

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 22, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/05/22

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee to order.

head: Main Estimates 2001-02

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister to open debate.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, it's a great pleasure to stand before you as the first Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development for the government of Alberta. I'm really pleased to present the estimates for this new department.

As I travel across the province, aboriginal leaders and northerners tell me how pleased they are to be recognized in this new ministry. Responsibility for aboriginal affairs was transferred to this stand-alone ministry from International and Intergovernmental Relations, and responsibility for the Northern Alberta Development Council was transferred from Alberta resource development. Our business plan and budget have been amended to reflect these changes. I will address aboriginal affairs first, and then I will discuss important northern issues and the key role of the Northern Alberta Development Council.

We may be one of the smallest ministries, but we are also one of the most active and dynamic. We deal with a full scope of issues, and we are championing one of the four cross-government priority initiatives. In order to do the job, however, Mr. Chairman, we rely on the good efforts and co-operation of every government ministry. We facilitate solutions rather than just managing problems. We work with aboriginal governments, communities, and organizations to ensure that their requests and views are heard within the Alberta government. We also work with other Alberta ministries to develop strategies to address the needs of aboriginal people. This includes providing guidance on appropriate protocol and ways to consult with aboriginal communities. Our ministry also has knowledge of and sensitivity to aboriginal issues and culture in Alberta.

In the year ahead our key goal, as set out in the government of Alberta's business plan, is to support aboriginal people and governments in achieving self-reliance and enhanced well-being. We will be pursuing this goal through the implementation of Strengthening Relationships: The Government of Alberta's Aboriginal Policy Framework. In addition, the ministry will also contribute to the other priority government goals through both an aboriginal and northern development perspective.

The framework was conceived by the Hon. Dave Hancock and supported by ministers like the Hon. Mike Cardinal. Their support, that was instrumental in the development of the framework, and involvement will be needed as we move forward through the whole process of implementation of the aboriginal policy framework. Addressing aboriginal issues requires co-operation and teamwork of all ministries. It is not my responsibility alone. We will be relying on their continued support and all other ministries that are also part of this process.

The vision of the framework is a future in which strong, sustainable aboriginal economies support self-reliant First Nations, Metis, and other aboriginal communities and people. The framework

consists of two goals. The first goal focuses on well-being and self-reliance of aboriginal people and communities. The second goal addresses federal, provincial, and aboriginal roles and responsibilities. The strategy is not to provide handouts but to provide a hand up through the development of relationships, participation by aboriginal people in the economy and programs that affect them, and cross-cultural awareness that works for both aboriginal and nonaboriginal partners.

I will soon announce a collaborative process through which the province, aboriginal communities, and industry will work together to develop an aboriginal capacity-building strategy. In the meantime, we have been working with aboriginal communities, including the Grande Cache co-operative enterprises, the Cold Lake First Nation, and the Kapawe'na First Nation on specific capacity-building initiatives.

There are a number of cross-ministry initiatives that were completed last year that merit recognition. An aboriginal high school, the Amiskwaciy Academy, was established in Edmonton. An Alberta First Nations gaming policy was announced. The First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act was passed, the first legislation of its kind in Canada. A Provincial Court with an aboriginal judge, court workers, and a peacemaker program was established on the Tsuu T'ina reserve. An oil and gas consultation pilot project was initiated with the industry and the Dene Tha' First Nation, and a natural resources initiative and petroleum employment training pilot project have graduated trainees in land administration, oil and gas field workers, and oil rig work.

We are also starting discussions with aboriginal communities on developing best-practice guidelines with respect to traditional-use studies. My ministry staff and I will work hard to fulfill the promise of the aboriginal policy framework and the aboriginal policy initiative.

A key concern for the ministry is to continue improvements for the Metis Settlements governing structures, systems, and accountability. Our main objective is to enhance the settlements' capacity to be self-reliant and self-regulating. We are working with settlements representatives to develop proposals for revised legislative and long-term financial arrangements to further these ends. We'll be reviewing this proposal throughout the summer.

This year is the final year of operation for the Metis Settlements Transition Commission, an organization that has been assisting with the development of the settlements' governance systems. The commission will dissolve on March 31, 2002, and its essential functions, such as the Metis Settlements land registry, will be transferred elsewhere. With the dissolution of the commission the settlements will be fully responsible for their own administrative affairs.

A significant focus for this fiscal year will be to ensure that appropriate accountability mechanisms such as community-approved three-year business plans are in place for each settlement. The Metis Settlements Transition Commission has implemented a revised performance measurement system that focuses more on the results actually achieved. We are also working with the Metis Settlements to examine additional ways to address the need for greater accountability.

The ministry continues to make progress in the settlement of outstanding aboriginal land claims. Since 1986 Alberta has been instrumental in settling 11 treaty land entitlement claims. Our record is one of the best in Canada, Mr. Chairman. The settlement of these claims has created greater certainty for all parties. The financial compensation and opportunities provided by land claims settlements provide the means for First Nations to truly benefit from Alberta's thriving economy and increase the role of aboriginal Albertans in the

province's economy. This ministry will continue to strive towards settlements that are fair and equitable for all parties.

Over the past year we have seen an improvement in relations on aboriginal issues with the federal government. I do not want to give the impression that there are no problems. However, there is greater co-operation among federal and provincial ministries on projects that produce specific and meaningful results, as indicated in goal 2 of the framework. To this end the Canada/Alberta partnership forum has been established to work with First Nations and Metis organizations to develop partnerships that will lead to improved participation by aboriginal people in the Alberta advantage.

As well, Alberta participated with the federal government, other provinces, territories, and national aboriginal leaders to develop a national framework to increase aboriginal participation in the Canadian economy. This document supports our own provincial initiatives and our framework. An essential theme of the federal/provincial framework and Alberta's aboriginal policy framework is the need to recognize and develop solutions for including the rapidly growing aboriginal youth population, who could address future labour force shortages. As part of the implementation of a national aboriginal youth strategy, a conference involving 120 youth from across Canada will be held in Edmonton this year from October 26 to 28.

I will now briefly focus on the northern development work within the ministry. Under the leadership of my colleague Gary Friedel, MLA for Peace River and chairman of the Northern Alberta Development Council, the council continues to work on the advancement of the north by communicating northern interests, both private and public, addressing development opportunities, and promoting skill development for northern youth and adults. The ministry's aboriginal initiatives complement the work of the council, and the work of the council supports the ministry's initiatives. A key initiative for the NADC will be the preparation of a strategy that further advances northern development.

I would be remiss if I did not mention NADC's work on interjurisdictional initiatives. We will be hosting this year's northern forum in Edmonton this summer. This international forum brings together delegates from around the world to discuss northern issues. For the first time this fall Alberta will be represented at a meeting for northern development ministers from across Canada.

I am also looking forward to assuming the Alberta co-chair position for the implementation of the Alberta/Northwest Territories memorandum of understanding for co-operation and development. Our neighbour to the north is entering an exciting period of development that is expected to have a positive impact on Alberta. The department looks forward to addressing these northern opportunities as well as challenges.

In terms of staffing, our ministry is relatively small, with a complement of 60 FTEs, which includes 15 within the NADC and seven within the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal. The total budget for the year ahead is \$30.2 million. The department's budget is based on the budgets for aboriginal affairs and NADC with minimal cost increases over last year. In order to maximize the resources of the ministry, we will be implementing a human resource plan with the priority focus on leadership development and success in planning.

Finally, a brief outline on the performance measures. We will report on the strategies outlined under the government of Alberta's business plan aboriginal goal and the aboriginal cross-ministry initiative. We are developing cross-government performance measures for these activities. We will work with all ministries to improve the number of data sources for aboriginal-specific data and the quality of data. Improved data will be used by ministries to

report progress on improving the well-being and self-reliance of aboriginal people. The department will undertake the development and the evaluation of pilot projects, and we will also conduct a client satisfaction survey. These measures will help us track our progress in meeting our goals in both an accountable and efficient manner. The new business plan for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development lays out in more detail how we will meet the priorities for our province in the year ahead.

I look forward, Mr. Chairman, to listening to what the comments will be from my opposition critics as well as finding out how they can improve the system in order that we can satisfy the needs of aboriginal Albertans and northern Albertans.

8:10

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a privilege to rise to speak to the issues concerning a brand-new ministry, and I congratulate the government on setting up a separate department for aboriginal issues: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. It's undoubtedly a very important area. The minister and I already briefly chatted, and I'm going to encourage that her budget be doubled next year. But if that doesn't work out, I've got some other thoughts as well.

I noticed the overall trend. As you compare expenditures in these areas from when it was under a combined department to now, it looks to me like the pattern in spending is very stable, and the intentions are that spending will remain stable. In fact, if I read the figures correctly – and I'm going from memory here – looking over the next three years, I think that in the business plan there's very little increase in spending anticipated. I would expect that once one were to account for inflation and a growing population, actually the minister will be dealing with a shrinking budget, which may bring various problems and issues of its own.

I did notice in her opening comments the emphasis on interdepartmental co-operation. I think that's tremendously important. If there is one thing that this department can do that would be of great help to all Albertans and to all aboriginal Albertans, it would be to act as a catalyst to bring together in a focused way the efforts of departments such as Health and Wellness, Learning, and other departments to address the concerns of the aboriginal population.

My suspicion and my experience would suggest to me that too often, especially when it comes to provincial affairs, the aboriginal people fall through the cracks, between programs, and their particular needs get left in between other departments and other programs and are not adequately addressed. It's probably aggravated by the fact that the federal government has such a major role in this area and things tend to get pushed off from one level of government to another, either between the provincial and federal governments or between provincial, federal, and municipal governments, or local governments, when we're talking, for example, about urban concerns. So if this department and this minister can succeed at pulling together and focusing the efforts of each of those other departments on aboriginal concerns, it would be a great success for us all. Of course part of that is working, as she noted, on the community collaborative process, bringing the local people together in a true program of community development, listening from the grassroots level and responding at that need, rather than bringing solutions down from above.

I noticed a few particular initiatives that were mentioned. The repatriating of sacred objects, a very, very difficult subject or a very difficult area to sort out. I commend this government for its

initiatives, I think probably groundbreaking initiatives, in repatriating sacred objects. I'm aware of the struggles that can occur between museums and their legitimate interests in preserving objects for the very long term and safeguarding them and studying them and, at the same time, the legitimate claims of the people to whom those objects belong to use them and to use them as part of their own culture to sustain and develop that culture. I think this government probably has handled that about as well as any government will have done.

I also noted her comments on judicial reform. Again, a very difficult area. I'm sure we're all aware that the aboriginal population is overrepresented in our judicial system and that there are great cultural frictions between the European-based, the British-based judicial system and the traditional aboriginal judicial system. There's plenty of room for innovation there, so I would encourage the minister in that direction.

Before we get into specifics, the general areas that I see as needing most attention are all interrelated. Employment, the very high unemployment rates among aboriginal people is a serious concern. Of course, then, not surprisingly, so is poverty, poverty and unemployment going hand in hand. In so many of our situations now I suspect that with our aboriginal population there's a multigenerational pattern that's been established, and it will be a real challenge for us to break. Along with the unemployment and the poverty go persistent health problems, and those will have, I'm sure, some aspects of them specific to aboriginal predicaments, whether those are on reserves or in cities. Lack of education or inadequate education again raises problems that relate back to unemployment and poverty and health. I think there are some innovations occurring in education, but those could certainly be extended and encouraged so that they offer hope of breaking the cycle that so often we see our aboriginal people caught in.

Finally, one other area that may not get as much attention as perhaps it deserves in this discussion is environmental issues. I'm concerned with the great burgeoning of development across this province, whether it's in the northeast, in the huge areas of north-eastern Alberta around the oil sands, the whole development of forestry along, for example, the Athabasca river, or the problems over the long term in the Peace River delta right down to recent proposals in southeastern Alberta for water damming or certainly in southwestern Alberta and the Oldman River dam. Everywhere we turn, the natural environment is under pressure, and certainly historically the stewards of that environment were the First Nations, the people who managed to survive and create a culture in this environment that was sustainable not just for generations or centuries but for millennia. I think that we need to be very careful as we look at how we manage our environment, to learn all the lessons we possibly can from our First Nations people.

So those are some areas – employment, health, poverty, education, and environment – that I think I would certainly encourage attention to.

Shifting now to a little bit more specific material, the whole notion of breaking out a separate department for aboriginal affairs, as I said earlier, is probably a far-sighted one. It will take some particular care to manage that properly so that the new department will perform as efficiently and effectively as it possibly can. I'm wondering what work is being done in that area and what analyses the government did to reason through or to think through its decision to break out this separate department. Presumably it's a reflection of a shift in government priorities, and it would be useful to know what that shift is. How have the priorities changed now that we have a separate department as opposed to the time when aboriginal affairs was under the minister of intergovernmental relations?

Among the three programs under the department there is aboriginal relations, Metis settlements governance, and northern development. We'll talk to those just one by one and then keep going into more and more detail.

8:20

I would have to look at the figures to ensure that I've got them correct here. It looks like there may have been a real drop in spending in the area of aboriginal relations. The gross comparable actual figure two years ago was about 11 and a half million dollars, and it's budgeted this year at \$8.3 million. That's a drop of about 30 percent. That's a pretty marked decline, and I'd be interested to know what's caused that, if it's a transfer of activities to other departments or what's going on there. It's notable for its size.

Also, in the Metis settlements governance program there is a substantial decline, I think a difference of about, if I'm correct, 16 percent. A similar question there: what accounts for the marked decline in those areas?

Again, in the third area as well – no, I guess there wasn't a drop in northern development. Anyway, there are a couple of trends in spending there that are surprising for the decline in spending that's occurring there. It's probably easily explained, but I'm curious to know what it is.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development focuses its goals around the three core businesses: people, prosperity, and preservation, which has a nice alliteration to it. I'm not precisely sure what the preservation refers to. I like particularly the phrase I saw. The department's key goal is "to support Aboriginal people and governments in achieving self-reliance and enhanced well-being" and then somewhere else ensuring that "the well-being and self-reliance of Aboriginal people will be comparable to that of other Albertans," which seems to be a goal entirely justified and perhaps difficult to achieve but certainly something to strive for. Until we reach that level, I don't think we can say that we are as socially fair and just a society as we ought to be.

Many of my comments actually address some of the questions around key results. I talked about emphasizing the co-ordinated approach to Alberta's relationships with aboriginal people, the interdepartmental co-ordination, and increasing the self-reliance and well-being of aboriginal communities and people. That could of course include some of the areas I've mentioned, education and employment and also economic development in aboriginal communities, which can include businesses based within those communities.

The original entrepreneurs of Canada were the First Nations people. The First Nations people were the original traders, and if you look at the historical trading patterns of the Blackfoot or the Cree, they covered huge areas. They were very successful at trading within their nations and from one nation to the next. Of course, with the arrival of the Europeans the trade expanded. We so frequently forget that heritage and underplay it, and if we could do something to encourage and stimulate the entrepreneurial, to use a very European kind of word, heritage of the aboriginal community, it would be a big step forward. I think it would be important for developing and increasing their self-reliance, their self-respect, and reducing some of the concerns around poverty and poor health.

Given the stability of the budget over the period we're looking at, except for those questions I had going back a couple of years when there were the big drops in spending, I don't have extensive comments on the budget.

I am however noticing some issues around the performance measures and performance indicators, particularly numbers 3 and 4 under the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Number 3 is "survey of clients and partners." I generally

have a lot of difficulty, as I know some of my colleagues do as well, with performance measures that are based on surveys of satisfaction.

Surveys are easily manipulated. They're easily shifted. It's difficult to be sure exactly what they're measuring, and frankly satisfaction is important, but it's only one facet of the whole issue we're looking at here. So I would much prefer something meatier and – what would the word be? – more reliable as a performance measure than a survey of clients and partners. Certainly you don't want your clients and partners to be upset with you. You want a good working relationship, but as a performance outcome it's not going to convince me.

I have similar comments also about performance measure indicator 4, "public polling data." Public polls are, like surveys, very easily manipulated. Public opinion can shift dramatically over a period of just a few days as issues flare up or die away. I can easily imagine public polling being done immediately before or immediately after a particularly vivid incident, perhaps revolving around First Nations people, incidents such as those that have occurred in other provinces, at Oka or elsewhere, wildly affecting the results of public opinion polls and throwing the value of public opinion polls as performance measures right out the window. So as with surveys of clients and partners I find public polling data as a source of performance measures to be very weak, shall I say.

The work of the Northern Alberta Development Council has been ongoing. It seems to me it's been around for 25 years or something. My memory goes back at least that long with this council. Obviously, to the extent that it can take responsibility for the economic development of the northern half of the province in the last couple of decades, it's been doing something right. Far and away the largest portion of major industrial development in Alberta has in fact been Edmonton and north over the last 10 years and will be even more so over the next 10 years.

I would encourage the Northern Alberta Development Council to take whatever steps it can to guarantee that the economic development of northern Alberta doesn't just go to people who newly arrive or recently have arrived to northern Alberta but rather to the people who have lived there the longest and whose heritage is the deepest in the north, whether those are the First Nations or Metis or the long-term European settlers. These are people who may have come here as agricultural people, as homesteaders, as trappers, as First Nations, and they are easily steamrolled in the process of industrial development of the north. I would encourage the Northern Alberta Development Council to take whatever steps it can to ensure that all people in Alberta from Edmonton north participate in the economic development of the north.

I see that my time is just about running out here, so I will take my seat and wish the minister the very best. Thank you.

8:30

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to participate in the estimates debate this evening for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Contrary to my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, the budget of this department and the size of this department and the expansion of the cabinet to 24 ministries, including this one – I'm not so certain that we needed this large cabinet. These are very worthwhile and noteworthy initiatives that are being proposed in this budget, but at this time I don't know if it should be a stand-alone ministry. But certainly the goals and strategies – there's so much work that needs to be done here.

The department's key goal is "to support Aboriginal people and

governments in achieving self-reliance and enhanced well-being." Well, certainly that is, to say the least, commendable. We look at some of the Third World conditions that exist in our communities with our First Nations' people. There have to be improvements, and I certainly wish the minister well in her leadership and her department well.

There are rates of child poverty, there are suicide rates, whether it's with adults or with teens, there's alcoholism, there's drug abuse, there are issues of malnutrition, there are issues of inadequate housing all across Alberta, not only in northern Alberta but everywhere. These issues have to be addressed. There is the entire issue of policing itself. My colleague from Edmonton-Riverview mentioned the disproportionately high number of inmates in our justice system who are First Nations. That is all the key performance measures that this member needs: to see that there is so much work to be done. I would certainly like to see and hear from the minister in due time.

In the business plan there was a discussion about collaboration not only with the federal government but also with the Northwest Territories. I would like to understand a little better the relationship between – I know it's a federal police force – the RCMP, the province, and the Territories in regards to recruitment and retaining of First Nations' officers. I think an increase in the hiring of young First Nations' persons would be beneficial for the entire justice system. Now, at what pace this is going on, I don't know, and if the minister could share any initiatives that have occurred, I would be very grateful.

The minister also in the business plan – well, this fits into the enhanced well-being. Hopefully the days when First Nations' members are going to be on slashing crews and skid hounds on pipelines are finished. There's going to be on-the-job training. There are going to be apprenticeships. I know there are unions based in Edmonton here, the northern Alberta Building Trades Council, quite willing to foster a relationship and ensure that members of First Nations are trained in the skill trades. Again, hopefully the days of just going ahead and slashing a cut line for a seismic crew or for a pipeline project are over, and there's going to be an improvement so that once the projects are completed, northern Albertans have jobs and the better paying jobs as well.

At this time I would like to talk about the Northern Alberta Development Council. I'm just having a quick look at the business plan here, and I see northern Alberta, certainly, and we seem to forget about that. I don't know if we can call Edmonton the south, but certainly it's what's affectionately called "the city" by northern Albertans. They're going to go to the city. To all hon. members from Calgary, well, I'm sorry, there's only one city in this province, and it's the capital city.

Now, 60 percent of Alberta's land mass is in the north, 10 percent of the population only.

It is resource rich, with 90% of Alberta's forests, 100% of Canada's oil sands development, nearly 40% of Alberta's conventional oil and gas activity, and 20% of Alberta's agricultural land.

Well, at this time I would like to inquire if the Northern Alberta Development Council has done any sustainability studies on Alberta's forests – I would be very curious to know – and particularly on what species of trees there has been any sustainability studies done. We all hear every now and then that there's going to be further development in the north, and I'm curious to find out if the wood fibre is there to meet the long-term requirements of those developments.

Certainly 100 percent of Alberta's oil sands are in the north. I would like an update, please, on the Peace River/Shell project. This was a pilot project that I believe started about 15 years ago. I think

that the Peace River tar sands are a little deeper than the ones over to the east in Fort McMurray. Shell had a very successful pilot project there. I know what this would mean for the development of northwestern Alberta. Earlier this evening, Mr. Chairman, I attended a standing policy committee, meeting as an observer, and I noted . . .

DR. MASSEY: Not as a participant?

MR. MacDONALD: I was not a participant, no. I was an observer.

I noted a question from an hon. member regarding the proposed development that was going to go on at Fort Kent by a subsidiary of Koch oil of Minnesota, and in the discussion this particular member was concerned about the development and the pace of expansion in Fort McMurray: would it be possible to slow down the development in the north so maybe the people of Fort McMurray could catch their breath? Perhaps a solution to this, if it is a problem – I don't know if it is a problem. I was listening to the reassurances of the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. Perhaps the next stage of the development of our synthetic crude resources could occur in the Peace River district. Shell certainly is building an upgrader at Scotford. It has capacity, I believe, for a hydrogen cracker. So that would be worth exploring by the Northern Alberta Development Council.

Further on we see that the hon. Member for Peace River chairs the 10-member council, and there are members from Fort McMurray, Kinuso, Athabasca, Cold Lake, Whitecourt, Peace River, Grande Prairie, and Fort Vermilion, which is fine, but I notice that no one from High Level is on that committee. As a frequent visitor to High Level over the years I'm curious about that. I also see over in the strategies in goal 1 that there is to be an increase in consultation in northeastern Alberta through the new Northern Alberta Development Council office in Lac La Biche. I may have missed it somewhere, but I'm wondering if there is a regional office also over in the Peace district, and if not, why not. I think I'd have to put a pitch in for one at High Level and Peace River. I'm told now that there is an office in Peace River, and I think that's a good place for it.

8:40

Now, I can't remember the exact details, but I believe there was an order in council shortly after the cabinet expansion to increase the salary of the hon. Member for Peace River to chair this council, and that salary increase, I think, was \$1,970 a month. Fair enough. But when you add it up, it's, like, 20 grand a year. And who knows? There could be a vehicle with this appointment. I would like to know where in the budget that 20 grand plus is going to come from. You know, that's a significant amount of money. I'm sure I saw that in an order in council, probably the end of March, first of April. Where that money is coming from I would be very grateful to find out.

Whenever we think of northern development, the first thing we think of is roads. I can recall not getting a satisfactory answer before in this Assembly when inquiring about road construction, the development of roads. There is a proposal, as I understand it, to come across from Fort McMurray west to the Peace district with an all-weather highway. Now, I don't know whether it's going to go as far south as Wabasca or not or whether it'll be further north, but when you think of that, I think it would be prudent to study the construction of that road, not just a lease road but an all-weather road across there.

The trade pattern there I think would be very interesting with all this development that's going on in Fort McMurray. There is talk of further diamond exploration in that immediate area. Well, it would certainly be beneficial to the oil and gas industry. Right now you've got to come fairly far south from Fort McMurray if you want to

move machines or trucks or crews around. I know it's not very far by air, but a lot of people cannot afford that. I think it would be an initiative to benefit all northern Albertans.

The cost of this I don't know. I know there's some muskeg there, but if in this modest budget there is a study, I would love to see this, because again I think it would be a noteworthy project not only for diamond exploration but oil and gas, and there are some tar sand deposits further west there as well. I don't know how far below the surface they are, how much overburden there is, but this is where a road would come in really handy.

Now, is the Northern Alberta Development Council also studying the whole idea of local content in the contracts to ensure that local citizens can have a fair shot at the jobs that are created? If there are local fabricators, for instance, local welding shops, local X-ray firms – I can go on and on and on. Is local industry being given a fair chance at developing their own businesses to meet the demand, or is all this work coming from outside? I think one way to develop the economy is to encourage local citizens to be entrepreneurs and to help them out along the way.

I have a few other questions at this time that are specific to the Slave Lake area. We all hear the talk and the questions around the quality of our water. Certainly with what is called the brown rivers – those are like the Athabasca and the Peace rivers – that is the term put on them by scientists. The quality of water in the brown rivers as the north becomes industrialized – is the Northern Alberta Development Council doing any studies on the quality of the water in the rivers?

Also the Slave Lake; sometimes we forget just how big the Slave Lake is. Just to the east of the Slave Lake is the Mitsue oil and gas field, and that was a real nice find in its time. It's been a producing field and continues to produce rather well. I believe Chevron has a major play there. Is the Northern Alberta Development Council working with the oil industry in regards to drilling in the lake itself? I realize we can go a fair distance with directional drilling, but what exactly are the plans for any oil or gas that is under the lake itself?

Are there any initiatives by the Northern Alberta Development Council with Tourism Alberta to promote Pelican Lake? For that matter the beaches at Slave Lake, too, but Pelican Lake is noteworthy, for all hon. members, and it is a great place to go camping with your family.

DR. TAFT: Why?

MR. MacDONALD: Because the lake is very aptly named. The pelicans are there, and they are also raising their young in the summer. It's noteworthy and is a rather unique place.

I'm just wondering if it's going to be part of any Travel Alberta promotions, because I think it certainly would be a very modest promotion. I think it would be worth while. Particularly now that gas is expensive and the Canadian dollar so low, maybe Edmontonians could visit the Slave Lake area more frequently. There's a folk festival in Slave Lake. It's an old country fair, and it's a good one.

I have one more question, and that is also in the business plan, again on cross-government strategies. This one is in relation to gaming. As I understand it, there are going to be increased opportunities for First Nations' people to set up casinos in our fast-developing gaming industry. I wonder what measures are going to be employed by this department to check on this initiative.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will cede the floor to my colleague, and I look forward to more questions later on. Thank you.

8:50

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to take part in the discussions this evening of the estimates for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. I'm pleased to congratulate the minister on her appointment. We have a bit of a history that precedes our work here in the House, and I know she'll do a fine job of the responsibilities that she's been assigned. I think it was a very appropriate appointment, and I wish her well. Having said that, I do have some questions. Given who the minister is, some I find somewhat surprising, and maybe the minister would comment on them.

As I look at the business plan on pages 42 and 43 and read through the Vision, the Mission, the Core Business, the Clients and Partners, the Goal and Strategies, I come away with the feeling that things are being done "to" the aboriginal population rather than things being done "with" the aboriginal population, and I say that, I think, with good reason. If you look under the core businesses, one of the first is to "provide leadership in the management of Alberta's relationships with Aboriginal governments, communities and organizations." So those organizations are set aside, and we have that juxtaposed against Alberta.

If you look down a little further to the key services provided by the department, at "coordinating Alberta's strategies relating to Aboriginal relations," it seems to be sort of us against them in this front piece to the business plan. I think there are other examples in this text that would bear that out, and I wouldn't mind the minister commenting on that observation. There seems to be – and the minister underlined it in her opening comments – a great emphasis on teamwork with everyone else, yet for instances where the teamwork involves aboriginals, you have to start and look for them, at least on this front page, although there are some examples on page 44 where they talk about "working with" the aboriginal community. I guess it was that kind of language that I expected to see in this business plan with this minister, and, as I said, I'm somewhat surprised that that's not what we see here this evening.

The minister talked about the aboriginal policy framework. It's mentioned a number of times in the business plan, and it's mentioned again on page 52, the last page of the business plan. The minister mentioned the work of at least two of her cabinet colleagues in the development of that policy and there is reference to some other groups that were included, but I wonder if we can have more information on who exactly was involved in that policy development. What was the nature of public input, wide public input? How aware, I guess, are Albertans that that policy exists? What was the invitation to Albertans to be involved in the development of that policy?

While I'm on collaboration and teamwork, the minister indicated that there would be a collaborative process that would be announced. Just what does that involve? Who is going to be part of that collaborative process? What's the time line on the announcement? What is going to be the substance that the individuals involved will address? So some more information, if we might, on the collaborative process that the minister remarked on in her opening comments.

One more while I'm on the business of public involvement and wider public involvement, and that is the reference to land claims in the documents. We're all aware of the controversy brewing in British Columbia about the settlement of land claims and the election of a new government that at least before the election indicated that there would be greater public involvement, that in fact there would be plebiscites held, I take it to approve any land claim agreements. The documents before us talk about the success we've had in Alberta in settling aboriginal land claims, but I wondered if the minister feels comfortable that the general public as well is aware of what's involved in those settlements and the implications

of the settlements, because I have a feeling they aren't. I wondered if the minister has given thought to that and whether it's an issue that has to be addressed.

The record seems to be good, and maybe we shouldn't play with something that seems to be working well, but I think the red flags have been raised in our province to the west and that we'd be wise to heed the warning that comes from there in terms of the backlash that there seems to have been by the general public in terms of the settlements that have been reached and the lack of public input into those agreements.

I'd like to move on, then, if I might, to some of the goal 1 strategies. There's one in particular, and that's strategy (f), to acquire, prepare and distribute Aboriginal-specific data for internal use by provincial departments, Aboriginal governments and organizations, other governments and agencies, the private sector, academic institutions and the public.

I have a word of caution in terms of the kind of information that is gathered and then distributed. I use as an example the work that was done in terms of rating the success of schools in the province based on achievement and diploma test results. That information was widely circulated, and I've heard from individuals involved with aboriginal education that that did more harm than it did good. Certainly the problems in schooling in some aboriginal communities are severe, problems of attendance and problems with completion rates, but the treatment of the data, the way it was handled by the agency that gathered it and the information made public, did nothing but hamper the work of those who are involved in trying to improve aboriginal education and to work towards excellent programs in those schools. I think the information may be valuable and may be useful as we do some planning, but I think we have to be careful why we're gathering information and what use will be made of the information to assure ourselves that it's going to be used to improve conditions and not, in fact, cause further problems. So just a caution as we move into acquiring that kind of information for planning purposes.

I was also a little surprised that, on page 45 under key result 1.3, the key result expected is "accountable, self-regulating, and self-reliant Metis Settlement governments." The first strategy, strategy (a), would be to

assist the Metis Settlements General Council to develop and implement business plans, including the reporting of accomplishments through appropriate performance indicators.

I can't think of a more worthy strategy, but it would be one where you would think that the department would lead by example. Certainly that's not the case in this budget. In fact, it's a rather curious collection of text that one finds when one looks under the performance measures and indicators of the department. Page 45 of the business plan indicates:

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has several methods of measuring its performance, including the following:

1. Reports on Department Performance
2. Secondary Indicators
3. Survey of Clients and Partners
4. Public Polling Data

Then you go over to see each one of these better defined or extrapolated, and there's only one performance indicator, which is an "approval rating on Aboriginal relations." Even that one is really very questionable.

9:00

If you look at the reports on the department's performance, again where are the measures? Attention to aboriginal affairs has been part of this government's operation since at least 1993 that I know of, and you'd think that by now with the great emphasis the

government has had on the development of business plans and the admonitions of the Auditor General, they would have had performance indicators honed to a fine level at this point, yet they aren't here, and one would have to question why. Why are they not here at this stage in our development? It's like this has just been created, and we have nothing to go on.

Under secondary indicators again why aren't there the indicators that we would expect to find there? If I could make a plea, I would hope that some of those indicators, when they are developed as promised, will include some education indicators. What exactly is happening in terms of education, and what is the performance of the government or this department in helping to promote high school completion rates and participation in postsecondary programs or postsecondary training by the aboriginal community?

The survey of clients and partners again I think is interesting, but this business plan, like many others that are contained in this document, asks other departments for an approval rating. So here we have every department asking every other department: do you approve of the work we're doing? I really question the validity of the information that you'll gather from those kinds of surveys, that you won't end up with you pat my back and I'll pat yours kind of information. I also question having to focus so heavily on it throughout the entire budget documents. Surely competency of a department is something we should assume, and only when things go wrong would you expect to hear about it.

"The Department will undertake to develop and implement a satisfaction survey." My colleague from Edmonton-Riverview has made some comments about satisfaction surveys and the value of the surveys, again good public relations – people like to think they're being asked – but in terms of usefulness, in terms of program planning I think rather limited. I say that out of experience in public education with the annual parent surveys that indicate, for instance, that 90 percent plus of parents who send their children to public schools are satisfied with the programs that their children receive. Well, that's not really very surprising, and it's not really very useful information, but it's very good information, I guess, if you're waging a public relations campaign and trying to convince people that you're doing the job that you're supposed to be doing.

On page 47 the public polling data I thought is interesting in that the department seems to be satisfied with such a low performance and that they use as the standard the four-province average. Just because those four provinces are at 29 percent, somehow or other we're supposed to feel good at 43 percent. As far as I know, 43 percent in most situations is not considered a satisfactory performance. So why would you pick such a low standard? Why would you not set goals that were higher than those that have been established in the document that we have here?

I'd like to move on to the Northern Alberta Development Council business plan and ask a couple of questions there. On page 50, goal 3, "to increase northern skill levels," I wondered what part Campus Alberta plays in this effort to increase northern skill levels. Is Campus Alberta part of this planning? If it isn't, why isn't it? It seems to me that it fits into the goals quite nicely and that seamless movement of students through to postsecondary institutions. As I understand, Campus Alberta is part of their plan. So is Campus Alberta part of this planning is my question.

I looked with interest at the bursary recipients return service rate, and I think that's a useful measure. The actual is 74 percent. I think it's really quite good. I've done some work in the north with teacher education, and if we had a 74 percent return on those programs, we would have been ecstatic. So I think that this is a good and useful measure to have and points to some success.

I wondered about other measures. Do we have participation rates

for students in northern Alberta in terms of taking part in postsecondary education in the province or postsecondary training of any sort? Do we have program completion information that would tell us how successful those students are when they complete the programs that they're enrolled in?

If I could move on to the next page, there are a number of items under expenses. One item that I would appreciate some explanation on is the Metis settlements legislation. It's \$10 million in 1999-2000, \$10 million in 2000-2001, and then it's \$10 million, \$10 million, \$10 million, \$10 million. What does that include? I assume it's an estimate, but I would be interested in what it includes. If you add it up over that time period, it's a tremendous amount of money unless I'm not reading this correctly. Is there any allocation for this in, say, the Department of Justice's budget or other government departments?

If I might ask about Metis settlements governance. Just what is included in that? Can we have a breakdown of some of the items that that would include?

On the last page of the document I have just a couple more questions. I've referred already to the aboriginal policy framework. It was approved by cabinet in 2000, and I already asked what the involvement was of the public in that policy other than interest groups. Was there a wider distribution asking for input?

A further question. I think it's something that maybe the minister can address. That's the difference between the performance measures that are included in the business plan and . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, you've run out time.

Before I call upon the hon. minister to close debate, is there anybody else who wishes to speak?

The hon. minister to close debate.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank all the members who participated in this evening's discussion. I really appreciated getting the good questions and the comments that were raised. Although I'd like to answer all the questions that were asked tonight, I'm not able to do that with the amount of time we do have. However, I want to make a few comments.

I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Riverview for his comments. He had some really kind words, and I appreciate that. He made some recommendations also that I'm sure we'll look into and try to figure out what we can do in relation to that.

There was a question, however, that he asked about a drop in funding in aboriginal relations from 1999-2000 and 2001-2002. That was the result of land claims settlements in 1999-2000. So that was why it dropped in terms of the amount that he saw in aboriginal relations.

9:10

I really want to address his concerns in terms of some of the areas that he has identified, and one of them, of course, is that in my opening comments in response to his concurrence – we do serve as a catalyst with government for both aboriginal and northern issues, so I think it's very important for us to be able to identify what it is that Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is doing, which is to make sure that we do work with other ministries as well as aboriginal governments to ensure that we continue to work as that catalyst. That's an important perspective.

Edmonton-Gold Bar, I was really disappointed with you in terms of your comments relative to the stand-alone ministry. I thought you were always concerned about aboriginal people, but it appears that you really don't care when you're talking about some of the things in terms of saying that this is not needed in terms of an aboriginal

affairs ministry. I was really taken by that, and I think that's an important comment for me to remember as we move forward in the province. But I liked the idea of you bringing forward the collaboration and how we can do things within the departments and how we can do that with the various aboriginal governments as well. So for me that's a very important part.

Edmonton-Mill Woods, you targeted your comments very well, and I appreciate the fact that you were talking about identified measures. Those are important in northern Alberta and making sure that we continue to work in that vein. I can't answer all the questions, but I really appreciate the fact that you do that. I will answer them to you in writing and make sure that we continue to ensure that everyone understands that the establishment of this ministry reflects government's commitment to resolving the issues raised tonight as well as others throughout the province as I've traveled. We want to make sure we resolve these issues as we are a catalyst, as I identified, within government, and we are currently in discussion with aboriginal leaders throughout the province as well as industry and other stakeholders to make sure we continue to implement the aboriginal policy framework.

Of course, we'll answer any questions that we can have answers to to the members that asked questions. I can't do this alone, Mr. Chairman, so tonight I have staff in the public gallery, and I'd like to introduce them because they are a very big part of what I do in aboriginal affairs. I'll start out with Paddy Meade, who is my deputy minister, and some of you may know her. Ken Boutillier is the assistant deputy minister of aboriginal relations. Martin Hanly is director of project resourcing. John McDonough is executive director of strategic services. Tom Baldwin is executive director of the Northern Alberta Development Council. Ken Borch is the senior financial officer. However, this is his last official duty tonight, and I appreciate him coming. He's leaving as of tomorrow and won't be back to the government. Thank you, Ken, for all your hard work. My acting EA is Donna Hickey. It is with them that I'm able to carry out some of the projects that have been identified, and I know we look forward to a really good year coming up and in the future dealing with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Thank you.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense	\$20,210,000

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Innovation and Science

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister to open debate.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. I am pleased to present to you this evening the 2001-2004 business plan and the 2001-2002 estimates for the Ministry of Innovation and Science.

With today's rapid pace of change it makes it challenging to plan ahead, but I believe that the activities and investments outlined in the plans presented tonight will help to create a framework for sustainable prosperity for all Albertans. One of the keys to economic success in this era of change is innovation. We must continue to embrace new ideas if we are to become leaders in a global knowledge-based economy.

Thanks in large part to the growth of technology and knowledge-based industries, Alberta has made great strides in diversifying its economy. As Minister of Innovation and Science I'm committed to continuing that work to diversify the provincial economy, particularly in the information and communications technology, life sciences, and energy sectors.

Referring now to the 2001-2004 business plan, our vision is to have Alberta

recognized locally and globally as a world leader in the development and application of science and technology that improves the well being and prosperity of its people and improves its communities and natural environment.

Innovation and Science consists of several elements, the first being the Alberta Science and Research Authority and the research institutes that fall under it; namely, the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, which is co-chaired by the Member for Wainwright, the Alberta Energy Research Institute, which is co-chaired by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, and the Alberta Forestry Research Institute, which is co-chaired by the Member for West Yellowhead. There are also two provincial corporations that are part of ASRA, those being the Alberta Research Council, commonly known as ARC, and ICORE Inc., which refers to the informatics circle of research excellence.

The second element is the Department of Innovation and Science, which includes the components of information technology services, the chief information officer, and of course Supernet. In addition, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research and the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research report through me to the Legislative Assembly but are not included in the business plan or voted estimates for Innovation and Science.

Innovation and Science has two core businesses. The first is science, research, and development. This involves providing strategic leadership for science and research in Alberta, promoting a science culture in Alberta, applying science and research to improve stewardship of our resources and environment, and increasing the application of technology throughout the economy.

The second core business is government information technology. This involves ensuring that the government of Alberta is exemplary in the efficient and effective use of information technology in providing services to all Albertans. It accomplishes this through a number of means: one, co-ordinating the effective use of computer technology, voice and data networks, and information systems within government; secondly, establishing cross-ministry policies and standards for information and communications technology to improve the efficiency and flexibility of government; thirdly, identifying, facilitating, and providing cross-ministry solutions for ICT; and fourthly, identifying and promoting best practices through cross-ministry initiatives.

As you are aware, Alberta Supernet will be initiated in this fiscal year, 2001-2002. This project is a significant initiative under this core business, and when complete, Supernet will make broadband Internet and network access available in 422 communities across Alberta. Lethbridge will be one of them.

Our business plan outlines long-term goals and strategies that will support activities in Alberta's research community and nurture the innovative spirit that will make this province a prominent and

recognized leader in the global economy. Our business plan is focused on ensuring that Albertans have the skills, incentives, and tools they need to succeed and thrive in a knowledge-based economy, in a knowledge-based world. Our six goals focus on the development of human resources, infrastructure, access to financial capital, a supportive business, social, and political environment, and ensuring that we effectively manage our human resources within the ministry.

9:20

I'm now going to refer to the 2001-2002 fiscal plan. In order to obtain these goals, the goals I referred to in terms of the previous goals, we need to ensure that sufficient funding is available. The government recognizes this need and over the past several years has increased its support for research, science, and technology. Our 2001-2002 voted estimates are \$204.5 million, and this includes \$90.8 million in lottery proceeds. This total funding is split between our two core businesses: \$105.5 million for government information technology and \$94.6 million for science, research, and development. In addition, \$4.3 million has been allocated to provide support to these core businesses.

Programs within information and communications technology are co-ordinated and delivered by departmental staff. Within this program \$50 million will be allocated to develop Alberta Supernet, \$53.7 million will be allocated to working with ministries to carry out the corporate strategic direction for information and communication technology applications and infrastructure and ensuring that quality ICT and telecommunications solutions are provided through shared services and/or the private sector, and \$1.8 million will be allocated to the development of resource policies and standards as well as corporate strategic direction for information technology applications and infrastructure.

The science, research, and development program's main component is an \$89.6 million grant to the Alberta Science and Research Authority, commonly known as ASRA. ASRA and its various entities also attract significant funding from the private sector and has a total budget of approximately \$140 million. ASRA is an independent board made up of key members from the business and research communities in Alberta appointed by the Lieutenant Governor who seek to enhance the contributions of science and research to the sustainable prosperity and quality of life of all Albertans. I might add, Mr. Chairman, that the people that are involved in that particular independent board contribute an enormous amount to the well-being and success of our province, and we can't thank them enough for their involvement in that process.

As the senior science and research body of the government of Alberta, ASRA's two core activities involve, one, developing and promoting informed and practical recommendations to the provincial government with respect to science and research policies and priorities, investments in science and research, and science and research infrastructure and, secondly, facilitating the identification, development, and implementation of strategic, high-value science and research initiatives. The ultimate goal of ASRA is to increase the socioeconomic benefits of science and research investments in the province of Alberta.

The following are some highlights of the budget allocations made by ASRA in 2001-2002: \$25 million to support research infrastructure and research activities at Alberta universities and research hospitals; \$10.9 million for strategic investments in science and research activities; \$10 million for ICORE – the goal of ICORE Inc. is to attract and grow a critical mass of outstanding researchers in the fields of computing science, computer engineering, physics, mathematics, and other ICT-related disciplines – 3 and a half million

dollars to support the retention of top-quality faculty at Alberta universities and research hospitals; \$2.4 million to promote the application of technology in electronics and microelectronics, telecommunications, and information networks, computer technology, multimedia, biotechnology, advanced materials, and manufacturing with the ultimate goal of attracting IT business to the province; \$68 million in spending by the Alberta Research Council to support the provision of applied research to small to medium-sized Alberta enterprises that enables Alberta firms to enhance their global competitiveness; a \$1.5 million grant to the Alberta Forestry Research Institute; \$8.6 million to the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, your time has elapsed. The chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You can't fault enthusiasm.

I'd like to start by thanking the minister. The minister was courteous enough to invite me to his office after he was first appointed to the cabinet, and he was frank in sharing with me his vision of his department and where he would like it to go, but he was also frank in sharing his trepidation as a new minister. I have to admit that I was impressed, and I think you'll notice that we haven't asked the minister a question this session. I'm not sure the two are related, but that's the way things have developed. I do wish him the best, and I'm sure that he'll serve the ministry well.

I'd like to start off with a number of comments, if I may. On page 231 there's a reference to priorities. One is "a focus on education"; two is "public relations and stewardship issues." I wondered if we could have some more information in terms of exactly what public relations involve. From reading the document and the thrusts that are there, I think I have an idea, but public relations is usually used in a different context than it's used within this budget document, so I wondered, when the minister has an opportunity, if he might comment on that priority as it's outlined in the document.

The minister – and this is a bit of an aside – when I visited his office shared with me a report from the Alberta Science and Research Authority. I looked through that document, and I came away unclear – and it may be my problem – as to the relationship between that authority and the ministry, because in the report they list the Alberta Science and Research Authority and do in fact list the ministry as an equal entity. It was my understanding that the research authority was subsumed under the ministry, and certainly from the budget documents that would seem to be the case. Oh, I found the part I needed.

On page 40 of the report the Alberta Science and Research Authority is listed. The Ministry of Innovation and Science is listed. Then the Alberta Research Council, the informatics circle of research excellence, the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, the Alberta Energy Research Institute, and the Alberta Forestry Research Institute are listed as almost parallel or separate entities. I think it's misleading. I had sort of a picky question, they used to call them when I was on the school board, about the Alberta Science and Research Authority having the money to put out a report which is as luxurious as this one is. I know a bit from preparing annual reports that when you have embossed covers, when you have ghost leaflets, when you have the quality of paper and the binding used in this document, the price tag is fairly hefty. I noticed in the document that they said the report was posted on the web, so I wondered about the need for such a showy document. But it is picky, and I'll set it aside for more important questions, Mr. Chairman.

9:30

I've had a bit of a discussion with the minister about the Supernet project, and I'm still a little concerned about the technology changing so fast. The minister indicated that wireless technology was going to be used at the extremities of the network, where it wasn't possible or it wasn't feasible to have hard wiring. I wondered if there's more information on that. He talks about 422 communities being served by the high-speed network band, and I have a question with respect to the measure that's being used. I think the project is mentioned on page 233. There's a performance measure on page 243. It has as the heading, "Number of communities where residences are using high-speed internet access." So 422 communities have access to high-speed network bandwidth. But how many residences are there actually involved? How significant is the fact that there are residences there in terms of the total population or the total number of residences in a community? It seems that without that further information, just saying it's there isn't very useful.

The same with the second indicator: businesses "are using high-speed services." The information has yet to be collected. I would be interested to know if the data being collected would tell us the extent of the user service in a community. I think it would be interesting to know and it's an index worth pursuing, because the access is available in this city, yet I know a number of individual residents who are reluctant to sign up for it, given the cost. Getting access to cable is about a \$50 bill a month for a residence. I think it would be interesting for our own community in terms of how extensive that service is being used. It seems again to me that low-income families may be excluded from this. So any information on that use objective I think would be interesting in terms of trying to judge the success of the money that's being spent on it.

There's a strategy under goal 1 that would "support graduate students through project and program funding." The graduate students across this province have made their voices very loud in terms of the need for more assistance. This is one way that the assistance available to them can be increased. I would appreciate some more details in terms of that particular program.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

I wanted to move again to page 238, "increase the awareness and promotion of science and technology to K-12 students so that they will consider science and technology as a viable career opportunity." That's a great goal. I think schools have other objectives that supercede that one in terms of why they want students to have access to the technology, but I'm also aware that schools are really struggling with finding appropriate funds for software and finding appropriate money for the hardware. Evergreening is becoming a huge problem for them, as it is for the rest of us that use the Internet in our daily lives, and I have this vision of the schools all having access to the Internet yet not having the money to pay for the machines and the software to access it. So this is an objective, and I guess my question is: how well co-ordinated is this with the efforts of the Department of Learning to ensure that schools aren't left in that position?

On page 239, where the strategy is to "adopt standards and best practices across government," one of the strategies, the fourth strategy, the fourth bullet, is to

identify opportunities in IMT for shared service approaches, standards (e.g. common platform and tools), best practices and cross ministry initiatives to reduce duplication of effort/investment and collaborate with ministries to implement solutions.

Further, the next bullet is to

lead government in the planning, standardization and ongoing

development of a compatible, secure infrastructure for information management and ICT.

I was looking back at the *Hansard* for November of 1999. A previous minister made comments about the problem of developing common standards and common platforms across government. The minister indicated at that time that the "issue is being handled by the chief information officer," and he further went on to indicate:

I believe we have four or five different e-mail platforms inside government, and some of these e-mail platforms can't talk to each other. Well the question is: why? So that's one of the issues. We have a whole series of different desktops across government, and these desktops can't talk to each other.

That was in November of 1999. We see the same item here. Although the minister did indicate at that time that this was going to take a number of years to resolve, to get the common standards in place, I wonder what kind of progress has been made to have all the departments working from common platforms and using standards that bring some uniformity to government operations.

There's a further reference that I wanted to track too. It is on page 240. Given the minister's comments at that time, where the desktop standards are indicated, there's e-mail: nothing for 1999-2000, so a standard wasn't set; 85 percent for 2000-01. Then it goes on to list some of the other kinds of standards they're working on. I'm surprised, given the information that was here in 1999, that there isn't the information available for the 1999-2000 budget year and that the goals are still rather modest in terms of the hardware baseline.

9:40

I'd like to move on to the government survey of Innovation and Science employees and raise the same point that I raised in the previous estimates, and that is this business of the government asking employees or employees of other departments how satisfied they are. Again, in terms of all the key performance measures that could be included in a business plan, I wonder about the extensive treatment being given in this business plan to the Innovation and Science employees.

The information is interesting, but it raises another question that I have, and that is: how do you decide what information you're going to include in the business plan and attach it to dollars and what information do you include in annual reports? I looked back at the Department of Learning, for example, which has a fair number of measures that are useful within the context of the business plan and that are attached to dollars. Their annual report is much more extensive in terms of the performance measures they include. So if you look at the business plan, you have a good idea of how the dollars are being targeted, and if you want further information, if you want some of that information interpreted more widely, you can go to the annual report eventually to see a wider range of performance measures. It seems to me, at least in some cases, that is becoming closer to the kind of thing the Auditor General has commented upon so often in his report and has been so critical of government, in terms of the performance measures that are not there.

There's a line question I have on page 244 in the ministry expenses, and that's ICORE, the informatics circle of research excellence. If I read that, there was \$855,000 spent in 1999-2000, and there's \$10 million for the next number of years included in the budget item. There are some chairs that have been dedicated at postsecondary institutions, and I wonder if we could have some expansion on that item. What else is intended to help attract and keep high-quality researchers in the province? This is an important initiative coming out of the Cloutier report a number of years ago that indicated there was a brain drain and that government action was needed. I'm delighted to see this in the budget, but I would

appreciate some more information in terms of what is exactly going to be included and does it include more than dedicated chairs.

The office of the chief information officer shows the budget remaining about the same. I wonder, given that the work of standards over the next number of years will eventually be completed, why there is not a decrease eventually shown in that budget. Or is it just the nature of technology that there are always going to be new problems to solve and that this is going to be an ongoing budget item that remains at that level?

I had some other questions on some of the specific budget lines, but I think I'll leave those for now and conclude with those remarks. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm delighted to make my comments on the estimates of the Department of Innovation and Science. I listened to the minister's introductory comments, and I appreciate his enthusiasm and his commitment to the department and to the task at hand. I notice he's having a nice increase in budget that will help him and that I'm sure contributes to his enthusiasm.

But as I listened to him, I felt like I wanted to put up a caution, thinking back to efforts along these lines starting in 1976 and going on through until the late 1980s. There was a department of technology, research, and telecommunications. There have been variations on this current Department of Innovation and Science for years either as a stand-alone ministry or as a subset of some other ministry such as Economic Development.

I'm sure the minister is well aware of the pressures he's going to face, but he's now got a substantial budget here, and it's large enough and growing rapidly enough that it's going to attract and create all kinds of pressures. People are going to be after him for money. As they say, honey attracts flies. There's a lot of honey here, and he's going to have a lot of people coming to him to get a piece of it. My concern, frankly, is that keeping control on expenditures is going to be difficult, and exercising wisdom in allocating those expenditures is also going to be very difficult. All kinds of enthusiasts for different projects are going to be coming his way, and it makes me nervous to see governments getting into these kinds of areas. At the same time, I will admit that it's necessary. It just requires a great deal of caution. A great deal of wisdom is perhaps the way to put it.

As I mentioned already, it's a department which is experiencing a rather generous increase in its budget, I think over a 26 percent increase from the budget of last year, and that's obviously not a sustainable sort of pattern. I'm not sure what the trends are expected to be over the next two or three or four years, but a 26 percent increase in one year may be fine once but it's clearly not sustainable. So, again, that reinforces my sense of caution with this department and for this minister.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Part of that trend, the department's capital investment, is budgeted at nearly double last year's estimate. This year it's expected to be \$8 million, and last year it was about \$4 million, so that again reflects the pattern of rapid increases in expenditures.

I'm also noticing the commitment to strategic investments and various research initiatives, whether it's the Supernet or the research infrastructure in universities and teaching hospitals or commitments to promote economic development through commercialization of research. Again, these are areas that are so prone to commercial

pressures and to the pressures that will come when leaders of projects see this as their last resort for getting money and put intense, intense political pressure on the department to pay up. I feel very nervous for that \$204 million.

The biggest jump, I think – it's certainly one of the biggest – is in program 2 of the department's operating expenses, information and communications technology, which is getting a 28 percent increase and now will surge to over \$105 million this year. So given that program 2, the information and communications technology or ICT area, was actually about 15 percent under budget last year, I'd like to know how the department justifies a 28 percent increase in spending for this year. How is that justified? What are they spending the money on? Why the big jump? Indeed, what do they foresee for next year and the year after?

9:50

Given my concerns over spending, I'm going to ask for more detailed information from this department than I have from most others. I would like the minister to provide a breakdown of the ministry's gross operating expenses for the year by object for the following components: salaries for permanent positions, salaries for nonpermanent positions, and salaries for contract positions as well as travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, and hosting expenses. There are areas in there where we could see all kinds of expenditures slipping out of control: hosting expenses, travel expenses in these high-tech areas could quickly get beyond our reasonable controls which we are expected to respect for the taxpayers of Alberta. If the minister would also provide a breakdown of where the additional 28 percent in expenditures for program 2 is going and how that spending will meet the department's stated core businesses and goals, I for one would appreciate it, and I think all Alberta taxpayers would.

The \$50 million that is budgeted for the Supernet this year alone is a tremendous amount of money. Fifty million dollars is a perfectly round figure. I wonder what the plans are for the next four years and how they arrived at exactly \$50 million. It is a suspiciously round figure, and I'd be interested to have more details on that.

Has the department done a cost-benefit analysis on the Supernet project to determine whether it will really be worth while and, as my other colleagues have mentioned, whether it's technology that will even be up to date by the time this project is implemented. I'd be curious to know beyond simple buzzwords how exactly the Supernet will make Albertans more competitive in the world marketplace. What's the direct tie between that \$50 million expenditure and the goal of making Alberta more competitive? I'm not sure that it holds up if you become critical on the buzzwords.

If on the other hand it's meant as a sign of commitment to bringing most Albertans onto the Internet in the same way that there were the rural electrification programs in the '50s and the programs of Alberta Government Telephones decades ago to bring telephones to all Albertans, if it has a social component to it, I'd like to know that. What steps will the department take to ensure that all Albertans will have access to the benefits of the Supernet? Could it be in fact that it will undercut local businesses if a bookstore owner in a small town, say Lac La Biche, suddenly is facing a lot of competition from the big Internet suppliers? Is that really something we want to have? If these things are thought through, are we sure they are going to be as beneficial as the promoters of them want us to believe? I'm also interested, once this system is in place, in what the costs will be to maintain it. Has the department done any in-depth studies on the administrative and maintenance cost associated with the Supernet? So there are a lot of questions around the Supernet. I know my colleagues have raised those from time to time, and they will be raised again.

The goals of the department are worth mentioning here, not only

for what they include but for what they do not include. The goals as listed in the business plan are:

1. Maximize the international competitiveness of Alberta's science and research system.
2. Promote effective technology commercialization, adoption and investment in Alberta.
3. Promote effective application of science and research for improving the stewardship of Alberta's resources and environment.
4. Promote the benefits of science and innovation within Alberta.
5. The Government of Alberta will be a model user in the application of information, knowledge and technology.
6. Effectively manage human capital within the Ministry of Innovation and Science.

Those are laudable. My concern is that when we are into an area like innovation and science, things happen so quickly and there is often so little forethought that the big picture is sometimes forgotten. So while I note, for example, that goal 3 does refer to "improving the stewardship of Alberta's resources and environment," that's about as close as the entire business plan comes, as far as I can see, to addressing any questions around the ethical implementation of new technologies and the ethics surrounding innovation and science.

We are seeing ethical questions rise all over our society from these areas, whether it's in the medical area and the ethics of new medical technology, whether it's in the wisdom of committing to unrelenting innovation and the stress that comes from a rapid change in society as we are forced and driven to innovate and innovate and innovate. We see reports out of Calgary, done by the Calgary regional health authority, that Calgarians are under intense stress. They're some of the most highly stressed people in the country.

AN HON. MEMBER: Do you think it's the traffic there?

DR. TAFT: Traffic is part of the problem.

The speed of change in that society is part of the problem. The suicide rates in Calgary are among the highest in the country, and indeed the suicide rates in Alberta are among the highest in the country. How many of those relate to the unrelenting pressure of innovation and change? It's certainly worth some consideration in this department. Where is the wisdom going to come from as we bring in more and more of these technologies and create more and more change and pressure in our society? So I would encourage this department, and I think it would indeed be of fundamental importance to the success of this department in the long run, to actually set up an office for ethical issues around new technologies.

With those comments, I'll move to some of my reactions to the major strategies. I read, for example, the second strategy, "make strategic investments to help modernize the research infrastructure at Alberta universities and teaching hospitals." How will this operate? Who is going to determine the priorities? I'm sure every department in every hospital and every faculty in all the universities and colleges has ideas for improving their research infrastructure. I'd like to know how this is going to be implemented, how the priorities will be determined.

The strategy relating to ICORE Inc., attract and grow a critical mass of outstanding researchers in the fields of computer science, electrical and computer engineering, physics, mathematics and other ICT-related disciplines, raises the question, of course, of how that will be done and who will do it. Is this something the department will largely delegate to universities and colleges and institutes, or is it something the department and the minister plan to have a direct say in?

"Promote economic development through the commercialization of research in existing and emerging industries." A strategy here, a

major strategy of the department, sounds very much like getting back into the business of choosing winners and losers, something that we have struggled mightily to extricate this government from. Yet here they are, moving in with a burgeoning budget and a growing department, back full scale into the notion of picking existing and emerging industries and presumably channeling public money to them to promote economic development. It sends up all kinds of red flags for me. How is that going to be done? How are we going to avoid the pitfalls of these kinds of initiatives of the past? How are we going to ensure that we don't end up backing the NovAtels and MagCans of the world yet one more time?

10:00

Further down the list of strategies: working with key Alberta science, research, and technology organizations to "enhance the science culture and literacy within the province." Who are those organizations? I'd be interested to know. Are they universities? Are they schools? Do they start in kindergarten? Do they include organizations like Access television, which maybe can undertake science programming for schools? Would they include something like sponsoring and encouraging greater participation in science fairs among elementary and junior high school students? So some more detail on those areas would be of real interest to me. My concern consistently is that in the fast-paced, overhyped world of high-tech innovation, the taxpayer is going to be fleeced or runs an increased risk of being fleeced and that the pressures on the minister and his senior officials to avoid that will be intense.

Continuing through the strategies:

\$39.4 million will be allocated to provide strategic leadership for science and research in Alberta through the allocation of funding to ongoing science and research activities, research infrastructure and the retention of top quality faculty at Alberta universities and research hospitals.

A laudable goal. I'd be interested in how it will be implemented. When they talked about providing "strategic leadership for science and research in Alberta through the allocation of funding," whose leadership? Is this the minister's leadership? Undoubtedly he will have a host of advisors, but again it resonates with the old problems we got into of picking winners and losers. I would like to see how this will be implemented and what safeguards are going to be in place for that.

I also read with some skepticism the strategy that says that \$45.6 million will be allocated to ensuring that the Government of Alberta is exemplary in the efficient and effective use of information and ICT in providing services to Albertans; coordinating the effective use of computer technology

and so on. I am concerned that information and communications technology within government can be a bottomless pit and that we can end up pouring millions and millions of dollars into IT systems that are frankly often of very disappointing value. I reflect back on experience that I've had and have observed directly in the government over the last years with spending huge amounts of money on information systems that in the end were very disappointing indeed.

Moving along to indicators of success, I notice R and D investment. An indicator will be "\$2 billion total R&D investment from the province, federal government and business by 2005." I'd like to know: what portions do they anticipate coming from each of those levels, from the province, from the federal government, and from business? Of that \$2 billion, which of those three groups will be putting up how much money?

Under Business Innovation again I'm concerned about getting into very high-risk areas when we're talking about putting Alberta taxpayer money into promoting "the Internet to sell goods and services."

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, your time has elapsed. The chair now recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to get a chance to participate in the debate this evening on the Innovation and Science department. I listened with a great deal of interest to the minister's initial remarks. I, too, would like to echo my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods and wish the minister the very best in his career as Minister of Innovation and Science.

Now, there are the core businesses that are outlined here. The goals are certainly, I think, very important. You can just go down the list here. Science, research, and development involves "providing strategic leadership for science and research in Alberta." That's an excellent goal.

"Managing and funding strategic investments in science and research." That, too, is noteworthy, but there were cautions expressed by my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview.

"Co-ordinating government science and research." There is a real need for government science and research, and there's also a need to ensure that if there are to be commercial applications for the science or the research, the taxpayers benefit as well as the commercial enterprises.

"Promoting a science culture in Alberta." As a parent of three elementary schoolchildren that is also very important, and I can't stress that enough to the minister. There is also the fact that as you work in Alberta industry and you see young people coming out of school and you're working with them either on the job or in a supervisory capacity, you can notice straight away those that have had their curiosity tweaked, so to speak, Mr. Chairman, by science and how readily they are able to adapt to the workforce. You can really see that. I don't know – and perhaps the minister can explain this – how the department is going to promote a science culture in Alberta. I suppose I may be getting ahead of the issue here by assuming that it's going to be in schools. It could be a lifelong learning initiative. I don't know.

"Applying science and research to improve stewardship of our resources and environment." I'm going to hopefully get a chance to talk about that a little later on.

"Commercializing the results of research." Well, that's fine again, Mr. Chairman, but let's ensure that the taxpayers are also going to be beneficiaries of that.

"Developing the 'knowledge industry' component of the Alberta economy." We have to realize – and time is running out as our resources are being exported – that there's more to this province than, as they say, rocks and trees, and there's more to this country. The development of this knowledge industry: well, that's fine, but let's ensure that it continues and that it's just not more sloganeering.

Now, "increasing the application of technology throughout the economy." Again, I'm not going to dwell on this. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods asked some very pointed questions about the Internet and Internet access for Albertans. Everyone was very excited with this initiative. Students told me that it's fine that we've got high-speed Internet, but they can't afford a computer because tuition fees are high. The farmers: well, they were very excited about this, but unfortunately with the price of commodities they cannot afford a computer. So the farmers are not going to have to worry about getting any dust in their laptop. It's not going to happen this year. Hopefully, it may happen next year.

10:10

There are some research initiatives that I would like to talk about specifically. I have some questions around the Alberta Energy Research Institute. There are three different research institutes, but

at this time I want to talk about the Energy Research Institute. Now, just exactly what is going on there? I would like to ask the minister a couple of direct questions, Mr. Chairman. The first is: is that department doing any research into semiconductor activity? For instance, let's say nitrogen is going to be the core of our electricity transmission lines. Naturally it's going to be very cold, and there's going to be very little resistance on the high-voltage lines. The reason I ask this is that there's talk now of more power lines to export electricity to America. There are limits that have been put on the main transmission line that's running north/south, and this is something that I think we need to do some research on.

In many transmission grids there is at least a 7 percent loss, and I think it's greater in Alberta. I'm having difficulty getting the statistics on Alberta. For some reason it's easier to get American statistics than it is Canadian statistics. It's easier to get data from the NEB than it is from the EUB. You know, there seems to be a veil of secrecy. The old cone of silence is over the province. Anyway, in America it is 7 percent of electricity that is lost in the high-voltage transmission lines. There is nitrogen being used to chill the line, and zing, there's no electricity loss. There's no line loss. Now, I don't know what the commercial applications are of this technology. Are the individuals at the Alberta Energy Research Institute doing any such research on this?

It's unfortunate that the hon. members in this Assembly who have large deposits of coal in their constituencies – I'm sure they're all interested. It's the Member for West Yellowhead, yes. I was looking over there, Mr. Chairman.

Now, clean coal technologies. Unfortunately, clean coal technologies do not exist in commercial applications, because there needs to be more research done. The cost has to be lowered. Clean coal technology is more than throwing a little bit of lime in the snuff box of a power boiler. There's a lot more to it than that. I was at a standing policy committee this evening where the Minister of Environment expressed concerns about CO₂ emissions in Fort McMurray. We have to develop these clean coal technologies. We need to ensure that clean coal technologies are developed. I want to know how much research is going on in the Alberta Energy Research Institute to develop the clean coal technologies.

George W. Bush, the current President of the United States of America, has also expressed reservations. He was shocked and appalled to realize that clean coal technologies do not exist in commercial applications. I have a report sitting in my office that indicates that we're at least 10 years from that, Mr. Chairman. This is another project I would like to see research done on in this province.

I had the pleasure of being at an Alberta youth forum with the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, and in his remarks he instructed the Alberta youth that there's a project on CO₂, I believe it was, in Fort McMurray. In the next 10 years this was going to be reality. It was going to be piped . . .

MR. HERARD: What?

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, that's what I thought: what?

Now, it was going to be piped to central Alberta. There are coal seams down by Sylvan Lake that run west to Nordegg, and this was going to be used as a catalyst to develop methane coal gas beds. I would be very interested to know how far from reality this is and if any research is being done by the Alberta Energy Research Institute.

I would also be very curious to know from the hon. minister, please, Mr. Chairman, if there is any research being conducted regarding the efficiencies of natural gas fired electrical generating stations. Is there anything that can be done to increase the produc-

tion of those facilities? Is there some little thing that has been missed over the years in the burners that could increase the efficiency? As far as that technology exists, what can be done?

Getting back to the coal-fired generating stations, to reduce the grams of carbon particulate in relationship to the generation of a megawatt of electricity – now, that is a measure that's routinely used by American researchers. I would be very curious to see what's going on here in Alberta.

Now, the Alberta Forestry Research Institute. That department has a lot of information, and much of it must be vital to the economic prosperity of the West Yellowhead region of this fine province. I would be curious to know if there is research being done as to the sustainability of our forest cut or our timber harvest. This is vital. I was after the same information in the last series of estimates, so I won't go into detail on this, but I think it's important for the long-term view of the province.

Getting back to commercializing the results of research, we'll have to go to the Alberta Research Council. I have to ask the minister at this time if the Alberta Research Council – I may have missed it here, and I apologize if I have – has any formal ties with the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority. I'm very curious about this because there is so much research needed to be done to ensure that we can get every barrel out of the tar sands in a safe environmental fashion or method. Whether the tar sands are in Fort McMurray or Cold Lake or over in the Peace district, it doesn't matter. What is the relationship between, again, the Alberta Research Council and AOSTRA?

10:20

The Alberta Research Council. I think there was a \$56 million line in the budget, but I can't see it here. Anyway, I may have missed that, Mr. Chairman, and I apologize to the minister and officials if it's not \$56 million. The Alberta Research Council, of course, was involved in the whole pine shakes scandal, the untreated and treated pine shakes scandal. The Alberta Research Council was an accredited certification agency for a while.

AN HON. MEMBER: Is it still?

MR. MacDONALD: No, no. They were very anxious to let other third-party agencies be involved in the inspection and certification of the pine shake product.

Now, the rotting pine shake is a fine example of what can go wrong with research. The Alberta Research Council, to their credit, started some long-term durability testing on both the treated and untreated pine shake. I still have outstanding questions about the durability of the treated pine shakes in these field tests, but they were responsible enough to start field testing. There's no doubt about that.

This field testing went on and on for intervals. I believe it's going to go on for another three years up in Whitecourt, and there's a lot of rain in Whitecourt. There's a lot more rain in Whitecourt than there is in Calgary. We need to have a good look at these field studies, and I don't think that has been done to date. Also, at the farm down by the Ellerslie rugby pitch the Alberta Research Council had some battens set up with pine shakes on them, and none of the homeowners either to the north of that development or in Calgary or anywhere else in the province had the opportunity of having a look at those detailed field studies.

So hopefully that's been a lesson learned by everyone in the province. Not only do we have to do through research and development, but we've got to do it before we commercialize the product. Even as I was driving down here at 8 o'clock, I could see on 98th

Avenue where there were lots and lots of residential homes, Mr. Chairman, that had the pine shakes removed and cedar shakes put on, and they had large reroofing bills to deal with. However, it reminds one of the quote that came up in this Assembly – and I forget which hon. minister it was at the time – about how the gray weatherbeaten look of these pine shakes was an example of Alberta entrepreneurship. This was the quote. This quote originated in a committee similar to this one. Of course, we all know that is not the truth. It's simply not the truth. This product is just one headache after another for Alberta homeowners, and it is a fine lesson.

Now, the Alberta Research Council certainly does notable research and development, and I would like to see that continue. We all learn from our mistakes, and I'm curious: are there any sorts of liability contingencies set aside? Or is there an insurance policy in case the Research Council is at this court case that's going on? Now, maybe other members of this Assembly know more about that court case than I do. What's the status of the Alberta Research Council in relationship to the fact that the government may at some time be found guilty of authorizing and promoting this shoddy building product?

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'm curious about this office of the chief information officer. I would like some details on that.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize the hon. minister to close debate, is there anybody else who wishes to speak on these estimates?

The hon. minister to close debate.

MR. DOERKSEN: Well, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for giving me this opportunity, and with the five minutes I have to close debate, I can't possibly answer all the questions this evening but will commit to do written answers.

I do want to recognize some members from Innovation and Science who have come tonight. I want you to know that I have encouraged all the staff at Innovation and Science to stay home, fill their emotional tanks, and prepare for another exciting day tomorrow, but even here at 10:30 at night we have members of our finance division who have come to see the proceedings and help me out. I do want to introduce Brian Fischer, who is a senior financial officer, Sophie Kwan, Clem Benoit, and Byron Nagazina, who have come tonight. Thank you very much. I appreciate your attendance here.

I do want to make a couple of points and finish my opening comments, as I never had a chance to do that. First of all, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods talked about not having asked me a question in question period yet. I know that eventually he will get around to doing that, but I realize he has had other conflicting priorities that have more compelling urgency. So I respect that.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar talked a lot about the Alberta Energy Research Institute. I did want to refer in my opening comments, and didn't get around to it, to the \$8.9 million grant to that institute to support research on efficient and economical recovery and processing of oil sands and related products and the development of technologies that will ensure economic and sustainable energy production from currently underutilized resources such as oil sands, clean burning coal, and coal bed methane.

There was a simple question about the relationship of ASRA to the minister. I would point out to the hon. member that if he would review the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Act, it really gives legislative authority to that particular board and shows you what the relationship is. Just in review quickly, the authority gives advice to the minister respecting science, engineering, and technology. It stimulates research and development and technology activities in Alberta. It develops and recommends

science, engineering, technology, and research policy and priorities. It conducts an annual review and evaluation of all government science, engineering, technology, and research policy, and it goes on. But quite clearly that relationship is established within that particular act.

As far as Supernet is concerned, there were a number of questions about Supernet. I just want to point out that the primary benefit of Supernet – well, that should be, too, what I will call the extended network or primarily to the rural or remote areas – is eliminating the digital divide in Alberta, one of the few jurisdictions actually that has taken the initiative to eliminate that disparity between, if you want to call it, the haves and the have-nots. It will provide access at equitable pricing across the province, thereby giving the economic initiative and incentive for those communities in use of that particular technology.

With those few comments, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the questions, and actually there were some suggestions which I appreciate as well. We will commit to get back and table those responses at a later date. So with that, I will take my seat.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$204,458,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

10:30

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

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: 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, 2002, for the following departments.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: operating expense, \$20,210,000.

Innovation and Science: operating expense and capital investment, \$204,458,000.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:32 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

