

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 21, 2000**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 00/03/21

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'd like to call the committee to order. This evening in Committee of Supply we have designated subcommittees to report, and I presume we will continue with the traditional 20, 20, and 5.

HON. MEMBER: Agreed.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Peace River will start off this evening's deliberations, followed Calgary-Buffalo.

Human Resources and Employment

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You caught me a little unawares. I wasn't aware that I was first up to bat.

I'm pleased to report that the designated supply subcommittee on human resources met on the morning of March 13 to review the business plan and the budget estimates of the Ministry of Human Resources and Employment. The minister started out the meeting with an overview of the new people-and-workplace department and provided a summary of the 1999-2000 estimates. The ministry's 2000-2001 budget is increasing by \$43 million, or 4.3 percent, over the 1999-2000 forecast of \$992 million. This increase provides Albertans with the quality programs and services they need to help them lead more productive and fulfilling lives.

Our training programs and initiatives are just some of the ways we can help Albertans achieve their goals. By providing supports for independence clients with basic foundation skills programs and other work experience programs, more Albertans are working.

The ministry's budget review covered each of the major program areas of the ministry, and in particular the minister highlighted various program increases including a significant increase in funding for the AISH program, our training and employment support programs, child health benefit programs, workplace service programs, and shelters for homeless adults. The minister also gave a brief overview of the Labour Relations Board and the personnel administration office.

The opposition subcommittee members were provided with two hours to ask questions and receive answers from the minister, and the government subcommittee members were allocated the remaining time. There were numerous questions asked by opposition members. A significant number of these questions related to the ministry's programs as well as specific questions covering the budget estimates.

The minister did a commendable job answering the questions given the very large number and the long list of questions that were asked by the opposition. The minister also provided explanations of the ministry's programs and plans to meet the various needs and expectations of Albertans. The minister committed to review the numerous questions and to provide written answers to any of the budget and business plan related questions that were not answered during the meeting.

I'd like to thank all the members of the subcommittee of supply for their contributions to the review. I particularly want to commend the members of the opposition for agreeing to a format that made the dialogue, although a little bit informal, more beneficial – it tended

to be more of a discussion debate, allowing, I think, a maximum number of questions – and the minister for also participating in this format. I think it was a pleasant alternative to some of the confrontational types of questions and answers that we have seen from time to time. I think it certainly did provide the maximum amount of opportunity for questions. The members of the government obviously have opportunities at other times, such as through standing policy committee discussions and caucus, so allocating a little extra time to the opposition I think was beneficial.

I believe that should pretty much cover it, Mr. Chairman. With that, I'll take my place and let those others who are designated to speak take their turn.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Just so you know, what the opposition proposes to do tonight: I have a few comments, and then we're bringing in our colleague from Edmonton-Manning, who is going to finish up the time we've got.

A couple of things I want to raise straight off. Mr. Chairman, when you look at the ministry business plan summary on page 248, we see the highlight that "the Supports for Independence budget reflects the continued success of welfare reforms and reduced caseloads." Calgary-Buffalo has over 30,000 residents, but 18,000 of them live in low-income households, which is a huge number. Many of these are seniors. Many of them are single mothers. A significant number of these people at one time or another require supports for independence. Calgary also happens to be the tightest rental market in the entire province.

I see that there's provision for additional money for medical and dental in terms of people on supports for independence. What I have not seen is something that's been talked about certainly in the last two years as the population pressures have brought so much difficulty to the business of finding safe, affordable accommodation. I want to know what concrete plans this government has in the forthcoming budget year to address the fact that it makes no sense to give the same supports for independence cheque to that mother with two young children in downtown Calgary as it does to somebody in Drumheller.

This is not a new issue by any means, but I recall that at least in perhaps the last two years opposition members have challenged the government to recognize that needs are different in different parts of the province, and what that requires is some flexibility in terms of the supports for independence program. I'm extremely disappointed and I know that many of my constituents will be even more disappointed to see that there's no provision for that, at least that I can see, in the budget. Now, I wasn't a member of the panel for the designated subcommittee of supply. Maybe that was addressed. I've reviewed the *Hansard* from that, and frankly I can't see it having been raised and answered.

MR. DOERKSEN: *Hansard* must have missed it.

MR. DICKSON: The suggestion of my colleague from Red Deer-South is that *Hansard* must have missed it. *Hansard* misses nothing, Mr. Chairman. I know how scrupulous those people are. Would that the provincial cabinet were as thorough as the men and women responsible for churning out *Hansard* on a daily basis. We'd all be further ahead. But that's another matter. I'm not trying to curry favour just so my name is spelled correctly in this evening's proceedings.

Anyway, Mr. Chairman, that's a particular concern.

We have an increase of "\$500,000 to \$10 million to accommodate

an increased demand for beds” in the homeless adults budget. There’s some excellent work being done by the Calgary Homeless Foundation, certainly supported by the Member for Calgary-Bow and Art Smith and John Currie, all of that group of that foundation, and they’re looking at a multiple initiative strategy in terms of dealing with people who are presently homeless and a much larger population who are at risk of being homeless.

8:10

What I need to hear from this minister is how he’s tying in his work around homeless adult shelters with the excellent work that’s being done by the Calgary Homeless Foundation. You see, I’ve had the opportunity to go McDougall Centre. Yes, Mr. Chairman, occasionally I manage to sneak in the door. I put on my nose and fake glasses and moustache, and they think I’m a government MLA. I run by the security people, and I get access to Government House South.

I remember going there when Claudette Bradshaw, the federal Minister of Labour and the minister responsible for homelessness, came and made a presentation. What struck me – and there may be members here who may have a contrary view – is that the federal government has finally got the message in terms of the homeless crisis in Canada. We’re starting to see some creativity, some flexibility in terms of their approach.

I think I’ve asked this question before, maybe of other ministers. I need to see how this is knitting together, because we have some opportunity. I’d like to see government match the Calgary Homeless Foundation in terms of creativity, in terms of energy, in terms of resourcefulness. If that could be done, we’d come as close to solving the homeless and those at risk of being homeless crisis as probably I could ever imagine. So I’m interested in finding out about that.

The other issue I’m interested in finding out about – I get real confused in terms of how we are dealing with persons with developmental disabilities. This is an area I’ve been particularly interested in. The responsibility for developmental disabilities has been split in at least three different directions. The Minister of Health and Wellness and his associate minister have got a chunk of that. The associate minister just finished producing, incidentally, a very useful report, and I congratulate him on actually getting the message. I went to some of those meetings. So that’s good. But we have sort of taken responsibility and parceled it out.

One of the ironies I find, Mr. Chairman, is that there’s so much talk about co-ordination, consolidation, efficiency, yet as we saw the other day with the whole area of information technology and access to information, we then sort of bifurcate. What’s the counterpart of bifurcate if you’ve got three splits? Trifurcate? Well, whatever the word is, we’ve got responsibility split off in too many areas.

I see support to dependent adult agencies, line 7.0.2. Is this when the VRRI or some of those agencies in Calgary or Edmonton receive funding to be able to provide certain kinds of school services, job linkup things? I assume that’s coming through program 7, supports to dependent adults. I’m assuming that’s where that is going.

There have been lots of problems, Mr. Chairman, in this area. We’ve got the report from the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness. I have to understand how this is being organized. You’ve got three different departments with some responsibility. You’ve got the Department of Children’s Services dealing with children with developmental disabilities, you’ve got the Minister of Health and Wellness dealing with some PDD clients over 18, and then we’ve got the agencies. If I understand it correctly, the agencies, the PDD agencies, fall under the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. If I’ve got that wrong . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: You’re not wrong.

MR. DICKSON: Okay.

What I have to understand then is – and it’s a basic question, but as I say, if the minister will bear with me, I wasn’t part of that subcommittee. Program 7.0.2, support to dependent adult agencies, I take it is dealing with agencies that provide services to PDD adult clients.

MR. DUNFORD: We don’t have a program 7. Are you on health? You need to be on human resources.

MR. DICKSON: Human Resources and Employment. I’m looking at page 244 of the 2000-2001 budget book, line 7.0.2.

MR. DUNFORD: That’s the Canadian National Institute for the Blind.

MR. DICKSON: Okay. I understand, Mr. Chairman, that this isn’t PDD clients at all. Okay. So all of that then is between the Department of Children’s Services and the Department of Health and Wellness. Okay. Well, that’s helpful. I appreciate the clarification.

Now, the other item I wanted to ask appears in *Hansard* when the DSS committee was under way. This would be page 23 from March 13, 2000. There’s a reference there that “our partnership program, regulatory enforcement, and regulatory review contribute to our success.” Well, I wonder, Mr. Chairman, if the minister will provide us with a detailed schedule of the regulations reviewed in the last fiscal year by the regulatory enforcement mechanism and the regulatory review committee or task force, whatever it’s called, and provide us with advice as to the number of regulations that have been put forward by a department and not accepted by this regulatory review process. I know initially it was focused on that body of regulations. We make about 700 to 800 regulations a year in this province, and I’m not even talking ministerial orders. I know that the Member for Peace River chaired that committee. I had been dealing with past regulations, but I assume that also part of what they do is deal with ongoing regulations.

It’s a big mystery to me, Mr. Chairman – and that may be just because I’m not real swift – just what regulations are being reviewed. One of my concerns is how rigorous the scrutiny has been of regulations. I need some measure to know how many times this regulatory review scheme rejects regulations, finds regulations to be excessive, unreasonable, unnecessary, inefficient. Without that, how do we have any way of knowing whether this process is achieving anything useful at all? It’s an exercise up there in the ether world. I think what Albertans want to see is less inappropriate red tape, but I think they’re anxious to get that done.

I have some other questions, Mr. Chairman, but I know I have a colleague that wants some time, and time is short. Thanks for the opportunity to ask these questions and raise these concerns.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning in these almost seven minutes remaining.

MR. GIBBONS: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I did sit in for a brief while in your committee, and I appreciate a lot of the answers you did give us and what I’ve been reading in *Hansard*, but a few things I wanted to point out and ask about. I do understand it’s a newly created department, and you emphasized it as a newly created people-and-workplace department. Around the outlook for Alberta looking bright for the next few years – you put

it in terms of having to wear welding goggles – I hope to see a business plan. I would like to see something like I've been emphasizing in Infrastructure and Municipal Affairs, which is three to five years so we can actually build on something over the next few years. With this new department and everything coming together within your new department and listening to you and reading what you put in *Hansard*, I think it might be going somewhere.

8:20

One of the questions I do have on this particular one is referring to the performance measure on the "percentage of participants employed post-intervention." What does the department consider to be "employed"? What is considered to be appropriate contact to determine the employment status? How did the department determine that the projected caseload for all four main areas – supports for independence, AISH, widows' pension, and the Alberta child benefit – come together?

Now, looking under the training program, I did emphasize a few things that I would like to see around apprenticeship. Hopefully it will be brought up under Learning. But training programs, from what you're saying in *Hansard*, are a big part of what your department is about. So I do hope there is some cohesion between the silos of your deputy ministers and working together on this particular item and emphasizing that if we're going to proceed into this new millennium, with the booms that we had in the 1970s that I worked through – we didn't think there was ever going to be an end to it, that the streets were paved with gold. Most people didn't learn how to budget for the next 10 years afterwards. But it's a fact that we have to train our young people and get them into the trade programs that I came out of, anywhere from welding, machinists, sheet metal, electrical. We're interested in actually how fast we're going to be producing some of our own tradespeople, our own young Albertans that are coming out of our schools.

Another comment you made was that "Overall our employment and training initiatives are showing a great return on dollars invested." This is very interesting, to the point that I'm going to put a couple of points on record on this one. What accounts for the anticipated increase of 36.9 percent in the budget for program delivery of benefits for people not expected to work? Are there additional staff that are going to be hired on this particular item?

Another item. "Today there are greater opportunities for Albertans to find employment because of our growing and booming economy" is what the minister has said. On this particular one I have a question. Given that the first two major budget areas are showing an increase in the funding for program delivery, why is there an anticipated decrease of 31.3 percent in the program delivery area for training and employment support? Given the focus of this government on the employment of persons receiving living assistance, why is there an anticipated decrease?

The AISH program. This is one that through our constituency office we deal with quite a bit, just due to the makeup of portions of our constituency and also the fact that Alberta Hospital is within the boundaries and it's the closest residential area to the Alberta hospital. One thing you mentioned was that "We think this will show tremendous increases in part-time employment." Well, I do see that. A see a lot of our restaurants hiring people, but I do hope that in terms of employment initiatives, between the AISH funding and the dollars and cents that are coming from working part-time, it isn't a detriment to some of the people there. That's a big concern that I do get in phone calls.

I'm very supportive of people on AISH. I'm very supportive as they call in stressing that it's better for them to be out there working part-time instead of sitting around wondering where the rest of their

lives is going to be going. I'd like to ask the question: what percentage of the amount of funding is being allocated for employment initiatives for Albertans with disabilities?

Now, the mentally ill. You can tell by the questions I do ask in the House around the fact that a full moon – I never did understand it until after getting elected, but it is a very big part of life in our office. With the very little bit of funding that we have for a constituency office for people having offices in big cities and the costs of operating, two people would be very essential in an office like my own when it came time for the full moon to come around.

Now we have a new ministry out there around children's services. This is a ministry that is way overdue. It was timely considering what has happened in the world, in North America, and as close to us as southern Alberta last year.

It is so important that I do hope that there's another case where your deputy ministers take their two silos and work together there too. On this particular one I have a question that I'd like to pose right now and see if we can get an answer later. How many additional clients will be served to justify the 24 percent increase in funding of Youth Connections?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Human Resources and Employment for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$1,034,970,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall this vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Children's Services

THE CHAIRMAN: The place of the chair will be taken by the Minister of Children's Services. Hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the interest of brevity, we have had a full accounting for the Department of Children's Services and met on Monday, March 20, and agreed to report here that the designated subcommittee has agreed to affirm what was presented and provide it for you here this evening.

Just briefly, we have three divisions in the newly restructured Children's Services, with provincial programs ranging from adoption services, day care staff qualifications, and the children's initiative, ever expanding, to family and community support services.

Predominately, Mr. Chairman, we address children's issues through the child and family services authorities, who, though newly set up, are established to set and monitor standards at the local level. The budget for 2000-2001 is \$537 million, including \$485 million for direct services for children and families. The role of the authorities had been discussed at the presentation, and the role of the First Nations delivery system was also highlighted.

We have 2,082 staff in Children's Services in direct delivery, along with approximately 3,000 contract workers and other ancillary contracts dealing with support systems. Our most predominate concern this year is our review of the child welfare caseload. As of December 31, 1999, we have 12,922 children receiving protective services.

Mr. Chairman, sometime in the next couple of months we will respond to the Children's Forum and the Task Force on Children at Risk, which has been highlighted as a dominant public theme in the last year. We will also hear ongoing reports from the Youth Secretariat, a newly established part of our ministry which is providing a great strategy in building relationships with needy adolescents.

We would be prepared to answer any questions and will be responding to questions that were raised on staff experience and training, the legal suits and liabilities against the ministry, and vacancy rates in day care, among others.

From my point of view as minister, I thank everyone for their participation on the committee and, with that, would await any further responses that may be required. Thank you.

8:30

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and good evening, Madam Minister. The difficulty here is that the designated supply subcommittee dealing with Children's Services met only yesterday morning, Monday morning. The reality is that we have no *Hansard*. I regret that because I'd like to not waste the minister's time or the House's time by not knowing exactly what's been covered and what's been responded to. Mr. Chairman, you will appreciate that not having been there on Monday and not having the benefit of *Hansard*, I've got to ask the questions that are important from my perspective, so I'll apologize to the House if in fact I'm treading on some ground that's already been covered.

My first question to the minister. Madam Minister, in the event that the Court of Queen's Bench determines that the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act is ultra vires or in fact offends the Charter – I understand that the government is going to vigorously assert the position of the province – in the event that the act is struck down, I'd like to know what contingency plans the provincial government has. Typically, if the court were to find that the Charter was offended by that particular bill, Mr. Chairman, then what normally would happen is that there would be like a suspensive veto. The court would give the provincial Legislature a period of time, six months, a year, whatever, to recast the bill, to make appropriate amendments, whatever.

Now, you know, the last time I looked, we've got about 250 lawyers in this giant law department called the Department of Justice.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. DICKSON: Well, other members have questions. That's great to see. It's great to see Calgary MLAs are getting impatient already. It's only 8:34, Mr. Chairman, and we've got a lot more questions to ask yet tonight.

The point, Mr. Chairman, is simply this. I'd like to know what arrangements have been made. To me it would be inexcusable to have the act struck down, if that should happen, and then for the province to have to spend six months or a year deciding what they're going to do. Specifically, since there are a number of young women who are already in the program, if you will, where the jurisdiction has been invoked under the act, it would seem to me that the most important thing would be to make sure that the safety programs and the support for those young women aren't compromised because the government was caught flat footed in the event of that kind of court ruling. So I'm interested in knowing what the contingency plans are.

Now, one of the things that concerned me is in terms of what

happens with child welfare caseloads. There's some core information we need. Would the minister tell us how many children are currently the subject of a support agreement under part 2 of the Child Welfare Act, how many children are subject to a custody agreement under part 2 of the Child Welfare Act, and how many permanent guardianship agreements were entered into in the last fiscal year? For each of these items I'd like to know what's projected by the Department of Children's Services for the 2000-2001 budget year.

I'd like to know how many supervision orders were sought in the last year, how many were granted, and what the expectation is for the next year. I'd like to know how many temporary guardianship orders were sought in the last budget year, how many were granted, and what the expectation is for the next year. In terms of permanent guardianship orders, I'd like to know how many permanent guardianship orders were sought in the last budget year, how many were granted, and what the projection is for next year.

Now, one of the reasons for asking this. The minister, who's writing furiously as I pose the questions, may be muttering under her breath: why would she be asked for this information? Well, part of the thing we can do from this is determine how effectively and efficiently those child and family service authorities are operating. We get to determine whether we're intervening appropriately. It gives us a chance to sort of measure the effectiveness of the system and so on.

I'd like to know how many apprehension orders were sought in the last year, how many were granted, and what the projection is for the next year. I assume that all this stuff has been pulled together, presumably, for the children's summit, and I assume it's there. Some departments produce an annual report. It might be in there. I haven't had the benefit of seeing any of those things, so I don't know if that information exists.

I'd like to know how many restraining orders were granted pursuant to section 28 of the Child Welfare Act, how many were applied for, and what the projection is for the next year. I'd like to know how many secure treatment certificates were sought in the last year, how many were granted, and what's projected for the ensuing budget year.

There is provision in section 46 for search and apprehension orders. How many search and apprehension orders were applied for in the last year, how many were granted, what's the projection, and what's anticipated for 2000-2001?

Under part 5, private guardianships, for the last budget year how many private guardianships were sought, how many were granted, and what's projected for the next budget year?

Now, adoptions. How many adoptions by stepparents were sought in the last year, how many were granted, and what's projected for 2000-2001? We're not talking about stepparent adoptions, so what I'd look for, then, broken out separately would be stepparent adoptions. They may be treated through the adoption bureau, but it's typically a different file and a somewhat different process.

When I first got elected, Mr. Chairman, and came rushing in here to change the world, I remember that one of my pet issues had to do with a baby-adoption pipeline that was going on where children in various U.S. states were born and where the birth mother didn't want the father to be involved. You had people being sent up here, referred by a Los Angeles lawyer to counsel in Calgary, and we were doing adoptions. I mean, it was a really smarmy, distasteful, prejudicial kind of process that we were running in this province, not that the provincial government was doing it. Justice Blair Mason I think had tried to send the strongest possible message to the Legislature. This was about 1993 when that happened.

Now, there were some modifications made, but I guess I'd like to know if that is still a problem. Maybe it's not even a blip on the

horizon. This isn't something I've been following recently, but I'm interested in terms of knowing whether that continues to be an issue, whether the minister is satisfied that we currently have adequate safeguards to make sure that we don't have children being brought up here for adoption purposes, basically to frustrate requirements in a number of U.S. states that natural fathers be given notice of birth. That's of interest to me, and I'd be interested in what the minister has to say about that.

The minister may not have been here earlier, when I was asking some questions about PDD, persons with developmental disabilities. I'm interested in currently how many children there are in this province with identified developmental disabilities.

8:40

The other thing. The minister has been to the Renfrew school in Calgary, and I've had quite a bit to do with a group of parents there. There are a group of children in the province who benefit from a particular educational program that's run at that Renfrew school, and there's been a real issue with fairness in funding. There was a legal challenge. Now, I haven't checked in with this group for a while, and I'm close to running out of time, but my recollection is that there had been some undertakings by this minister. I know the minister, and she gets full marks for working hard and trying to respond to issues as they come to her attention. I remember she came to Calgary and toured the school, I think, and probably met with some of the parents. There was some talk of some additional funding, and I haven't heard what the last chapter on that is. I hope it's positive news. The fact that I haven't heard from any of the parents recently suggests that maybe we made some progress there, and maybe the minister has been able to ameliorate what's been a pretty tough situation for families with those children with some pretty severe disabilities.

I know I've got a colleague who wants to share some of the time, Madam Minister, but I'd just make the observation that the reporting back doesn't work so well when it's less than 48 hours after the designated subcommittee of supply. I think when we originally set this rule up, the notion was that there would be time to ask the questions, time for the department to respond, and then we'd sort of come in and wrap things up.

Those are the comments I wanted to make. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks, Madam Minister.

THE CHAIRMAN: Before I call upon the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, would the committee give consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. It's a pleasure to introduce two guests this evening, Cameron and Kyle Gudmundson from west Edmonton. They have come along to be educated in the ways and the processes of this House, and we'd like to extend them a warm welcome and hope they enjoy and learn a little at the same time. Would you please rise.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood to finish off. You have a little over eight and a half minutes.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. It makes me feel good when I see a young

person wearing a DARE T-shirt. It's a program that I support a hundred percent. That young man up there gets an A.

Children's Services (continued)

MS OLSEN: I have a few questions for the minister. Some very serious concerns have come my way recently about the applications to bring a child into the custody of the government. What appears to be happening – and there are matters before the court right now and matters that in fact have been dismissed – is that if there's been an apprehension under section 17 of the Child Welfare Act, if that's occurred, then "an application under subsection (1) shall be heard not more than 10 days after the child is apprehended". Now, what's happening is that it's become 30 days or 40 days, so what judges are doing is dismissing that because the government is breaking their own law. They're saying: look; you were supposed to come before me a maximum of 10 days after the child was apprehended, and you've chosen not to do that for whatever reasons.

My understanding is that many social workers have caseloads so big now because of this increase in child welfare apprehensions that they can't possibly get to court in those days. Now we have kids, vulnerable children, if the issue of guardianship is dismissed, who will go back to the home they are apprehended from. In fact, the government doesn't even think they should be going back there. So you've got a big problem here. There are appeals before the courts. There are all sorts of things happening. Quite frankly, there's going to be a high price to pay when we have another one of those kids who's seriously injured or suffers death at the hands of either a parent or stepparent or whoever it is that they're being apprehended from.

I would urge the minister to look into this right away. This is not something that can wait. This is absolutely urgent. You know, for judges to say "You're breaking your own law" is sending a message to me that there aren't enough people doing the work and that they cannot handle the caseloads they have. It's not the fault of the social worker; it's the fault of the system. It's the issue of not having enough people to deal with those cases. So if they can get those ones flagged, if they're TGOs or if they're going for permanent guardianship orders, then they must come to the top of the line. They must be in that court before 10 days. I urge the minister please to deal with that.

In terms of child welfare cases, I brought this up at the Justice budget debates; however, I think it's something the hon. minister should be aware of as well. When looking at some of the child welfare court cases for days and dates for two- and three-day trials, you're looking at waiting eight to 10 months. That's the backlog in the system. That's unacceptable, because what you have are children who are left hanging within the child welfare system, and nobody is attending to the needs of that child. That is unfair, and it's absolutely astounding to me that this government, who has all these programs and that says "We care about children," is leaving these kids hanging. I'm getting more disillusioned by the day, hon. minister. I know you're working hard and I know you're looking at changes, but these are critical areas of change. We measure time to trial for criminal or civil trials, criminal trials for sure, but we don't measure time to trial dates for these civil applications under the Child Welfare Act. I honestly believe there's got to be some change there, and it has to come quickly.

I'm interested, hon. minister, in knowing how many cases the children at risk response team is dealing with on any given night or any given week. The children at risk response team is that social worker/police officer pair, and I know social workers and police officers who are involved in that. In fact, I was a sub when I worked

downtown and worked on those teams as well. I know where we took those kids. That's the other question I have. Where are you putting these kids? Foster homes are often filled up, so where are these kids going? Are they still going to hotels? I know we used to take them to hotels. I know that they would have one-on-ones in some homes that were quite abusive, and they should never put a social worker into a home situation like that to do a one-on-one. I'm wondering where these things are at.

Back to the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act. I'm a little bit concerned about the lag. The young kids that were on the street have said: look, we need more than 72 hours. To be quite honest, I told you that a long time ago. I told this Assembly, when this act was being brought in: 72 hours is not going to be sufficient for kids. I don't like to see kids incarcerated for not committing a crime. However, we talked about a voluntary long-term program. Where is that at? I sent you a letter on that, Madam Minister. What more have you done? The kids were asking for a place out of town so that they could become detached from the environment they're in. They've got drug problems. They've got all sorts of issues they need to deal with. I'm just wondering where you went with that.

I'm wondering what your position is once this file goes to the Supreme Court of Canada. The likelihood of it getting struck down is probably quite high. Where do you go from there? Are you going to go back to the Child Welfare Act, where the powers belong? What's going to happen? There's obviously a need for something like this out there. I'm not sure it's apprehending kids against their will. It doesn't seem to be doing anything. We've got a high recidivism rate in that program, almost 50 percent or more in fact. We've got a small number of kids responsible for a huge number of arrests, so that to me says that maybe it's not working as well as we had anticipated. It doesn't mean it's not working, because some kids have been taken off the street, and some things have worked out really well. But what about those kids that aren't making it? Where are you going with that, Madam Minister?

I think my time is just about up. When the minister can respond to those, I would appreciate it. I'm especially concerned about this court issue, Madam Minister, if we can look into that as soon as possible. I can speak to you about the courtrooms you might want to be looking at.

8:50

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Children's Services for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense	\$535,540,000

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Environment

THE CHAIRMAN: For a report on this department I'll call on the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

MR. HIERATH: Mr. Chairman, I would like to report on the

meeting of the designated supply subcommittee for the budget estimates for the Department of Environment. The subcommittee met yesterday morning at 8. The meeting was approximately two and a half hours in length, which allowed members an opportunity to address their questions and comments to the minister. The questions provided a frank discussion on many key issues faced by Environment and were comprehensively answered by the minister. The minister also committed to respond in writing to any questions which required further information and research and that these responses would be also tabled in the House for the record.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I was taken by surprise by the brevity of the report from the chairman of the committee.

A couple of observations I want to make. The first one is that once again we have a designated subcommittee of supply. I've got a complete set of *Hansard*. I looked through it. I can't find *Hansard* for the designated subcommittee of supply dealing with Environment. So once again some of the questions I'm asking may be because I was not one of the three opposition members on that particular panel. We may be going over some territory we dealt with before.

Let me start off by asking this. It has to do with the Natural Heritage Act. Members will remember that last year we spent a lot of time talking about the Natural Heritage Act, not as much time as we wanted because we got cut off at second reading. There had been lots of concern. There were to be some public consultations. Then the government said that they had done that. We thought that at least there would be some broader consultation. We thought we'd see legislation. Well, here we are almost at the end of the budget process – I'm starting to feel nostalgic already, Mr. Chairman, that we're going to be looking at the nasty old appropriation bill any day; that makes me think we're sort of well past the halfway point of the spring session – and I haven't seen the natural heritage legislation. I don't know whether it slipped in while I wasn't paying adequate attention. Maybe it's been passed out. Maybe everybody knows about it but me, but I'd like to know.

[Mr. Herard in the chair]

There's been some kind of an MLA committee reviewing it. Well, I haven't seen a report. Has there been a report tabled in the Assembly with respect to that MLA consultation? This reminds me, Mr. Chairman, of sort of secret societies, where right in this very room there may be members who have participated in an MLA consultation on the Natural Heritage Act and I don't know. If anybody is, would you put your hand up, please, so we know who you are? You see, I suspect that right in this room there are people that were part of that so-called MLA consultation. Well, it was no MLA consultation; it was a government caucus consultation. It wasn't a consultation of this Legislative Assembly. My colleague who's the critic in this area certainly wasn't part of that MLA consultation.

My questions would be along this line: where's the report from the MLA review committee? Mr. Chairman, I'd like to know: where is the committee, and when are we going to see that report? When will it be tabled in this Assembly? I'd like to know what the recommendations are from that MLA review committee. This is something that's far too important to be done as some kind of an internal, quiet secret. My constituents in Calgary-Buffalo have a huge interest in

the environment. They would like to be let in on the secret. So maybe we could just sort of lift up that great big blanket of secrecy and have a peek at what the government proposes to do with the Natural Heritage Act.

You know, what's interesting, Mr. Chairman, is that if you look at page 145, Highlights for 2000-2001 – this is the highlight, members – it says, “Respond to the MLA Committee’s review of the draft Natural Heritage legislation.” What does that mean? A thank you letter to the people that made submissions? Does it mean that one Conservative caucus meeting is going to have that as item 1(a)? Most unsatisfactory. I think what we want is not a response. What we want to know is if there’s going to be legislation. Is there going to be adequate, proper legislation to protect those special places? We don’t know. Most unsatisfactory information in the ministry business plan.

Now, one of the things that I note was the issue of park visitation. I’d like a progress report from the minister. There had been that area – I’ll think of the name in a moment. It’s west of Cochrane. If you start driving from Cochrane . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Waiparous.

MR. DICKSON: Yes, Waiparous. It’s a recreational area where there had been huge problems, Mr. Chairman. For anybody who heard a Calgary media outlet, I think it was last summer, there was a huge problem, and there were some additional people hired by the department to go in there and try and police that area. There was actually a major problem, and you know, the minister, to his credit, said that he was going to deal with it. I understand there were some additional patrols and supervision. Some of the volunteer groups that were in there were helping out.

Mr. Chairman, I’m not sure, but it looks like Mr. Don MacDonald is up in the public gallery. Mr. MacDonald at one point was a member of this Assembly, a member for the Three Hills constituency. In fact, could I invite Mr. MacDonald to stand and receive the customary warm welcome of members of the Assembly?

In any event, Mr. Chairman, I’d like an update in terms of whether that problem has been fixed not just for last summer but whether we’re going to see any recurrences of that in the next summer. So I’d like some information with respect to that.

It may seem odd that in the most urban constituency in the province the concern I hear a lot of in Calgary-Buffalo, usually about the number two issue in my constituency office, is the concern around Kananaskis and the Banff-Canmore corridor and that entire area. I’ve got some questions in terms of whether the province is now prepared to take an excellent idea that was put forward by the Liberal opposition in late 1996, early 1997, which was to make all of Kananaskis a provincial park, to outlaw forestry and mining and drilling.

9:00

Frankly, Mr. Chairman, I think the government would earn huge rave reviews from Calgarians certainly and probably from Albertans everywhere if they had the fortitude to do that. It seems to me that month after month we see this to-ing and fro-ing in terms of what’s going to be allowed, what development is going to be permitted, and what’s going to be curtailed in the Kananaskis area. It just seems to me that it’s long past time when our provincial government should go in and say: we’re not just going to make Peter Lougheed park at the far end of Kananaskis Country a protected area; we’re going to take the whole Kananaskis Country. There may be a requirement for grandfathering. We’ve got two downhill ski facilities. There are some existing uses of the park, and there may be grandfathering issues.

If you look at the population of Calgary, Mr. Chairman, you know like I that we’re soon going to hit a million people, the largest unicity in Canada. What that’s going to mean is that that highway to Kananaskis is going to get busier and busier and busier. That’s going to mean more people who are going to start saying: well, let’s build a few more motels; let’s put in a couple more golf courses; let’s put in bowling alleys and movie theatres. We don’t want to see that, so the best way of not getting incrementally taken to that place is just to take a firm stand and say: we’re not going to allow development. It was a Liberal idea, but like so many good Liberal ideas we’d be prepared to have the government take it and use it.

MS OLSEN: They don’t even have to ask.

MR. DICKSON: That’s true. My colleagues are urging the government to take this gift. We make it as a gift to them, that suggestion.

Now, I had some other questions in terms of the major strategies. I’d like to know specifically in this year the details of what the performance measures are going to be around implementation of the Commitment to Sustainable Resource and Environmental Management. There’s an issue of revising and implementing forest fire management policy to incorporate more meaningful and attainable goals. When is that going to happen? Is that the last week of February in 2001? We’ll probably be in an election by then, Mr. Chairman. Can we see some detail in terms of specifically what’s planned?

The forest fire management policy. I think it’s now been a couple of years that there have been deficiencies and shortcomings identified in that. It seems a bit lame, a bit limp for the minister to say that we’re going to revise and implement the management policy. I would have thought that we’d be much further along than that.

“Contribute to the development and implementation of government’s [strategic] direction on climate change and greenhouse gases.” Well, can we particularize? How is that going to be done? Who’s going to do it? How are we going to know whether it’s been successful? When are we going to know when a measurement can be taken in terms of the extent to which government has achieved any measure of success at all in those things? I mean, those are pretty obvious issues that I think we’d like to see.

Now, I’m not sure – I may have some colleagues that wish to speak to this thing, but in the meantime I’m going to take advantage of this chance.

With respect to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, there’s a five-year review under way, and the province has said: look, we’re going to make some submissions to that. Has anybody considered that it might be a good idea to share with Albertans what you’re going to take to the table federally? Before our provincial government, before the Member for Calgary-Nose Creek goes off to a meeting in Ottawa to sort of lay down the law with his colleagues and say, “This is what the province of Alberta wants in terms of changes to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act,” why wouldn’t the minister sort of test that on Canadians?

You know, Mr. Chairman, I have a great location for my constituency office right on 11th Avenue. I’d be happy to put a big poster there and invite Calgarians. When the Minister of Gaming drives by 11th Avenue, he’d be able to drive right up beside my constituency office. He’d drop off some petitions in the mailbox: stop private hospitals. He could also review this. When the Minister of Health and Wellness is at McDougall Centre, he could pop over to the Calgary-Buffalo constituency office. We would have this thing there so Canadians could stop by, take a look, and say: okay, this is what our government proposes to do in terms of making a submission to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. But we don’t do that.

This is like my other pet beef. That has to do with the Bill C-5, the whole business of privacy protection. Other provinces hold public hearings so citizens have a chance. [interjection] You know, Mr. Chairman, if I could digress for a moment.

I remember going into Calgary-Varsity because there were seniors that called me. They had a big concern. There are three or four big apartment buildings right across from Market Mall, a large number of seniors there. They had a real concern with what was happening in terms of rent increases, and they wanted to be able to talk to somebody in the provincial Legislature, so I had a chance to attend that meeting. What those constituents wanted – and I undertook to communicate to their MLA, to remind their MLA of some of their concerns, because he's probably too darn busy in Edmonton to be able to come at the drop of a hat. I understand that.

The minister is very busy. There are gaming machines to check out from lounges in Fort McMurray to Milk River.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I was prepared for a little digression, but this is getting to be quite a long, long story, so we could maybe get back to the budget.

MR. DICKSON: It's the story of my life, Mr. Chairman. You get sort of caught up in the flight of the moment. Thank you very much for bringing me back and keeping me on task.

Just as a fundamental rule, if the government of the province of Alberta on a major issue like the federal environmental legislation is going to make representations on our behalf, let us in on the secret. You know, take out a little ad in the paper; highlight it. Even if they sent out some material to my constituency office, I could share. I would like to be able to do that. When constituents come in and go through the budget book – and I do have constituents who are interested, say, in Environment – I just give them the budget book and tell them to go through and identify things, questions they've got, and I'll see if I can find answers for them.

If they ask about this, I don't know a darn thing about that. There may be other MLAs that are better versed than I am in it, but I don't like not being able to assist and be responsive when I hear those kind of concerns.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Those are matters that I think are particularly important. I have a couple of colleagues that wanted to make some observations too. The last one, though, that I did want to make – and this is interesting. If you look at element 2.0.6, freedom of information and privacy, we're forecasting an increase from \$582,000 to \$603,000. This is one of the few departments where I've seen them forecasting an increase in FOIP costs. [interjections] I saved the best to the last, Mr. Chairman.

What I want to know is: why is the department contemplating an increase in fees instead of a more aggressive strategy in terms of making publicly available the information that the people want? You know, any MLA in Calgary worth his or her salt should be able to tell you right now the kinds of environmental information that . . .

9:10

MR. SMITH: You sound like Allan Rock, telling people what's good for you.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, I'm trying to stay on task. I'm being baited mightily by the Minister of Gaming, but I'm not going to gamble with him.

You know, there are times that you wish you had ministers here

provincially with the courage to be able to stand up and fight for public health care. I'm proud that the federal minister of health was able to come to the city of Calgary, be respectful by coming to the city of Calgary rather than issuing statements from Ottawa, and have a chance to listen to the Minister of Gaming. The Minister of Gaming was there. I had no idea he had so much interest in health care, but he was there and was taking notes. He looked very solemn. He looked quite hurt. He looked quite offended that the . . . [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: Order. He only has one minute left. Let him speak.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, maybe he would answer this question.

THE CHAIRMAN: Order, hon. minister.

MR. DICKSON: In any event, Mr. Chairman, what I would like is answers in terms of the basis for the projected increase in element 2.0.6 over last year and why the provincial government chooses not to adopt a more aggressive strategy in terms of getting information out to constituents.

Mr. Chairman, after the buzzer rings, I'm going to go over and sit beside my friend from Cypress-Medicine Hat, and I'm going to share with him . . . [interjections] I think those are the observations that I wanted to make at this time. I can't concentrate on the subject at hand any further.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

MR. WHITE: Sir, a couple of questions for the minister very quickly, because my hon. colleague was baited into taking much more time than he actually really wanted to take. I'd like to ask the minister a number of questions surrounding: in his business plan under strategy 4 it says "cooperate with Municipal Affairs in the delivery of the Petroleum Storage Tank Remediation [plan]." How, in fact, is this going to be done? We haven't heard about this plan for quite some time. Is the fund established, and will those current owners who are not responsible for the contamination be actually compensated?

Thank you kindly, sir.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Environment for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$332,506,000

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Treasury

THE CHAIRMAN: Now, are we agreed on the adjudication of time that we've had in the past: 20, 20, and five? Is that agreeable?

MR. SAPERS: As long as it doesn't set a precedent for any other meeting of this committee.

THE CHAIRMAN: No. It's for this evening. The committee makes . . . [interjection] Right.

All right, with that in mind we'll call upon the hon. Provincial Treasurer to give his report.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The previous evening which we spent in estimates of Treasury was very helpful for me both to share a message that I think is an important one and also to receive input from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, which I did. We are still working on the huge volume of questions which we were given, but it is our intention of course, as in the past, to complete that list. I would be pleased to take any other input from my colleagues or those across the floor at this time.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me start off by saying that I'm pleased that the minister was able to be here tonight and give that brief response and join in the discussion. I must say that I find it a little disconcerting that here we are at the culmination of the budget process, and we've heard not from other ministers tonight but from some committee chairmen, and that leaves me with a very hollow feeling on behalf of the taxpayers of this province. The least I think they would expect is that the ministers would defend their own budgets through to the end of the process.

I would certainly take the Treasurer at his word that he will be providing written responses to the many, many questions. He has a good track record actually in his department of doing that, but the bad news is that they come months and months and months and months after we have voted on the estimates. We're in that position again where we're being asked to approve business plans of this department, which of course are core to the overall business of government as they talk about the tax strategies of the government, et cetera, not to mention this minister's own budget estimates of some 9 and a half billion dollars or so when he talks about the revenue. So when we look at the consolidated statement, we're talking about a considerable amount of money, and I just wish that we had answers to the very good questions from the Official Opposition – and I'll stress that they're questions from the Official Opposition – before we're asked to vote on these estimates.

I want to focus my comments tonight to the Provincial Treasurer on his business plan and performance measures. I note under goal 1, "a healthy and sustainable financial position," that one of the performance measures is "a measure that tracks Alberta's wealth creation, achievement of fiscal sustainability and reduction in dependence on resource revenues," and the measure is to be developed. Now, as I recall, this is a measure that in one form or another has been under construction for quite a time, and I'm a little disappointed to see that at this point in the province's evolution it is still to be developed.

We've had the government take a rather bold step in creating a \$500 million endowment for science and engineering research. We've seen some other commitments that will bring us into a new economy. Yet we see Treasury lagging behind with a performance measure in terms of "fiscal sustainability and reduction in dependence on resource revenues." Obviously one of the key goals of this government since it came to power has been economic diversification, and it's a little surprising that this performance measure is still not fully developed.

Going on with goal 1, another performance measure has to do with

the pension plan. I must say that I join with many other Albertans who are confused about what is the real goal of the provincial government when it comes to reforming the Canada pension plan. We see joint communiques from finance ministers talking about the future of the pension plan and talking about working with the federal government, and we've seen, of course, reports that a made-in-Alberta pension plan doesn't seem to be really sustainable, that there's too much debt to be assumed, that there are too many administrative problems, that there's too much risk and uncertainty. Yet right in the government's business plan under Strategies/Outputs it talks about this two-track approach. One is working with the federal government, but the other is to "investigate the advantages and disadvantages of establishing an Alberta Pension Plan."

Now, the performance measure attached to this is even more surprising. It is the "agreement by Finance Ministers on legislative amendments to the Canada Pension Plan Act at the end of the current renewal period December 2002." This is either very clever by design, which is to hold out some little carrot to those Albertans who are convinced that we should move to a made-in-Alberta pension plan, and it makes it look as though this government is ready to opt out at the first opportunity, which would be 2002, or what it says is that because of all the contrary evidence and all the advice from finance ministers in other jurisdictions, in fact the agreement will be to renew involvement in the federal plan, in the Canada pension plan.

9:20

I guess I'm asking the Treasurer to be clear: which is it? Are we actively investigating the possibility of a made-in-Alberta pension plan and therefore opting out of the Canada pension plan? If so, could we see the work in progress? Could we see how we're going to deal with the assumed debt obligations, et cetera. Or is this just written this way so that it can be all things to all people, so it can appeal to people on both sides of the argument?

Mr. Chairman, the next performance measure also has to do with pension plans; in this case, the local authorities and university academic pension plans, which are not without their own controversies. I don't want to dwell on all the issues associated with those pension plans and pension plan reform in this province, but I specifically want to look at the performance measure that says that there will be "less day-to-day involvement of the government in pension plan decisions."

Now, the way that performance measure is worded, of course, it would give me ample opportunity to have fun at the Treasurer's expense in terms of there being less day-to-day involvement and the fact that he may be moving on to bigger and better things. So I suppose I could say that this performance measure may be accomplished simply because of the ambition of the Treasurer, but that would be a cheap and hollow attempt at humour. What I will ask is if the Treasurer would please ensure that his performance measures have a little bit more substance than this.

I don't know, Mr. Treasurer, what "less day-to-day involvement" means. Compared to what? One less phone call? I mean, what's less day-to-day involvement? What is the issue that is being addressed in this performance measure, and how are you going to tell that you dealt with it? This is an example of a very poorly worded performance measure, very unsatisfactory, and it really doesn't give a reader any information about what it is that's going to be accomplished through this strategy and by this performance measure.

The next performance measure I want to look at is under goal 2: "Appropriate financial and performance information available to allow Albertans to hold government accountable." The first performance measure is the "portion of Albertans aware of govern-

ment's financial performance in the past year; target: 80% of Albertans aware." It's not a satisfaction measure. It doesn't say that they're satisfied with it. It says that they're aware of it. I'm wondering exactly how that performance measure is measured. Is there a survey? Is there a poll? Is it a mail-out? Is it part of those 770,000 phone calls that the Treasurer was talking about today when he was reporting for Executive Council? How do they get to that number? The target is 80 percent. Where are we in actuality, Mr. Chairman?

The next is one of my favourite performance measures in this minister's business plan, because it is so self-congratulatory that I find it hard to believe it would be here. The performance measure has to do with the relationship between Treasury and other ministries, and it's the "satisfaction of deputy heads with the government's accountability system; target: all satisfied or very satisfied." All of the deputy ministers are satisfied or very satisfied.

I'd like a show of hands here in the Assembly, Mr. Chairman, if you'd permit me, to see who would be surprised if not all the deputy heads were satisfied or very satisfied in terms of the accountability and financial management relationship they have with Treasury. And if they weren't, another show of hands, how many think that they would officially report it? Just curious, Mr. Chairman. It seems to me that this is another one of those performance measures that is there simply to take up space on the page, because it really doesn't mean a darn thing.

Now we get to goal 3: "a fair, competitive and simple provincial tax system managed efficiently and effectively," and we get to this performance measure under the first set of strategies, which again is one under construction. It says, "A measure to compare Alberta's tax competitiveness to major international competitors," and it's to be developed. Mr. Chairman, how can this be? We have a Treasurer who's going across the country coast-to-coast-to-coast talking about Alberta's tax competitiveness and holding it out as a model for the rest of the country and hoping he'll even have a chance to impose it on the rest of the country, and they haven't even developed a core performance measure to determine the benefit of Alberta's tax strategy right here at home.

Now, I would like to give the Treasurer some advice that I found in the 20th report of the Standing Committee on Finance, which was issued by the federal Parliament in June of 1999. The title is *Productivity with a Purpose: Improving the Standard of Living of Canadians*. It's referring to the work of Jonathan Kesselman, a noted professor from the University of British Columbia, who has reported on the role of tax and tax reform as it relates to productivity. One of the conclusions of the report is:

The more appropriate way to link taxation to the standard of living is the manner in which it affects the incentives faced by individuals and corporations. What is important is not just the level of taxation but the composition of those taxes and the way in which they are imposed on the economy. For example, a variety of European countries face higher tax burdens than Canada, yet they have been able to achieve better productivity and faster growth than we have.

I hope the Treasurer is paying attention to that because I think he'll find that it's constructive. Taxation is a complex problem and requires much more than a simple flat solution.

While we're on the topic of flat simple solutions, let me say that the much-touted flat tax is beginning to go the same way as those people who believe in a flat earth, and that is that it just doesn't make sense and it's not true that it'll be helpful, Mr. Chairman.

The fact is that if you look at what it would take to flow through tax savings to Albertans, it would take into the fiscal year 2008, including a reduction of the 11 percent rate to a 7.8 percent rate

before Albertans achieve the full benefit of the federal tax cuts. In fact, if we don't do anything, if we don't move that rate down and raise the personal exemption, Albertans are going to be hosed by this Treasurer's tax plan. We're going to see Albertans losing a tax advantage, and we're going to see Albertans, for example, in the \$35,000 tax range having to pay well over \$200 more under the flat tax system.

Even if it were moved down to 10.5 percent, Mr. Chairman, at \$50,000 Alberta taxpayers will have to pay over \$190 more under the Treasurer's proposed plan. For those Albertans earning \$65,000 a year, even if we move the flat tax rate down from 11 to 10.5 percent, Albertans again are going to come out on the losing end and will have to pay nearly \$200 more in income tax to this Treasurer than they would if we stayed at the tax-on-tax rate. So I would ask that the Treasurer take a close look at his tax plans and these performance measures.

The next goal I want to look at is "an efficient, fair and competitive capital market and an efficient and fair regulatory environment for financial institutions and private pension plans." One of the performance measures is that Alberta's market share of investment capital be maintained. Mr. Chairman, Alberta's share of investment capital is not sufficient. I think the Minister of Innovation and Science will back me on this. We don't have enough access to capital in this province, and there are things that have to happen in terms of tax policy and investment policy and management issues that will raise that. We have to attract more venture capital. It is simply not good enough for this Treasurer to say that the performance measure target will be achieved if our share of investment capital is maintained. It has to grow. I am looking toward this Treasurer and this government to demonstrate some leadership in that regard and not be satisfied with the status quo.

Mr. Chairman, the last one I want to deal with is also in goal 5, and it's the development of "a risk assessment system to help identify pension plans needing special attention and assistance to maintain registered status." Now, the performance measure here is another one of those that's under construction. It is: "compliance problems in 'at risk' pension plans resolved within an acceptable period of time," and the measure again is to be developed. This is another example not just of a performance measure that should already be on the books and that we should already be measuring progress towards, but the language here is incredibly soft and mushy, and it doesn't make much sense. What is this acceptable period of time, and acceptable to whom? I would say that for those men and women who are waiting for their pension issues to be resolved, a day is too much of a delay.

I would ask that this Treasurer pay some attention to these performance measures. His department is supposed to be setting the standard across government, and these performance measures in many cases just simply don't add up.

Mr. Chairman, I have one other general comment that I want to make about the business plans of Treasury, and that has to do with the effort that these business plans go to to try and convince Albertans that this government is being aggressive about tax cuts. Now, let me say that if we compare the Alberta tax cut plan to the federal tax cut plan and we take a look at how much effort is truly being made in this province compared to the federal government, what we find is that under the leadership of the federal government, the Prime Minister and the Finance minister federally, there is a total effort of 42 percent of the fiscal dividend being used right now for tax cuts, and 23 percent is going into program spending.

Let's look at Alberta this fiscal year. What we find is that program spending is going up by 61 percent, throwing money at problems, often in an untargeted way. Debt repayment is good, at

20 percent, although the feds outstrip them there as well, with 35 percent of the federal surplus going towards debt repayment.

9:30

On this issue of tax cuts, where we see this government pounding its chest and trying to claim some primacy and some leadership, what we see is the most striking comparison, and that is that while the federal government is able to contribute 42 percent of its surplus to tax cuts this year, the provincial government has only allocated 12 percent. I think that in itself takes away the bragging rights from this Treasurer and this provincial government.

Mr. Chairman, the last comment I want to make has to do with this government's use of taxpayers' money to run what are in essence caucus committees of the PC Party. It's the issue that we've raised in this Assembly many, many times, and that is that the standing policy committees are really nothing more than caucus committees and in fact are extensions of the PC Party's policy development process. In that regard they should not be paid for out of the departmental budgets. Taxpayers' money should not be going towards these committees. These committees are not an extension of democracy. In fact, they are exactly the opposite.

I would like to propose an amendment to the motion which would approve the estimates of Treasury. I believe the amendment has been circulated, so I will move it now and read it into the record.

Be it resolved that the estimates for the standing policy committee on financial planning and human resources under reference 1.0.8 of the 2000-2001 estimates of the department of Treasury be reduced by \$95,000 so that the operating expense and capital investment to be voted is \$139,343,000.

Mr. Chairman, obviously the purpose of this is to protect the taxpayers . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: This amendment, hon. members, will be known as amendment A1.

Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. As I was saying, Mr. Chairman, obviously the purpose of this amendment is to protect the taxpayers from an expenditure of their money that would be inappropriate and contrary to the stated intention of this Treasurer: to make sure he gets value out of every loonie that he collects from Albertans. I would hope that the committee tonight will approve this motion. I think it will send a message to government.

Some people may say that it's not a significant amount of money, that it's only \$95,000. I say two things to that, Mr. Chairman. Number one, \$95,000 is a lot of money in my household. Number two, \$95,000 may pale in comparison to the budget surplus of this government, but it's \$95,000 that could be spent to hire a couple of nurses or \$95,000 that could be used to provide a couple more teachers or \$95,000 that could be used to provide some more funding for school hot lunch programs or \$95,000 that could be put to use in any of a number of the priorities of the people of Alberta.

Not in one survey, not in one public opinion poll, and not in one conversation I've had with any constituent has anybody ever said to me: "It's a priority. I want to see my tax money go to buy sandwiches and cookies for Conservative MLAs so that they can get together behind closed doors, in secret, in camera, and have their policy committee meetings. That's how I want to see my tax money spent." That conversation has never taken place, Mr. Chairman, and I don't think that conversation ever would take place. I think taxpayers deserve a break, and I would suggest that one way to start giving them that break is to support this motion and send a message to this government that they can't be wasteful with taxpayers' money.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the department of Treasury for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$139,438,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$98,941,000

Gaming

THE CHAIRMAN: First of all, we'll call upon the minister to start off the deliberations on this department.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a welcome opportunity both to thank the Minister of Infrastructure for being able to move us up with some dispatch to discuss the Gaming ministry budget estimates and also to table responses to questions from February 29, 2000. I'm happy to be able to do that. Considering that we were fighting a considerable bout of the flu that night, we have worked diligently on the answers to the key questions put forward by the opposition. We are tabling that tonight, and we look forward to comments from the critic.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have in front of me a copy of the annual report for the year ended March 31, 1999, for the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. Now, I'm not going to refer to the document tonight, because tomorrow night and Thursday afternoon, of course, we deal with lotteries specifically. Tonight we're dealing with the wrap-up for Gaming, but I have lots of questions from this booklet that over the next two days I'm going to be touching on, so the minister should be prepared for those.

Let me say first of all that I had anticipated that by now I would have gotten the written responses to the questions that were raised in the committee stage upstairs, and that's one of the disadvantages of this process we're into where we're split into two different areas on one particular night. There are many of you that didn't have the opportunity, of course, to hear the questions that were raised, and the minister had assured that the answers we didn't get that night we would get in writing. As I say, up to now we haven't gotten them. Had we gotten them by now, it would have made my job a whole lot easier tonight because then I wouldn't have to repeat myself. All of you would have copies of the responses, so you'd know exactly what I'm talking about.

So I'm going to be forced to kind of go over the issues that were raised to sort of educate or inform the rest of the Members of the Legislative Assembly, that I know would be so interested in what's happening in the area of Gaming. I don't want to take too much time doing it, Mr. Chairman, because there are other members of this caucus that want to speak within that allocated period of time. I will keep my comments relatively short, knowing at the same time that we also have two days coming, tomorrow and the day after, dealing specifically with lotteries, which will give us ample opportunity to raise additional concerns and such.

One of the first things I talked about at the committee stage when

we dealt with the budget for Gaming was the freeze that was put in place by the minister, the freeze that was announced. We read about it in the paper. I was never sent any type of formal or written report or memo or letter as the critic for Gaming, for lotteries, saying: I've proposed a freeze, and this is what the freeze is going to entail. That never was done, so I'm not familiar with the terms of reference, for example, for the freeze. I'm not sure if the freeze is going to be wrapped up by this summer or if we were talking in terms of it wrapping up next summer.

I'm not sure how many slot machines were kind of jammed into the casinos at the last minute that had apparently been approved prior to the freeze being announced, not installed but that had been committed. I understand it's something like an additional thousand machines that are either in already or else working their way in. I understand that the Palace Casino, for example, in West Edmonton Mall is once again expanding. We have another new nonprofit casino coming on board on the Yellowhead Trail.

9:40

Let's make it very, very clear that from this caucus's point of view, we've never taken the position that we would expect Alberta would be what we would call a totally gambling-free zone. I don't think that's realistic. I don't think in any province you would see that type of thing. We've grown accustomed to the 6/49s, to the scratch and wins, to the bingos, to the horse races and such, and I've participated as a spectator and wagered the odd 2 dollar bill at the racetrack myself in the past. We've all had the opportunity to gamble to some extent, some to a very, very limited degree.

The position of our caucus really is – and had the plebiscites that were held addressed that particular option – to restrict gambling activities to the nonprofit casino centres, where the bulk of the proceeds from the gambling activities goes to nonprofit groups, the very, very many nonprofit groups that we see now being benefited to some extent by foundations like the Wild Rose Foundation and such. Poring through this report, there are hundreds and hundreds of worthwhile organizations throughout the province that do benefit from lottery proceeds, not necessarily VLT proceeds but lottery proceeds. If in fact Albertans had been given the option of restricting gambling activities to the many nonprofit casinos, I think Albertans by a majority of 70 percent would have opted for that particular alternative. That would have put to an end the controversy surrounding the question of the VLTs in the bars, the drain on the local communities and such, but that option wasn't there. Possibly some day we'll see that option being provided to Albertans.

I think that most of the anti VLT groups or those groups that headed up the plebiscite – I shouldn't call them anti VLT groups. I think by and large they would have accepted the fact if the gambling activities were restricted to the nonprofit or charitable type casinos. That would have been acceptable all around.

Questions were raised at the committee stage. Would this freeze, for example, look at the presentation that was made by the offspring of the Hotel Association that proposed turning a number of the hotels throughout the province into minicasinos, not charitable minicasinos but minicasinos where the hotel operators or the operators of that gambling centre would receive a chunk of the action? If I recall correctly, something like 15 percent. Then they were allocating another 15 percent, whatever, to be given to . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Are you rising on a point of order, hon. Minister of Gaming?

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. SMITH: A point of order, Mr. Chairman. Would the good member entertain a question under *Beauchesne* 333?

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Chairman, I would love to. The difficulty is that I've agreed to a relatively narrow time frame to make my comments, and because these questions weren't addressed by the minister during the earlier budget process, first I'd like to see him answer our questions before he starts tossing us questions. Now, had he answered all our questions, then I'd have been glad to answer his question.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. member just has to say yes or no.

MR. WICKMAN: I'll just continue, because I know this member is anxious to get going.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: Is that freeze going to involve a review of the possibilities of larger-type casinos in areas like Banff, for example? Is it going to see an expansion of electronic gambling into the bingo halls?

Now, I want to talk just a bit about addiction. I commend the decision made by the government, the previous minister, to spend \$1.5 million in terms of setting up a research institute in terms of addiction and for appointing as a board member a reformed addict to VLTs, who lost, by his own admission, something close to a million dollars, who lost his business in Fort Saskatchewan as a result of his addiction to those machines. Coupled with the \$3.4 million to fight addiction, that brings a total expenditure there of \$4.9 million, and that's getting to be a more respectable figure than we've seen in the past. However, I'd like to see it just tied to a percentage, that 1 percent of all gambling proceeds be set aside that would be used to try and fight the addiction problems and the other social problems that result from those that can't control their gambling urges.

We also talked in terms of the distribution of the lottery dollars. The gaming summit, of course, that was held in Medicine Hat talked in terms specifically of gambling proceeds not going to general revenue, and we do see a portion of it going to general revenue to be used for nonprofit community charitable type organizations. We see the biggest portion of gambling profits now going to various government departments. Virtually every government department now gets a chunk of the action. We even see the lottery boards turn around and funnel some of their millions of dollars that they receive to branches within their jurisdiction; in other words, bypassing the true nonprofit organizations and turning some of it over to parks and recreation and so on and so forth that they may call a nonprofit activity.

We also talked about the court actions. What ever happened to this? During question period today questions were asked of the Premier about trust, promises that are made. One of the promises made by this Premier was that within seven days of a successful plebiscite or resolution by a municipality, the machines would be removed. The VLTs would be gone. Up in the Fort McMurray area – and the member could nod his head – I believe we're now talking in terms of 24 months and the machines are still humming away, still spitting out the big bucks for the hotel operator but a bigger share of the proceeds, a much bigger share of the proceeds, going towards the government coffers, of course.

Some of the questions talked in terms of the distribution of liquor and the possibilities of rule changes that would allow certain advantages to some of the larger retailers. A question was raised by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, and I often wonder whatever happened to her recommendations that were made in one of her reports, why they were never acted on. She asked some questions in

a session here one day that sounded to me like she was questioning whether some of these representatives of the distillers are – I think the term that was used was bribing – bribing the retailers by giving them freebies, kickbacks, giving them gifts.

A N HON. MEMBER: They call them incentives.

MR. WICKMAN: Incentives, yes. That, according to legislation, is supposed to be outlawed. It's supposed to be banned. It's not supposed to be allowed. But it is going on. I know it's going on. It's going on in the form of sweatshirts, advertising, various little things like that to allow a retailer to display.

Now, I've used up a portion of the time we're allocated, and I know the Member for Edmonton-Glenora is anxious to go. I'll have more opportunities in the next two days, so I'll let him take it away from here.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Could you give me a time count?

THE CHAIRMAN: Eight minutes and 45 seconds.

MR. SAPERS: Oh, that's terrific. Thank you very much, Edmonton-Rutherford. That's terrific.

I just had a chance to read the responses to questions that the minister tabled at the beginning of his remarks, and he goes through I believe 10 questions that he answers in this document that was tabled. What I note is that while the minister in his comments said, "I'm going to table responses to the unanswered questions," it would leave one with the impression that all the unanswered questions were in this document, and in fact that's not the case. There are many questions that were put to the minister regarding his performance measures, regarding the issue of the so-called incentives from breweries and distillers and their agents to Alberta retailers, regarding the operation of the gaming commission. Many, many questions are left unanswered.

9:50

I find it a real shame – when we're talking about almost a billion dollars of lottery funds coming into the provincial coffers, when we're dealing with significant issues that touch on addiction, that touch on fraud, that have been so controversial that there have been plebiscites in several Alberta communities about things like VLTs, that they have been the discussion of sermons in places of worship – that an issue as important as this does not deserve or does not get the complete attention of the minister and that for the men and women of this Assembly who come here to ask the minister appropriate questions about his responsibilities and about his government, he doesn't take his responsibilities seriously enough and doesn't feel any sense of obligation to answer those questions.

Of course, this is an extension of the rather dismissive way in which he handled himself during the subcommittee debate in which he even at one point, in the middle of questioning, got up and left the room and then made the observation that maybe he would answer some questions but not some others, because those others perhaps weren't deserving in his opinion.

You know what? His opinion isn't really what counts, Mr. Chairman. What counts is that the people of this province get answers to questions about (a) how their money is being spent and, even more importantly, (b) how it is that this government is scheming and conniving to find new ways to pick their pockets

through gaming and lottery schemes. So I would ask that this minister rethink his approach to his responsibilities as a member of Executive Council and start answering questions that are put to him by members of the opposition. After all, the questions we bring forward during this process are questions that are raised to us by the taxpayers of this province.

Whether the minister wants to acknowledge that or not, that is in fact the case. It is our role at this point in time as members of the Official Opposition to, amongst other things, hold the government accountable. You see, their responsibility is to reciprocate and to be accountable. I think Albertans are going to not feel positively inclined towards this minister and the government he's part of if they tend to continue to dismiss the questions that are raised and they don't feel any sense of responsibility to be accountable.

Mr. Chairman, I must say, though, that this minister's attitude doesn't surprise me in terms of the overall budget examination process as it's evolved in the province of Alberta. It seems to me that this examination process has become an inconvenience to the government. While they can no longer govern by special warrant, they still have to bring in supplementary supplies, and we've had lots of those, but this government seems to have been doing everything it can to dismiss and diminish the role of the Legislative Assembly when it comes to examining the budget and the business plans of the government.

While they would like to think that what happens during this process is not relevant, I can tell you that the three million citizens of this province don't think it's irrelevant at all. They certainly don't think it's irrelevant when it comes to the money that's been taken out of their pockets to contribute to the areas of priority that they believe in as opposed to the areas of priority that the government has told them they should simply trust them on. Mr. Chairman, it's insufficient, it's inadequate, and it's contentious. It simply is disservice.

I have a list of perhaps another two dozen questions for this minister regarding his business plans and his budget estimates. I could read them into the record now. I could write them like I've done in the past. I could table them in the Assembly, which I've also done in the past for other departments. I guess I'm a slow learner, but I finally caught on. This government just doesn't care enough to answer those kinds of questions. They don't want to take the tough questions. They don't want to address them, and they certainly don't want to account to the taxpayers of this province when it comes to anything that makes them feel uncomfortable or would indicate that maybe they haven't done all their homework.

In spite of the waste of time that it has often become asking certain members of Executive Council questions about their budget estimates, I guess I'll continue to do so because that's certainly what my constituents would expect of me, but I would just hope that one day soon these members of Executive Council will reciprocate in kind and will provide full, complete answers to legitimate questions. Until that day comes, Mr. Chairman, I'll be reminding them of that obligation, and of course I look forward to the day when my colleagues and I will have an opportunity to answer their questions, although I can't imagine for the life of me that their questions will be very difficult. I'll undertake right now that when given the opportunity, I'll respond more than in kind. I'll be accountable to the taxpayers.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Gaming for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense \$183,191,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Lottery fund payments, \$837,500,000. Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.*

Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Infrastructure

THE CHAIRMAN: To begin this evening's deliberations on this department, we'll call upon the hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Last Thursday, the week before, we had the opportunity to answer a number of questions with respect to our budget presentation. Earlier today I dispatched the last answers to questions that were raised by hon. members in the House.

Over the next three years in the province we'll see tremendous growth attributed to infrastructure development in all areas: roads, health facilities, and schools. On the road side approximately 13,500 person-years of work, about another 500 miles of road, four-lanes, including numerous other improvements.

I think we've answered conclusively any of the questions that were raised, and I'll just leave it at that this evening and ask for the vote.

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few questions for the minister. When we debated the budget over a week ago, I asked the minister about infrastructure in relation to the new aboriginal school that is trying to come onstream. At that time the government had said: no, we are not going to build a new school; we've only got a 70 percent utilization rate in the city of Edmonton, and 85 percent is what we're looking for. So what they offered to this particular school was separate classrooms around the city, an environment where all the kids going to the new schools wouldn't be able to go to one school at one time. It was somewhat segmented in the way that the space was going to be used. The reality was that there wasn't one facility that could house 600 to 800 students, and that's what the school was looking for, the actual school board and the principal-in-waiting, if you will, Phyllis Cardinal.

Now, as of yet I'm not sure, Mr. Minister, how far those negotiations have gone, but I understand we still don't have any funding for the needed building. What we have is a school board having to negotiate another facility with a private enterprise. I'm not impressed. I'm absolutely not impressed.

10:00

We are going to have the largest growth in aboriginal young people in front of us in the next 10 to 15 years. These kids are faring better in schools like Ben Calf Robe, in the Awasis program. As I mentioned before, their parents are putting them in the program because the kids are learning. They're not just hard-to-handle kids any more. They're not kids that are going there because no other school will take them. These are kids who want to learn Cree, who want to learn, who want to be in a school environment where they're actually learning, and that is the thing that has been brought forward to me.

I also alluded at that time, Mr. Minister, to some of the feel-good stuff like the bill before us, Bill 2. It's great for the Premier to come in here and put on his feathers and sit in his chair, but he still won't fund a school. That has far more weight, in my view, and has a real, real potential to start graduating some kids from high school. When we're looking at the costs associated, at one point I was told that up in Lac La Biche and St. Paul \$6,000 per student is going into some of these schools. That's what they're getting. That's what the school is getting per student because it's federal funding. Okay? They're not graduating one kid. Not one aboriginal kid is graduating from those schools.

Mr. Minister, I am going to urge you at this point to drop the arbitrary 85 percent utilization rate. I'm going to urge you to drop that, and I'm going to suggest to you that for this particular program you ought to not worry about that rate. You need to focus on the program, the school program as it is, and the needs of the school.

So while the education minister is over there, you should be talking. The two of you should be talking, and he should be saying to you, "Look; we need that school in Edmonton." You should be saying: "You know what? I'm a responsible member of this government. I want aboriginal kids in this province to pass. I want them to carry on and become leaders in the community and become members of the Legislature or wherever they choose to go." But you know what? It isn't going to happen if you don't play your part. So I'm just asking, Mr. Minister, where you are on that. Have you gotten any further than our last discussion? I'll let you ponder on that while I ask a couple of other questions.

I wanted to know, Mr. Minister, if the government has a clear statement showing the cost per unit length of highway per region for maintaining primary highways. We received some information in response to our written questions but not enough, and it's difficult to determine cost-effectiveness from the information supplied. So I'm wondering if the minister could provide additional information, if he could do a cost comparison showing costs before and after privatization, the cost now associated to municipalities as a result of that. Mr. Minister, will you table any studies, reports, cost-benefit analyses that were done by this government to support the argument for privatization in transportation? I'm wondering if the minister would undertake to do that for us.

The reason I'm asking that, Mr. Minister, is that I was in Public Accounts last week, when the minister of energy was asked to table reports, cost-benefit analyses, and studies in relation to his electrical deregulation plan. The end result of that was that he didn't have any studies; he didn't have any reports. He didn't have to provide them, you see, because this was based on ideology, and ideology, I'm afraid, Mr. Minister, doesn't necessarily realize the savings you think you might be endeavouring to end up with. So I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, if you could possibly do that for us. I think that would be really helpful so that all Albertans, not just us but all Albertans, will have an understanding of how the Department of Infrastructure and the then department of transportation came to believe that they should privatize the transportation department. Was it just ideology, so you didn't have to provide those things?

*see page 578, left col., para. 10

You know, I'm glad the Minister of Health and Wellness is here today, because I'm a little worried that his health bill is just ideology. We've seen it in electrical deregulation, I think it exists in Infrastructure, and now I'm almost a hundred percent sure that this ideology has expanded into that private health care bill. It would be really helpful, Mr. Minister, if you could do that for us.

The other issue that I wanted to speak to specifically was not the notion of the national infrastructure program, Mr. Minister, but if this government has had any discussions with the federal government or other provincial governments in relation to a national highways program. I'm just wondering, if that has come to your attention, what your perspective is on that. Are you going to invest any time and energy into something like that? Maybe you can help us out with that too.

I know other members of my caucus have some questions they would like to ask, so I'll take my seat.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I had a chance to watch tonight on TV the Francophone program which was held here today. I watched as you toured some students through your office, and it was reported that you were lobbied for Infrastructure money to build new schools. The students interviewed mentioned that many students were riding buses in the urban areas for one to two hours. What my question is leading up to is that when I was questioning you last week, I think there was a misunderstanding of my question to you, and you came back only with the answer that rural students ride buses from one to two hours. When I brought up the fact of questioning the hundred percent utilization, I suppose my question to yourself, Mr. Minister, around new schools, construction in communities or areas like large cities where rapid growth is happening, wasn't too clear.

When this government is fixated on a hundred percent utilization and I read that some people are proposing that inner-city schools aren't needed, well, the fact that they have 100 students now, and when they were built 40 years ago, there were 180 students there, doesn't mean that the school isn't required. I tried to emphasize that students in the inner-city settings need a school within walking distance. These students, if made to ride Edmonton Transit, in most cases wouldn't even attend school due to the lack of parental support in taking them to school, lack of money and food, lack of bus fare. I also brought up the fact that I've attended two different seminars that highlighted no new schools since 1994.

A hundred percent utilization is what I'm really concerned with. There's no problem with hundred percent utilization in, say, my end of town from 127th Avenue north to 149th Avenue, because I don't have any schools past 149th Avenue, and they are filled to one hundred percent capacity. But I am talking about inner-city schools, maybe from the river north to 127th Avenue, varying between 60, 70, or 75 percent, whatever you want to play the game with. Then anything farther north of 127th Avenue must have a hundred percent utilization to trigger anything.

I do know that if you went into this type of thing, you would have to build new schools. I don't care if it's on 153rd Avenue or it's on 167th Avenue, but with this method it would also help south of the river, where we're seeing the same case in the last few years in the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek or the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They would benefit from the same kind of solution that I'm suggesting to you.

10:10

We have looked at existing schools and when they were built.

Schools built from the early 1970s, when the Conservatives did come in, until the late 1970s were constructed with reasonably good structure, but any school within my constituency that was built in the 1980s, within a few blocks of these schools, are totally inept, if that's the right word for it. They're infrastructurally in bad shape because they weren't built with any money. It was a time when everybody started to cut back on money. We are going to see with schools even from 1980 to 1994, when they quit building in Edmonton or quit building throughout the province, that these schools aren't built to the standard of the last number of years.

I traveled the province and talked to different areas in the province; for example, Exshaw school. Last year we brought up a lot of questions on this particular school. It's overcrowded, it's old, and it's got health problems because of its age. It's also in an area of the province that is paying the highest education tax into the province's kitty. Mr. Minister, when you were traveling in the area last August, your only answer to the people then was to wait until next spring, that you have lots of demands on your budget and they'd just have to put up with it and wait. Well, my concern is that we have to start spending some of this money and start planning properly and start to build schools in areas where they are required. We shouldn't be forced into a hundred percent utilization throughout the whole school, which is a cop-out by this government and playing the one-string guitar instead of actually going out and building a plan around it.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my questions.

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

MR. WHITE: Well, thank you, sir. Just two very, very quick points, Mr. Minister. They're centred about a bit of a home request. I happen to represent an area that Edmonton-Calder has within its boundaries, a school called Prince Charles. It has a great history of educating a great deal of the native population in the city of Edmonton, the urban natives. They are doing very well. The Awasis program is doing exceedingly well in this province, but it needs a little of your help, along with the Minister of Learning, in order to extend into a high school program.

It seems that there are some difficulties with funding it in that currently there's an 85 percent occupancy requirement. I don't understand all of the ins and outs of this issue. All I do know is that the school board, Edmonton public, hopes to open this September with this very worthwhile program, and there is some concern that they may not be able to. If you would be so kind as to look into that for this year's budgeting, this member would certainly be appreciative.

I must explain that this particular program has had a great deal of success, and it plays a great deal upon the self-confidence of the children within the program. They learn a lot about native culture and begin to feel much more proud of it. It appears that in the general population of society they feel themselves being put down a lot of times, and these particular programs have been nothing but of great benefit to the students that are going there. So it would be a great service, sir, if you could spend a little time looking into that program.

Another area that, again, is a homegrown constituency concern centres around the 149th Street intersection with Yellowhead Trail. It is a very accident-prone area, the highest in the city. The entire length of the Yellowhead needs upgrading. You yourself would know from traveling the route a great number of times that it does have stop-and-go traffic; it's certainly not a freeway. This particular intersection needs some support badly. I know you don't directly tell the cities where to put their money, because it's a co-operative

effort. This particular area needs either more money from the department to say, "Look; this just has to be done to save Albertans' lives," or some other safety program. It needs to be worked on. There are just too many people dying. There's too much loss of productive time for the companies that have to use that intersection. It's dangerous, it's slow to get through, and it really bottles the traffic up.

That's the extent of my questions tonight, sir. I thank you for the time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Infrastructure for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$2,152,558,000

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The chair would like to note that an error was made in the estimates for Gaming. Inadvertently we had called for a vote on the lottery fund payments, and of course we have not yet debated those. Those are due tomorrow and presumably the next day, so that vote would be invalid. So it will not be reflected in the report nor on the official records of the Assembly.*

Innovation and Science

THE CHAIRMAN: To begin this part of our deliberations we will call on the minister.

DR. TAYLOR: On the evening of March 7 I presented my estimates to subcommittee D, and we had a very fruitful discussion. We had a lot of good questions and a lot of interaction. There were some questions from the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora that I didn't feel I answered quite with enough information, so I have five copies of some additions to the responses that I would like to file with the House to the questions that were asked of me at the subcommittee D. As I said, it was a fruitful discussion and good questions from both sides.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Thanks to the minister. I look forward to getting these responses and reading them over. I'll incorporate some of my earlier comments, but the timing of the responses – it would have been helpful to get them a little sooner. I recognize that it's a busy time, but we're talking about a lot of money, and they were important questions.

You know, the ministry is, generally speaking, moving in the right path. A couple of points that I would like to make, though. One, I would like to see this minister continue being as aggressive as he has been in putting technology issues forward and in helping the government understand the importance of moving Alberta into the new economy. Just today, I think, Nortel Networks announced that

there was another billion dollar plus acquisition, another Canadian company leading the way, buying a U.S. based switching company with now, I believe, the fastest Internet switches made on the planet. You know, we have a big role to play here in Alberta in taking advantage of this technology and also in developing and fostering it. I'm not sure that these business plans are ambitious enough, if I can put it that way.

The report of the Canadian E-Business Opportunities Roundtable, prepared by The Boston Consulting Group, a document titled, *Fast Forward: Accelerating Canada's Leadership in the Internet Economy*, makes very interesting reading. I know the minister is familiar with it, but I'm not sure that all members of the Assembly are. This document I think lays out pretty clearly what some of the challenges are when it comes to fully leveraging a commercial advantage out of the Internet. I believe that there is a role for some government policy and leadership in this regard.

10:20

One of the conclusions that The Boston Consulting Group reached in their report on the roundtable was that "Canada's business-to-business e-commerce [is] estimated to be only 7.7% of U.S. levels by 2003." So even though we are growing at a steady pace here in Canada, we won't even reach 10 percent of the market that the United States will have achieved over the next three years. I don't think this is good enough. I think Alberta could establish itself as a leader. I guess I'd like to see a performance measure in this minister's plan that says that Alberta will lead the charge in Canada when it comes to business-to-business e-commerce.

I recently had an opportunity to meet with a purchasing agent for Syncrude, who tells me that they're going to be dealing with all of their vendors in a paperless way, that they want to make sure they are linked electronically to all of their suppliers even if it comes down to where they have to send people and technology into the businesses that provide goods and services to Syncrude and get them online and up and operating. So there are some good business partners out there, and I guess I'd just like to see, as I say, just a little bit more ambition on the part of this government, particularly through this ministry.

The report that I refer to, compiled by The Boston Consulting Group, also said that "Canadian businesses also trail their U.S. counterparts in e-commerce with fewer companies offering their products or services online." I've been talking to several retailers about their e-business plans, and what they tell me is that they were absolutely surprised, overwhelmed by the response over this last Christmas season to their e-commerce offerings. Whether it be the com that Sam built, when we're talking about buying your music and videotapes et cetera online, or whether it be any of the other vendors that are out there, whether they be clothing vendors such as Eddie Bauer or some of the others that have very sophisticated electronic sites, they report to me that they were just taken aback with how successful those initiatives were over this last Christmas period.

So I think we need to sit down with some of these companies that have had success, and to the extent that they're willing, find out what their secrets of success are so we can develop some appropriate policy that can assist Alberta businesses in taking advantage of this coming boom in e-commerce. That would be something I could wholeheartedly support and endorse.

Also, Mr. Minister, for your interest. I don't know whether you've had a chance to read it or not, but I had a chance to mention it earlier in debate. There is the 20th report of the Standing Committee on Finance, entitled *Productivity with a Purpose: Improving the Standard of Living of Canadians*. It was tabled in June of 1999. They go through a rather interesting exercise of talking about where

*See page 576, left col., para. 7

we stand in Canada, what the forces are behind productivity trends, what drives productivity and economic growth. Interesting reading. But I found one paragraph in here that I thought would be relevant to tonight's discussion. What it really talks about is that governments and others have been slow to recognize the importance of technology as a driver.

I want to quote from page 22 of the report under the heading Evidence of Benefits from High Technology. The quote is this:

In the United States, some economists are now accepting the fact that high-technology does indeed have the potential to enhance productivity. They cite the fact that productivity has been picking up in recent years, well into the current business cycle. Typically, the big productivity gains tend to occur early in the business cycle, when output is growing but firms are not yet rehiring.

The reason for this, as some economists at the U.S. Federal Reserve Board are now suggesting, is that computers had little positive impact on productivity early in this decade but that they are now contributing significantly to growth.

I cite this quote not just for the earlier reason, that I think it speaks to this growing awareness of governments about the role of technology as a driver, but also to say that there is this theory of lag time, and the investments that we make now may not pay off for a decade or more. Whether it comes to the plans to have high-speed, wideband Internet access throughout rural Alberta or whether it comes to investing in high-speed computers themselves, the hardware, or whether it comes to investing in software or whether it comes to putting money into advanced education so that we are graduating more technologists and more engineers, what we're really looking at is a generational thing. We're really looking at something that this government will be able to look back on with pride as opposed to something that this government is going to be able to take credit for in the short term.

I know that doesn't make it a very political issue. We can't look at government policy and leadership in this regard as something to take to the voters in the next 18 months or whenever the next election call is going to be. This is something where this government has a chance to really demonstrate some leadership in a nonpolitical way, in a nonpartisan way, and say: we are going to build a foundation here that is going to serve our children and our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren, and we're going to do this in a way that is going to bring stability and some predictability into the area, and we're going to recognize that it's a legacy that we're creating, not just some opportunism.

The way that governments used to deal with this would be to build hospitals and provincial buildings and pave roads. It was something you could turn to and say: "Look what I delivered to my constituency. You know, that hospital wouldn't be there if I wasn't your MLA. That road wouldn't be paved if I wasn't your guy." This is entirely different. I daresay that when every man and woman in this Chamber is well retired and beyond their political productivity years themselves, this is something that they would be able to look back on and say: "You know, I was part of something that was good and proper. I was part of something that had wide acceptance from all political quarters in this province. It was the good and right thing to do, and we're proud of it."

Mr. Minister, as long as you keep on encouraging your government to move down this path, we'd be pleased to be there providing input and advice and ensuring some accountability. We have raised some concerns. We've addressed them in the earlier questions. I have had an opportunity to talk with the minister and some of his staff about those concerns. We will continue to probe when it comes to some of the gaps that we've identified, but all in all this is a bright pinhole of light in an otherwise dark set of government business plans. I'm pleased to talk about this for the Official Opposition

when it comes to this government stating its importance in terms of getting behind science and innovation in the province.

I will conclude my comments by asking one question that was asked of me just the other day, believe it or not, by a taxi driver who was dispatched to deliver a package to Coronation Plaza. I still think of it as the old Woodward's warehouse. Then it was a Costco. Then it was a flea market. Basically it's 149 Street. I think it's called Coronation Plaza. It's a big warehouse. It's leased property, I think, from Infrastructure, leased in part to Innovation and Science. The taxi driver said that he was asked to deliver a small box to the Innovation and Science offices in this Innovation and Science building. He said, and I quote: do you know what the hell's going on in there? I said: I really don't. He said: "Well, I had to bring this little box in, and there were all these guys running around. It looked like they were busy, but I couldn't really figure out what they were busy doing, and they wouldn't tell me what was in the box, and it's really driving me crazy."

So I guess on behalf of this taxi driver that gave me a ride to the airport about 10 days ago, I just want to ask the minister: could you find out for us what's going on in that space, and could you report back so I can put this gentleman's mind at ease that his tax dollars are being put to good use in that facility and so the next time somebody asks me just what's going on in that building, I'll be able to explain to him with certainty what purpose we're putting those public servants to in that leased space?

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and the proposed estimates for the Department of Innovation and Science for the year 2000-2001, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$184,867,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

10:30

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, for the following departments.

Department of Human Resources and Employment: operating expense and capital investment, \$1,034,970,000.

Department of Children's Services: operating expense, \$535,540,000.

Department of Environment: operating expense and capital investment, \$332,506,000.

Treasury Department: operating expense and capital investment, \$139,438,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$98,941,000.

Department of Gaming: operating expense, \$183,191,000.

Department of Infrastructure: operating expense and capital investment, \$2,152,558,000.

Department of Innovation and Science: operating expense, \$184,867,000.

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

Bill 1

Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I think this is one of the most excellent, most progressive bills that we've had discussed in this Assembly. I'm fully in favour of it, as I'm sure most other colleagues here are. With that, I would move that we proceed further with the vote.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I was hoping to hear again from the Minister of Innovation and Science on this bill. I know that at third reading I can't yield the floor and then have an opportunity to get back up. I don't know if he's going to say anything about this bill or not. I think it's a real shame if he isn't.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the Official Opposition is pleased to support Bill 1, particularly as amended. I again want to thank the House for its co-operation on the amendment during the committee stage. I think Albertans are going to be well served by this foundation.

Mr. Speaker, think for a minute about an Alberta that is as rich in high-technology activity as it has been in agriculture and the exportation of natural resources. Think about an Alberta where boys and girls in schools have access to the Internet no matter where they live, no matter what grade level they're in. Think about an Alberta where there are community kiosks that provide high-speed access to information and communications technology. Think about an Alberta where we have reduced the barriers to postsecondary

education to such an extent that there's not one qualified student that's unable to access postsecondary education and training should they so desire it. Think about an Alberta where we have been able to take full advantage of the growth in communications technology and information technology. Think about an Alberta that is truly geared towards a maximum-wage mentality instead of one that until recently has been at the bottom of the minimum-wage list in this country.

Think about an Alberta, Mr. Speaker, where we provide leadership to the entire world when it comes to models of co-operation in the pursuit of science and in the pursuit of knowledge and, through that, in the creation of a high, high standard of living and quality of life. If you think about all that, what you will find in part is that you are thinking about what the intent is behind Bill 1, the establishment of this foundation for science and engineering research. That is in fact at least half of what will bring Alberta to that kind of future. This kind of legislation is at least half, and that's why I'm here to support it.

Now, of course, the other half that's necessary, Mr. Speaker, to bring Alberta that kind of future is a Liberal government. I am very happy to support Bill 1 because it's the first step in that two-step process we have to take to get to that kind of Alberta. So we'll support this bill now, and then we'll be well poised, when there's a Liberal government in this province, to take full advantage of it so we can achieve that vision of that kind of Alberta.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science to close debate.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that we have managed to pass this bill as quickly as it's being passed. It is Bill 1. It is a momentous bill. I think it's something that everybody in this House will be able to look at in the future, when we're all out of politics, at some stage in our lives . . .

DR. OBERG: Duck; there's lightning coming.

DR. TAYLOR: Duck; there's lightning coming. Thank you, Minister of Learning.

We'll all be able to look back and say that this was a good thing that we've done. It started a new millennium, and it created a real future for our children and grandchildren.

Thank you, everybody.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've made excellent progress tonight, and in view of that, I would move that we adjourn until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[At 10:40 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]