

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, February 29, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/02/29

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I would call the committee to order.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

Community Development

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I understand that at 5:30 we were still in discussion on the estimates for Community Development. I would move that we adjourn debate on those estimates.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: We are about to go into the two subcommittees, A and B, tonight, and A will go upstairs to room 512, where *Hansard* is awaiting you. So we invite those members of that committee to please go up there under the chairmanship of the Member for Lacombe-Stettler. We'll wait a moment and then we'll commence ourselves.

[The committee met as subcommittees A and B from 8:01 p.m. to 10 p.m.]

MR. SEVERTSON: Mr. Chairman, subcommittee A of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Gaming, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? So ordered.

MRS. LAING: Mr. Chairman, subcommittee B of the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

THE CHAIRMAN: Does the committee concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report progress on the estimates of International and Intergovernmental Relations, Gaming, and Community Development.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Gaming, subcommittee A, and the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations, subcommittee B, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again. The Committee of Supply has also had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Community Development, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

I would also like to table copies of all documents tabled in the Committee of Supply 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: Second Reading

Bill 9

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased on behalf of the Provincial Treasurer to move second reading of Bill 9, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, we're in the process now of considering the estimates under the budget for this new year commencing April 1. In order to ensure that there's appropriate time for due analysis and critique of budget and supply, it's necessary to bring in an interim supply act to ensure that the good programs of this government can be continued without interruption and with concern for any of the employees of government, who wish to and need to be paid, and in order to carry on in a seamless way the operations of government. Therefore, in the tradition of this Assembly when estimates are dealt with during the month of March with the possibility of us continuing into April before supply is finally voted, it is necessary to bring forward an interim supply bill.

In Bill 9 we're asking the Legislative Assembly to vote \$13,953,000 for the operation of the Legislative Assembly and \$2,750,403,000 for the operation of the government in addition to nonbudgetary disbursements and the lottery fund payments as noted and printed in the bill. I won't go into detail as to the sums set out for each department. It is sufficient to say, Mr. Speaker, that again in order to provide for the seamless operation of government while we continue the thorough debate of the estimates over the course of this next month, it would be in order for the House to vote interim supply.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 9 seeks the authority for granting interim supply. As the Government House Leader pointed out, it is because we're at that point in the budget process where if we don't give the government some money, it might not be able to pay its bills. It's probably destined that Bill 9 is going to pass, but it can't pass without some comment on the process.

We're talking about nearly \$3 billion in this bill, Mr. Speaker: \$14

million, give or take a few dollars, in operating expenses and capital investment for the Assembly; \$2.75 billion in operating and capital for government ministries; another \$28 million and change in nonbudgetary disbursements; and \$158 million in payments to be made through the lottery fund.

Now, all of this money, this some 3 billion dollars, we're being asked to give the authority to spend in the next perhaps 60 days. There are 28 days provided the Assembly to discuss and debate the main estimates, Mr. Speaker, and if the Gaming estimates debate is any indication of how the rest of estimates debates are going to go, it'll be 28 days of questions posed and concerns raised and 28 days without answers and 28 days of rather offhanded responses, certainly nothing that passes for debate in a democratic system.

In any case, it's difficult to support an interim supply request at this time because we don't really know how the money spent will match the performance measures in the current business plans or in the proposed business plans. Keep in mind that the new business plans, of course, haven't been passed yet. Mr. Speaker, we don't know, for example, what outcomes and performance criteria are expected for this money for such issues as reducing waiting lists in the public health care system, opening up new hospital beds, reducing the waiting time for long-term care beds, reducing the pupil/teacher ratio, reducing the reliance on parent and student fundraising in our public schools, reducing classroom size, and improving the lives of Alberta's vulnerable citizens, whether they be those with mental health concerns, seniors, or children who are living with hunger and poverty.

Mr. Speaker, there have been many examples of where this government has been called to account for its lack of budget management. One of the areas that I'd like to bring to the Assembly's attention is the amount of unbudgeted spending brought in through supplementary supply. Now, I know sometimes it's easy to mistake the players without a score card here, because you've got interim supply and you have supply. With the amount of supplementary supply bills that this Assembly has had to deal with under the current Provincial Treasurer's watch – I'm tempted to say that it's 33 months and counting, but that would be wrong. I think it's 33 months and ending. Anyway, under this current Provincial Treasurer's watch we've seen no fewer than seven supplementary supply bills and then of course interim supply bills in every budget cycle as well, and then we have all the appropriation bills.

MR. HANCOCK: It used to be done by special warrant.

MR. SAPERS: Now, Mr. Speaker, I know it's not appropriate for me to respond to interjections made from another member when they're not officially recognized, but I can't help but comment on the fact that the Government House Leader and Minister of Justice for all of Alberta just said: well, we used to do it by special warrant. I don't know whether he's proud of that and whether that was a plea to go back to the old ways or not. You know, it's certainly sort of like picking which torture you like best. Do you want the electric prod, or do you want to be beaten with a chain?

10:10

The fact is that Alberta taxpayers can't really rely on the budget process very much, because we see all this unbudgeted spending and all of these last-minute requests for new appropriation. In fact, the Treasurer has now presided over \$2.9 billion worth of unbudgeted spending in his 33 short months as Treasurer. So some may say that his reign of error is about to end.

Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Treasurer in previous times – and of course he's been much maligned. In this particular case let me say

that he brought in only six supplementary supply bills during his entire four-year tenure as Treasurer, for a paltry \$611 million. It pales in comparison to the nearly \$3 billion that we've been faced with by this Treasurer. The honourable but much lamented Dick Johnston during his seven years as Provincial Treasurer brought in \$2.1 billion in unbudgeted spending, but as I say, he took seven years to do that, more than twice as long as the current Treasurer.

Now, one of the problems with this government's performance has been their improper management of the budget and the budget process. I think it's clear to all Albertans now that the government wasn't able to manage the cuts properly, particularly in health care and education, and of course they're now scrambling to put money back into those programs. They want to be congratulated for that, but that's kind of like thanking somebody for cleaning up after they smash your windows.

They're not really effectively managing this reinvestment either, Mr. Speaker. I would have expected some more careful consideration of the budget cycle and timing so that we wouldn't be faced with such unbudgeted spending and such last-minute requests. Responsible fiscal management would require the establishment of several mechanisms within the budgeting process that not only protect the fiscal bottom line but also sustain investments in our society that contribute to health and to wellness and to a fiscal and social balance. It's too bad that in this regard the government's actions don't really match their words.

Let me for a minute just say, Mr. Speaker, that that's not just my sense of the way things are but in fact the Auditor General's sense of the way things are as well. I can quote from the Auditor General where he says in his last report:

In our review of the Ministry business plans in Budget 99, we found that over half the Ministries had at least one goal that did not have a performance measure associated with it. Overall, 24% of all the goals in Ministry business plans did not have a performance measure. In addition, in many business plans where performance measures were included, the linkage between the goals and the performance measures was not apparent.

Mr. Speaker, particularly troubling is that last phrase, that "the linkage between the goals and the performance measures was not apparent." So you have a government that's priding itself on being accountable, yet the mechanisms that they use to pin those claims on, these business plans and performance measures, seem to be not only inadequate but perhaps even misleading in that there isn't an apparent relationship between what they say, what they do, and what they've said that they've done.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General also said in his last report:

In Budget 99, core businesses are still defined variously in terms of goals, strategies, activities, or performance criteria. Strategies are sometimes defined as desired results rather than broad actions to achieve them. Goals are sometimes defined in terms of activities rather than end results.

So I say again that we'd like to get the story straight from this government before we can have any faith in their ability to both budget and be accountable for their budgetary decisions.

The Auditor General makes some other rather damning observations as well. He says, for example, that some performance measures are not measured on an annual basis. He comments that "few business plans discuss external factors that can effect performance." He also notes that

in Ministry business plans, output and outcome measures are not always well defined, measurable, and clearly related to core business goals.

You know, if this was a group of managers that you or I were employing in our business, Mr. Speaker, I think with this kind of an audit we'd have to fire them. We certainly wouldn't be able to trust

them, and if we allowed them back into the office and gave them the keys to the piggy bank again, I think we'd be watching them with every means of surveillance available.

It's quite clear that we need fundamental changes to the budget management process in Alberta in order to create certainty, predictability, stability, and sustainability for our local authorities, including municipalities, children's services authorities, school boards, and health authorities. Over the years Alberta Liberals have proposed a number of elements to improve the credibility and stability of the budget planning process, to sustain our core programs in health care, education, and other core services, and to ensure that there is a fiscal and human balance in both good times and bad. Some of these elements include amendments to require the government to table monthly budget updates so that all Albertans know where they stand on a regular basis, requiring an independent assessment of provincial revenues by an independent source, and comparing these forecasts with those of Alberta Treasury. These forecasts would then have to be tabled in the budget in subsequent monthly, not quarterly but monthly, budget updates.

On this point, Mr. Speaker, I'll say that I am flattered that the Provincial Treasurer now includes the Alberta Liberal caucus as one of those expert groups in his quarterly updates. I don't know whether you've had a chance to read the press releases, but when the Provincial Treasurer does his quarterly updates now, he actually indicates the Alberta Liberal forecasts and projections in terms of several fiscal and economic indicators to show where we stack up compared to all of the other experts that the province relies on. I know that the Provincial Treasurer has been relying on the advice that comes from this caucus, and it's just nice to see that publicly acknowledged in his press releases.

Mr. Speaker, establishing ministry performance measures and benchmarks for a variance between budgeted and actual revenues would certainly go a long way to quelling the suspicion I have that the government is not terribly serious about this kind of budget criteria, and it wouldn't even be new and uncharted territory if the government wanted to go down that path. All they have to do is look at the state of Minnesota's finance department. Of course I've given the Treasurer the references that he needs to see how other jurisdictions are able to accomplish this very important accountability measure.

In addition, Alberta Liberals have said that it should be required in the budget for the preparation of a fiscal strategy report with 10-year trends for major fiscal and economic indicators. Now, the federal government is currently using a five-year planning horizon, which still exceeds the province's three-year planning horizon. It was just recently that we saw this Provincial Treasurer wagging his finger and saying that the feds ought to follow Alberta's lead. Well, in this particular case I think it would be nice if the province of Alberta followed the leadership of the federal government and projected a planning forecast with a reasonably long horizon so that people could make their own determinations about whether the government is playing some kind of shell game with revenue and expenditure projections.

There are some other issues as well, Mr. Speaker. For example, the establishment of a fiscal stabilization fund, which would ensure that strategic investments undertaken in our health care and education systems are sustainable over the long term. This would help us deal with the volatility of our economy, and it would provide revenues to guide budgetary decisions or priorities, particularly on the program side of the ledger. The fiscal stabilization fund, which we've talked about at length in this Assembly, would introduce greater stability and certainty into the budget process in Alberta and allow us to sustain our core social programs, which are the backbone for our competitiveness.

Mr. Speaker, the fiscal stabilization fund would be a real entity. It wouldn't be this cushion that's built into the budget on this 3 percent or 3 and a half percent formula that they use now. It was said once in this Assembly that this Provincial Treasurer builds so many cushions into his budget it reminded him of a pool table in the St. Louis Hotel. I don't know whether all of those cushions being built in are a reasonable and prudent way of doing budgeting, but I do know this. In any business you want to try to accommodate downturns in revenue, and the way you can do that is by setting aside a protected fund with very strict guidelines around allocations. That's what a fiscal stabilization fund would be.

Now, on this issue of sustainability and stability, which I say are key to effective spending and tax reform, I'd like to say that Alberta Liberals have been calling for the establishment of a fund within the budget process itself. The stabilization fund would allow spending and revenue reduction commitments made, for example, under the Fiscal Responsibility Act to be sustained over the course of the entire fiscal plan and not just be changed by another act of the Legislature when it became politically expedient to do so. We already saw that when this government says we're going to respect the law, they mean only when it's convenient, Mr. Speaker. What this government does is variously either challenge something in the Supreme Court, try to bring in a bill with a notwithstanding clause, or just rewrite the law at whim. We've seen examples of all of that in recent times.

10:20

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that I'm not questioning the need for the expenditures that are enumerated in Bill 9. What we question is a Treasurer who doesn't have the budget management and planning systems in place to anticipate at the start of the budget year what will be needed at the end of the budget year. We would never want to accuse this Treasurer or this government of playing politics with revenues and expenditures. That would be an easy and cheap shot, that I won't take, but remember that this is a government that talks about outcomes, yet it has missed more than 200 of its own outcome measures. So words and deeds. [interjections] I hear the taunts: "Out of how many?" and "Aim high."

Well, my question rhetorically back to those members, Mr. Speaker, would be: which ones should Albertans take seriously? Which ones of the performance measures should we take seriously and which ones are we saying to Albertans: "Oh well, we're only putting that in place because we think it looks good. It's for the optics."? Remember, so many issues of this government are simply a matter of optics and a communications plan.

Actually, you know, it surprises me that they're still continuing to say as a government that the reason Albertans don't like their private health care initiative is because it's a communications problem. Of course, those of us who have been listening to our constituents know that's not the case at all. It's because Albertans know exactly what this government is trying to do, and they don't want any part of it.

Mr. Speaker, what I'll say about Bill 9 – I'll finish off where I started. This bill will no doubt pass and money will be spent and Albertans won't really be any the wiser for how it was spent. We'll have yet another example of this government's inability to properly manage within the budget cycle. That distresses me, because while it may be insignificant to this government that they're wanting us to commit nearly \$3 billion at this point in time, it's not insignificant to me. It's not insignificant to the neighbours and constituents of mine who just over this last weekend have filled out their tax forms and have been forced to submit to this government the .5 percent flat tax, for example, which was brought in as a deficit elimination tax. It's really quite galling to sit there and fill out on your form that you have to send in another \$100 or \$200 or \$300 to the provincial

government for deficit elimination when the government is bragging about its multibillion dollar surplus.

One specific question that I will ask and I would hope will be addressed at some point in the debate on Bill 9 is why it is that some government departments are asking for as little as 12 percent of their budget on an annual basis in this interim supply vote, but other departments are asking for as much as 46 percent. I note that the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations is with us in the Chamber, and her department in particular, Mr. Speaker, is asking for 46 percent of its budget allocation in this interim supply bill, nearly half a year's allocation, yet the Legislative Assembly request is only for 12 percent. While we're looking at that variance of between 12 and 46 percent, I'll note that the request period covers about 18 or 19 percent of the year on an annual basis. So you would expect that departments such as the Department of Community Development, which is only asking for 19 percent, would be really the benchmark, that it would make sense that you'd be looking for about 19 percent of your budget if you're looking at about 19 percent of the fiscal year.

So with those very few comments and concerns, Mr. Speaker, I'll pass the torch to another member of the Assembly.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

Community Development *(continued)*

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I'll just take a few moments to address one topic at this time, the topic of seniors, and hopefully respond to some of the concerns raised. I understand the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre would like an opportunity to voice some more questions, which I'll be very pleased to give to her.

What I'd like to say, first of all, is that the accusations against my ministry of being somehow not compassionate with respect to its dealings with seniors I think are somewhat unfounded and unfair. As a matter of fact, I'd like to read a letter that I just happened to sign a few moments ago to a senior, whom I will through respect not name here, whose concern was brought to me via one of the member's colleagues. It goes on to say:

On January 24, 2000 . . . MLA for [such a place], contacted me on your behalf about your Alberta Seniors Benefit.

Each year, Alberta Seniors Benefit sends seniors a letter detailing the benefits they are eligible to receive and the information on which their eligibility is based. In these letters, seniors are asked to provide an update on any changes to this information. Changes to the benefits are then made retroactive to the date the most recent letter was sent out.

Due to the change in your address, it is possible you did not receive these letters since your move in April 1996. Therefore, you may not have known of the need to provide Alberta Seniors Benefit with updated information on your place of residence. On this basis, Alberta Seniors Benefit has agreed to provide you with benefits retroactive to May 1996.

You can expect to have these retroactive benefits included with your March 2000 payment from Alberta Seniors Benefit.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to help you.

And that's signed by myself as minister.

That, Mr. Chairman, is certainly not the actions of a department or a minister of a government who does not have compassion for seniors. To give retroactivity on a program for four years I think is the right thing to do and probably quite unheard of.

With respect to some of the concerns on the special-needs program, I think it should be pointed out that the special-needs program is intended for that very purpose, and that is to help with things like shelter. I went through that in my talks earlier. We found – and I was a part of this decision – that perhaps it would be more prudent and better not to get into a replacement policy, if you will. Hence we shortened up the desire or the request, shall we say, for appliances. However, I must point out that whether it be a freezer, a stove, a washing machine, or whatever, we treat each case on an individual basis. Therefore if, as the member pointed out, there were a need and a desire for a particular senior to have a freezer, for example, that would accommodate, say, a person living in the country who has a large garden – although we don't condone outright applications from everybody for a freezer, if there were a need shown that that freezer would in fact help the living standard of that particular senior, we would grant it. If you have any of those particular situations, hon. member, I'd be more than willing and pleased if you would have them identify that to the staff at the department, who are very good at looking into these things. We certainly want to do through the program whatever we can within reason to assist these people and make their lives a little easier.

10:30

Now, there's been much discussion with respect to the Alberta seniors' benefit program. I'd like to set the record straight on how we compare with other provinces, because I think this would put what we're trying to do into a bit of perspective. For example, in income level for eligibility Alberta is the highest in Canada, the highest by a significant margin. I'll just go through what it is on a per couple basis. For example, Alberta seniors benefit consideration starts for couples in Alberta at less than \$27,385 as income, B.C. is \$19,000, Saskatchewan \$19,000, Manitoba \$18,500, Ontario \$19,600. Northwest Territories, the closest one, is \$25,400. Yukon is roughly \$20,000. Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland: no program. Keep in mind that this is the situation that we have in a province that has the best tax regime in the country. So you have the best standard of living and the highest cutoff levels before the program is implemented.

If you look at the amount of support, Alberta also has – and I won't go through it all – the highest maximum monthly eligibility at \$292 per month for a couple compared to \$121 in B.C., \$145 in Saskatchewan, and so on. Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland all have no program.

We could go on to health care premium subsidies. Only British Columbia and Alberta charge premiums, and we both do subsidies there, so that's equal up.

Special needs, one that we were just talking about. We have up to \$5,000 a year for seniors who qualify. They would have to be on Alberta seniors' benefit to even be considered for qualification. Northwest Territories has additional assistance for seniors who are on social assistance, so it would be a similar kind of thing, and the Yukon has low-interest home repair loans. British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland: no program.

Dental, which is again one of the ones that we even help out under special needs. Again, Alberta, Northwest Territories, Yukon are the only ones that have some description of a program. All the other provinces have no program.

Optical. We have roughly \$93 every three years for eyeglasses,

similar to Manitoba. Northwest Territories, for example, has a pair of eyeglasses every two years, and in Yukon the lenses every two years with 50 bucks for frames. Again B.C., Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland: no program.

I'll leave it at that. There are a few others that I could go through, but I think I just made the point quite clearly – if the hon. member would like that information at some point, I'd be pleased to forward it – that in Alberta not only are we very generous in our interpretation of the rules to ensure that the seniors who are eligible receive retroactively even in some cases what they are entitled to, but we have the best seniors' benefit program for needy seniors in all of Canada. I think that is something that we can all on both side of the Assembly be very, very proud of.

As I indicate in my discussions with senior's groups, if you know of seniors who are in need, for heaven's sake, please put them in touch with people in the department, who I feel do a very, very fine job of dealing with this particular element of our society.

With that, I'll give up my place and let the member ask some more questions.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm keen to put more questions before the department. I'll just pick up where I left off. One of the strategies being put forward this year is around this interministry committee dealing with implementing the legislation affecting seniors and investigating protection for persons in care. I was asking about whether that would be including developing standards of care, and I mentioned the FAIRE group at the same time.

I was also asking about standards and criteria for care around the day homes and the boardinghouse type of homes and whether there'd be any legislation coming in this year to regulate the provision of services there. I hope there is, because that is an area where we really need to see some kind of regulation and standards of care.

I find the minister's point that the special-needs benefit program is flexible and that indeed if a senior were in need of one of these appliances that has now been restricted – I appreciate that. I certainly know that the staff in the department are excellent and work very hard, and it certainly wasn't me who was indicating that they don't have compassion. My question is: how are they supposed to know this? As much as I'd like to believe that every person duly reviews and scours the *Hansard* from every debate, I don't think it's true. So how are people supposed to know that these exceptions could be made or that it is still worth while asking for this if indeed they've gotten a slip of paper that says: you can't ask for it anymore?

I guess I have a problem with the idea that seniors need to be coming to their MLAs in order to be able to get full access to everything that's available in these programs. Of course, we're all here to serve our constituents, but I don't think it's appropriate that there's a situation where you have to know the tricks and be able to get through to the right people to access points. I certainly agree with the minister about the compassion and excellent work done by the people in the program.

I note that there's a transfer of moneys to Alberta Health for payment of health care premiums. I'm sorry I don't have the vote number for you. It's probably under vote 4. I'm wondering if there is an increase in this payment reflected in this budget and, if so, by how much. In other words, are there more people qualifying for this subsidy of full or partial payment of health care premiums? We certainly have seen the demand under the special-needs benefit

increasing. Are we also seeing this increase under the section of Alberta senior's benefit that allows for the full or partial payment of health care premiums?

The lodge assistance grant. I know that this is an issue that the minister is familiar with, but it's one that's causing some concern. I've heard about it particularly in relation to Edmonton. One figure that I've heard is that Edmonton is losing \$360,000 a year because the provincial funding for the senior citizens' lodges, I think it could be fairly said, discriminates against the larger cities. The funding formula that's in place right now is that the province will pay \$3.60 per resident per day for those in the larger centres. The exceptions there are Calgary and Lethbridge, but for all of the other larger centres in the province that holds.

10:40

Now, the smaller and usually the rural lodges get \$4.80 per person per day. I think this was developed with the idea that there were economies of scale for the larger lodges, and that may well be true, but we have larger organizations that are running these, and there is a definite discrimination factor here. I think it's affecting our ability certainly in Edmonton to be able to provide new facilities. I'm aware that the mayor from the city of Edmonton has contacted the minister asking for a correction in this inequity.

I think part of the issue around this is that we have more seniors in lodge-type care who are in fact older and more frail than perhaps the program originally envisioned, and therefore the lodges are having to provide care beyond what was originally expected of them. I'm asking whether there's been consideration in this budget year to increasing that allotment. If not, then is there any special consideration to be given to the Greater Edmonton Foundation: Housing for Seniors in the assistance they're looking for specific to a couple of the lodges that they're attempting to renovate or rebuild? There's quite a bit of material available on that. If the minister is in need of any of it or wants copies, I'm happy to help with that and provide it to him.

Moving on, I'm wondering if the minister can make a commitment as to when the government will be tabling their response to the impact of the aging population study. I know that he mentioned it in his opening remarks. I'm just looking for a specific date when we might expect a response from the government on that.

Before we leave seniors' issues, in a quick literature review of the issues that are being raised in the paper, in different reports and analyses that are being done, just a couple of things that I want to point out here. Alberta has had higher inflation than, I think, the rest of the country for a given period of time which was in the last year. That certainly affects seniors or anyone, in fact, on a fixed income. Things are costing more, and it's eating into their savings.

There are also a couple of times now when I've seen concerns raised around undernourishment of seniors. I'll very quickly refer back to the point I was making about funding for seniors' centres, in that often there is a hot lunch program or a once a week program that involves food and nutrition information or perhaps eating together, which at the very least is getting seniors out and getting at least one good meal into them, or perhaps teaching them better the skills and information they need on how to shop and cook for themselves. I'm really saddened to hear that there are seniors who have that kind of undernourishment if they can afford it. Then, of course, as we know, there are seniors who are struggling, particularly with the rent payments that we're looking at right now, and are using food money to pay for their rent and therefore are not eating properly.

We have some instances – and I have seen this in our office in Edmonton-Centre. Given the hot rental market, seniors are being asked to leave, with the appropriate notification I'm quick to add, to

vacate apartments that are currently under a subsidy program. So they're uprooted, have to leave where they're living, and the apartments are not offered again at the subsidized rate, and that's expensive. As anyone here that's ever moved knows, even if you're going to somewhere not that far away, you've still got moving costs for the furniture plus any days you may be in between places and a number of other costs that are incurred there.

We've had a natural gas hike here in the last year, and that has certainly affected seniors. I'm sure we've all heard about that. I notice that Telus phone rates have gone up I think by \$2 and then by another \$2, and I think they just went up another \$3 in January. Again, for someone on a fixed income that's significant money.

I do have a motion before the Assembly, Motion 519, which is asking that the costs of the telephone be included in the 30 percent of income that's paid by seniors for rent and utilities in subsidized apartments, because we've got basic phone rates that are now in the \$23 to \$25 range. When that's above and beyond what they're paying, this is getting to be a significant cost, and telephones are not an option for seniors. The medic alert help lines work through the phone lines, so you've got to have a phone to have one of those "I've fallen and I can't get up" medic alert systems. As well, it's an isolation-breaking factor. People keep in touch with their family and friends that way.

I have spoken before about the number of user fees which affect seniors. User fees are a regressive tax. Everybody pays for the service no matter what their income is, and I've had a number of seniors talk to me about that.

I also note that there was a Calgary regional health authority study on regional health in that area which turned up that one-quarter of their seniors, 25 percent, didn't have the money to eat properly, and I had referred to that earlier.

I also note that the cable TV rates have gone up. When I first heard this, you know, I viewed cable TV as an entertainment expense, and it was my choice as to whether I had it or not, and should we really be feeling sorry for people that couldn't have cable TV? But I have been educated in that. In fact, for anyone living in my constituency and I'm sure in a number of other ones, if you want to have any kind of television reception, you have to have cable. In downtown Edmonton you can't get any kind of reception, unless you're really fond of that sort of three-ghosting appearance on your television set, and you might get one station, but it's a pretty interesting thing to try and watch. It's been shown to me that really cable TV is pretty important to a lot of seniors. It's how they connect. It keeps their minds alert and active. It gives them some connection with the outside world when watching the news. Perhaps they even watch question period on Access television. That would be great. Nonetheless, there's another cost that's gone up by 6 percent.

Just very quickly there are a number of things that have gone up for seniors in the last year.

Just in closing on the seniors – although I do hope to get back to it – has the government considered the suggestion put forward by the Liberals of abolishing the health care premiums? As the minister pointed out, there are only two provinces that charge them. Certainly, if we were looking for a way to put money back in the pockets of seniors, there's a very effective way to do it, and it's certainly much needed when we look at all the other costs that have increased in their daily budgets.

[Mrs. Laing in the chair]

Now, moving on, tracking the FTEs in the department is an exercise in deciphering which, I will admit, is beyond me. They are

now appearing as a straight one line. I would ask the minister for a breakdown of FTEs by each vote number and subvote number. I think we've got a total of six votes, and in some of the categories I think there are up to another six subcategories. I'd like to see exactly how those FTEs break down and also ask if the minister can supply an accounting of the changes in staffing for each area from last year to this year. One of things I've noted is that staff have been transferred around, and again I have not been able to track this through the documentation that's provided in the budget process. Sometimes I can find it in the public accounts process, but mostly it's just knowing people in a department and knowing where they came from and where they went to. I'd like to be able to get something on paper with that, so if the minister could be so kind.

10:50

Thirdly in that category, if I can get a comparison – and I know this is difficult because the department has been changed and sort of folded into itself and folded into itself quite a bit – on the FTEs as close as you can get with the vote numbers, comparing from, say, '93-94 to the year that we're in, '99-2000, that would be helpful. I'm asking if pension liabilities are reflected anywhere in the budget. Any anticipation of retirements?

Now, I'd like to move on to a couple of other issues. The performing arts stabilization fund. The government's commitment to that fund was to have been completed in the current fiscal year, '99-2000. I'm looking for confirmation that that indeed did happen and asking if there is any additional moneys going into the fund in the budget year under consideration, 2000-2001. If there is a new commitment, could we please get a description of that and copies of the agreement that's been made to put further money into that fund?

The Western Heritage Centre, which appears under vote 3.0.4. or 3.0.6. It's not quite clear in there where it would come. Now, I notice in the public accounts that despite previous ministers being on record saying that the government would not be supplying any additional funding to this organization, in fact in '98-99 Treasury did grant an additional \$200,000 to the Western Heritage Centre. So I'm asking: what is the commitment to the Western Heritage Centre in this budget that we have under consideration? Was this figure included in the figures that I see before me? It keeps mentioning 18 of the historic sites, and the minister used the same 18 figure. Is the Western Heritage Centre now one of those 18? I don't think it is. So where is the money coming from to undertake the costs that have now been incurred by the government, and what, if any, other commitment has been reduced to offset that? If, indeed, there was an offset, what is it, and if not, does this mean that we can be expecting a supplementary supply request from the department before the end of the year? I'd also like a description of the operations of the restricted fund in the Western Heritage Centre fund. That would be helpful.

Oh, dear, I'm going to have to continue on once I take a little break here. I've got so much more to get through. No, I've got another minute. I'm going to use it.

Starting in on arts and culture then. I note that the goal and strategy is to achieve full participation in the cultural life of Alberta. As I have many times before, I'm of course advocating for government support and leadership for support of arts and culture in Alberta, and no matter how the numbers are presented, the truth is that the money in the arts and culture has remained stagnant since the late '80s. Certainly to anyone that's out there talking to the groups, the amount of money they're receiving has not increased. As I explained it last year, I think the pie is the same size and the pieces are getting cut smaller. Certainly, we've had professional staff that have been moved out of the branch, and I think that

expertise is lost to the organization and lost to the public generally. We've had new projects brought into the portfolio and a bit of money came with them, and then that gets touted as an increase in the budget, but it isn't. That was money that came tagged to a specific project.

I'll make the point again that I see tourism and economic development and in some cases games who love to use the photos of the thousands of happy people at the Folk Festival or the Fringe or the Calgary Children's Festival or the Blueberry Bluegrass Festival or whatever, but I don't see any accompanying money to support this fine programming and these exciting performances that draw people in and makes for the great photo op which is then used by these groups.

I think I've reached the end of my time. I know the minister wants to say a few words, and then I'll be happy to get up and continue with my questions. Thank you very much.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I again will keep my comments relatively brief with the obligation that we'll answer most, if not all, of your questions later.

A couple of points I want to make. You have to appreciate that with respect to seniors' premiums some 130,000 seniors either pay little or no premium because they're on the seniors' benefit program. So that's one chunk there. They don't pay it. [interjection] The others, you have an interesting point. I'm sure that at some point we will be looking at this option also, but I will not make a commitment one way or the other, because quite frankly I can't.

You raised the Western Heritage Centre the other day in question period, and I thought I had made it clear, but I'll explain it again. We now own the building. The people look after the programming, so there is no money allocated in this budget for the Western Heritage Centre, period. The operation, the maintenance of the building is in the infrastructure budget, as it is with all the other facilities. You are correct. This is not one of the 18 facilities I'm referring to. So there is no skimming off of any kind of dollars to facilitate this particular group, and the programming is totally on their own hook. I'm sure it's going to get better as we go on, and it is excellent at this point in time also.

As much as I would like to, I will not commit to giving you the breakdown that you requested for the full-time equivalents going back to '92 or '93. That would be such an exercise in futility and research, if you will, for people on my staff that I don't feel it's warranted. However, I will give you, if you want, current ones by department within reason.

Just to give you an idea of what's happened. For example, we are getting five more in the human rights and citizenship division, working at the ground level to try to bring down the backlog there, which we are doing, as I understand, in that area, probably, again, the best in Canada for a time frame for getting the complaints turned around, and we want to, hopefully within the next reasonable period of time, get that shorter yet. So those are five new ones in that area.

We've got two people in sport and recreation volunteer services to meet a demand there, four in the cultural facilities and historical resources division, one in the cultural facilities for planning, and one in the housing services communication staff. As you can appreciate, seniors' housing, which we inherited as a ministry, brought in some 34 new bodies and special purpose housing, another 62 bodies, for some 96 more. I believe those numbers are quite accurate there, for a total in the ministry of 700 and some odd full-time equivalents, so a little over 700. To go back and go to year-to-year changes, I'm not prepared to do that, not that we're hiding anything. It's just simply an exercise that I think isn't really warranted.

You had comments on the lodge assistance grant. When that was brought forward, it was accepted universally by all as a good way, with the idea being that the operators in the major centres such as Edmonton and Calgary – and I believe Lethbridge is the third one that is affected by the lower rate. The understanding at the time it was brought in was that the economies of scale, for example the Greater Edmonton Foundation – I don't know off the top of my head, but they've got a considerable number of units. The feeling was that they could operate at a much lower rate of support, if you will, than the smaller lodges outside. That's why it was done. Are we reviewing it? Yes. Will it be changed? I don't know.

One of the concerns that we have is that this is operating dollars, and they have gone into lodge expansion programs with support through Infrastructure and some additions on their own. Part of the problem is that they're carrying mortgages, and that's being a squeeze which we have to look at. But I will not commit to changing anything in terms of the differences. I don't feel it's discrimination. I don't feel it's unfair. However, I do feel it warrants a review, and that's all I'll commit to, is looking at it, and I think you would be quite satisfied with that.

With respect to impact on aging. When am I going to respond to it? That report hasn't come to me yet, so it will be at some time after, and that's part B of a bigger report. Part A came out earlier in the year, and we will be looking at that in conjunction with other reports. As you can appreciate, we've had a couple of social housing ones, homeless reports. The Broda report was a very good one. Looking at the policies as they pertain to any particular segment of society we're dealing with, we have to look at them in a total and complete context instead of just factoring out one or the other. What I can assure you, however, is that when that report is submitted, it will be made available very quickly so that people who are interested will certainly know the content of it, and then where it goes from there remains to be seen.

11:00

Your observations on seniors' centres, especially the one in the General hospital, I'm cognizant of and, quite frankly, sympathetic. We are trying to somehow get that rent problem addressed. I don't know if we'll be able to or not; it's outside my jurisdiction. But I do agree with you that the seniors' centres are a very good operation. How we could or whether we should get funding to them I don't know. You may or may not be aware that over the years across the province there have been considerable CFEP dollars going into funding a lot of these centres in terms of the capital, especially in smaller communities. Although I'd like to, I can't commit and say that there's going to be an operating dollar going in there, but I do agree with you that they do a very, very good service to the seniors of the province overall.

Some of them operate – I can give you an example. For example, the Seba Beach seniors' centre actually has an operation that turns a surplus, which they give to charity throughout the area, without any kind of financial assistance from any level of government, period. They run a very successful thrift store. At some point if you're interested I can put you in contact with the people there to just see how they do it, and you can ask for yourself firsthand. That is one situation. It is not necessarily something that can happen right across the province. They're doing a very good thing there, and they're quite unique. I happen to know them on a very, very personal level, and I have nothing but respect for that particular group from Seba Beach. Like I say, they don't take any kinds of rent, nothing, and they do help out in the community quite generously.

With respect to seniors you had some reference to: how do they

know what they're eligible for? I guess the best thing I can say to you is that obviously people on the staff are very, very, very good at dealing with them. In terms of conversations or whatever, in terms of dealing with their applications, they're pretty sharp at picking out if they may or may not need it. I would hope that the word spreads, and certainly we, through our program, if we find it necessary could go down the path of letting them know that in fact there are some variations. They're quite aware of it, quite frankly.

I don't really appreciate the comment made: how do they get to know if not through an MLA? I think that was a rather unfair, underhanded, and inappropriate comment because, quite simply, on special needs we get some 6,000 people, and the MLAs would be swamped overboard. All I'm saying to you is that there's a senior who went to one of your colleagues for assistance, and if a senior can't go to an MLA for assistance – and this was from across, if you will, one of your colleagues, not one of mine. I read you the letter of what we did for him just to give you an example that we're very open to access. I don't care where it comes from. If we see a senior in need who qualifies, we help, period.

That's something I want to encourage more, and it's not a political process in any way, shape, or form. I have a lot of confidence in all my colleagues in the House on both sides that when it comes to issues such as seniors, those are brought forward in good faith and not with political brownie points in mind, and I treat them accordingly. I think MLAs on a lot of issues, as you well know, being a seasoned veteran, are quite familiar that you can in fact do a lot of good for a lot of people in a lot of areas by helping them out through the system.

With respect to seniors who are malnourished, that is I hope – I very sincerely hope – a very small number. I would hope it is, and they're out there. This is where some of the special needs goes, for getting that kind of thing if they qualify. Also, some of it is management, some of it is home care, some of it is Meals on Wheels. Those are individual situations that hopefully as people who are involved identify, they help them through the process.

The other thing that was mentioned this afternoon was the whole area of women's issues. I'd like to point out that women's issues are a concern across government. Although I'm the minister responsible, many of the ministries have programs. You identified some of them yourself in the House and the various services, legislation that are of direct benefit to women as such. Within my own ministry we've not identified specifically dollars for policy analysis and support respecting women's issues per se, but these are done through the human rights and citizenship branch as a part of their overall responsibilities.

It is good enough, and the ministry staff do a good job in supporting me in my role as the minister responsible for women's issues. They provide consultation services to other ministries; for example, participating in interdepartmental committees dealing with matters of concern to women such as the People and Prosperity initiatives, the interdepartmental committee on family violence. Further community groups wishing to develop education programs that reduce discrimination against women and foster equality for women can apply for grants from the human rights, citizenship, and multicultural education fund.

Just to give you some examples of applications and funding provided in the last fiscal year, there is something called Changing Together: A Centre for Immigrant Women, which received \$6,000 for a provincial conference to identify critical issues for immigrant women and planning strategies to address these issues. The Women's Economic and Business Solutions Society, or WEBSS, received \$14,850 for a provincial conference entitled Rebuilding Strength, Dismantling Barriers. This conference will be held at

Grant MacEwan College coming up on September 29 through October 1, 2000, and will focus on issues of community inclusion and equality for women with disabilities. Women in Scholarship, Engineering, Science and Technology, or WISEST, received \$25,000 for a project entitled: if women ruled the Earth with men, what then? This project involves the production of a video and written guide based on the stories of the successes and challenges of 17 women in leadership roles.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

The human rights and citizenship branch distributes education materials that are of particular interest to women; for example, an audiovisual resource on preventing gender discrimination, something that's of concern to all of us. In 2000-2001 the branch will also update and redistribute the women's organizations of Alberta directory, which has proven to be a very popular resource. A new initiative on women's history will be developed in 2000 as a millennium project. It's a booklet that will be produced and includes a time line of significant events and profiles of women important to Alberta's history. This project is part of a joint initiative by the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for the status of women. In addition, the ministry will continue to distribute resources such as a Stepping Stones role model, materials produced by the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for the status of women.

I should also mention the seniors' benefit program in my department. It's the best income support program for seniors in Canada, most of whom are women.

So, hon. member, when you say that this minister does not take that particular section of his portfolio seriously, you're absolutely wrong.

Thank you, and I'll yield the floor to you for some more.

MS BLAKEMAN: I think I would ask the minister to perhaps review the questions and the points I was raising by reviewing the *Hansard*. I think he'll see that the questions and points I wanted have not quite been answered by his lengthy and thorough response to me. I encourage him to review the *Hansard*.

I'd like to continue talking about arts and culture. I found an interesting quote here that I'd like to read into the record from Shirley L. Thomson, who is a former director of the National Gallery of Canada and currently a director on the Canada Council for the Arts. She's talking about why there's a need to provide public funding, and although she's talking about Canadian public funding, I think the argument serves just as well for Alberta. She says:

A major argument for public funding is one of scale. To support Canadian culture across a country as diverse as ours, and to take risks in fostering art at the leading and less-understood edge, you need funding agencies large enough to perform effectively and to distribute resources widely and wisely. They must be able both to spot talent and to do something about it. Their communication tools must reach the artists and the public who are the potential users, and they need a varied pool of staff and advisors on whose judgment and expertise they can call.

I think that's a nicely encapsulated view of what I would be looking to the minister's department and the AFA to be doing. I think I've already brought up some points that show that this vision is being eroded with the staff reductions we've had in that area. The understanding of the whole concept of development of arts and culture I think has fallen by the wayside in the last seven or eight years, and I'd encourage the minister to perhaps go back and look at some of the policy documents that existed in the late '80s and early '90s for inspiration there.

11:10

I note a government news release dated February 18, 2000 – oh, goodness, we're right up to speed here – that speaks in glowing terms of how much money the arts organizations are putting back into Alberta communities. Indeed, that is an important and valued part of what artistic organizations and artists bring to Alberta, an economic impact, but I think what they bring goes much further than that. One of the points that is raised is that arts organizations spend \$127 million in their communities on materials, supplies, services, and salaries. I want to point out that that's money that stays in the community, and in many cases that's money that's brought either from outside the local community or from outside Alberta. So, in fact, it's new money coming into the Alberta economy, and it stays here. The supplies are purchased by the organizations, but the individual artists are also paying rent, buying food. That money stays in circulation here.

There is a significant volunteer role in the arts organizations, and I don't think we value that enough yet. What I'd like to ask the minister is: can he show me if there are any specific increases that are going directly to the organizations in this vote? I notice that the budget amount has gone up, it's gone down. Still, when I'm visiting the organizations themselves, they're not seeing an increase. I'm looking for the minister to show me specific increases where the money is ending up in the pockets or in the accounts of the organizations.

One small thing I came across that the minister might find interesting and I hope inspiring is the support for the Alberta film development program. We're in year two now and going into year three. I'm expecting that the minister is doing an evaluation. In fact I think I saw that in one of the strategies, that there would be an evaluation of that program. I just found it really interesting that in a document called the Practical Guide to Canada's Film, Television and Multi-Media Industry we have one paragraph about two inches long on the Alberta film development program, but when I look at the assistance that's given from other provinces to the film industry, we've got things like over a page of different programs that B.C. offers their film industry. We've got half a page from Manitoba. Ontario: almost two pages of programs and incentives that are offered. Even P.E.I., valiant little P.E.I., has more than half a page of programs that are offered. So perhaps that would be an inspiration to the minister to take a look at this.

I think the government learned its lesson and learned it the hard way on support of the film industry. Certainly we lost an awful lot of money out of this province, and we also dealt a fairly serious blow to the industry itself. I'm sure the minister is well aware of how many of our trained technicians – and I know that the minister for science, research, and information technology would join me in recognizing how important it is to keep the people that are trained in this knowledge-based business in our province. The estimates are that we lost I think about 75 percent of our technicians. In many cases these people also had highly specialized equipment that they took with them because they owned it, and now anyone trying to do that kind of business here has to woo these people back.

So, as I say, I think the government learned their lesson on that one. I encourage a very thorough review of the program, and I encourage them to seek out other ways to give support to this industry. It's a moneymaker, it's a tourism draw, and it's a renewable resource because it is knowledge-based.

I'll also note the number of letters that I've received CCed copies of from individuals. I think all of them but one or two were from individuals living in Calgary who were writing to their MLA asking for additional money – I think \$8 million was the figure that was mentioned – from the government to funding into arts and cultural

programming. I've been impressed by the number of people that felt they needed to write. As we know, lots of people think it, but they don't actually follow through with the impetus to send the letter, and to me that's a fairly strong indicator that, particularly in Calgary, people are looking to the government to give better support in funding for arts and culture.

Now, a number of miscellaneous points. The changes in funding to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. I'm a little concerned here that this is going to come at a very difficult time for the groups that are currently receiving operating funds through this foundation, and I'm wondering if the minister has planned a phase-in of the cuts. I suppose that's not strictly speaking an accurate description, but if they're being told they can no longer qualify under the program if they receive funding from any other source, it certainly would be a tremendous loss of revenue for those organizations. Was there a phase-in considered? If there wasn't, boy, I'll be asking you for one.

Part of my question is: have you included the Wild Rose Foundation in your list of other lottery-based granting agencies that are the exclusion criteria here. The Wild Rose Foundation is doing something totally different. They are funding the volunteer component. As you've heard me say on a number of occasions now, we have a huge sector under what could be called the voluntary or nonprofit or charitable sector here. It's one thing to be funding a recreation group like the naturalists' society or the orienteering club of Alberta or whomever with operating funds, but they may well have received moneys through the Wild Rose Foundation, which I know the minister is aware one can only apply for every couple of years, and there is a maximum amount to the grant, but it's specific to volunteer development.

I'll remind the minister again of the excellent report produced by the federal government in which they talk about the need for provincial and municipal governments coming in on capacity building. So I'm very concerned, and I'm looking for reassurance from the minister that the Wild Rose Foundation has not been included on the list, which would mean a group would get cut off from funding from Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife. Has there been a discussion or any criteria put in place for organizations that may face having to close their doors if they're not receiving this funding?

11:20

Certainly if there was a group that was getting operating funding through Alberta Sports, Recreation and Wildlife, to lose their operating funding grant and run their organization on the \$20,000 from Wild Rose, which is for a very specific reason – and that is volunteer development. We will end up with organizations closing down. Has the department just said: "Yes, we have a criteria, and that's tough luck. Good-bye." Or are there any other provisions being put in place there?

I've asked the minister before; I'll ask him officially as part of this budget process. I'd like to know what the department's policy response is to the recommendations that have been made through the voluntary-sector report from the federal government: a number of recommendations in there about capacity building, about training for staff, training on information technology, purchase of equipment, training for volunteers, and the need to develop good recruitment, screening, and training programs there for volunteers.

The minister mentioned Trailnet, and I'm pleased to see there's support for that project. I know that one of the sticking points that would make everybody feel much happier about this, for those that do have a problem with it, is occupiers' liability legislation, which I have now seen come forward twice in this Legislature. What is the

problem? What is holding this legislation up? I mean, certainly there's strong support for it from this side. Can we get on with this? Perhaps if there was some detail here about what the problem is, we could all work on this, because certainly that occupiers' liability legislation would be very helpful to get this wonderful program in line. I do understand there are people that have concerns about it, and I'd like to see those concerns addressed and people feeling comfortable with the project.

I note in the Auditor General's recommendation in the public accounts that there are recommendations on governance principles for appointments of individuals to agencies, boards, and commissions, and I'm wondering if the minister has developed criteria or is following the recommendation from the PAO staffing directive on proper recruitment of people to agencies, boards, and commissions.

A couple of other questions here. Historical sites. I'm wondering what the minister has planned for protection of the Rossdale site that's underneath the EPCOR Rossdale power plant. We know now that that was the site of Fort Augustus, one of the two Fort Edmontons, and also was a burial ground for the Blackfoot tribe. We look to the provincial government to be providing protection for this site. What exactly is the government doing? What protection will be forthcoming? How is the province working with the city on this? What is being put in place?

I note the planning money that's being put in for the 2005 Alberta anniversary celebration. I hope in this case that history repeats itself. In 1980, at the 75th anniversary, a fund was created, and from that fund was development of a number of projects which we value enormously today, such as the Street Performers Festival, the Fringe Festival, the Works visual arts festival, the jazz festival, Folk Festival, et cetera. So I do hope that will be coming.

There are a number of other sectors that I have not yet covered, and I understand there are other issues that we're trying to get through tonight. Other things that have not yet been covered include youth, volunteers, amateur sports, the Francophone Secretariat. By the way, earlier I had mentioned that there were some new programs moved into the department and some moved out, and the Francophone Secretariat is one of the new ones that's been moved in. I had been asking the minister for an accounting that showed moneys leaving and moneys coming back, and the Francophone Secretariat is one of the ones that's come in.

I know there are more issues that are coming on seniors. Additionally, we haven't talked about the human rights, citizenship and multiculturalism education fund or the Human Rights Commission. I think there's more that needs to be raised on the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, and I haven't even touched on the special housing that's now under the portfolio. Those are just a few of the things that have yet to be addressed in this portfolio. I point out once again that one evening or one go at this department is not enough, and anyone that has to be debating Human Resources and Employment now, given all that's in that superministry, has my condolences.

I'd like to go on now, and in the few minutes I have left I'd like to look at some of the concerns that have been raised about the Human Rights Commission. There have been a couple of literature reviews done recently or done within the last couple of years on the Human Rights Commission. We've certainly had it in existence long enough now to be able to be taking a good look at it, and there are a few things I want to raise there.

Some of the things I'm reading are saying that there's a need for increased public education about human rights complaints procedures. This is particularly true in rural areas. I think we also need to include aboriginal communities in that and other peoples or areas that have accessibility concerns. I think there also needs to be

increased financial and personal support for complainants. Staff such as accessibility co-ordinators may be necessary. [an electronic device beeped]

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aw.

MS BLAKEMAN: No, no, no. It's just mine. It's just my little reminder. Joy and happiness everyone. It's just a little reminder to help me come to a form of . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Conclusion.

MS BLAKEMAN: No. There's no way I can conclude. I still have a number of other things to do.

I guess what I'll do now is ask that the debate be adjourned at this point so that we can resume on a different day to complete all the other questions I have around this department. Mr. Chairman, I would ask that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

11:30

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

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 9 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000 (continued)

[Adjourned debate February 29: Ms Calahasen]

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to have this opportunity to speak to Bill 9. Earlier this evening when the Government House Leader opened the discussions on Bill 9, he talked about it being necessary for us to have an appropriation bill at this particular stage so that the government could carry on the seamless operations of government in the event of debate carrying on into April. Well, it's laughable at the very least to think that when this government has only designated 15 days of discussion on the budget, we could somehow stretch that into more than a month of debate into April, which would somehow then impact the government operations in terms of dollars. It really is a joke and is something that is beyond the comprehension of any logical kind of review of the dollars we're talking about here.

Mr. Speaker, there is no way I can see that we could reasonably support this interim supply bill without some kind of explanation on

how this new spending is going to contribute to meeting any of the defined outcomes and performance criteria in the government business plans. We have lots of outstanding issues in this province, things like waiting lists in the public health care system, opening up hospital beds in this public health care system. The Grey Nuns hospital, in my riding, is a relatively new hospital, and two complete floors of that hospital have never been opened up regardless of the number of red alerts we face in this city, regardless of the kinds of waiting lists we have in the health care system.

Reducing pupil/teacher ratio is very important, yet we don't see how that's addressed in this interim supply bill. I have a letter waiting to be tabled in my desk now from one of the local PACs in my riding that are very concerned about the pupil/teacher ratio and whether it is going to be addressed at all in this interim supply bill.

We have concerns with the auditing certification process of annual performance reports from this government, and they're not addressed in this interim supply bill. There's a lack of disclosure when we talk about supply votes. No doubt we've heard from both the Auditor General in this province and the Alberta Financial Review Commission, that recommends the separation of operating expenses and capital investments as a means of strengthening managerial accountability and evaluation of effectiveness of programs. This doesn't happen in supply bills, much to the detriment of disclosure for the government.

This government keeps telling Albertans that they have a plan to link expenditures to outcomes, but we see in this interim supply bill a request for 18.6 percent of the total expenses appropriated for the fiscal year. So how does that link expenditures to outcomes in any fashion at all?

We see really sporadic and disjointed requests for dollars in the departments here. With one month left of operations, we have a range of 12 percent to 40 percent funding requests of total budgets of the year. We had International and Intergovernmental Relations up for debate earlier this evening in terms of the next year's budget, yet in this interim supply bill they're asking for 46 percent of the total expenditures of the last year's budget. Where do these figures come from? How can they possibly reasonably match any of the performance measures with this kind of budgeting expenditure? It's hard to believe that they think this is justifiable.

Were these three-year business plans they talk about and the performance measurements to be really useful, to give any real indication of where the government is going, to see any kind of planning in place and any results-driven kinds of program and funding results, we wouldn't see an interim supply bill like this. We would see properly adjusted budgets on a regular and consistent basis coming forward from the Provincial Treasurer's department, but that isn't what happens, Mr. Speaker.

Any business and industry who operated on this kind of basis would have their CEOs and all their managerial staff turfed the very first time they came back and asked for money on this kind of basis. It's a complete lack of strategic planning at any level.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's a trust-me budget.

MS CARLSON: It's a trust-me budget. That's exactly right. The problem is that now Albertans aren't trusting this government anymore because they've just done this one too many times in all areas.

There is no matching of dollars with performance measures, with outcomes. It just doesn't happen here. Albertans expect to receive value for their tax dollars, and they're not seeing it when you see this kind of budgeting happening. It's budgets done by pulling numbers out of a hat. It's budgets done without being responsible in terms of

the budget forecasts on the revenue side. There's no doubt that budget forecasting is a little tricky in the province when you've got oil and gas revenues and when we see the volatility in the market, but there is also no doubt that this government can do exactly what industry does at all times, and that's adjust their forecasts as appropriate.

At least it could be done quarterly, and sometimes the requirement would be for it to be done more often. But what does this government do? It doesn't do it at all. It makes lots of promises, comes back for interim supply budgets whenever they need to rather than being responsible in terms of how they do their forecasting or rather than being accountable to Albertans on how the money is spent.

There's no ability to scrutinize the dollars they're asking for now when we get less than an hour's debate on this particular bill before it passes second reading. There's no opportunity for me to go back through the departments that I'm responsible for, which would be Environment, where they're asking for a 28 percent increase, and International and Intergovernmental Relations, where they're asking for a 46 percent increase.

What are they going to do with those dollars in one month, Mr. Speaker? It looks to me like they're going on a spending spree. Why? Just to get rid of money that's in the department at that level? [interjection] Well, then answer the questions. Have the ministers stand up here and tell us what they're going to do with those dollars. That would be responsible. The irresponsible thing to do is to just come in and ask for this kind of money with 30 days left in the year. That is not good planning. It isn't good management. It isn't being accountable. It doesn't make any progress in meeting any of the identified goals. We don't see any clear and measurable terms coming forward here. There are no clear, set objectives. There are no effective strategies set. This is a complete lack of planning and is an act of irresponsible behaviour on behalf of a government that is talking about billion-dollar budgets.

So why is it, Mr. Speaker, that they aren't prepared to stand up and defend what they're asking for at this point in time? Why do we have to go through this process so many times every year with this government? Why can't they come through with requests that are detailed? Well, I hear lots of grumbling, Mr. Speaker, but I don't see too many people standing up here prepared to speak to this particular budget, and so they could do that. Let's see some accountability in terms of how the money is spent. That's what we're asking for. That's what Albertans are asking for. It's lots of money. They're happy to stand up here and talk about tax cuts that are going to be delivered over the next three years, but they're not prepared to stand up and be accountable for the moneys they're asking for at this time, which are literally millions of dollars and which reflect a huge percentage of this year's budget.

11:40

How are we going to see identified goals being met here or measure any of the progress? There is no mandate, no ability to do that, and we don't see the benchmarks or the targets attached to these dollars. Why is that? What is this government afraid of and what are they hiding from in terms of bringing in an interim supply budget asking for so many dollars at this particular point in time?

Mr. Speaker, these are issues that we have to address every single time they bring in one of these budgets like this, and it's a real problem. We recognize that funding is required in areas of public health and education and infrastructure, but when you have to address the serious issues that are outstanding around the lack of planning within the government's budgetary process, it is our responsibility as the Official Opposition in this province to stand up and criticize the technique by which this government gets to their

end goal. We expect governments to be accountable. Certainly this one is not.

A main problem here is the improper management of the budget. Like we talked about, in industry this Treasurer would have been out a long time ago, because you need to be able to properly forecast the revenues and, just as necessary, match the expenses not only with the revenues but with whatever benchmarks have been set, whatever objectives have been set, and this is a government that cannot do it for one quarter, never mind for one year or three years or five years.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I hear lots of grumbling, but I don't see anybody on their feet prepared to defend this and prepared to tell us why we do not see prudent financial management and why we do not see fiscal responsibility from a government that talks about it all the time. Talk is cheap. What we need is action from this government. We need action from this government in terms of being fiscally responsible for their projecting and for their forecasting and for their budgeting, and they are not prepared to do it. They are prepared to try and spin master their way out of these issues, but they are not prepared to be accountable.

We've talked for a long time, Mr. Speaker, about lots of options

they could be taking a look at in terms of balancing out the revenues and the expenses on the budgetary side. One of those is a fiscal stabilization fund which would take some of the surplus and ensure that strategic investments are undertaken to be able to flatten out the valleys and mountains.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's called the heritage fund.

MS CARLSON: Well, the minister likes to talk about the heritage savings trust fund, but in fact it's not used for that purpose at all. It wouldn't be a bad idea if they considered using it for that purpose.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, but in accordance with Standing Order 61(3) the chair is required to put the question to the House on the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

[At 11:46 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]