but I want to know exactly what the minister has in mind.

Finally, the youth justice act has not been without its own controversy. There are those on one side of the debate that say the new legislation is far too tough and onerous and should never be the law of the land, and there are others who say: well, you know, the act is far too lenient and lets these young folks get away with murder, and therefore it should never be passed. So the middle ground is probably where the act is at, and it's probably the most appropriate place for it to be.

I'm just wondering whether or not we're going to see an expansion of the kinds of programs that, unfortunately, I think have flowed from some rhetoric around young offenders to sort of counterbalance the good initiatives which are talked about in this supplementary estimate. In other words, is there going to be some kind of trade-off? If we see that we keep on moving towards community programs, is there going to be some temptation on the part of govern-

ment to say, "Yeah, but we're still really tough; we still lock up more kids than anybody else and spend less money on them," which for a while seemed to be the rallying call of this province?

With the incarceration rate of young offenders being what it is and being, I think, overly high in this province, I'm just wondering if the minister can give some assurances that as we move more fully into these community options and these restorative options, in fact, it's not really a net widening, that we're not just trying to find new ways to capture more young offenders into the system, but in fact it will truly be a moving away from the overreliance on expensive incarceration and moving towards, I think, more appropriate and more meaningful and often more impactful sanctions that are managed in the community and that are really aimed towards reconciliation and prevention.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Some very good comments and suggestion and ideas from both members. I will assure both members that I would be happy to respond in some detail to those comments over the course of the next few days and weeks, because I think they are discussions that we should have on an ongoing basis and on a much longer term than just tonight.

The short answer is that I'm in a bit of a conundrum here. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora would have us wait until the youth justice act is in and everything is in place before we come forward with our spending programs, yet he wants us to plan ahead for anticipated revenues. In this particular case, we're anticipating revenues coming under the youth criminal justice act. We've been told that the revenues are going to be there. We've been told that the federal government will have some money in this fiscal year, which, if we allocate them to programs in this year, we can have. I have to anticipate that and bring it forward to the Legislature and ask for permission to spend that.

Unfortunately, if that money does not become available from the federal government, this spending will lapse because we don't have the money available. It's a revenue neutral line in the budget. So that's a problem we'll have to deal with, but we're not anticipating that problem will happen.

In terms of the specific programs and how it's going to be detailed out, I don't want to go on at great length here tonight, but I will assure the members that I am very, very interested. As they well know from having participated in conferences that I've spoken at, I'm a very big fan of community conferencing, of family conferencing, of community programs and diversion programs which allow offenders to meet their victims where the victims agree, to accept responsibility, to atone for that responsibility in a noncustodial setting, if you will. So that's certainly the direction we're going in this.

That doesn't mean to say that he will hear any less emphasis on the need to be tough on young offenders, but how you define "tough on young offenders" is something we can discuss and debate. What we need to make sure is that young people understand their responsibility in society, that they accept responsibility for their actions, that they have an atonement for those actions which is acceptable to the victims and acceptable to the community and encourages them to understand that they shouldn't repeat them. I think that is all in keeping with the concept of restorative justice, which, again, I am very committed to.

There are some young offenders that do need incarceration, unfortunately, in young offender centres if for no other reason than that's the only place they will get the structure they need in terms of going to school and other things, but that shouldn't be the main

priority or the main issue. I think we find that in putting people into correctional centres, whether they are young offenders or other offenders, the bottom line is that we need to be doing things which will improve their ability to move back into the community. In many, many cases that could be accomplished without taking them out of the community in the first place.

So in a general sense I think we're speaking the same language in terms of what needs to happen. It doesn't mean that we're not going to be tough on young offenders. We are going to be tough on young offenders. We're going to continue to do that in a manner which doesn't overburden the court system or overburden the correctional system but instead provides for better opportunities for young offenders to find a better path.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, and again my commitment that I'll respond fully and certainly be willing to discuss any of these programs with any member of the House that's interested in how the implementation will work out, I would hope we could move to a vote.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I would be remiss if I didn't comment on the minister's public support for community options and restorative justice. In fact, I appreciate the fact that he has made those comments both in this Assembly and to public audiences and audiences of criminal justice professionals. Of course, we're here to help him in every way we know how to follow through with the actions that are required to put real meaning to those sentiments that he's expressed.

I want to help the minister, though, with his conundrum, because maybe I wasn't clear or maybe he misheard me. I wasn't saying that we should wait for the feds. What I was saying is that if the law somehow were delayed, if the money were somehow delayed, would there still be a commitment to pursuing the kinds of program initiatives the minister spoke of when he described in general terms how the \$1 million would be spent? I want to make sure I understand the minister's response, and the short form of the response, I think, is no. If the money from the federal government is not received, this spending would lapse, I believe, is the expression the minister used, which I take to mean that the provincial government would not follow through with spending a million dollars on these enhancements to community programs and to restorative justice initiatives.

Well, I'll leave it at that, because I just want to seek some clarity as to whether or not this is in fact going to be the expenditure of a million dollars one way or the other or if it's only going to be the expenditure if the federal government writes the cheque.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, let me be clear. We are going to be bringing out a business plan for the next and ensuing years within the spring session. Certainly, in doing so we will be paying great attention to the results of the growth summit. The short answer is that within this fiscal year it probably wouldn't be possible for me to reorient enough programming to move money from what we have existing into these programs. So we probably would not be able to, certainly not to this magnitude, fund those programs without the federal resources. We would have to look to doing that in another fiscal year and dealing with our priorities and changing priorities as a result of the change in the ministry towards more community correction programs and the results of the summit.

11:10

On that point and since I was very complimentary to the federal government on some of these programs, I might say that we're going to a meeting of justice ministers in the next couple of days. One of the issues that's very clearly on the table is that sometimes these programs get started – I know members in this House wouldn't want to believe this. Sometimes these programs get started on a specific time frame basis, and they get funded, and then the federal funding gets cut off. We get left holding the bag with what everybody has agreed are good programs, but because we own the programs and they've just provided the money, then we have to continue them on. So we are looking in the next couple of days for commitments from the federal government to continue funding in some of those areas.

The short answer to the question is that it will probably be very difficult to fund some of these programs if we don't get the federal money in this fiscal year.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the supplementary estimates for the Department of Justice, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$1,000,000
--	-------------

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report progress and request leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the supplementary estimates, general revenue fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2000, reports the approval of the following estimates, and requests leave to sit again.

Government Services, \$1,276,000, operating expense and capital investment; Innovation and Science, \$2,000,000, operating expense and capital investment; Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, \$189,717,000, operating expense and capital investment; Children's Services, \$36,897,000, operating expense; Justice, \$1,000,000, operating expense and capital investment.

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

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 40 Health Information Act

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

We'd ask the Member for Calgary-Lougheed to make her comments.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This evening it is my intention to introduce a number of amendments to Bill 40, and in that regard I would ask that the proposed amendments be distributed to members in the Assembly.

Before proceeding to describe these amendments, I would like to say that in the House yesterday evening my colleagues the Member for Calgary-Glenmore and the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake and I provided responses to the various concerns raised by opposition members during the debate on second reading of Bill 40, and I would say that the comments that were provided during those speeches were based on careful consideration of the concerns raised by opposition members. In this process we have also reviewed the comments and recommendations for amendments by the Information and Privacy Commissioner which were contained in his report on Bill 40, which was tabled with the House recently.

We have also reviewed the positions and comments of the Alberta Medical Association as put forward by that association in different sources and, in particular, as contained in a letter from the president of the AMA, which was tabled in the House recently. This was a letter dated November 25, 1999. I'd also note that my colleague the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake spoke specifically last evening to the AMA concerns and to the corresponding government position on these various concerns.

Mr. Chairman, at this time it is my pleasure to move the government amendments to Bill 40. There are six amendments as contained in sections A through F, and I would propose that these six amendments be considered as one complete package, or as one amendment.

THE CHAIRMAN: We'd note that this is amendment A1. Do you wish to speak to the amendment?

MS GRAHAM: Thank you. Yes, I would like to now speak to the amendments. The first section of amendment A1, section A, provides for the striking out of section 2 of Bill 40 and the substitution of a new section 2.

Section 2 contains the seven purposes of the act, and this amendment would simply reorder the purposes of Bill 40 and place the protection of privacy purpose up front to reflect the importance of the protection of an individual's health information. This was a requested amendment by the AMA, and I would point out that the reordering of the various purposes does not change the interpretation of the purposes, nor does it change the interpretation of the contents of the bill which follow.

Moving on to the second amendment which is contained in section B of A1. This amendment would affect section 22(2)(e)(i) and responds to a recommendation of the Information and Privacy

Commissioner. The effect of it is to make it very clear that a custodian may only collect individually identifying diagnostic treatment and care information to assemble "a family or genetic history" indirectly, which means from someone other than the individual who is the subject of the information,

where the information collected is to be used in the context of providing a health service to the individual who is the subject of the information.

Mr. Chairman, this amendment is consistent with the policy intent of the existing section, and the amendment makes it very clear that a custodian cannot indirectly collect family or genetic information for any purpose but that it must be used in the context of providing a health service to the individual, as I have described.

11:20

The third amendment is contained in section C and amends section 27(1)(d) of Bill 40, and it is also in response to a recommendation from the Information and Privacy Commissioner. This amendment, Mr. Chairman, is also consistent with the policy intent of the existing section as contained in Bill 40. The effect of the amendment will make it explicit that custodians who use diagnostic treatment and care information for research purposes must abide by the conditions set down by an ethics committee.

The fourth amendment is contained in section D of A1, and it amends section 41(1) of Bill 40. It is a very straightforward amendment, and it basically inserts a phrase in section 41(1), being the words "a record containing." These words describe the disclosure of individually identifying diagnostic treatment and care information. The effect of the change will ensure that a custodian would not be obligated to make a notation of every conversation in which identifying diagnostic treatment and care information was disclosed; that is, not for every conversation involving a discussion of this type of information.

The fifth proposed amendment is contained in section E of A1. It adds a new subsection, subsection (5), to the existing section 46 of Bill 40. It responds to concerns raised by the Information and Privacy Commissioner and the AMA and in the House by opposition members. The issue that has been raised and which is addressed by this amendment is: what protection is there for an individual's privacy, given the minister's and the department's ability to request individually identifying information?

As has been mentioned in the House during debate, the minister is constrained by the rules around least amount of information and highest level of anonymity, as well as the other duties on custodians. However, our amendment will require even more focus and more obligation to protect the privacy of individually identifying health information by requiring the preparation of a privacy impact assessment by the department – this is the department of Health and Wellness that we're speaking of – and the subsequent submission of this assessment to the Privacy Commissioner for his review and comments.

The second part of the amendment would require the minister or the department to "consider the comments of the Commissioner, if any, made in response to the privacy impact assessment before disclosing" any of the individually identifying health information which was the subject of the assessment. This would be in the context of disclosure to another custodian, which is provided for in the act under section 46(3).

The sixth and final amendment is contained in section F and is simply to correct a typographical error which resulted from the movement of a definition within the bill and the subsequent renumbering.

That, Mr. Chairman, is a brief description of the amendments contained in A1, and at this time I would just reiterate my motion to move these amendments.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on amendment A1.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. Some of us have been looking forward with great anticipation to committee stage on Bill 40. I'm thinking that we're really going to have to expand the desk surface here before we get to the end of Bill 40.

Let me start off by acknowledging that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed has in her usual thoughtful, considered fashion put forward the case for the amendment. I see across the way the minister of health smiling benignly, encouraging all of us to enable Alberta Health and those 631 employees, who are champing at the bit, to get access to this information, to sanction that and move on and roll out this bill.

You know, if one had not had the opportunity to sort of examine the process over a period of time going back to Bill 30 and beyond, this would be just so darn seductive. I was almost having to restrain myself from jumping up and cheering when I heard the amendment package, but there are a few concerns, and I want to go through and review them.

I want, though, to deal firstly with a subamendment I want to propose, Mr. Chairman. I think that's being distributed as I speak. The subamendment deals with the A part of the amendment put forward by Calgary-Lougheed. I'd ask: would this be A2? How do you want to identify it, Mr. Chairman?

THE CHAIRMAN: Subamendment A1.

MR. DICKSON: Subamendment A1. Excellent. Thank you for your help here. So subamendment A1 would make a small and modest change but I think an important one in the proposed section 2. Section 2 of the bill talks about the purposes of the Health Information Act.

I'll loop back to something I said in my comments at second reading, and that is that there are two actually quite different concepts, that are often confused, one being privacy and the other one being confidentiality. Privacy relates to the intake end of the system. Privacy relates to what information you, Mr. Chairman, or the minister of health are entitled to find out, what information I give up at the front end of the system. That's what's referenced currently in the proposed section 2(a). But the sequential issue is that once that information is given up by me as a patient, as a consumer of the service, then I've effectively lost my privacy. Then the issue is confidentiality and how that information is kept safe. Although often we refer to the two as being synonymous, privacy and confidentiality, in fact they do represent really two quite different concepts.

So the subamendment would simply change 2(a) to read: "to establish strong and effective mechanisms to protect the privacy of individuals with respect to their health information and to protect the confidentiality of that information." I expect, Mr. Chairman, that this is probably what the minister intended all along. What this does is just make it absolutely clear, as the act in fact attempts to do, that it deals with information when it's first given up by the patient, and then it deals with information as it moves through the system and is shared between custodians and other custodians and the minister and the 17 RHAs and the Alberta Cancer Board and the Provincial Mental Health Board and ethics committees and so on. It just makes it clear that we deal with both of those.

I'm mindful, Mr. Chairman. I don't want to talk myself out of a subamendment. I hope I've explained it to a point where it's clear. I thank the Member for Calgary-Lougheed for sharing with me this afternoon the House amendments and for her courtesy in allowing

me to present earlier the subamendment. My hope is that she and her colleagues would support this to clarify the intent of Bill 40.

What I propose to do is sit down, and once we deal with the subamendment, I have a few other comments I'd like to share on the balance of the main amendment, Mr. Chairman.

11:30

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, I would like to comment briefly on the subamendment. I think the subamendment does reinforce and complement what is already stated in that particular section of the overall set of amendments moved by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. I think it does give added emphasis to the whole area of confidentiality, and I would suggest that this is an amendment that we should give consideration to approving.

[Motion on subamendment A1 carried]

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much. You know, I just have to say that the minister is so darn reasonable. Having seen this kind of flexibility and the flexibility from the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, one's reaction is just to sort of wrap up, pack our bags, pass the bill, and move on.

But, Mr. Chairman, in fact, there are a few other items with this bill that need our attention before we move on from it.

THE CHAIRMAN: On the amendment.

MR. DICKSON: On the amendment, yes. Thank you for bringing me back to that, Mr. Chairman.

Now, what I propose to do is spend a few minutes surveying the elements of the amendment that's in front of us right now and, if I can, loop back. The first thing I'd say is that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed made the case that this was in response to the response of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, dated November 22, 1999. I'd mention, Mr. Chairman, that there was actually a lot of material that the commissioner – I'll just refer to him as the IPC – shared with us. In fact, I think he's presented something of a 41-page document. Although there is some very helpful analysis in it, there are some parts I take strong exception to. I'll alert members that I tabled in this Assembly a copy of my letter to Mr. Clark where I raised with him some of the concerns I had.

The key part, I think, is page 4 of the report of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. He made a number of specific recommendations, not as many recommendations as I might have liked, but he made five very specific recommendations. The first one, having to do with section 22(2)(e)(i), has now been addressed I think satisfactorily and credit to the minister and Calgary-Lougheed for responding there to narrow the opportunity for a custodian to indirectly collect information for the purpose of "assembling a family or genetic history." That's a positive item. That's the amendment which would be amendment B in this package. So I'm supporting amendment B. I think that makes sense.

Amendment C, the one that deals with a requirement around an ethics committee, makes perfectly good sense. If you look at section 27, this is circumstances under which individually identifying health information can be used. There's reference there to the ethics committee, and there's a provision that if the ethics committee offers or suggests conditions, as they often and customarily do, those conditions should be met.

Now, this raises a real problem for me, Mr. Chairman, and it has to do with ethics committees. I'm going to suggest to the minister

of health right now that between now and maybe tomorrow night, when we're back dealing with this, he may want to look at a further amendment. I've mentioned this to the Member for Calgary-Lougheed as well.

There is currently no legislative basis for an ethics committee. Now, some of us may be surprised. I was surprised to find that out. If there is, I haven't found that statute.

I had the occasion to attend a meeting of the Calgary ethics committee, and I was frankly blown away with the quality of the people on that committee. Former Chief Justice Herb Laycraft is on that committee, a person who is probably one of the most distinguished jurists that certainly I've had the occasion to be aware of in my career as a member of the bar. Chris Levy, a well-known and certainly colourful member of the law faculty at the University of Calgary, and they have Dr. Doug Kinsella, who is one of the foremost medical ethicists in Canada.

But here's what I found curious. When I look at the group of people on that Calgary ethics committee, I as a patient, frankly, have more confidence that they would do the job of protecting my personal information than anybody I can think of. That's a committee I'm familiar with. We wonder what an ethics committee is, and you look at the definition section in the bill where they talk about the ethics committee. This is section 1(1)(j): "ethics committee" means a committee designated by the regulations as an ethics committee."

One of my concerns then. I know the Calgary ethics committee is made up of top-notch people, and I may have great confidence in that committee. But what if the minister takes a business unit in Alberta health? You've got 630 employees there, and they've divided Alberta health into these business units. We had a chance on the health information steering committee to hear from and meet with representatives from many of those business units, all very competent and professional people.

If, for example, you were to create and designate an ethics committee of those people, they tend to bring kind of an institutional bias to what they do, or you could imagine a group of people who would also present a bias. How do you ensure that that ethics committee is made up of somebody who's going to be alive to issues of privacy, who's going to be alert and looking at it not just from the view of a medical researcher but somebody who has some concern around privacy and so on?

I think this amendment C is better than what was there before, but there's this gap because we just don't know what an ethics committee is going to be. There's no statutory requirement that an ethics committee is going to have somebody on there that speaks to sort of a privacy perspective or a consumer perspective, who that might be. It doesn't have to be a retired Chief Justice of the Court of Appeal. It might be somebody who'd been involved in the Consumers' Association of Canada. It could be somebody involved with FIPPA, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Association. There are lots of groups that you might agree would have somebody with something to say who'd be part of that ethics committee. Absent that, I think any reference to ethics committees makes me a little nervous.

As I've often said before, while I may have confidence in this minister of health, I don't know who's going to succeed him when he moves on to become Provincial Treasurer or whatever new lofty position awaits him. So that, Mr. Chairman, is frankly something of a concern.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Now the next item, amendment D. I understand the reason for it, because, absent this, we're just dealing with information, which is tough to build rules around, so now the requirement is that it's

information in a record. That makes realistic sense. I don't think I could fairly mount a lot of opposition around that.

11:40

We then get to item E, which is a little bit more problematic. This is an attempt, I think, to deal with one of the recommendations from the IPC. The IPC recommended that

sections 21(1) and 30 be revised to clearly prohibit a person from collecting or using personal health numbers in contravention of Bill 40.

I'm sorry. Actually, I think what this amendment does: this is the fifth bullet on page 4 of the IPC response. He says:

Sections 46 and 47 be revised to enable any custodian to refuse to disclose information for health systems purposes and to allow a custodian to request a review by the Commissioner.

What we've got here is a provision for a "privacy impact assessment" and then a requirement to "consider the comments of the Commissioner," but there's no obligation to do what the commissioner recommends. So that's problematic.

The other thing I draw to your attention, Mr. Chairman, is that there are two other specific recommendations made by the Privacy Commissioner that have not been touched in this amendment package. I am speaking to the amendment, but there may be some people who were under the impression after hearing the Member for Calgary-Lougheed that all of the specific recommendations from the Privacy Commissioner have been incorporated in this amendment package, and that's not the case.

The two obvious ones that have not been dealt with, Mr. Chairman. Firstly,

the disclosure log requirements under section 41 be expanded to apply to disclosures by other custodians under sections 39, 40, 46, and 47.

That has not been addressed, as I see it, in this amendment package.

The other outstanding recommendation from the Privacy Commissioner is that

sections 21(1) and 30 be revised to clearly prohibit a person from collecting or using personal health numbers in contravention of Bill 40, and that Part 5 be revised to prohibit a non-custodian from disclosing personal health numbers without authorization.

Now, some may say: well, what's the big deal with a personal health number? I think what's happened: there are a couple of developments going on around Canada and internationally around personal health numbers. The personal health number becomes the key. The personal health number is acquiring a whole new kind of significance and importance in terms of personal health information than has ever been the case before. That hasn't been addressed in the amendment package.

That last amendment, F in A1, is simply correcting a typo, and I have no issue with that.

So I have some concerns around section E in terms of whether it goes far enough, and then the two other recommendations from the IPC that weren't addressed here.

One of the other comments I want to make loops back to a question that was raised in question period last Thursday with the minister of health. It has to do with privacy impact assessments, and I just want to register a concern, Mr. Chairman. This amendment talks about another kind of privacy impact assessment, so what's happening is that our Privacy Commissioner, we discover, has been doing all kinds of privacy impact assessments for Wellnet. Wellnet is this program where the government announced, I think on June 18, 1997, that they were going to spend between \$200 million and \$300 million over the next five years – that's what the news release said – on health information management. All of it may not have been Wellnet, but I mean the point is that it's health information management. It was then about 1 and a half percent of the annual Alberta health budget, a huge program.

At the time, the concern was that Wellnet would be sort of marching ahead and we wouldn't have the rules in place because Bill 30 was withdrawn. So here we are two years later, and what we see is that there have been all of these programs that Wellnet has developed. They've been pilot tested, and now they've been rolled out. I read some news releases from Wellnet last Thursday that talked about moving from the pilot stage into full implementation in the fall of 1999 in 17 health regions.

The minister didn't get a chance to tell me – he might have told me last Thursday, didn't get a chance to – that many of them have been subject to privacy impact assessments. One of the questions, Mr. Chairman, is: in the absence of a piece of legislation that sets out what the rules ought to be, what's the threshold that the Information and Privacy Commissioner is using in terms of assessing those privacy impact assessments? Because of some other elements in that response from the Privacy Commissioner, I think there's some concern around that, so I wanted to raise that.

Now, one of the other issues here, just looping back to the ethics committee for a moment, is that – I made the point that I think we need some statutory underpinning for the ethics committee. I was looking through the comments that had been made the other day by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, who had tried to buttress the case made by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. It's not often we have a health minister and three MLAs all offering commentary and debate on the bill, but there were some comments that bear on the amendment that we're dealing with now, amendment A1.

One I'd just go back to. This was Bonnyville-Cold Lake, and he talked about ethics committees. He spoke on November 29 at page 2084 referring to sections 48 and 56, and he, I think, purported to put our minds at ease because there were these ethics committees, but for the reasons I'd mentioned earlier, that's not very satisfactory because of the absence of some legislative underpinning for that provision.

If you just bear with me for a minute, Mr. Chairman, I just want to make sure my comments are germane to the amendment we've got in front of us, A1.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

I'll go back to amendment A1. The difficulty, I think, is with item 2(b). This is the one that says: "to enable health information to be shared and accessed, where appropriate, to provide health services and to manage the health system."

I just go back to something that we learned early on with the health information steering committee. I think one of the rules with the steering committee is that what we learned was going to stay within the steering committee; in other words, that the information wasn't going to be published in later form. I want to make sure that I'm not violating the pact of confidence surrounding the work of the committee. So if the minister thinks I'm going too far, I don't want to take out comments that were made, but I want to relate one of the concerns that was heard. There was some focus group work done, and I know we talked about that here. The focus group work, in fact, was consistent with other kinds of information I've seen from when people have been surveyed. I'll talk about the other information, not the five focus groups that were done by Alberta Health.

11:50

People have a very high degree of comfort with information being shared for therapeutic purposes with their physician, with their specialist. They have a very high degree of confidence in medical research, which is interesting. There is a lot of recognition, I think,

of the excellent medical research that's done in Alberta. I think people are proud of that, and people are anxious for that to continue.

The polling suggests that there's a real problem when we get to section 2(b) in terms of managing the health system. I think there's a whole lot of issue and question around what information can be shared. The Canadian Medical Association privacy code, that was adopted in July or August of 1998, may have got it right. I see the minister frowning. I suspect he may not be a big fan of the CMA privacy code. What that privacy code does is say that you give up health information about yourself, Mr. Chairman, or about the Minister of Learning or anyone for a therapeutic purpose: we have a broken leg, or we've got a mental illness, and we want it diagnosed and treated.

Most of the information that health managers need is anonymized information. It's nonidentifying information. What we've done in this bill – and this is a general comment, but it relates to the amendment in front us. We've enormously expanded the secondary uses of that information.

I'll be back, Mr. Chairman, with some other observations.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to enter debate on the amendment, and I appreciate as well the government's response to my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo's request for a subamendment to make sure that confidentiality becomes part of the defined purposes of the act.

When I took a look at the amendment – and unfortunately my first exposure to the amendment was when it was circulated here in the House; I didn't have the benefit of the advance discussion that my colleague had – I wondered what exactly the purpose was of moving up the notion of privacy as a purpose of the act from the position it used to occupy in the listing to the top of the list other than perhaps just appearances. I'm wondering whether it's that same kind of notion of it, just for appearances, that is to lead us to conclude that in fact the government has seriously addressed all of the concerns – and I don't want to reiterate all of the concerns – that were raised by members of the Official Opposition, concerns that have been raised by members of the medical professions, concerns that have been raised by other health professionals regarding privacy.

I listened carefully to Calgary-Lougheed's explanation of all of the amendments, the six amendments, and I'm pleased that to the extent she shared with us the thinking behind the amendments, she put on the record that the government is in fact responsive to some of the concerns that have been enumerated. I just can't help but think that so much more could have been done. I'm wondering whether or not this is going to be like the bill that was known at the time as Bill 20, Mr. Chairman, which was the bill that formed the health regions in the province of Alberta a few years back. What happened with that bill is that when it was introduced, it was a few pages long. A couple of days later in debate in committee a telephone book size package of amendments was introduced. In fact, there were more amendments which took up more pages than the original bill. We've amended that legislation in subsequent legislation a number of times, at least two other times that I can think of, in this House. I saw the quizzical look coming from the minister of health when I said "a number of times." I wouldn't want to be responsible for an inaccuracy or an untruth in the Assembly.

Now we're faced with Bill 40, the Health Information Act, and we

see the first amendments. I can only assume that these are going to be the first amendments. I know full well that there are going to be other amendments coming from the Official Opposition, and if the third party ever catches on to this debate, maybe they'll introduce some amendments as well.

I'm wondering whether or not the Minister of Health and Wellness or his colleague from Calgary-Lougheed would be in a position to share with us now what they're holding back. I know that the government has received exactly if not more of the same input that we've received. Those individuals and groups and organizations which are opposed to Bill 40 in its present form have not been shy about their opposition. In fact, they've been very vocal, and they are continuing to be vocal.

We know full well that these few amendments don't fully address that whole range of concerns. I take the government at its word when it says that it wants to make this bill the best it can be. I understand there are some legitimate research needs, some legitimate health information sharing needs, but those needs certainly have to be secondary to the need to protect privacy and confidentiality.

Given that we've all received the input, that we've all received these suggestions, that we've all received the concerns and the complaints, why is it that we've seen, in essence, such a skimpy response? Why is there not a more fulsome response, particularly to the AMA and some of the other groups that have voiced their concerns? I would hate to see this debate prolonged a moment longer than it needs to be. That suggests that if there are going to be other amendments forthcoming . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, I hesitate to interrupt you, but we do have to make a report according to Standing Order 60.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 40. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

12:00

MR. HANCOCK: In light of the hour and in light of the fantastic work we've done this evening, might we all agree to go home and come back tomorrow at 1:30?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: It being slightly past midnight, the hon. Government House Leader has moved that the Assembly do now adjourn and that we reconvene at 1:30 this afternoon.

[At 12:01 a.m. on Wednesday the Assembly adjourned to 1:30 p.m.]

