

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, March 13, 2003**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 2003/03/13

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Dear God, author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask Thy guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Wamer.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly someone who really needs no introduction. Mr. Jack Ady is with us today. He sat in this Assembly as an elected Member for Cardston-Chief Mountain for three terms. During that time he was my MLA, and I can tell you and the members that he was considered by his constituents to be a very, very good MLA. I'm pleased that he's here today, and on behalf of this Assembly I would like to extend our thanks to him for the service he's rendered to this Assembly and to Alberta and to his community. He's in your gallery. I would invite Mr. Jack Ady to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me to be able to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly four guests that are in the members' gallery today. The first and most important, of course, is Abigail, who is just a little girl but a very, very special little girl. She happens to be the daughter of Jennifer. She is sitting on her mom's knee up there. They happen to be the wife and daughter of Frank Ostlinger, who is a member of our government members' research staff, who originally came to us from Sweden, spent some time in the United States, and decided that he wanted to learn more about political things between Canada and the U.S., came up here and took his political science degree, also went on and took information systems and libraries. He's got his masters in that. We ended up with him as one of our incredibly talented research staff, just a huge addition to us.

But the real reason that the three of them are here today, Mr. Speaker, is the fourth guest that's with them, who is Sven – these are all Ostlinger family – and Sven is from Sweden. He originally was a marine with Sweden, later became a high school teacher, decided that he'd not had quite enough of the military and applied through the United Nations to become a member of the peacekeeping forces. So he's an encryption specialist and a sergeant now with the United Nations. He's stationed – and I'll probably say this wrong – at Prizren, Kosovo, at Camp Victoria, where he serves now. He's on leave and came to visit his brother and family for two weeks. I would ask them to please rise in our gallery, and we could all give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Tannas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to

you three different groups. The first group is 33 students who are here today as participants in Mr. Speaker's MLA-for-a-Day program. They've spent time at their member's office and with you in the Chamber, and they will receive a tour and briefings on the constituent elements of this House later this afternoon. This program will be run again on Thursday, April 10. The ultimate aim of the day's activities is to further develop the interest and understanding of our parliamentary system among our student guests. Our student shadow colleagues are seated in both galleries, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is a group of students from Edison school, just outside of Okotoks. They're great students. There are about 25 students and parents with teachers Joseph Smith and Jennifer Harriman and parents Mike Farrier, Stephanie Orr, Krista Smith, Blair Murray, Nigel Waugh, Alnoor Rana, Brad Cennon, and Brent Spice. I'd ask those students to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly. They're over there.

My third introduction, Mr. Speaker, is on your behalf. I'd like to introduce, again, to you and through you to all the hon. members of the Assembly Mr. Brad Watson, town manager of the town of Swan Hills. He's accompanied today by his wife, Louise Watson, and their daughter Ellie Watson. They're seated in your gallery this afternoon, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Norris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you a very special guest sitting in your gallery. My sister Sheilagh Ross and her family from Camrose are visiting us today. Aside from the obvious reasons, this is a remarkable family. They are. My goddaughter Jennifer underwent a liver transplant 10 years ago and is now the longest surviving liver transplant patient in Canada. To honour that remarkable journey, my two nephews, Mike and Tim, who tower over me at six foot six and six foot five respectively, skated across Canada to raise awareness for organ donation. The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose will be doing a member's statement later about that, but I would like you to welcome my family to your gallery and give them the warm welcome and the honour they deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of people whom I had the pleasure of meeting with today to discuss issues of concern in our community. Mr. Randy Atkinson, Mr. Murray Dorin, Mr. Ramsey Mackinnon, Mr. Wynn Payne, Mr. Ted Shields, Mr. James Spalding, Blaise Szekely are all seated in the members' gallery, and I'll ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you it gives me great pleasure to welcome five dedicated and wonderful University of Calgary students to our Assembly this afternoon. I'd like to ask each of them to rise as I call their name: Jennifer Banks, Connie Bird, Kathleen White, Kent Saga, Layne Douglas. They're all social work students at the University of Calgary, and they're all stopping

in to see the excitement of the Legislature on the way to the Alberta Association of Social Workers conference in Edmonton this weekend. Two of these students, Ms Banks and Ms Bird, call the constituency of Calgary-Bow home; however, I would like to wish each and every one of them the best of success as they begin their careers as social workers here in Alberta.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, the daughter-in-law of Mr. Jack Ady.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. The favourite daughter-in-law. It's on the record. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As you know, I have 25,000 students in my constituency, but rarely do they get to come up here. It's only the second time in the two years I've served. I'm proud to be able to introduce them today from Trinity Christian school and the parents. Their teacher is Mr. George Graffunder, and the parents that were brave enough to travel that far with them: Eileen Gaetz, Mary Zwingli, Monique Evans, Hazel Gunn, Linda Thiessen, Jayne Barnett, Jayne Walker, Angela Rankel, Charlotte Loepky, Kathleen Lefevre, and Scott Dykes. I'd ask that they would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

1:40head: Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Dr. Nicol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government will stop at nothing to get permission from Albertans to use the heritage fund. Today this government claimed that a nonscientific survey will provide direction for the future of the heritage fund, a fund that all Albertans hold dear. Despite the existence of scientific proof that Albertans want their heritage fund to remain an endowment fund, this government has left the door open to raiding the heritage fund. My question is to the Premier. Will you honour your pledge made to Albertans in 1993 when you said, and I quote, this is something that's so important it ought to go to a referendum, close quote, and hold a referendum before introducing any changes in the way the heritage fund is managed?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I would like to set the record straight. First of all, the Minister of Revenue set out to consult the public as to what they would like to see done with the heritage savings trust fund. All he did today was release the results of that survey. There is no action being contemplated by this government vis-à-vis the fund because, ostensibly, people said, "Leave the fund alone," albeit the survey said by 51 percent, a very, very slim majority, that a portion of the fund should be used to pay down the debt. Well, some time ago we rejected that idea and introduced, instead, a new fiscal policy, which will be outlined in detail in conjunction with the budget and the business plans.

So this hon. member is getting way, way ahead of himself, but not surprising for political reasons to instill fear, to instill anxiety, to throw out falsehoods and assumptions and speculation to get people riled up. That's what it's all about. It's not about what we're going to do or what we're contemplating or what we might contemplate relative to the heritage savings trust fund. But I can say once again that the fund as it now sits will stay the way it is today.

Dr. Nicol: To the Premier: so there's no basis to the Minister of

Revenue's comments this morning when he said that in the next year's budget, 2004-05, you will be looking at the possibility of using the heritage fund to pay down the debt?

Mr. Klein: I don't know what the hon. member said. You know, he can say that anything is possible because nothing is carved in stone. Nothing is certain. But I can tell you that as of today, this very moment, nothing is contemplated relative to the fund. But with respect to what the minister said or did not say, why not ask the minister? I'll have him respond.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans value – and we've always known this – the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, and I do too. This question was to allow Albertans to provide some feedback about how they view it could best serve us in the future. It was always about: how can this fund best serve Albertans today and forever? So in that respect the endowment portion is and has been our policy and will continue to frame the primary policy of this government.

Now, there was one question related to the debt repayment. As was mentioned, 51 percent of Albertans did say that they would support using the fund. We released the results today. But it is important to ask Albertans, and we're pleased to be able to get a response from those types of consultations. It is not in our budget contemplation this year, but we clearly will come back and revisit making sure this fund is structured properly for even those kinds of questions but at a future date. It was just part of the consultation we've been involved with.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Nicol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Revenue: you just said "the endowment portion" of the heritage fund. Since when has this fund been divided up into a series of things. It is all an endowment in the minds of Albertans. Why are you changing it by making comments like that?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This fund has served Albertans very well for a variety of reasons over its 26-year history. It was originally created as a multipurpose fund for many of its years of history. In the last number of years our priority has been to repay the debt. We have used the income to help support programs of the government, over \$25 billion of income over the life of that fund. That income has helped benefit health and education, repayment of debt. It benefits Albertans continually. In that respect, it was very important to us to help clarify even the misconstrued comments at times – is it a rainy day fund? – or, otherwise, to get a clearer focus. Yes, it is an endowment fund, and I support that.

Dr. Nicol: To the Minister of Revenue: if you wanted to clarify Albertans' perspective on what that fund should be used for, why didn't you do a scientifically based consultation with Albertans rather than a voluntary response as a form of consultation?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we are pleased with the opportunity to consult with Albertans and ask Albertans. This survey was not a survey in the sense of only limiting it to a few randomly selected people to participate. It was designed to allow all Albertans to have a voice on it. Over 77,000 people responded to it, a tremendous response from Albertans.

Dr. Nicol: Again to the Minister of Finance. The process doesn't give any statistical significance to that kind of a survey. How can you judge policy changes on a survey that has no scientific statistical analysis basis?

The Speaker: I take it that question was to the Minister of Revenue.

Dr. Nicol: The Minister of Revenue, yes.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, as I mentioned earlier, was the release of the survey. There were no policy announcements, no changes contemplated in this budget, but it is part of the consultation to which we are listening, and we will follow up on it.

Dr. Nicol: To the Minister of Revenue: since there's no scientific basis for that survey, why don't you just throw it out?

Mr. Melchin: Over 77,000 people felt it important enough to respond. That's a very high response and even statistically valid with respect to a representative sample. When you break it down geographically among all the regions of Alberta, results were similar, and it does have a high confidence level, even to that of exceeding a poll.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Natural Gas Rebates

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government threw millions of dollars around in energy rebates during the last election to hide the true cost of energy deregulation from Albertans before they voted. After the election this government promised in the throne speech that it would tap its substantial energy riches to shield consumers whenever natural gas prices get abnormally high. My first question is to the Premier. Given that after the last election the Premier stated that if we are facing something like \$9 or \$10 per gigajoule, that is abnormally high, why is your government so mean now when the average monthly price that Albertans are paying is over \$9? Why was that true then and is not true now?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, what we have here is the re-re-rebate. You know, I've answered the question so many times in this Legislature. What we said at the time – and there was no program in place other than an ad hoc program to shield consumers. By the way, the Liberals never talk about that. They never talk about that in positive terms and the benefit to Albertans at that particular time, that along with the electricity rebates. They never mention also that they were part of the debate that led to the legislation and never opposed the legislation that went into place, setting up a program to provide certainty relative to rebates. They never ever say that. They never ever say that they were part of the debate and did not oppose the legislation. What they are doing now is pure, unadulterated, down-low politics. Nothing more; nothing less. They were there for the debate.

1:50

Dr. Nicol: Where were the regulations?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, they talk about the regulations. At that particular time – and I'd like to go back to *Hansard* – I don't recall any of them getting up and saying: where are the regulations; how is

this going to work? [interjections] Oh, now they complain. Now they complain because it's politically expedient; the temperatures are cold. It's politically expedient for them to do it. When the temperature warms up, then they will cool on this particular issue, and they'll go on to something else, whatever is politically expedient at that particular time, whatever is negative. Whatever they can tell Albertans about what is wrong with this province, they will capture the moment and go out and spread their negativity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that the Premier stated in April 2001 that \$9 to \$10 a gigajoule for natural gas was abnormally high, what has made your government change its mind and made you break your promise? Is the orange and blue sweater going to be your legacy to this province?

Mr. Klein: The orange and blue sweater, Mr. Speaker? Orange and blue are great colours.

I'm just reading here the natural gas prices 2000 to present: from April \$3.10, May \$3.35, June \$4.33, July \$4.42, August \$3.93, September \$4.66, October \$5.53, November \$5.79, December \$8.28, January \$11.21, February \$8.05, and March \$6.48, Mr. Speaker. Then it started to come down. We had a program in place at that particular time which was ad hoc because we didn't have the room to introduce legislation. As a matter of fact, the Liberals were out there saying: what this government needs is legislation to bring in a sustainable long-term program. We did it. We brought it in. They debated it. They didn't oppose it at all, and now they're complaining about it. But the facts clearly show that when the rebate program was introduced, gas had reached an all-time high, and it has not reached that level since.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that in April 2001 you said that if natural gas was between \$9 and \$10 a gigajoule – and that was an admittance that it was an abnormally high price – you would provide rebates, where are those rebates in the emergency that many Albertans are now facing? Where's the money?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, right now we go to two thousand and . . .

Mr. MacDonald: Broken promise.

Mr. Klein: Do you want to hear the information?

The Speaker: I do, and that's why I recognized the responder.

Mr. Klein: Well, they don't want to hear the information, obviously, because these are the facts.

Reference price natural gas 2001-2002: April \$6.59, May \$5.74, June \$4.44, July \$3.75, August \$3.53, September \$2.76, October \$2.40, November \$3.33, December \$3.20. We're into '02: January \$3.17, February \$2.71, March \$3.23, April \$3.91, May \$3.91, June \$3.54, July \$3.17, August \$2.93, September \$3.51, October \$4.27, November \$4.85, December \$4.94. January no figures, no figures, and no figures up to March, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, if you take those averages, if you take the 12 – how thick are they to realize that there are four seasons usually in this province? There is winter, spring, summer, and fall. They only allude to summer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Health Care Workers' Collective Bargaining

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This week at the request of health employers the government moved to deny internationally recognized employment rights to health care workers and chose to shuffle them around without any promise that their service or seniority would be protected. The government did the bidding of the employers in this case but completely blindsided the employees. We have a minister of human resources who sides with business over injured workers, the WCB over firefighters, and now regional health authorities over nurses and other health care workers. To the minister: why has the minister bent over backwards to let employers write their own ticket yet failed completely to consult with thousands of workers or their unions in matters of direct concern to them?

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, I might remind the hon. member that with the bill that was introduced the other day, we're really talking about a platform for collective bargaining going forward. Unions will be in place. There will be collective agreements that will be in place. It's just that we've enabled a much more streamlined position in terms of nine employers trying to deal with perhaps over 400 collective agreements, that this ultimately and finally would be 36 in number.

I might add to the comments on his preamble that the particular concerns he was expressing are not really labour code activities. They're more in line with the collective bargaining that would go on between two parties, and of course that will continue to go on. That hasn't been touched.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that this minister seems to value the input of employers more than that of employees, since he didn't consult with them at all, how does he define the concept of balance in labour relations?

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity a number of times to speak publicly regarding this particular issue, and I think that the message is coming through to Albertans, at least I hope it is, that this was all about the delivery of health care. There's reform that's taking place here in Alberta that we believe will lead to better access to health care, lead to better delivery of the health care once a patient is in the system. So we have focused entirely on that, and I think that there's a greater good here that has been met and hopefully will be achieved.

As far as balance, we still have an incredibly good Labour Relations Code in this province, and we are providing a structure for health care bargaining similar to having had to provide a structure in the past for construction bargaining, for an example. So I think that in this particular case the government has upheld its responsibility, and we look forward to the two parties moving forward, then, from this point on in a more streamlined and hopefully a more beneficial manner.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, why is it that this government uses a heavy hand – and those are the minister's own words – against its employees but a wet noodle against employers; for example, the Edmonton Economic Development Authority, which repeatedly violated Alberta labour laws?

Mr. Dunford: I guess we managed to connect some dots there.

What we, of course, do on a daily basis, Mr. Speaker, is deal with the issues that are in front of us. Again I want to repeat that this was an activity that the whole motivation for has been in the interests of the delivery of health care. That was the reason for it then, it's the reason for it today, and it'll be the reason for it tomorrow.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

(continued)

Mr. Hutton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As chairman of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee I read with interest the survey results that the Minister of Revenue released this morning. They show that Albertans value the fund and are not keen to spend it. I have one question to the Minister of Revenue. To assist the all-party committee that I chair, to help us with our deliberations in our meetings, what are some of the options that are being considered?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:00

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to first say, with respect to the survey, that the heritage fund has always been known and valued, that it is an icon for Albertans. They do value it. In our approach to it all of the questions of the survey were preambled by: its uses ought to be allowed to be replenished and grow over time. That was the preface, that was the background to the survey. In that respect, with the options being reviewed, do we review things like the endowment fund? What does that mean, an endowment fund, and how is that properly structured so that it is clear to Albertans what that means and you can be clear on that? So that's paramount. That is the most supported idea, and we will bring that clarity back in further discussion. But this is a fund here to stay.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Student Loan Program

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cuts and chronic underfunding characterize postsecondary school finance in Alberta. The students in the gallery today will be under constant pressure to pay higher tuition, higher fees, and more for campus services. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. How will students at the University of Calgary next year pay for housing when a one-bedroom campus apartment costs \$726 and the student loan allowance is \$315?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I cannot comment specifically on what the rental rates are in Calgary, but what I will say is that the student loan limit for students this year will be around \$10,200 to \$10,400 per year. That means that on a four-year degree they will be able to get around \$42,000. The interesting part is that they will have to pay back 20,000 of those dollars. The other roughly \$22,000 will be picked up by the provincial government.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, which is really important, as well, is that in the upcoming year we anticipate that there will be 46,400 students who will receive student loans, for a value of \$417 million in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Thank you. Again to the same minister: does the government see any relationship between rising student costs and the 1,500 people being fed at the U of A's food bank each year?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I have looked at a lot since becoming minister has been the student loan program, and over that time we have increased the student loan program by about 45 to 50 percent. It's something that I feel very strongly about. We have also increased quite dramatically the student awards, such as the Jason Lang scholarships, numerous other scholarships. Jason Lang scholarships, by the way, are to the tune of around \$5 million or \$6 million a year, are regardless of financial need, are there for performance. We have seen a tremendous amount of dollars being put into that. The Rutherford scholarships, for example, are something else that this government does. I believe, off the top of my head, that they're around \$35 million or \$40 million a year.

So there is a huge amount of dollars that are going in. Students, for example, now pay in tuition an average of about 25 percent of the cost of their actual education. Seventy-five percent is being borne by the government and other sources. So we're seeing a huge amount of dollars go into postsecondary education. In saying that, Mr. Speaker, I will say that it's money extremely well spent.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Thank you. Again to the same minister: what adjustment will the government make in the loans program to help students deal with skyrocketing utility costs?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we tend to work on in the student loan program is the overall loan limit, and each and every year we look at the overall loan limit and how we can increase it. This year in the upcoming budget you will see what is going to happen. I think people will be reasonably happy. But, again, what I will say – and I really must reiterate this – is that Alberta has by far the best student loan program in Canada. Talk to any of the student groups; they will agree with that. It's something that we're very proud of: \$417 million goes out each year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Utility Costs for Low-income Albertans

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Mr. Minister, I've continued to hear from constituents who are still worried that they won't be able to pay their utility bills, so I'd like some further clarification on this. What is your department doing to help low-income Albertans who don't have the money to pay their bills?

Mr. Dunford: Actually, Mr. Speaker, we will help Albertans who do not have the resources to pay these utility bills. We have an emergency assistance program, that we've used now for a number of seasons, under our supports for independence program, but in answering the hon. member, it's very, very important that Albertans understand that in order to be able to access this particular assistance, there is a screening process that they're going to have to go through. First of all, they will have had to have received a disconnect notice. Through examination and through revealing of their particular situation, they will have to show clearly that they have no

other choice, that they have no other method of being able to pay and, I guess, more importantly, as well that they can show they are not eligible for any other types of assistance. So if you or any member here in the House have constituents that are in that situation, they must apply in person to a Human Resources and Employment office, and then we'll try to help as best we can.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. How much money will your department provide to people who have no other way of paying their utility bills?

Mr. Dunford: Well, of course, we don't have just a sum that's given to everyone. We would want to examine each of the situations on a case-by-case basis, but we have a policy in place that there could be up to a thousand dollars for a circumstance, that could be provided for utility arrears or reconnection or perhaps even if there are some deposit fees that would come into place. Now, technically, under our policy there might be an opportunity for a person, you know, in really dire situations to perhaps use this more than once, but that would be a very exceptional situation, I'm afraid.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. Mr. Minister, you haven't mentioned people on AISH. Does this include people who are on AISH?

Mr. Dunford: Well, it can. While AISH is a stand-alone program, we can move people off AISH on a temporary basis into our supports for independence program and perhaps, then, look after them that way. But in specific answer to your question, AISH in and of itself does not have this type of assistance available, so they'd have to move onto our SFI program.

Physiotherapy Programs

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, every Thursday the Alberta Liberals will ask a question that members of the public have asked us to pose. Members of the public can send us their questions by phoning our office or visiting our web site at www.altaliberals.ab.ca. Today's question comes from an Albertan very concerned regarding funding and operation of physiotherapy programs in Alberta, so my questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that the Expert Advisory Panel to Review Publicly Funded Health Services has already reported to the minister, when can Albertans expect an answer as to what is going to happen with public funding for physiotherapy?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, my expectation is that government will have a response to the report tabled by the expert panel, headed by Dr. Bob Westbury, sometime in the next three or four weeks, and the public will certainly be made aware of the response that we have once government has had the opportunity to review, digest, and make decisions on those recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Given that there are no requirements that community rehabilitation funding provided to RHAs actually goes to community rehabilitation programs, how does the minister ensure that Albertans get the physiotherapy service they need?

2:10

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, we do rely upon regional health authorities to establish priorities for the delivery of health services within their particular regions, so we would expect that if physiotherapy is a needed area within a regional health authority's boundaries, that need would be made known to the people who run our system in those areas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Given that the current community rehabilitation program is widely regarded in the profession as complex, confusing, and perceived by many as being unfair, what is the minister going to do to fix the system?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, we have asked this expert panel to provide for us their best advice on how to resolve some of these issues as to how we get effective – cost-effective and physically effective – treatment to individuals who require it. It is a complex area, but they have been charged with the responsibility of trying to sort through some of these complexities and look at evidence-based decision-making for the purposes of making policy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Calgary Consolidated Courthouse

Ms Graham: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As someone who has advocated for a consolidated courthouse in Calgary since my election some six years ago, I was very pleased to see that government had initiated a process last summer that would see a new Calgary courthouse built. Since then, I understand that three developers have been chosen to submit detailed proposals pursuant to an RFP, or a request for proposal. My question, then, this afternoon is to the Minister of Infrastructure. When will a developer be chosen to start construction of the much-needed courthouse?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is, indeed, a very exciting and large project that we are undertaking in the city of Calgary. We're probably going to be building a building with some 1.1 million square feet, so it is a very large project. I would like to just quickly run through the process that we've been using, because it is extremely important to us that this be very open and transparent, and we wanted to make sure, because of the size of the project, that we didn't leave anyone out that had the expertise or financial ability to participate in the project.

So we first called for a request for expression of interest and had some 27 respondents to that request. Because of this great interest, we then decided that it was extremely important that we get some outside expertise to help us with it, so we called for an RFP to bring on consultants that had expertise in courthouses, in financing, in architecture, and those types of things. We then moved on to a request for qualifications, and out of that process we had some 10 people and firms respond. We then short-listed those and came out with six firms that were interviewed, and out of that, there were three that qualified to move forward to the next level, which will be the request for proposal. As we speak, the request for proposal is being printed. It will be made available to the three companies on Monday.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Graham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this process is under way and that a developer will presumably come out of this process, when will the courthouse be built? Can the minister advise?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, we are actually on a fairly fast track with this whole project. We hope to have the contract signed to go ahead with construction in October with completion in the summer of 2006 and the ability to move in and start operating from that consolidated courthouse.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Graham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the Minister of Justice. Given the obvious benefit to the court-going public in being able to attend one location instead of seven, I'm wondering if the minister can advise of other anticipated benefits to this new facility for the public.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we would anticipate huge benefits to having a consolidated justice facility in the city of Calgary where all citizens of Calgary would know where they could go to access courts. Right now, as the member has indicated, there are seven different locations. There's prisoner handling in at least two of those; I think probably three or four of those where there are prisoner handling facilities. There are law libraries. There is a great amount of duplication of resources being utilized now, which can all be consolidated in one facility. So from an administrative point of view it makes a lot more sense and will save us some money, which can then be redeployed into the system to more effectively serve justice in that area.

From an access to justice perspective there are huge benefits to people knowing where they need to go to the court that they're supposed to be in, and that's very problematic right now with confusion. There's an opportunity in building a facility of this nature to bring together associated justice activities: family law clinics, mediation processes, and other processes which people need to access in addition to the courts. So there are a great number of activities which can be consolidated in that area, both redeploying resources and making the access to justice more effective.

Milk River Basin Water Management

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, 20 years ago this province tried to build a dam on the Milk River. That plan was scrapped because the dam would endanger an internationally significant grassland that serves as the habitat for several rare and threatened species. But now this government is quietly trying to bring that plan back. To the Minister of Environment: what has changed in the last 20 years to lessen the environmental risk of putting a dam on the Milk River?

Dr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, we're moving forward with the study at the request of the community. The study is not just looking at a dam; it is looking at options for water storage. Even in the driest year, about two years ago, we passed on between 55 and 57 percent of the water in the South Saskatchewan basin to Saskatchewan. We have to continue to provide 50 percent. Even in the driest year there was 7 percent of the water that flowed, so as we go forward in looking at water management issues, all the water management issues in all of the province need to be looked at.

As we move forward in particular to the Milk River basin system, the Milk River would be dry if it weren't for a number of options

and actions that have been taken in the past. This is a project of the community, the American government – the Milk River flows ultimately down to the Gulf of Mexico – and it is also a study that's been undertaken by us. As I say, it's just a study; there are no commitments. The study looks at onstream and off-stream storage plus environmental effects plus economic matters.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, why is the minister conducting a prefeasibility study without a river basin management plan, as required under the Water Act?

Dr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are going forward with a study, and certainly we are working with all the basins right now in terms of getting water management plans developed. We've done a good one on the Bow River, we're working on the South Saskatchewan, and we're working with one on the Milk River as well. There would be nothing built either onstream or off-stream until there was a water management plan.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, will the Environment minister tell this House how much this project will benefit Americans and how much it will cost Albertans?

Dr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course we're continuing to monitor the situation as it goes forward, but I can't tell her that until the study is complete, and if there's any benefit to the Americans, we would be expecting the Americans to pay their fair share. I had a meeting in Milk River some time ago with American community officials and so on. The Americans are interested in knowing what the costs will be, and of course they recognize that they need to pay their fair share of any project if – if – a project were to go forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Education Funding

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have never seen education stakeholders more united against this government's wrong-headed policies, which have created a serious funding crisis in our schools. School trustees, educators, parents, and students are speaking with one voice, saying that this Tory government is just not listening to their concerns. To the Minister of Learning. I hope he's listening. Can the minister please explain how he has managed the rare feat of uniting all education stakeholders against his government's policies.

2:20

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is hallucinating again. I believe that the school boards are doing a very good job of managing their funds. I also believe that there's been huge amounts of dollars that have been put into education and the learning system. We put more money into the system per capita than any other province in Canada. Our students do absolutely the best on any examination across Canada; indeed, any worldwide examination. Lastly, our teachers are paid approximately 10 percent more than any other teachers in the country. So I would really caution this hon. member about talking about a crisis in education. It is trumped up, and I think it does a disrespect to those teachers that are doing a very hard job and doing very hard work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very hallucinated answer to my very clear question.

My next question to the minister: why won't the minister swallow

his pride and admit that the government is wrong to not fully fund the arbitration settlement and grade 10 credits and that this refusal is exacting an unacceptable toll on Alberta classrooms?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the arbitration settlement was fully funded. It was funded to the tune of \$298 million for a \$260 million settlement. The second point that I wanted to make is on CEUs. Do you realize that in the Edmonton public school board we had to fine schools because they were putting forward the wrong CEUs? They were using the CEUs to put dollars into their own coffers. In some school boards the CEUs in grade 10 were up to 47 per year. We had students that were receiving over 80 – 80 – credits. Do the math timewise. There aren't that many hours in the week. This was a huge problem. We have addressed the problem and are coming forward with the solution starting this September.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the minister to say today that the settlement was fully funded really shows how hallucinated he is. Will the minister tell parents and students that he has gotten the message and announce today that next year's education budget will contain sufficient funds so the school boards are not forced to lay off teachers and cut vital programs?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I will elucidate that hallucinating question. There will be money in the upcoming budget. You will however have to wait till the upcoming budget. A lot of the school boards are working extremely hard to balance their budgets. They're attempting to keep the number of teachers that will be laid off by attrition to a minimum, and we will see how they do it. I listen to people all the time. As a matter of fact, last night I met with the parent council at Eastglen, which I believe is in the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands' constituency, and I didn't see him there.

The Speaker: Boy, there's a lot of activity back and forth. To my hon. colleagues the Member for Edmonton-Highlands and the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, just button it a bit; okay? Because if you don't, I'm moving your desks over here.

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

Labour Supply

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent reports have predicted that Alberta is going to have high employment growth over the next few years. Reports state that over the next five years there will be a strong demand for occupations that need university degrees, especially in nursing, business, and engineering. However, with many baby boomers retiring over the next 10 years, there is a real concern in my constituency that there will be large-scale worker shortages, especially in the area of health, where it has already been predicted that there is going to be a shortage of medical doctors and nurses. My first question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Does the minister and his department have any long-range plans to ensure that there won't be labour shortages in Alberta over the next decade?

Mr. Dunford: Yes, Mr. Speaker, to the question. In terms of plans they would be both immediate and, of course, long term and involve the federal government through the Human Resources Development branch of the federal government, but also we have cross-ministry initiatives here within the province of Alberta. I might just direct the

member's attention to a recent report that has been released by the Department of Learning and ourselves called Prepared for Growth. In that report we articulate a three-pronged approach to ensuring a strong labour market.

First of all, of course you want to deal with Albertans and make sure that there are strong training programs available for Alberta workers. Secondly, then, of course you want to increase the ability of workers from across this country to be able to come to Alberta and to work, and with that, then, of course we want to have in place good accreditation systems. Then, finally, just around the world: being able to attract skilled immigrants through, of course, the Alberta advantage.

So our portion of this in Human Resources and Employment is to provide information, to provide advice, and to provide financial support to help people get jobs, get training, and choose careers, then, with bright futures, for which, of course, doctors and nurses would qualify.

Mr. Johnson: My first supplemental is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What plans does the minister have to ensure that there will not be a shortage of medical doctors and nurses in the next ten years?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member and members of this House and Albertans that our department is clearly aware of many reports that have talked about a general shortage of health professionals across Canada. Interestingly – and I think it's worth pointing out – this is one of the areas that was not specifically addressed by the federal government in its recent budget, nor was it really referred to except parenthetically in the Romanow report, although it was identified in both the Mazankowski report and the report done by Senator Kirby.

Mr. Speaker, we have done a good job of trying to deal with this particular issue, and it's a two-pronged approach. First of all, through primary health care reform we need to make sure that we make better use of the health professionals that we currently have in expanding the scopes of practice and the utilization of competent professionals in various areas of health care. So that's the first prong to the approach.

The second prong, Mr. Speaker, is with respect to the training of professionals and their recruitment and retention. Now, that is also a two-pronged approach. One is that in the short term we can recruit people from other places, and we've been successful in doing that partly because of our labour negotiation contracts with nurses, with physicians that have resulted in almost 650 new positions coming to Alberta in the last three years, some 1,500 new nurses in the last couple of years that we've been successful in recruiting.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we are interested in training more people, the theory being that people who are born, raised, and live here in Alberta and train in Alberta will tend to stay in Alberta, and so in that respect – and this is my final point – we have focused on postsecondary education seats for health care. I'm pleased to say that over the last four years we have added an additional 2,116 new spaces. Alberta now has a total of more than 12,000 postsecondary education seats devoted to the education of health care professionals.

Mr. Johnson: My final question is to the Minister of Learning. What steps has the Minister of Learning taken to ensure Alberta students are being encouraged to enter studies at the postsecondary level, that are predicted to be in high demand over the next ten years?

The Speaker: Okay. Thirty seconds, hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very, very hard to talk about our excellent postsecondary education system . . .

The Speaker: Can we come back with a ministerial statement, then, on Monday?

Untendered Contracts

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Infrastructure said that he wouldn't waste taxpayer dollars to make public the records of untendered contracts issued by his department. When I revealed to him that members of his own department calculated it would cost less than \$6,000, he said the amount was so small that the opposition should pay for it. The minister cannot have it both ways. To the Minister of Infrastructure: which is it? It costs too much to find the records, or they're so cheap that the opposition should pay for them?

2:30

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I think it's deplorable than an hon. member – I don't know why I use the word "honourable" – would stand in his place and say that I said something that I didn't say yesterday. I did not say that since it was so cheap they should pay for it. I never said that, and I think that the hon. member should actually apologize for making those kinds of accusations. I never said that.

Mr. Bonner: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: do you deny that there is public benefit to making these records public?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I told the hon. member the other day to get his act together and then we would answer his questions, but until he gets his act together, he can go the other route that he started.

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister still doesn't have an answer, is he saying that the public should not be able to see these documents? What is the minister hiding that he doesn't want Albertans to see?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, we are hiding absolutely nothing. If the hon. member wants the public to pay for a fishing trip, I disagree with it. If he wants to narrow it down so that he defines what exactly it is that he wants, then we will deal with it, but I cannot, when somebody says that they want every contract that we've entered into over the last two years, have staff spend hundreds of hours going through and finding it. We will not do it.

Speaker's Ruling Items Previously Decided by the Assembly

The Speaker: Just a second. The chair is going to make a comment on what's just transpired here. This is the second day in a row now that this has transpired with this question. It would've been helpful if perhaps some learned parliamentarians in the Assembly might have interjected, but the chair will.

We have on our agenda and we have in our Routine items called Motions for Returns and Written Questions. Hon. members can pose certain questions. They have them identified. They're printed in the Order Paper. They're published. We arrive here on a certain day, and an hon. member moves a question. It is not for the minister to reject or accept the question; it is for the Assembly to accept or reject the question. If it were to come about that a question is being presented by someone and the hon. minister says, "Yes, I'm prepared to provide it" but the Assembly votes no, the minister cannot. It's the Assembly that rules.

In the series of questions that were raised the other day, I think following out of the question asked yesterday and the question asked today, the Assembly voted no to the provision of the statement. So for absolute clarity from a jurisdictional point of view and a constitutional point of view let us remember that it is the Assembly that rules, not a minister that rules.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly a very good friend of mine from Pine Lake, Doug Sawyer. Doug is a rancher at Pine Lake and a very good supporter of this government and a very good citizen of the Pine Lake area. He's also the president of the Clean Lake Society. He's a big-time hunter and a big-time fisherman, and I get to eat a little wild meat and some fish when I stop over by his house. I'm glad to see him come to take part in watching our Legislature today.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

The Ross Family of Camrose

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ross family in my constituency has done phenomenal work in raising awareness for the organ donation program. Mike, Tim, Kate, Jen, Rod, and Sheilagh have had a personal experience with the program. In 1992 Jenny, at the age of four, underwent a liver transplant to save her life from a virus. Jen lay sick for two weeks before an anonymous donor provided the gift of life for her. She made an excellent recovery, and she and her family have been large supporters of the donor program ever since.

Last summer Mike and Tim roller-skied from Edmonton to the Canadian Transplant Games, in St. John's, Newfoundland, in the Thanks 100 Times Over campaign. The campaign raised awareness of the organ donation program and also served to thank families of donors of organs and tissues. Mike and Tim roller-skied 6,000 kilometres in 69 days, visiting over 30 cities in nine provinces.

In November 2002 Jen was asked to represent the Stollery children's hospital as this year's champion child. She is an ambassador for the 80,000 children treated at Stollery each year. Jen has been asked to address the Senate of Canada next week on behalf of the children and families of the organ donor program.

Sheilagh Ross was appointed to the Canadian Council on Organ Donation and Transplantation in 2001 as one of the two Albertans sitting on the national council. Sheilagh is the lead for their public awareness initiative and sits on the donation committee.

The entire family continues to promote the benefit of the organ donation program, which is life. I encourage all Albertans to visit their web site at www.thanks100times.ca to learn more about the family's efforts. I also encourage all Albertans to fill out a donor card so that they, too, can give the gift of life.

From this Assembly I'm pleased to say thank you to the Rosses and welcome them here today.

Asbestos Exposure

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, I hold in my hand excerpts from this government's own *Occupational Health & Safety Magazine*. These four

simple pages document in just over one year the deaths of 32 workers in Alberta, workers who died because of asbestos. They were insulators, plumbers, carpenters, and electricians. They were mechanics, painters, store clerks, and engineers. These workers who died because of asbestos are only the ones we know about. How many more Albertans are out there dying from asbestos exposure?

Our knowledge of asbestos has come a long way. At one time it was known as a miracle mineral used in a variety of substances like building materials, fire retardants, and insulation. We didn't know that asbestos fibres become embedded in the lungs and can lead to several fatal diseases, but now we do. Asbestos is the largest single occupational cause of death and disease. In Great Britain asbestos kills more people each year than are killed on roads. By 2020 it is estimated that a staggering 10,000 people a year will die from asbestos exposure in the U.K. alone.

In the past few months serious concerns regarding asbestos exposure at two health facilities in Calgary have been brought to light. The safety of workers and patients was put at risk at both the Foothills and Holy Cross, and despite the seriousness of asbestos exposure, repeated breaches of the government's asbestos abatement policy continued to occur. Where is the government on this issue? A good abatement policy means nothing if there is no will to enforce it. Improper asbestos removal at the Foothills and Holy Cross are two examples that we know about. How many times each day does improper asbestos removal in Alberta put worker and public safety at risk? There is no excuse. We know the dangers of asbestos. It is time for the government to show leadership and take action on this issue by properly enforcing the legislation.

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

Farm Safety Week

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize and bring attention to the Farm Safety Week campaign, which began on March 12 and will be concluding on March 19.

Statistics, Mr. Speaker, show that farming is one of the more dangerous occupations in Alberta. Unfortunately, statistics don't show the real impact farming-related deaths and injuries have on the families who have had a member seriously injured or killed. Millions of dollars in production and thousands of work hours are lost, but how do you measure the emotional loss of a family member? On average there are about 120 people killed and another 1,700 seriously injured each year in farm-related incidents across Canada, and one-fifth of those deaths occur in Alberta. In 2002 Alberta lost 24 members of its farming community, and of the people lost five were children.

The focus of this year's campaign is on children's safety because even one is too many. Parents can ensure the safety of their children through proper supervision and training for any task their children might be involved with. Children need to be assigned tasks that they are capable of doing safely. Farm-related tragedies are preventable. One of the most horrific facts that surrounds the death or serious injury of a child on a farm is that in the majority of incidents the parents of the child witness the incident. Climbing hay bales may look innocent, but when children climb and play on top of them, they may become unstable and fall onto the child. Tractors are another dangerous piece of equipment that children should avoid. One of the most common causes of serious injury or death for children is when they fall off a moving tractor. Although hazards exist on farms, they are a wonderful place for children to be raised. Children just need to be aware of the dangers that exist.

2:40

Almost every farmer in Alberta could tell a story about an injury they sustained or a near miss that occurred throughout their daily farming tasks, and it is important that these stories and the recommendations arising from them are shared, especially during this farm safety campaign. Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development takes an active role in providing farmers with information that promotes farm safety year-round. Farmers are encouraged this week to share their knowledge and expertise and raise the awareness of potentially hazardous practices.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Electoral Boundaries

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last September a disappointing interim report was delivered by the Electoral Boundaries Commission recommending that the city of Edmonton lose a seat, that rural Alberta lose a seat, and that the riding of Fort McMurray be consolidated with the surrounding constituency to create a riding whose population was 20 percent over the provincial average.

The city of Edmonton is one of the two largest economic centres in Alberta. It serves as the capital for our fine province and over the past two years has seen substantial economic growth and increases in population. Yet even though our current population qualifies the city to keep 19 seats, Edmonton is being punished with the loss of one of them. This will leave our city underrepresented and with less influence and say in this House.

After the interim report of the Electoral Boundaries Commission was released, there was an outcry from the citizens, city council, and the opposition parties of this House. Mr. Speaker, we need representation in this city to watch out for the interests of all Edmontonians. This report takes that representation away. We need representation to protect our municipally owned utilities. We need representation to protect our public schools. We need representation to protect our public health care system. We need representation to protect and further our roads and our infrastructure. We need representation to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves: the disabled, those on low-income assistance programs, seniors, and children. If we lose that seat, the people of Edmonton will lose representation. They will have their democratic rights compromised. They will suffer the consequences of having one less voice at the legislative table.

I would now urge all hon. members, especially the majority of the Edmonton Progressive Conservative caucus, who to date, unfortunately, have remained quiet on this issue, to stand up and speak out on behalf of Edmonton. I am, as is the Liberal caucus, willing to work with those hon. members to ensure Edmonton does not lose a voice in this Assembly.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the working poor in Alberta I'm presenting a petition signed by 53 individuals from Calgary. These Albertans are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to immediately raise the minimum wage to \$8.50 per hour and index it to the cost of living just in the way MLA salaries are indexed to the cost of living.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Factual Accuracy

The Speaker: Excuse me. Hon. members, I don't know what the provision is with respect to the correction of stuff that's said in the Assembly that's wrong. The chair is also the chairman of the Members' Services Committee, and the last statement made is factually incorrect. MLA salaries are not indexed to the cost of living. This has been said in this Assembly several times, and who other than the chairman of Members' Services can stand up and correct it? All hon. members know how their stipends are calculated. It has nothing to do with the cost of living. This has to be clarified. This must be clarified. That is factually incorrect.

Members' stipends are adjusted on an annual basis on a formula that was determined, an independent formula called the average of weekly earnings index of the previous calendar year of workers in the province of Alberta. Totally unrelated to the cost of living index. The members of this Assembly have got to clarify. It's wrong to stand in here and make factually incorrect statements.

Dr. Pannu: With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for correcting me on this. I should have used the right language. Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday I will move that written questions 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10 be dealt with that day.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday I will move that motions for returns 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, and 10 be dealt with that day.

There being no additional written questions or motions for returns, there are none to stand and retain their places.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Bill 31

Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2003

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Local Authorities Election Amendment Act, 2003.

The act is reviewed approximately every three years. This bill will incorporate changes requested by local authorities since the last local authorities elections.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 31 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. Woloshyn: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the response to Written Question 4.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter from Gerry Toller-Lobe of Edmonton dated March 4, 2003, addressed to the Premier. Mr. Toller-Lobe is expressing his extreme dissatisfaction with the government's education funding policy and the resulting negative impact on his children attending McKernan school. They are reminding the Premier that education is an investment not only in education but in "health, law and order, productivity, culture and quality of life" for the collective good of society.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is from constituent Ian Crichton, who writes about P3s, or as he likes to call them, "Picking the Public Pocket." He's asking that "the province of Alberta with ample access to capital and pride in its fiscal accountability should not risk the delivery of the services in our community so deliberately."

My second tabling is from Phillip H. Walker, who's asking that the motion passed by city council be tabled, that the mayor on behalf of city council urges the Premier and all members of the Assembly "to direct the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission to maintain the status quo in Edmonton."

Finally, Mr. Speaker, there's a heartfelt testimonial from a constituent, Jane Doe, who has found herself needing welfare and offers up her critique on the SFI budget.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm getting a tremendous amount of correspondence these days. The first tabling is from a student at Ross Sheppard high school named Tara Kryns, who has written to me expressing her concern over the services available in schools and the shortage of funding.

The second letter is from Lana Cuthbertson, also expressing her concern over funding cuts to education that the province of Alberta is making.

The third letter is a copy of a letter written to the public school board of Edmonton saying among other things: I'm concerned that my daughter's education "will suffer as a result of the recent financial difficulties your schoolboard is facing." That's from Dan Musica.

The fourth letter is a copy of a letter sent to me strongly urging the maintenance of Edmonton's 19 seats in the Legislature.

The fifth letter is from a person, Peter Schiavone, who wants to add his voice "to those calling for natural gas rebates – as promised by the [provincial government] last year."

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter that I received, and I was delighted to receive this letter from the hon. Minister of Finance. It's dated February 24, 2003, and deals with the consultation process to review the auto insurance business in the province of Alberta.

The second tabling I have this afternoon is from citizens from the following communities: Athabasca, St. Albert, Alberta Beach,

Onoway, Stony Plain, Edmonton, and Calgary. There are over 200 citizens here urging the government to "reinstate the natural-gas rebates immediately" that were promised during the election.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling a letter from a retired couple in Two Hills, Alberta, dated March 7, 2003, addressed to me regarding their gas and power bills. They write, "Enclosed gas and power bills which are taking food from our mouths."

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 7(5) I would ask that the order of government business to be brought before the Assembly next week be now shared with the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under projected government business for the week of March 17 to March 20 we project that on Monday, March 17, under Government Bills and Orders at 9 p.m. for second reading Bill 27, Labour Relations (Regional Health Authorities Restructuring) Amendment Act, 2003, and Bill 30, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2003, and as per the Order Paper.

Tuesday, March 18, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 27, Bill 18, Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2003, Bill 26, Corrections Amendment Act, 2003, Bill 28, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2003, and potentially Committee of the Whole on Bill 27, and as per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. on Tuesday, March 18, under Government Bills and Orders for second reading or Committee of the Whole, depending on progress, Bill 27, and committee on bills 19, 30, and 3, and as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday, March 19, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders and Committee of the Whole or third reading, as the order progresses, bills 19, 27, and 3, and as per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders again Committee of the Whole or third reading, as progress is made, on bills 19, 27, 3, and for third reading Bill 30, and as per the Order Paper.

Thursday, March 20, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for third reading bills 19, 27, and 3. If time permits, Government Motion 13.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: We'll call the committee to order.

**Interim Supply Estimates 2003-04
Offices of the Legislative Assembly,
Government, and Lottery Fund**

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to comment on the interim supply requirements for the Department and Ministry of Community Development. I did note in reviewing the Blues last

night – late last night, I might add – that the Member for Edmonton-Centre had placed some questions on the record which she wanted some answers to. I also noticed that she made a comment about the length of time it took to answer some of the questions that followed the main budget debate from last year, and I just want to make a brief comment on that, if you'll allow, because she has asked the question.

I want to just state at the outset that during the spirit of that exchange with the hon. member during that part of the debate, as I recall, she had requested time during the debate a year ago to put on record as many questions as she possibly could. I agreed to that, and I also agreed to Edmonton-Ellerslie's request. I can't remember and I don't have it just in front of me, but I'm sure it was close to a hundred questions or thereabouts when I combined two or three of the opposition members' questions, so it did take quite a long time to provide that.

Now, I'll handle that situation differently this year, hon. member. I will take up the time during the debate to answer as many questions from you as I can, but in response I think I provided 34 pages of answers to this hon. member and the other and then a supplementary 17 or 19 pages of answers, and my staff worked very hard to try and provide as many updated answers as we could. Some of them weren't ready to go, of course, because as I recall, they surfaced around the topic of the G8 summit. Some of that was in progress and in motion, so we held back a little bit on the timing just so that we could provide as much of the updated information as we possibly could, making it the most current, in other words. Nonetheless, my staff did try their very level best to provide as comprehensive an answer to every single question that was raised by Edmonton-Centre or Edmonton-Ellerslie or one other member whose name I don't recall.

So that having been said, we'll endeavour to do that thorough job again when the appropriate budget debate occurs, and I would hope, hon. members, that it won't take a number of months to provide, but when you ask that many questions and you have a conscientious department and staff like I'm privileged to have, some of those answers take longer than anticipated. We only have so many staff members, as does every ministry, so in defence of the ministry and my staff I make those explanations.

Now, specific to some of the issues that were referenced yesterday, I know that there were a number of items that were asked and/or referred to, not necessarily in a question form, during interim supply debate last evening, and I just will clarify again, Mr. Chair, that the request before the House right now is for interim financing or interim funding, bridge funding if you will, to meet what I could only describe as the short-term needs of the Ministry of Community Development until the 2003-2004 budget is officially tabled, discussed, and passed by all members of this House. I know that there will be some vigorous debate at that time.

Specifically, the \$209.5 million or thereabouts in operating expense that is being requested and the \$265,000 in capital investment that's being requested is being asked for in order to help us cover the anticipated needs of the ministry for the period April 1, obviously, of 2003 through to approximately June 15. I think everybody in the House probably heard in the debates yesterday that come the end of the fiscal year that we're currently in, which will be March 31, 2003, we do have a need to facilitate operations and continue to maintain services for Albertans in all areas from health care to education to infrastructure to transportation and on and on. So, too, is that same statement applicable to Community Development.

So we will be looking for interim supply dollars to help us continue providing services such as grant funding for our persons with developmental disabilities boards, which are spread throughout

the province, and I'll comment a little bit more on that shortly. That would constitute for the interim supply period approximately \$190 million in grants, and that will include funding to the PDD Provincial Board and to the regional boards. That will also cover our excellent library system and various other grant programs within my ministry's five lottery-funded agencies.

3:00

So, again, the majority of those funds, Mr. Chair, will go specifically to providing services to the most vulnerable in our society, the PDD recipients, and the system in general. I think it's probably important to note that since they receive their funding at the beginning of each month, the request before us includes about three months of supply rather than two and one-half months of supply, but still it's within those first three months, roughly, that we're looking for interim dollars to be approved today.

The other point I referenced was with respect to libraries. Libraries operate on a calendar-year basis, Mr. Chair, so of the applications that come in, many of these requests are received early, so they're processed as quickly as possible at the beginning of the fiscal year on a first come, first served basis. I'd say that about 50 percent of all the library grants that we do pay out tend to get paid out within the first quarter, so it's important that we have that interim money block available so that we can continue to provide our libraries across the province with the support that they need.

The other point, with respect to the payment schedule, which references other grants within the department and lottery-funded agencies. That varies, and that really depends on the type of grant and which specific grant program is being discussed. Some of these, Mr. Chair, do require funding at the beginning of the year, others require it on a quarterly basis, and some, as the hon. member, I'm sure, will know, require it on a biannual basis. So there are varying time frames here that we're having to deal with. But specific to the amount being debated today for interim supply, this amount that's being requested is based on our best known practices. Let's call them historical spending patterns, if you like. They reflect what we judge to be the anticipated needs for the period April 1 through to, again, about June 15 of 2003. So that tends to cover most of the 191 million or so dollars that were referred to yesterday.

The other points are with respect to salaries, Mr. Chairman. No department, no ministry is able to function without staff, obviously, and when we look at staff in Community Development, who are spread out through most of the province – and, obviously, a lot are also headquartered here – we will require approximately \$8.7 million to cover the salaries for the staff members that I'm so privileged to be able to work with.

There's also, I should add here, about \$265,000 that is being required for capital investment for parks facilities. I think members of the House will obviously know that our parks tend to be the busiest during the spring, summer, and early fall seasons, so in addition to the \$265,000 for capital investment in the parks facilities, this interim request also references I believe about \$7 million for supplies and services, which includes normal operating needs as well as some additional funding that is normally required to get the start-up of our parks going and making sure that they're ready for the very busy summer season that lies ahead.

There will be, of course, more information provided once the budget is tabled, and I know we'll get into quite some discussion on that. But the members of the Assembly along with all Albertans will be privy to those details when the budget is handed down, and I believe that will be on April 8 this year. Now, with that in mind, there were some specific questions that were asked, and I'll try and get through as many of them as I can in the time available.

There was a question with respect to grant release dates. Mr. Chair, the grant programs of the five lottery-funded agencies will continue to operate as usual and in accordance with the time lines and the time frames that we have for grant applications, and we're not expecting any changes to that. The interim request before us takes into consideration the anticipated amounts that will be required for all payments, be they operating grants or project grants or what have you, as well as other operational and capital needs items. The amount of interim supply for grants was calculated, as I said earlier, using previous spending patterns that we have a history with, and we expect that to be the same in 2003-2004.

With respect to library grants, Mr. Chair, should there be any specific changes to the library grants, those would be announced in the 2003 budget. Processing of library operating grants remains unchanged. I think that was one of the items referenced. Cheques are released after libraries submit applications and we've completed our final verifications, and I'll add that applications are, again, processed on a first come, first served basis. It probably should be noted for the Assembly that beginning in 2001-2002, the current population figures based on Municipal Affairs' official population list from the previous year have been used to calculate grant payments for libraries, and I expect that will continue.

With respect to PDD members here should know that the department—that is to say, Community Development—transfers funds that are allocated to us for that purpose to the PDD Provincial Board, and that's done on a monthly basis. After that, the PDD Provincial Board immediately forwards agreed-to amounts to the individual regional boards, and we have six of them throughout the province of Alberta, who work very hard to provide services for persons with developmental disabilities. Now, the provincial board will be working with regional and community boards to develop specific plans and determine specific allocations based on a lot of factors, such as projected caseload growth, projected increases in the cost of providing services to individuals, projected costs of increased complexities of cases, and so on. More specifics, obviously, will flow out once the budget is tabled.

The other comment is with respect to the Auditor's opinion regarding the so-called friends-of organizations that Community Development does business with. This reflects comments with respect to revenues and expenses and so on. The fact is that those aren't included right now within the areas that the member referenced, but I would say this. It's the ministry's opinion that the volunteer societies, the friends-of, that we're dealing with are legally incorporated not-for-profit organizations under the Societies Act, and as such they are independent from government operations, and I think they should continue to enjoy that independence. Therefore, their financial statements are not automatically incorporated into my ministry's budget or my ministry's financial statements. But it's a fair question for the member to ask, and in response I would only add, Mr. Chair, that we are continuing to have this dialogue with the office of the Auditor General to see if there's some other way that we can accommodate our needs as a ministry, that we can accurately reflect the independence and arm's lengthness and all of that stuff which the friends-of groups enjoy as well as issues raised by the Auditor General.

I would say that the recording of deferred contributions that may have been alluded to was done in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles because these moneys were received as restricted donations. Specifically to the hon. member's question regarding unreturned surpluses of I think it was \$223,000 in the context of grants to the friends-of societies, I would like to clarify that the ministry does not provide those societies with those kinds of grants. Therefore, the amount of \$223,000 that may have been

referenced was not recorded in the financial statements of the ministry since they were still being retained by the various societies who operated the particular historic sites which, again, may have been referenced.

There was a question with regard to expenses of capital assets of less than \$15,000 and the request for some details. I would just add, Mr. Chair, that my ministry follows the governmentwide policy and directives in this regard, and the way that we've been doing this is very compliant with the policies referred to.

3:10

The final issue is with respect to the centennial legacies grant program. As all members in the House will know—and I answered part of this question earlier this week in the Assembly—the centennial program had a phase 1, that occurred in September 2000, and then it had a phase 2, which carried an application deadline of March 1, 2001. Now, it was always referred to that the phase 2 grant applications would be dealt with and, hopefully, announced by September 30, 2001. Unfortunately, the tragic incidents of September 11 put all of that on hold. The centennial grant program had to be deferred, and as a result it still remains deferred.

We've received numerous grant applications for that program, and we've received numerous requests asking: when will the centennial grant program be undeferred? My answer to that would be: I hope it will be sooner than later. The centennial of this province will be a great event. As minister responsible for not only the centennial legacies grant program but also for the anniversary celebrations themselves and for all of the good things that will be happening throughout our province during that year and particularly focusing on September 1, 2005, I for one am very supportive of doing everything we possibly can to help the communities. The communities have shown tremendous initiative, I should add, and have gotten on with a lot of their own projects in the meantime. But the request for the centennial program to be undeferred remains on the table, and details on any possibilities of the centennial grant program being reinstated, including any budget amounts, if at all, as applicable will certainly have to wait until the budget gets tabled in early April. We don't have any way of advising any members of this House right now as to what the time frame of phase 2 applications may be, but as I said, I hope the decision to undefer or whatever will be made sooner than later.

I think there are specifics that members were looking for or that at least one hon. member was looking for, and some of those are, indeed, much more specific than I would be allowed to comment on at this time, but I can assure the member that they will all be addressed when the budget is tabled on or about April 8 or shortly thereafter, Mr. Chair.

So with that, I will cede the floor to other members who may wish to ask questions about other departments. I've given out about as much information as I'm at liberty to do at this time. So thank you for your kind attention, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Centre for her questions yesterday during interim supply debate.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise on the interim supply estimates, although I want to put on the record my concern that we're not in fact debating the budget. There's something funny here with the government delaying the budget so long. I don't know what they're actually up to, but it's something, and I'm sure that it will be clear to us after the budget is actually brought down, when it finally is.

Mr. Chairman, I have a number of questions and comments

interspersed on any number of departments contained in these interim supply estimates. I'll just begin, and hopefully the appropriate ministers will be able to respond at some time, if not this afternoon then afterwards, perhaps in a written form.

I have questions for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. I'd like to know how much will be spent tracking livestock illnesses such as mad cow disease and foot-and-mouth disease. I'd like to know that if there's more drought, which seems likely, what measures will be taken to specifically protect family farms rather than to subsidize large corporate farms. I would like to know why the government reversed its position on subsidizing agricultural leaseholds, which has formerly been called cowboy welfare, between the never proclaimed Bill 31 and Bill 16, which is now before the Assembly.

In terms of Children's Services I would be interested in knowing how much the abominable adoption-by-eBay web site has cost and whether or not taxpayers will be expected to continue paying for this atrocity. Last year there was a total reduction in budgeted spending on early childhood intervention of \$6,277,000, or 17.56 percent, less than the year before. I'd like to know if the minister is committed to restoring that funding. I would like to know how many support agreements or apprehensions the department has had to enact because preventative measures, such as early childhood intervention programs, have not been in place.

Mr. Chairman, I'd just like to speak to this a little bit. Alberta has a high level of apprehensions of children, and it's one of the reasons why the government has a large number of children in care, in foster homes and so on, and it would seem better to me if the government would concentrate on preventative programs to support the families in the first place so that children need to be apprehended much less frequently rather than apprehending lots of children because the families don't have support and then marketing them for adoption on web sites. I'd like to know how much the support agreements cost last year and how much we can expect to pay this year.

Now, I know that Bill 24 has placed a greater emphasis on permanent placements for children in care. This appears to be an intentional shift in philosophy. A representative of the Alberta College of Social Workers has raised concerns that child welfare reforms and reform programs for families of children with disabilities are ultimately designed to reduce costs for Children's Services. So if children are adopted or placed with permanent guardians, then the financial responsibility of the department is reduced. I'd like to know how much the department expects to save with their emphasis on permanent placements.

Bill 24 will also put a 30-day cap on secure treatment for youths with serious addictions, and that's reduced from a cap of 90 days currently. I'd like to know what the expected savings are for that measure, and I'd like to know why, if there is not a significant saving, the cap needs to be legislated in the first place.

Some questions, Mr. Chairman, for Community Development. I'd like to know whether or not more money will be allocated to hire investigators at the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. I'd like to know why human rights complaints take so long to resolve. I'd like to know what Community Development is or will be doing to combat increased incidences of racism after 9-11. I would like to know what Community Development will do to assist community leagues whose funding has already been reduced by cuts to municipal grants. I don't need to tell anyone here who represents an urban constituency the importance of community leagues to the well-being of the community and the excellent work they do, which I daresay saves municipalities and the provincial government a great deal of costs because of the hard work of the volunteers in those organizations.

I'd like to come now to the Department of Energy, and I'd like to ask a question, and perhaps, Mr. Chairman, at this stage it would have to be considered a rhetorical question. When can we expect gas rebates? I would like a commitment from the government that if rebates are not going to be implemented now, halfway between the last election and the next one, because gas prices haven't hit the trigger, I would like assurances that the government isn't going to change the trigger just in time for the next election and allow gas rebates before the next election. I'd really appreciate it if we could get the minister or some official from the government to put that commitment clearly on the record. We spent \$2 billion on rebates before the election, and that's, I think, just dealing with the gas side, yet Albertans have paid \$3 billion in higher rates since the election. So the net cost to Albertans both through paying for their own rebates and the higher prices that they have to pay as well is a very, very large amount of money.

3:20

How much more will the Department of Energy have to spend on getting the electricity deregulation policy to actually work? We'd like to know how much deregulation of natural gas will cost consumers. The Consumers' Coalition of Alberta has found, Mr. Chairman, through surveys and focus groups that there was no consumer desire for gas deregulation. I think that's a very interesting point. The consumers did not want gas deregulation. [interjection] The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview seems interested in that statement, and he agrees with it. I am also not surprised to find that consumers didn't ask for deregulation of gas, just like they didn't ask for deregulation of electricity.

It's an interesting contrast to those statements that are made in this Assembly that consumers want choice. Sure, they'd like to have choice, but now they can choose between which package of high prices they want to have rather than no choice and get cheap and reliable energy. So I think that's the consumer perspective on the whole thing, Mr. Chairman. Certainly my constituency office and that of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona have not heard any demands for gas deregulation. I wonder if any other members have had calls to their constituency offices from individual citizens demanding gas deregulation. [interjections] That's interesting. A number of members are saying: no, they have not received any calls whatsoever for gas deregulation. Well, it seems, then, that the only people who want gas deregulation are very ideologically driven Conservatives, and I guess Direct Energy probably wants it too. I know that the power companies, including the much-maligned EPCOR, also favour deregulation, and I think that's because they want to make a whole lot more money than they are, and I think that they'll be able to.

I guess the next question I'd like to ask is whether or not the Minister of Energy will table before the Assembly documents from any organization that has asked for deregulation of either gas or electricity and, as well, the correspondence from Direct Energy. Since it's apparent that individual Albertans themselves are not asking for deregulation of gas and power, then I would be very curious to know who is. So I'd ask the minister if he'd be prepared to put that correspondence before the Assembly.

Now, I would like to know who the government is going to buy their gas from in the next period of time, whether or not it's going to be Direct Energy or some other company, and I'd like to know what additional billing costs we're going to have in order to support Direct Energy.

We'd also be really interested to know whether or not the government is prepared to set up any sort of program to assist people to make their homes more energy efficient. There are a number of

approaches to this. One approach which was used in the city of Edmonton in connection with water was to create a revolving fund that allowed people to make investments in water reduction, and then the fund was repaid from the savings that those individuals accrued. It's an excellent approach, Mr. Chairman, because investing in energy saving technologies and simple energy reduction techniques can actually save a lot of money. If you look at it as an investment, then you can actually replenish an initial investment many times over, so it's a very, very positive approach to take.

Now, I guess the next department I come to is the Environment department, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to know how much money is going to be allocated to implementing Kyoto. Then I would appreciate it if the government could compare that to the amount of time or the amount of money spent trying to sabotage Kyoto. I think that would be a very interesting comparison. The government was obviously very, very interested in stopping Kyoto and got everybody whipped into a frenzy. Then when Kyoto was passed by the federal Parliament anyway, all of a sudden the government said: well, you know, it's really not going to hurt us very much, and we'll monitor the situation. So they clearly were crying wolf, and we all know what happened eventually to the little boy who cried wolf. He got eaten by one, or at least he should have. So I think that the government should watch out for the wolf.

I'm going to come to the money spent on lawyers when we get to the Justice department.

Dr. Taft: How much was that?

Mr. Mason: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, I believe that it was half a million dollars, and that's an awful lot of money. We still don't know which lawyers got it or what they did. We do know that it probably didn't go to injury lawyers, but much more than that we don't really know.

I'd like to know whether or not the government has studied and is prepared to report to the Assembly on the impacts of intensive livestock operations on the environment. As we know, this was an area of considerable concern. I won't go into the statistics that we gathered, Mr. Chairman, about the volumes of pig manure that will be produced once the Premier has his way and we have millions and millions of hogs in this province, but I think that to err on the side of the environment, we really ought to know how these operations have affected the environment so far, the groundwater in particular. I'd like to know if the Department of Environment will commit to an independent review of the impact of intensive livestock operations on nearby ecosystems, on drinking water, and on air quality.

I have a few questions for the Department of Finance, Mr. Chairman, as well. I'd like to know why the budget is so late. I'd like to know why the Finance department continues to intentionally underestimate revenue, particularly royalty revenue. I'd like to know how much the government will be giving away in corporate tax breaks this year. That's another interesting question.

You know, Mr. Chairman, I have here a list of the amount by which the government has lowballed its revenues since 1993-94. It's averaged well over a billion dollars a year, and we're projecting it's going to be close to \$3 billion this year. In that period of time – I think that's about 10 years – the government has lowballed its revenues by \$23.3 billion. It's no wonder they have all these surpluses, and of course they've gone 75 percent against the debt. So by underestimating that revenue, they've managed to starve programs and accelerate the paying down of the debt.

I'd like to ask the Ministry of Gaming how much they're going to be giving to the horse racing industry this year. I'd like to know how much they're spending on VLT maintenance and upgrades. I'd like

to know how much they're going to be spending on support for people with gambling problems. I'd like to know whether Gaming will continue to support core programs such as health and wellness.

3:30

Now, for Government Services, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to know if it's going to continue the unfair user-pay model that it's implemented with all kinds of multiplying user fees, given the government's promise that there won't be any tax increases. Does the government consider user fees to be a tax or not? I'd like to know if we still need to worry about people stealing the materials needed to forge drivers' licences in this province. I think that's a serious concern that we have.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to come to Health and Wellness. I'd like to know whether Albertans can finally expect to see the elimination of Alberta health care premiums this year. I'm not holding my breath, but, you know, with an election coming, we know that everything changes, and maybe the government will actually take a look at that. I'd like to know if the minister is prepared to increase the income levels for premium subsidy at least. I'd like to know if there will be funds to restore the enhanced optical and health benefits for seniors. That was a real blow to the seniors when they lost that, and a lot of people have had a lot of difficulty as a result. I'd like to ask whether the minister will increase the low-income cutoff for seniors' assistance. And will the minister commit to supporting midwives?

I'd like to know whether the government will be introducing more programs to help with smoking cessation and whether or not these programs match the increased revenue from higher tobacco taxes. People may recall that I voted against that particular provision, even though I've opposed smoking in my entire political life, because it was a simply a tax grab from low-income people who are much more inclined to smoke and there was no indication that the extra tax grab revenue would actually be used to help people quit smoking. Clearly it's not. It's just going to the bottom line. I'd like to know if there are any other programs that are being introduced to help people make positive health choices.

Now, Human Resources and Employment. I have a few questions for them. I'd like to know, given the recent surplus, whether this will finally be the year that AISH and SFI recipients can expect an increase. I'd like to know how much the government saves per year by not affording people a decent quality of life. I'd like to know why the minister hasn't pushed for a fair taxation system that would allow him to afford AISH or SFI increases. We'd like to know whether or not there are instances of caseworkers in AISH and SFI being seriously overburdened.

For the Minister of Justice and Attorney General I'd like to know how much money was spent on fighting Kyoto, and I'd like to know if he has plans to spend more this year.

Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, the allocated time has run out.

The Hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know the hon. member had more questions on the Justice issue than just Kyoto, so I'll look forward to those questions when they come up, but he will have had the opportunity, of course, to debate in full in supplementary estimates not two weeks ago the supplementary estimate that was requested for the Department of Justice and Attorney General relative to a sum of \$500,000 which was in this year's estimates relative to the acquisition of outside legal advice relative to the matter of the Kyoto protocol. I've indicated both in answering

questions in the House and in debate on supplementary supply and elsewhere that we have, of course, a considerable contingent in-house relative to our constitutional law area. We've put a considerable amount of work in over the course of the fall in terms of providing legal advice to government on the Kyoto matter.

Kyoto, as all Albertans are only too acutely aware, is of extreme significance to our province in terms of the fact that we have a carbon-based economy, an economy that is very much supported by oil and gas, coal. Our electricity is generated primarily from coal and gas, so implementing a protocol relative to so-called greenhouse gases could have a very serious effect. So Alberta took a very strong and very important position with respect to the protocol. We always maintained that we were not opposed to doing something about the environment and environmental issues, and certainly we believed there needed to be a plan relative to greenhouse gases.

In fact, Alberta moved more quickly than any other jurisdiction in the country to establish Climate Change Central, to move and work very closely on the voluntary challenge process, to work with other jurisdictions across the country on a co-operative federalism basis with respect to how to meet the Kyoto challenge. But when the Prime Minister of this country went to Johannesburg, South Africa, and announced unilaterally to the surprise of his own government – and not just to their surprise but to the surprise of everybody across the country – what his timetable was and that he intended to do it without a plan, it behooved us to move very quickly to make sure that we understood the full legal implications of every step of that process, whether it was the process of approving the protocol or the process that might come afterwards with respect to implementation of the protocol, what our constitutional position was, what our position ought to be with respect to legislation, and what corporate advice we might give to government with respect to the risks that Alberta faced relative to the whole Kyoto question.

So the amount of money that was provided in supplementary supply, the additional \$500,000, was to cover some of the costs that were incurred, both the external costs and the additional internal costs that were dealt with. I can say that I think the external bills – and I don't have the exact number at hand – to date were in the nature of some \$300,000 to \$350,000. I can provide that number if the member is concerned about the specifics of it.

As we go forward, we're talking about interim supply for next year, and the money that's in the budget for next year will of course cover any advice that we need to provide. The question as to whether or not the quantity of money that will be needed to deal with the Kyoto protocol will bear a great deal of relationship to whether the federal government finally comes up with any specifics relative to how they intend to implement the protocol and what work we need to do relative to that implementation process.

So I can't give the member any more definitive answer than that with respect to the specifics of the numbers, but I can assure him that we will be vigilant. We will make sure that we have good research and good knowledge of all those which we might be reasonably expected to be engaged in and that we will continue to provide legal advice relative to legislation that might be brought forward, any potential challenges that might be made if and when appropriate and only if and when appropriate, but more than that, the baseline under any discussion relative to moving forward with the implementation of the protocol and how it might affect Alberta.

I wanted to just comment briefly because the Minister of Children's Services is attending a federal/provincial/territorial ministers' meeting. I know there may be others in the House who will speak directly to her estimates, but I wanted to respond to the question relative to, and more appropriately the derogatory note relative to, how he referenced the eBay web site. Just to put on the record

again, as the Minister of Children's Services has done so often in the past, the fact that we have children in this province who are in need of good homes and in need of loving parents. Any member who wants to criticize in that area – and critique is a good thing; it's not a bad thing – should be careful in terms of how they approach critique in an area if they're not prepared to step forward and do something, and there are children who need parents.

The *Wednesday's Child* program, using the television and using newspapers, has been in this province for a lot of years, and it's been a very successful program. Using technology to help make things better is not a bad thing. It's a good thing as long as it's done appropriately. Making sure that people know of the need for more people who are in a position to step forward and provide a good home for children in this province is a very good thing.

3:40

I can't provide the member with the specifics with respect to the cost of the web site, which was, when he got through the rhetoric, the gist of his question, and I'm sure the Minister of Children's Services will be happy to provide whatever detail is available on that, but I could not let the remark go by without comment. The web site has proved successful. People have taken more of an interest as a result of having that information available. There were a couple of issues that needed to be addressed and were addressed by the Minister of Children's Services relative to certain children who were on the web site, but overall it's proved to be a very positive tool to, again, increase the awareness of Albertans of the need to provide good homes for children who need it, when they are in a position to do so, and to provide access to the information and to encourage more people to be involved in that process.

So I would hope that he would in future, in dealing with issues of that kind of sensitivity and that kind of a nature . . . Certainly, needing information and critiquing process is a fair part of what we do and certainly a fair part of what the opposition does, but that web site is not a marketplace or an eBay or any commercial venture of that nature. It's a method, a very legitimate way of getting good information to people who need that information and to encourage people to be interested in children of this province who need their help. If they can provide that help, giving them the information and encouraging them to take advantage of that opportunity is a good thing, not a bad thing.

The hon. member also mentioned some issues with respect to Community Development. I'm sure the minister may wish to provide information on that, but he commented on one area that I wanted to deal with, and that was with respect to assistance to community leagues. Now, I'm not aware of provincial grants to community leagues other than through the very successful community facility enhancement program and the new and, again, very successful community initiatives program, but both of those programs are available for community leagues, and certainly I know that the community leagues in my region make good use of those programs to provide facilities for their communities.

I would concur with the hon. member that community leagues, particularly in the Edmonton experience that I'm familiar with, are a very, very strong builder of the community, and the programs that this government has put in place through the community facility enhancement program and through the community initiatives program serve to enhance and have been well utilized by community leagues to do that.

Community leagues in terms of their other funding and finances are really, well, creatures of the community, but they get support from the cities. So I'm not sure where he was coming from with respect to grants for community leagues or support for community

leagues, but I can think of no better support than that which is there now through the community facility enhancement program and the community initiatives program.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Can I just be made clear on how much time – is it 15 minutes or 20 minutes?

The Deputy Chair: Twenty minutes.

Dr. Taft: Oh, that's fun. Thank you very much.

Mr. Graydon: You don't have to use it all if you don't want to.

Dr. Taft: Oh, I thought I had to use it all. Don't I?

I know that I share the concerns of all the members in the opposition and, I have no doubt, the concerns of any number of other members on the government side with this entire process that we're faced with today. We are being asked here to approve legislation expending over \$5 billion with no supporting detail. I understand, of course, that it's interim supply.

Mr. Mason: Do we trust them?

Dr. Taft: The Member for Edmonton-Highlands is wondering if we trust them, and I guess we have no choice. Well, we do have a choice. We will be skeptical. That's our job, and it's needed. It's needed. So we're expected to approve over \$5 billion of spending that is itemized in total in about, I think, five pages, a billion dollars a page. In fact, I think it's only four pages. I know that none of us in the opposition, certainly in the Liberal opposition, I imagine in the third party as well, are comfortable with that – it's simply mind-boggling – and I'm sure that the general public won't be too impressed with that either. I cannot imagine any significant sized organization running like this. I can't imagine a multibillion-dollar corporation running like this. I can't imagine even a good sized nonprofit organization or a community league or a small business running with this sort of approach, and it is very worrisome.

The people of Denmark have an interesting saying that is of some relevance here. They say that one must walk a long time behind a wild duck before one picks up an ostrich feather. In looking at this document, it is a bit like a wild duck, and we're searching through it looking for something good, some ostrich feather somewhere, and I'm afraid we're going to run out of time before we find any. It is maybe not only a wild duck but a bit of a lame duck, maybe an ugly duckling too.

So I express a lot of frustration here, and that frustration is reinforced when I go through the *Hansard* of last night's debate for I as the health critic have many questions about how the \$1.8 billion that's requested in this legislation for the Department of Health and Wellness is going to be spent. Instead of any hope whatsoever of having that information provided, I see from last night's debate that the Minister of Health and Wellness has said that he's not going to do that.

I think it's important enough here to quote from last night's debate. I'm quoting the Minister of Health and Wellness.

I ask for interim funding of \$1.85 billion, enough to pay for health care until the end of June. This is prebudget funding, so like others who have commented on this issue, I cannot give details now.

Those will be available postbudget.

So he is not prepared and indeed he says that he cannot – it's not that he will not; he cannot – give details now.

He goes on to say a few sentences later, "Details on my final budget and how it is allocated will not be available until budget day," April 8, 2003, which is about three weeks from now. He finally concluded his brief comments – and that's all he made; the only comments he made last night are a few paragraphs worth addressing almost \$2 billion. He concluded by saying:

The delay in our provincial budget is unavoidable if we are to table a budget that best meets the needs of this province and the people who live and work here. Interim funding for health care is equally essential so health services can continue uninterrupted until the budget is tabled.

Well, I don't doubt that we need to find money to keep the health system going, and nobody on this side of the House is going to argue that we shouldn't, but the process is fundamentally broken here. I've heard other ministers use this terminology today, that they cannot – they cannot – provide details until the budget is dropped. Then I wonder if we aren't in a situation where in effect they would be violating parliamentary procedure in terms of anticipating the budget by giving details. If that is the case, then I wonder why we're here in the Legislature debating this at all.

The effect here is that we might as well return to the system of special warrants that was in operation for many years under the Conservative government. It was, of course, the current Premier. I think he insisted, he promised, he swore that he wouldn't use special warrants, but in effect that's what we've got here. We've got a request for \$1.8 billion, yet we have no ability for meaningful discussion of that money in this Legislature. So let's call a spade a spade. Let's be honest here and maybe just handle it through special warrants. At least that way there wouldn't be any pretext of meaningful legislative debate on these issues. That's my view on this.

3:50

I'm also distressed about the whole process because of the Auditor General's recommendations, and I'm now referring to the annual report of the Auditor General of Alberta 2001-2002. Recommendation 1, Improve Internal Controls: "We recommend that the Department of Finance, working with the other departments and the Alberta Corporate Service Centre, improve internal controls." It goes on to list a series of specifics.

Then it goes on a couple of pages later, recommendation 2:

We recommend that the Deputy Minister of Executive Council, working with other Deputy Ministers, establish an internal audit function to provide assurance that significant government systems and risks are managed effectively.

Risk management. Here we are being asked to approve \$1.8 billion in health funding alone, \$5 billion in total funding with no detail. Talk about risk and a breakdown in risk management.

Then recommendation 3 from the Auditor General:

We recommend that the Ministry of Finance, working with other ministries, develop comprehensive standards for preparing ministry business plans. We further recommend that Deputy Ministers and the Ministry of Finance ensure the standards are followed.

Yet here we are in a situation where we are approving more or less 25 percent of next year's budget with no significant detail, none whatsoever. It's unacceptable, and I need that to be absolutely and perfectly clear on the record.

We've been arguing for years in the opposition that there's a much better way to manage the provincial budget system, and maybe – maybe – this government will move in that direction. They're showing some signs of doing so. But, frankly, I'm very concerned, and I'd be prepared to bet that next year the budget will be late again. Maybe the Minister of Finance can tell me exactly what year was the last year in which the budget was voted on and approved

before the beginning of the fiscal year. It would be useful to know. It wasn't last year, and I know it wasn't the year before. It hasn't been as long as I've been in this Assembly, which is all of three years, but I'd be interested to know as a matter of fact when it was.

Now, we've argued for a radically different approach to managing the budget process, and to the government's credit they are gradually coming around to our perspective. Their wisdom is growing, but they have a long way to go before they catch up to us. What we've argued for, first of all, is to stabilize the wild misses in estimating resource revenues, to work from a five-year moving average based on the previous five-years' resource revenues so that we can smooth out these spikes and valleys in resource revenues and increase the accuracy of our resource revenue projections.

As the Member for Edmonton-Highlands was saying a few minutes ago, we have, I think he said, in the last 10 years missed the target on resource revenue projections by over \$20 billion. That's a staggering problem.

Mr. Norris: If he said it, it must be true, eh?

Dr. Taft: The Minister of Economic Development is wondering if it's true. It would be easy to confirm that.

Mr. Norris: That's your source?

Dr. Taft: That's one of my sources, yeah. What's yours? I'm wondering what the Minister of Economic Development's source is around this. [interjection] He doesn't have any. Okay. I guess he doesn't have any.

The Minister of Finance has made clear – and I sympathize with her – the difficulties in picking the right figure for resource revenue predictions, but if we used a five-year moving average, I think that would smooth that out.

The second thing we've argued for to improve the budget process is a fiscal stability fund, and we are seeing the government, after years and years of hammering away on them, finally moving on this. We want to ensure that funding for priority programs – health, education, children, infrastructure – is stable and predictable, and fundamentally it needs to be based on need, not on fluctuating oil and gas prices. Somebody's need for hip surgery or a child's need for a proper education or an impoverished family's need for the next meal does not change with the price of oil and gas. We need to break that bind that this government is in, establish base needs, and fund to those levels and then manage the swings in oil and gas prices. So by establishing a fiscal stability fund or an equivalent to one, I think this government is taking the right direction, and I do look forward to seeing that in next year's budget.

The government is also moving on one of our ideas with an infrastructure enhancement fund. They're calling it, I think, a capital fund. A good idea. That will allow us to get over the problems of on-again, off-again infrastructure funding, which plagues health care systems, schools, roads, all those basic services that the public needs. We have argued it for years, and the government has to some extent done this, but I'm concerned that they're losing focus.

A three-year business plan. The three-year plans that the government has produced have become less and less reliable, I feel, as the government has lost some of its commitment to this vision, so we see one year to the next all kinds of things moving. My colleague from Edmonton-Centre was referring to changes from one year to the next in the vision statements for the Gaming ministry, for example, dramatic changes, which make it impossible to track year by year the changes that are occurring in the business plans and really make the three-year business planning process very, very weak indeed.

So we can turn now to some of the specifics. I think a number of these issues have been covered by my colleagues, and I will cede the floor to collect some more information and see if there are any other members of either side, especially the government side, who want to make any comments whatsoever on the fact that we're being asked to spend \$5 billion here without any detail.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have an opportunity again to speak to the 2003-2004 interim supply estimates, and I'd like to start with a few minutes looking at the sums put forward by the Department of Children's Services. The amount here is \$225,075,000. It's a huge sum. I think that there has been a great deal of activity going on in the Department of Children's Services with the reduction of the number of regions in the province from 18 to 10 and the consequent enlargement of those regions. Some of the regions are very, very large right now. The changes are calling into question one of the pillars that the recent changes to Children's Services was built upon, and that was the community-based pillar, where we would move from a provincewide system to one that really reflected the needs and the wishes of local communities. Yet everything that seems to be happening recently seems to be working towards the erosion of that pillar so that community involvement is becoming less rather than more. The huge size of the regions, I think, will contribute to making local community input more difficult.

4:00

So there are a lot of changes going in, and there were some very interesting questions raised in the family day home and out-of-school child care report prepared by KPMG for the department by Jordan Cleland. I'd like to ask some questions or get some information, if I can, in terms of the allocation we have before us and how much of that allocation is directed to rectifying or acting on some of the recommendations from the Cleland report.

The family day home program was created in 1980, and it was recognized that there was a need between formal centre-based facilities for children and then fully unregulated baby-sitting services. So it was recognized at that time that there was a need for something in between to be created. The family day home program provides care now to approximately 6,000 preschool Alberta children, and as the name signifies, it provides care for youngsters that's regulated by government standards. The care is provided by caregivers in their homes, but the system is administered by 88 community-based agencies that hold contracts with the day home providers. Those day home providers themselves, then, are under contract to child and family services. A good number of those 6,600 children are subsidized by government. Close to 40 percent receive some sort of subsidy from the provincial government, and the subsidy is paid to one of the agencies.

Now, one of the concerns that Cleland raised was the lack of an adequate supply of family day homes in general among the child and family services authorities and that there was a shortage of care spaces, particularly for the care of infants, and infants are considered from birth to 36 months of age. So I'd like to know if there are funds in this interim supply that will address the problem of trying to identify and bring onstream a number of spaces. Are there incentives being created? Are there strategies in place that will result in more care spaces in family day care homes being created?

The second question I'd like to have addressed is the concern that the family day home agencies were operating in an environment that

was rather loose and that there was not the kind of accountability by those agencies that one might expect in terms of an agency that is responsible for carrying out government programs. So I'd like to know if there are plans to use funds here to tighten up the regulations or the parameters in which family day homes operate.

One of the issues that Cleland identified was the practice of paying a differential administrative fee, based on the age of the child, to the agency and not to the parent. In centre-based day care the subsidy paid on behalf of a child is dependent on whether the child is an infant or a toddler, because the day cares then turn around themselves and charge that differential fee to parents. There's a higher fee, of course, if you have to look after children who require higher levels of care, and it seems to make sense. But the differential fees are not paid to the actual care providers. The agency gets a differential fee for the homes that it has under contract, but that differential fee is not passed on to the person who is actually providing the care for the youngster. A flat \$300 low-income subsidy is paid to the home on behalf of parents, and it's regardless of the age of the child to be cared for. It was a problem that was identified, and I wondered if that problem is being addressed with the funds that we're going to pass in terms of the interim supply budget. It seems only logical that you would pass on and pay a differential fee on behalf of the parents to the provider, and it seems to be a problem that needs to be addressed. It might result in more day care homes coming forward or people willing to provide care in their homes for children were that differential fee actually passed on to them. So I would like some information about the situation and what's being done.

One of the huge areas for child care, of course, is rural Alberta. Cleland spends quite a bit of time chronicling the difficulties of providing day care homes in communities that are remote from urban centres. The agencies themselves don't want to get involved in putting in place systems because of the huge distances that are involved and the costs of administering a network of day care homes in remote regions of the province. What it means is that for a large number of rural Albertans there is no option to place their youngster in a day care home. It's not just the remote regions. The report notes that even in a centre such as Brooks there's difficulty.

4:10

So the problem of rural Alberta and trying to come up with some solutions in terms of providing day care facilities or home care facilities still persists, and my question would be: what are the plans from the department? What does the ministry intend to do to address that problem? The Cleland report puts forward a couple of alternatives. One is where they have a registry that would have people register their home and become a provider, and I think the report indicated that it's used in British Columbia. That's evidently been rejected by authorities here for fear of the lack of regulation and lack of policing, the inability of the department to monitor the activities in those homes. The Cleland report does put that forward as one possible solution to the rural problem. They call it the registry model of standards administration. Again, as I said, it's one model that's been proposed to try to address the problem of providing day home service in rural Alberta.

Going back just for a minute to the provision of private care homes, one of the barriers that Cleland identified to increasing regulated family day homes was the 1994 changes that were made to the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act. Those changes changed the number of children that could be allowed in an unregulated setting from three to six. In the report Cleland says that this change was seen as an almost universal answer given by stakeholders as to one of the difficulties they had in trying to meet demand for homes. It's a matter of judgment, I guess, how many children should be in those

homes, but at the time it's acting as a barrier to the growth of those kinds of homes.

A couple of questions follow, too, in terms of the operation of the family day home care program within the child and family services authorities. Cleland seems to have identified two or three things that work against the successful operation of the program. The report points to the failure of the authorities sharing with each other successful experiences. So my question would be: are there funds or are there programs in this allocation of \$225,075,000 that will encourage the authorities to share information and to share successes with respect to family day home care programs? If there are, I would appreciate knowing what those incentives are for that to happen. It seems to make only good sense that we don't have 10 authorities at this point trying to reinvent the wheel if there have been successes that others could profit from knowing about.

The other thing – and I think it's most disturbing and something we've noticed in the Assembly, Mr. Chairman – is that there's a climate of cost containment identified, that cost containment seems to dominate decision-making in the child and family services authorities and the department. I guess it's that budget pressure from Alberta Children's Services that has created this environment. I think it raises questions about whether or not the best solutions are being sought and the best solutions are being put into practice when the overriding concern is not children and their care, but the overriding concern is cost containment. Cleland points that out as an observation on the funding for children's services and points to the fact that the Children's Services department has some difficulty in getting the kinds of budget allocations from the general revenue fund and some difficulties in the general budgeting process, getting the funds that would lead to that climate being changed and there being a refocus on the needs of children and the resources for programs being in place without a major concern being cost containment.

I think it's telling that in 1994 the budget allocation for child care in Alberta was \$70.7 million. In 2002 the figure has dropped to \$67 million, and I think that in part results in the kind of climate that Cleland reported.

We had asked, Mr. Chairman, on many occasions during question period and when we had other opportunities in the Legislature for the Cleland report. It was not that long ago that we actually got the report. I think it's a very useful document, and I think it points to some concerns that need addressing. It's my hope that the allocation of resources that we have in the interim supply bill before us will be directed to following up some of the solutions that Cleland has suggested, with the result that children in day homes and children needing out-of-school care get the kind of care that they need and deserve.

I only have a few minutes left – and I hope that I'll get another chance to speak to the interim supply this afternoon, Mr. Chairman – but I would like to ask a couple of questions. One is with respect to Executive Council. Under Executive Council there was an increase in Public Affairs' expenses in 2000-2001 from \$8,954,000 to . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, the time allocated has elapsed. The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise in follow-up to some questions which I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands referenced a short while ago. I think there was a discussion he was pursuing with respect to community leagues. Now, community leagues do not receive any operational funding through the Department of Community Development. I believe the hon. Minister of

Justice and Attorney General commented on some other aspects with regard to the capital side of the equation, where they may be applying for assistance through the CFEP or the community initiatives program.

4:20

Specific to Community Development, the agencies that I'm privileged to work with, which include the Alberta Foundation for the Arts; the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation; the Wild Rose Foundation; the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation; the Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund Advisory Committee; and the Alberta film development program – none of those organizations, to my knowledge, provide operational dollars to the community leagues. However, with respect to the Wild Rose Foundation, particularly, I do recall that some community leagues may have been funded for some equipment purchases. I'm just not fresh on when that was, Mr. Chair, but something rings a bell to me that items like tables, chairs, perhaps computers, and some of those kinds of things that might help them out may have been funded somewhere along the line as capital-related or equipment-related purchases.

The other interesting part of this question, though, for the member's information is to look and see how a particular community league exists in terms of its status and whether or not it's a large enough organization to own its own hall, for example, and therefore they may be registered as a society, in which case they might be eligible for certain programs in certain departments.

Now, the other part is with respect to the centennial program. I commented at some length earlier about the Alberta centennial legacies grant program. If a community league is formally registered as a society, then technically, of course, they would be able to apply for a centennial-related grant, but I don't believe any actually did, pursuant to the March 1, 2001, deadline. That's, of course, the one that is unfortunately still deferred. But I hope that would shed a little bit of light on the Member for Edmonton-Highlands' questions.

The other issue he asked about was the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, and I think his question was with respect to the length of time it takes to process some of the alleged complaints that are received. Now, before I get into trying to comment on this area, I want to make it very clear, Mr. Chair, that the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission operates independent of government. This is not something that any minister interferes in directly or otherwise because they have their own independence, and I know that they enjoy that.

Some of the issues that the member would likely be interested to know he can certainly read up on in the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. This would outline a little more clearly for the hon. member what some of the possible grounds for discrimination under this act could be. I'll just reference a few of them for the purposes of the record, which will help me answer the other part of his question. There's a section in the act that deals with code of conduct and specifically discrimination regarding publications and notices; discrimination regarding goods, services, accommodation, facilities; discrimination regarding tenancy; equal pay; employment practices; applications and advertisements regarding employment; membership in trade unions; and so on and so on. Equally important and of great interest to the hon. member would likely be some references to the process, which is the thrust of his question. He can find some of those answers starting on page 10, I believe it is, of the act, where it talks about enforcement: who may make a complaint, settlement of the complaint, director's powers re complaint, investigator's powers re the complaint, and judge's order, and so on.

Now, what's important in having referenced that, by way of

background, Mr. Chair, is the fact that we have received more complaints over this last while, I'm told, and I think that based on what I've been hearing in the community and elsewhere, the complaints are not only increasing in number, but they're also increasing in terms of complexity. So it is taking longer for those complaints to be addressed by the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission and their staff, but we do have about 40 full-time staff, I'm told, at the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, who do their best to process these complaints as quickly as possible. But I think the first thing that has to be understood is that the nature of the alleged complaint has to really be discussed with the complainant by the staff in order to first determine what the grounds are and if there are deemed to be grounds that are in effect addressed within the jurisdiction of the act itself.

The commission staff are available – and numerous of them work in Edmonton, obviously, and others work in Calgary – and they do try to determine these kinds of things with the complainant at the outset. If the nature of the complaint or the submission of complaint is such that it does fit the terms and conditions as outlined in the act – in other words, there are grounds or there are felt to be grounds for the alleged complaint – then one of the staff members will undertake to his or her best abilities to try and meet with or speak with the complainant and review the matter, and then I believe they try to approach this from a conciliatory point of view and try to arrive at some kind of conciliation to try and bring the two parties together and try and settle the issue. In the event that the complexity of the case is such that conciliation is not possible, I believe the process then would be to try and engage in some form of an investigation, which could involve an investigator from within or, in some cases, hired from the general public, someone who has, obviously, expertise in the area. And we also have the process whereby panels can conduct hearings. So there's quite a lot to this process, and it does get quite complicated.

Now, one of the reasons why there is frequently a bit of a backlog in the system in terms of reviewing and processing these complaints has to do with the complexity that I referenced earlier but also with the fact that we have an increasing population in this province. I think we're very fortunate and very blessed to have a population that is growing, oh, roughly at the rate of about 40,000 individuals, at least from in-migration from other provinces, and of course our natural population growth added to that simply means that we have more individuals that would be eligible to file complaints should they feel they have been in some way violated.

In that regard, Mr. Chair, I do recall that some additional moneys were added to the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission last year to try and catch up some of the so-called backlog in this area. We are doing our level best to ensure that complaints get addressed as expeditiously as possible and responded to and decided upon. I'm very proud that the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission has a very dedicated staff, very hardworking individuals that are very knowledgeable in this area. In fact, of the many different departments that I've seen in operation over the past several years, I can tell you that the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission has one of the lowest overall staff turnovers, which is indeed indicative of the commitment and dedication of those staff members, led by a very fine chief commissioner, who does his best with the team to look after the protection of human rights in this province.

4:30

The final thing that I would just like to say is that we are very proud of the strong educational programs that we try to provide through the Alberta Advisory Committee on the Human Rights,

Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund. They are a very dedicated group, as well, who focus on educational programs that help eliminate some of the kinds of circumstances that might precipitate complaints coming forward to the commission itself. In that regard I would tell you that 80 percent or thereabouts, I believe, of the complaints that come to the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission are in one way or another targeting employment or employment practices. They are at least related to some form of employment-related complaint. So that having been said, Mr. Chairman, I think the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission does an excellent job. There's no doubt that human rights are important in this province and will continue to be.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I continue to be interested in the process here, and I've done a little bit of quick research, going back to the year before I became an MLA, to see when the budget was approved then. I don't know when it was approved, but I think the Minister of Justice might be interested. He personally introduced the Appropriation Act in the year 2000 on the last day that the House sat in the fiscal year 1999-2000, March 23, 2000. I haven't dug through here to see when the Appropriation Act was actually approved, but it would be interesting to see when was the last time a budget was actually approved before the fiscal year began. [interjection] I could keep digging. Maybe I will, just for the sheer joy of it.

Now, I'm wondering – and this is a serious question; again maybe the Government House Leader, the Minister of Justice, or somebody could advise on this – is there any danger of a minister breaking some kind of parliamentary protocol if they do respond with details on this bill? Are they in some way going to be violating provisions controlling the release of information on the budget? Is there any parliamentary procedural problem with their responding to details? Does anybody care to answer?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it's commonly understood in parliamentary jurisdictions that the provision of budget information prior to the delivery of the budget is a breach, and sometimes it's such a serious breach that you would then call for the resignation of the minister.

Now, in recent times, of course, we know parliamentary traditions do change. We see on the federal scale, for example, consultations with the Minister of Finance and various groups ahead of the budget and a committee which actually makes recommendations on those sorts of issues. On the provincial side, of course, there are sometimes comments made through the Speech from the Throne or through other vehicles, but I think it still is understood as a parliamentary convention that the new initiatives and changes that are being brought forward in the budget are first given to the House through the vehicle of the budget. So even through the discussion of supplementary supply one would hope that ministers and members of the House would honour that parliamentary convention, that the debate on supplementary supply is not intended to anticipate the debate on the budget but, rather, to justify the interim supply of money until you can have the budget debate.

Dr. Taft: I appreciate the minister's efforts. I'm not sure that that

leaves me any more clear. I guess we can just try and see what the response is.

I was going to ask some questions of the minister of health or at least see where we might get on those. I know that the minister said last night that he cannot provide details.

Ms Blakeman: That he wouldn't.

Dr. Taft: The Member for Edmonton-Centre is saying that he wouldn't. In fact, *Hansard* reads that he cannot. So I'm not wanting to trip anybody up here, but we can try.

The basic point here is staying on the theme of procedures for the moment but focusing more and more on health care. I'm sure the minister is aware that the entire business planning cycle for regional health authorities has been a real concern of mine. This is simply a subset issue of the larger one that I addressed a few minutes ago, which the whole budget process of the government falls behind. That then ripples through, of course, the Department of Health and Wellness down to the regional health authorities and their business planning cycle, and we had, I think, several dramatic examples of that problem in the fiscal year we're just concluding now. In fact, I'm certain that not one regional health authority had their business plan approved on time in terms of the fiscal year. I'm not sure that any even had it done by the end of the first quarter of the fiscal year, and I know of a couple that went long beyond that.

In fact, the Lakeland regional health authority's business plan, I think, never, ever did get approved, and eventually what happened is that the Lakeland health authority was eliminated without its plan ever being approved. Well, in fact, I guess Lakeland still exists. So I'm not sure whether the Lakeland authority's business plan ever did get approved through the entire fiscal year and if it'll just fall into the history books at the end of this month. I was just speaking an hour ago or so with media about the Lakeland situation and the situation regarding the new regional health authority 7, which replaces Lakeland, and their call to involve the Auditor General in their whole budgeting process and the interregional budget issues around the transfer of funds and billing. So we had a complete breakdown of the business planning process for the Lakeland health authority.

Similarly, there was, I guess, a complete breakdown for the WestView regional health authority's business planning cycle too, and as everybody here knows, the WestView regional health authority was eliminated midway through the year last year.

So these kinds of problems, which seem to be made even more extreme now, are making it almost impossible, I feel, or making it exceedingly difficult to effectively manage our health budget, which accounts for some 30 percent of the total provincial government expenditures. So I would put this question to the Minister of Health and Wellness. He may not respond; I think he said last night that he cannot. This is a question for him, though. How can the regional health authorities' business planning cycle be improved? What does his department plan to do to improve that process so that we don't have the single largest department of this government implementing business plans that are already six months out of date?

Now, we had some discussion on this issue yesterday in Public Accounts Committee with the Minister of Finance. It was a fairly candid conversation, as they typically are with her, and I appreciated her comments, but it seems to me that we need to work year by year to get this cycle on track more effectively.

4:40

So I'm wondering, to her or to the minister of health, what is realistic to expect for next year. Are we going to be moving on to a process where, perhaps, at the beginning of September the budgets

are being lined up, as they are internally anyways? We might actually see the budget for the following year introduced in this Legislature in February. I recognize that there are limitations because of federal policies and because of many other unknowns, but to be honest, those unknowns are always there. They're always going to be there. I think we would all agree that it would be a more effective planning process if the budget was introduced, debated, and approved before we began the fiscal year.

So I don't know if the Minister of Finance is prepared to make any comments on what might be realistic to expect next year in this regard. Would you like to take an opportunity on that? Yes? No?

Mrs. Nelson: No. Maybe. I don't know. When you sit down.

Dr. Taft: When I sit down. Well, I could sit down right now if you want.

Clearly, there are a host of fundamental questions to be raised about the department of health's spending here, the \$1.8 billion that we're going to be approving without any detail. I mean, some of the details I would be interested in are details around capital expenditures versus operating expenditures. In fact, if I could make a general suggestion, it would be delightful if the budget actually summarized the entire department's spending vitals categories. It used to be done years ago. It was done in the Department of Health and Wellness, or under its previous names: hospitals and medical care, and so on. Up until about eight or nine years ago they would actually summarize expenditures by capital and operating. That was helpful to know because we could keep a clear sense of what was happening with infrastructure in the health system.

Now it feels to me like the system is more difficult than ever in that regard. We have the Department of Infrastructure involved and the department of health involved. We have the regional health authorities, who each follow their own plans. So it makes it very, very difficult to follow. But I would be interested to know: of this \$1.8 billion how much is going to capital and how much is going to operating?

I'd also be interested to know how much is going to long-term care versus home care versus acute care and versus other services. Again, that used to be made very clear in budgets of several years past. It is now very difficult to track because each regional authority puts forward its own plans, and those are not summarized in the budget, at least not for the public to see. So we can't follow very easily, for example, what the multiyear trends are in long-term care spending or in acute care spending or in home care spending or in public health spending. That sort of detail would be very helpful. It used to be provided, and surely it exists somewhere in the system and could be fairly readily compiled by the vast staff that the government employs.

It also used to be the case that long-term care funding was broken down by public long-term care facility, not-for-profit long-term care facility, and private, for-profit long-term care facility. That, again, was helpful. Year by year you could follow the trends. How was the long-term care funding dollar divided up? How much of it went to for-profit long-term care facilities? How much of it stayed in the public sector? How much of it went to nonprofit groups like Bethany care homes and Good Samaritan long-term care services? So I would be interested in that kind of information here, and, as a heads up, I'll be asking for that in the budget when it is eventually introduced.

I think the public also has a right to know how much of this \$1.8 billion is going to be spent on P3s, especially on P3s that involve public/private partnerships with the for-profit, private-sector partner. For all we know, there are substantial new initiatives being proposed

here that will be launched in the next three months covered by this interim supply bill. Initiatives on P3s? We don't know. So there's no possible way that I'll be able to support this. The evidence on P3s when it comes to health care is not encouraging. The evidence is largely negative. In the long run they cost more, and often in the short term they cost more as well. There are already examples in Alberta of P3s with the for-profit health care sector that raise really serious questions. So I would like to know: is any of this \$1.8 billion allocated under Health and Wellness going to public/private partnerships? A perfectly reasonable question. The public has a right to know. I'm sure my colleague from Edmonton-Centre agrees, and my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods agrees, and all the other opposition colleagues agree. The public has a right to know where these billions of dollars are going.

I know as well that there are real concerns – and they are being brought to me repeatedly, and I raised them earlier today in question period – around expenditures and plans for physiotherapy and other community rehab services. There is no possible way to know how much is going to be spent on those programs in this \$1.8 billion. Will this government, will this minister, provide us with that information? I assume the answer is a flat no. I frankly think that's appalling. It's appalling that we're being asked to approve this money without any detail.

I could go on at length about health. I may continue to do so, but I have some questions about another area that I am critic for, and that's Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. This winter the issue that had been brewing for years around the access to Crown lands of oilfield suppliers and contractors blew up into the front pages of the newspapers. It was certainly brought to our attention forcefully by oilfield contractors and by members of aboriginal communities. The government eventually responded. A certain amount of confusion. We heard figures thrown around about the minister of aboriginal affairs hoping for \$20 million or \$25 million. The Premier said she would get \$6 million. I'm wondering if any of that money is anywhere in this interim supply estimate. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has here a \$10,175,000 allocation. How much of that, if any, is going to address this issue of access of oilfield contractors to Crown lands in the north? I would love to hear the minister's answer to that question. Is some of the \$6 million that we believe she's going to be allocated in here? I don't know. Maybe she will have the courtesy to tell us that.

So, Mr. Chairman, there are many, many unanswered questions in this mystery. It's a mystery book, really; isn't it? The \$5 billion mystery. I don't think this government is going to help the taxpayer solve this mystery, certainly not for many weeks to come. But we will try to penetrate the fog and get an answer on where this \$5 billion is going.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

4:50

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I've been told that last night I yelled at people, and I'm sorry for raising my voice. I don't take back one word that I said, but I'm sorry if I yelled at people.

I was and continue to be absolutely appalled and astonished at the government's arrogance around this whole discussion of interim appropriation. I've now heard a number of sort of possible causes and reasons put forward by members of the government, and I just want to talk a little bit about that, and then I have some specific questions about what we see in front of us. But it seems to me, you know, that the Minister of Justice, in defense of the lack of detail that

we were getting, even put forward the proposal that it was ridiculous that the opposition should be so forward in even asking for detail on this amount of money. I maintain that \$5 billion is an enormous amount of money.

Mr. Hancock: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

**Point of Order
Imputing Motives**

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), with respect to casting aspersions, I never suggested for a moment that it was astonishing that anybody should ask any questions. I just tried to put it on the record last night that we were in interim supply and that questions relative to the interim supply discussions ought to be within the appropriate context of interim supply rather than trying to move towards discussion of the budget and anticipate what might come in the budget. When people are asking for detailed business plans and people are asking for performance measures and those sorts of things, that anticipates the budget. So that was the context in which my remarks were made, and any allegation of other motives is not true.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I think we're arguing the same point. The minister was saying:

to expect, as is suggested by members of the opposition, that the budget should be prejudged in the interim supply estimates – with respect to what might be increased, what new programs might be in place,

in other words, the detail

what people might expect in terms of what is in the budget – is ridiculous.

So I would maintain that it is perfectly justified and that the minister in fact has suggested that asking questions by the members of the opposition around detail in this interim supply was ridiculous.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, a similar point of order was raised last night, and this chair did clarify that in these supplementary estimates that we're dealing with, there is no compulsion upon anyone to ask a question, nor is there compulsion on anyone to respond to that question. So I hope that this reclarifies the argument once again.

Hon. member for Edmonton-Centre, you have the floor now.

Debate Continued

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. So what we have here is the issue of an interim supply, the opposition's desire to get detail from the government as to what this money is for. A number of times the government has said: well, you get the budget on April 8. I see here, again, a difference in interpretation and time lines in that the government seems to be saying, "Once you get the budget on April 8, all things are answered," and there's a presumption there that the budget would then be passed. From the opposition's side we're saying: yeah, sure the budget comes forward on April 8, but it isn't discussed and debated and actually accepted until just prior to May 15. So there's a difference in time lines here as well. [interjection] Yeah. I just put that out, April 8 to just prior to May 15.

The opposition was saying: you know, you're asking us to stand by for a long time to approve this money before we get the kind of detail that we're looking for, because, indeed, we do go through a process of questioning each and every minister looking for that

detail. Well, we're looking for some of that detail now because you're asking for some of that money now, \$5 billion worth.

I raise the issue again now that I can look the Minister of Finance in the eye and suggest that if it is so difficult for the government to be able to present a budget with enough time to debate it and pass it prior to the fiscal year-end, then may I recommend that the government and the Minister of Finance look at changing the year-end. That happened previously. Our year-end used to be the end of December, and it wasn't possible to accomplish everything that needed to be done by that time, so we now have a fiscal year-end of the end of March. If, indeed, we're having to wait for federal money, then, which comes some time in between the 1st of January and the end of March, I'm presuming is what's being assumed there, then fine. Move the fiscal year-end so that we can actually have the budget debated and accepted before we start the fiscal year. It is inappropriate in my opinion to be constantly bringing an interim supply before.

Now, we've also had a great deal of discussion back and forth about whether ministers would give any detail at all, and I'm thinking back to when the current Premier assumed his position, and at that time he said: no more special warrants. You know, the government is going to be open and transparent and available to answer questions and defend its budget; therefore, we would have interim supplies. But now we have a position where there's an interim supply and ministers are in some cases flat out refusing to answer any questions. So if the government is really not going to follow a process of open debate and answering questions during interim supply, then why don't you just go back to the special warrants? Except that that would be breaking your Premier's own promise. So I call upon the Premier to enforce his promise to us of open debate during the interim appropriation.

Lastly, on this sort of overriding issue of getting information on the interim appropriation, at one point one of the ministers last night – and, I'm sorry, I don't remember which – said: "Well, we do three-year business plans. Just look in the three-year business plan and you will have the answer. The money I'm spending is all part of what's in that three-year business plan." So I did that. I got the business plans, and I got the business plans from 2001 to '04 and 2002 to '05, and I thought: "Okay. Great. Then I can look this up and all my questions will be answered. I'll be able to tell how much of their money they're asking for or what they're going to use it for." And, oh, my goodness, when I start to look at it . . .

An Hon. Member: Oh, my goodness, pumpkin.

Ms Blakeman: Indeed. Looking at the Justice business plan from 2001-2004, when I look under expenses for core business, in this first one the courts are given a target budget for 2003-04, which is the budget we're about to go into here, of \$92.445 million. When I look at the next year, it's \$99.580 million. So which number am I supposed to take, Mr. Minister? Let me look at another one. Legal services to vulnerable people. In one of them it appears as \$84.182 million. In the next one it appears as \$80.158 million. Which number am I supposed to take since all of this detail was available in these three-year plans? The plans are different.

This is the point I was trying to make last night. This government really did step forward and take the lead in putting these business plans out there, and then you didn't cement the plan in place. You didn't cement the process in place. You just left it. You walked away from it. You didn't enforce it. You didn't keep it up. As a result, these get less and less helpful. Your three-year plans three years out are not very good. You refer people like me, saying: all the questions you want, answered in here. And I look. Well, Mr.

Minister, which number would you like me to take? For prosecutions would you like me to take the \$30.303 million, or would you like me to take the \$40.934 million?

So when you're asking for an amount of money to be voted as part of your budget, and you're asking for \$71.335 million, and I'm saying, "What's this for? How is it going to be allocated?" and I'm told, "Well, look in the three-year business plans," which three-year business plan would you like me to look at? Because the numbers are all different. Would you like another example? Let's look at revenue. When we're talking revenue, again, forecast for the year 2003-04, we have revenue of \$80.079 million. I look in the other one. What's the revenue? Oh, \$100.954 million. Which figure would you like me to take? How am I supposed to understand the detail when we have that kind of a difference? I mean, that's \$20 million between those two figures. So this should work. I should be able to look at this and get some kind of consistency and continuity from those three-year plans. But what's happening is that everything changes all the time, and they say: "Oh, well, you know, we're improving, and we're updating constantly. We've got to allow these figures to change and roll over." Okay. Well, shall we look, then, at some goals? They should be the same – right? – because goals are goals. You're just going to keep those in place.

5:00

Well, all right. Let's do that. Let's look at the goals for Government Services. I'll go to one book: goal 1, efficient licensing and registration services. Goal 1 in the other book: a fair and effective marketplace in Alberta with informed consumers and businesses and a high standard of conduct. Which goal would you like me to work from? They're both goal 1, two different plans. Which one am I supposed to take? There's a lack of consistency of what's being delivered in these three-year plans. Should I look at core businesses? They're even changing. In one case I looked at – here it is – the actual goals themselves.

Let's look at Gaming. All right. In one of them we have a mission statement. That's a fairly significant core, base from which the entire department operates. You shouldn't be changing mission statements every year, but in one here we have a mission statement that appears as: to ensure integrity, transparency, disclosure, public consultation, and accountability in Alberta's gaming and liquor industries to achieve the maximum benefit for Albertans. Well, that should be identical in the next one; shouldn't it? No. What we have is: to ensure integrity and accountability in Alberta's gaming and liquor industries and to achieve the maximum benefit for Albertans from gaming and liquor activities. They're different goals. This is in one year, folks.

Now, pick one. Which one is going to appear in your three-year plan for the budget that you're about to bring out, that we're waiting for? You know, you're not consistent here, and you're not sticking to your three-year business plans. When you're changing your mission statement, what is it you want me to stick to? You guys are telling me that everything I want to know is in here. Oh, yeah? You change your mission statement. You change your goals. You change your numbers. You're totally inconsistent in what you're offering here. So I just thought I'd point that out, because I really think you're letting down the people of Alberta with all of this.

Okay. I have some specific questions on departments. Yes, back to the Minister of Justice. Thank you for answering my Written Question 7, but the minister and I have had an ongoing conversation for some six years now – would it be? – over the maintenance enforcement program. In 1998 there was an MLA review, and in it there were strong recommendations, accepted by the ministry, that there would be an update and a new integrated computer system that

would be put in place. I had continued to ask questions about what the progress of that was and was some surprised in 2000, when I asked a written question, to be told that they were just then tendering for this new computer system. I've continued to ask those questions, so I've asked it one more time. I'm now told – and this is fascinating – that there's a maintenance enforcement tracking system called METS. It does all kinds of wonderful things and staff are able to update things and yada, yada, yada. But, actually, in the second paragraph there's going to be a new integrated system. The program is constructing a new maintenance enforcement management system called MIMS to replace the aging MET system.

An Hon. Member: What does MIMS stand for?

Ms Blakeman: Maintenance information management system.

So could the minister please clarify then? Of this money that he's asking for, the \$71 million as part of the larger budget that we don't have and we don't have any detail on and does not appear in any consistent way in any of the business plans that are available – is this MIMS the long-awaited integrated computer system that was recommended in the 1998 – 1998 – recommendation?

Mr. Hancock: It's being built over four years, as you well know.

Ms Blakeman: Four years? No, I didn't know that actually, Mr. Minister. That's why I keep asking you these questions on the record, so that we can continue to track this publicly.

So this MIMS is the long-awaited new system, and the MET system is on its way out. Okay. Well, I'm putting on the record what the minister is sort of mouthing to me across the well here. We can now look forward to the MIM system in the fall of 2004. Fascinating. I'll have another written question next spring asking how we're doing on this system, which will have now taken six years to get in place. Six years those staff have been working with antiquated systems. I can't believe this. Anyway, it must just make Calgary-Glenmore spin.

All right. A question to the Minister of Seniors. Of the money that's being asked for, that being \$73,115,000, which, I think, is again 25 or 30 percent of the budget to operate for 10 weeks, I'm wondering how much of that money is being set aside to deal with the increase in the budget to cover the costs of providing those seniors that are eligible with the additional money to assist them with their high utility bills caused by natural gas and electricity deregulation in this province. If I can get an answer to that, please.

Now, the next question is back to Community Development. He has a review out there for the protection of persons in care. I am wondering: of the money that he's asking for, which would be \$209,510,000 or perhaps the \$265,000 for capital investment, how much is to cover this review committee or the implementation of this Protection for Persons in Care Act? Of course, with that is going to go my standard questions: are you developing standards of care, and will this act be expanded, then, to include people that are not in institutional care?

Now, this next question goes to the minister responsible for insurance and for motor vehicles. I think this a joint question to Government Services and Transportation.

An Hon. Member: Treasury, actually.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, I'm sorry. Treasury. All right. Great.

These are questions around why we have the increased insurance rates, going up because we have so many accidents in Alberta. I have a constituent, Jeffrey Streifling, who has written to me a

number of times with suggestions on simple things that could be put in place through legislation to cut down some of the insurance claims – so this is less of an insurance question – like a law requiring properly adjusted head restraints. We require people to wear seat belts that are properly adjusted, and he is pointing out that we don't have anything that requires a properly adjusted head restraint, which would cut down on the number of whiplash claims.

An Hon. Member: It works in NASCAR.

Ms Blakeman: "It works in NASCAR" is one of the comments.

I make note in this that not all head restraints, in fact, are adjustable. A number of them are fixed in place, so that to me becomes a much longer process of negotiating with the car companies. But he does make a good point about the head restraints and how that might be able to affect those insurance rates.

He also makes a number of suggestions, and perhaps – I don't know – this possibility of legislation development is included under the money that I can't get details on under Transportation. He points out that it's impossible for the police to be able to lay charges on things like following too close. They basically just wait for an accident to happen and then hope that they can actually lay a following-too-close charge on them, but they can't sort of intervene while it's going on. He points out that drivers should satisfy one of four requirements: that the quotient of the distance between the driver's front bumper and rear bumper divided by their speed is at least two seconds, that they're traveling slower than the vehicle ahead, that the driver is decelerating, and that the driver is traveling more slowly than 20 kilometres, basically an exception.

He also raises the points of the timing in the red-light cameras, that there is a suspicion, in fact, that where the red-light cameras are being installed, the timing of the yellow light has been reduced. This is not the first time I've heard this one on the timing of it. I think that it's usually two seconds that you get.

5:10

Dr. Taft: No. It's usually three or four, but sometimes they reduce it to two.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, that's what it is. It's usually three or four seconds that you get in the yellow, but where they put the photoradar up for the red-light cameras, they're reducing it to two. So almost anybody that gets into the intersection on an amber gets a ticket. They're capturing people to make money. It becomes a cash cow. I'd like to know if there's been any investigation on this, any work on this at all, or any way that I can go back to this man.

Dr. Taft: Maybe the Minister of Justice has thoughts on this.

Ms Blakeman: The Minister of Justice has thoughts on it. Or Transportation. Well, I'll put it out jointly to the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Transportation to get something back to me on that one.

I'm over my time. I think I'm going to run out quickly. So I'll look for some response and maybe see if I can get a few more minutes later in the proceedings.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Norris: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to talk briefly about children. As you know, children are a priority for this government. We heard in the throne speech last month that the

government of Alberta's highest priority must be and will be to secure a bright future for children and youth. Before us today is a request for \$225 million in order for the Children's Services ministry to operate without disruption before the new budget comes down. Very vital. A large portion of these funds will be provided for the ministry to Alberta's child and family services authorities for program delivery; \$75,000 of that requested amount is needed for capital expenses. The remaining amount is needed for operating expenses including salaries, contracts, and outstanding commitments.

An important factor facing this ministry, Mr. Chairman, is that many contracts that child and family services authorities across Alberta have with their agencies that deliver services are on the front lines. Some of these agencies are providing funds for three months at the beginning of each fiscal year to help them with their planning goals. An example of such a funding allotment would be some child welfare protection agencies that receive a quarterly payment at the start of each fiscal year. Another example is for the family and community support services funding that goes out to municipalities in quarterly installments. Another area of urgent need is for Alberta parents who receive day care subsidy funding through this ministry so they can work while their children are cared for. A large portion of the Children's Services operating budget is allocated to salaries for direct services delivered to Alberta's children, youth, and families.

Mr. Chairman, I would ask that the committee support the supply of \$225 million for capital and operation expenses for the Children's Services ministry.

Now I'd like to touch on for a brief moment, Mr. Chairman, some of the activities that I think are vital to the economic . . .

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Economic Development, but pursuant to Standing Order 59(2) and Government Motion 12, agreed to on March 11, 2003, I must now put the following question. Those members in favour of each of the resolutions not yet voted upon relating to the 2003-2004 interim supply estimates, please say aye.

Some Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed, please say no.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Deputy Chair: Carried.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:15 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Graydon	Masyk
Calahasen	Haley	McClelland
Cao	Hancock	McFarland
Cardinal	Hlady	Nelson
Coutts	Hutton	Norris
DeLong	Johnson	O'Neill
Doerksen	Jonson	Pham
Dunford	Klapstein	Smith

Forsyth	Kryczka	Stelmach
Fritz	Lukaszuk	Tarchuk
Gordon	Mar	Woloshyn
Graham	Marz	Zwozdesky
Against the motion:		
Blakeman	Massey	Taft
Mason		
Totals:	For – 36	Against – 4

[Vote on interim supply estimates carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Klapstein: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports as follows.

All resolutions relating to the 2003-2004 interim supply estimates have been approved.

Support to the Legislative Assembly, operating expense, \$10,890,000; office of the Auditor General, operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$5,195,000; office of the Ombudsman, operating expense, \$590,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, operating expense, \$600,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, operating expense, \$120,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, operating expense, \$990,000.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: operating expense, \$10,175,000.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$139,655,000.

Children's Services: operating expense, \$225,075,000.

Community Development: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$209,510,000; capital investment \$265,000.

Economic Development: operating expense, \$11,445,000.

Energy: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$47,130,000.

Environment: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$29,340,000.

Executive Council: operating expense, \$3,760,000.

Finance: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$20,925,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$20,635,000.

Gaming: operating expense, \$47,000,000; lottery fund payments, \$309,500,000.

Government Services: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$58,280,000.

Health and Wellness: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,849,835,000.

Human Resources and Employment: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$274,000,000.

Infrastructure: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$394,190,000; capital investment, \$14,000,000.

Innovation and Science: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$43,500,000; capital investment, \$11,500,000.

5:30

International and Intergovernmental Relations: operating expense, \$1,940,000.

Justice: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$71,335,000.

Learning: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$888,895,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$30,000,000.

Municipal Affairs: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$64,525,000.

Revenue: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$11,345,000.

Seniors: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$73,115,000.

Solicitor General: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$66,840,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$91,635,000; capital investment, \$1,300,000.

Transportation: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$157,085,000; capital investment, \$63,260,000.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table a list of those resolutions voted upon by the Committee of Supply pursuant to Standing Orders.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Hon. members, we've worked hard this week. Given the time, the House stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

[At 5:32 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]