

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, April 17, 2003**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 2003/04/17

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. In our mind's eye let us see the awesome grandeur of our Rockies, the denseness of our forests, the fertility of our farmland, the splendor of our rivers, the richness of our resources, the energy of our people. Then, O God, let us rededicate ourselves as wise stewards of such bounty on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Dunford: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour today to introduce to you and through you Mr. Fred Drury. Fred is an excellent example of how care for employees on the jobsite can have remarkable impact and remarkable effects. He is the owner of Flexxaire Manufacturing Incorporated. They employ about 40 machinists, welders, electrical assembly people, and they are currently celebrating 3,308 days without a chargeable incident. Now, depending on how you want to count the number of workdays in a particular year, by any calculation that's going to be somewhere between 12 and 13 years without an incident leading to an injury or a fatality, so there's no wonder that we went to Fred's manufacturing operation to help kick off WorkSafe Alberta. He's here in the members' gallery today. It's the first time, I understand, that he's been able to visit the Legislature when it's in session. I would ask Fred to rise, and we'll give him a very warm welcome and reception.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the House 103 visitors from Spruce Grove. These students attend Brookwood elementary, and they are a great group of kids. The staff and parents are to be commended on the great job they do at Brookwood. The students are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Debbie McFarlane, Mrs. Ev Nixey, Mrs. Nancy St. Amand, by teacher aides Mr. Don Antkow and Mrs. Heather Poff, and by parents Mrs. Cathy Seifrit, Mrs. Cheryl Pitruniak, Mr. Brad Wilson, Mrs. Cherine Campbell, Mrs. Laurie Moeller, Mrs. Betty Lou Lesoway, Mr. Doug Gallacher, Mr. Darrell Hancock, Mr. Bob Shepherd, Mrs. Brenda Maginnis. They are seated in both galleries, and I would ask that they rise and be granted the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 40 visitors from Killam. They include nine parents and teachers and 31 of the best and brightest students from my constituency that this province has, and judging by this group, the future of this province is bright. The teachers are Karin Brussé and Denis Boutin. The group leader is Colleen Helgeton, and parent helpers include Ginette Dammann, Bill Felgate, Meredith Neilsen, Diana

Kelndorfer, Jim Slavik, Barb Holmstrom. I apologize for butchering any names. I also would like to point out that one young lady is turning 12 years old today and is sitting up in the gallery. Her name is Kaylene Bieleny. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. McClelland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to members of the Assembly it gives me great pleasure to introduce my evil twin, the other half. This is, to my knowledge, the first time he's visited this Legislature. I'd ask my brother Brian to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Edmonton Oilers and Calgary Flames

Mr. Norris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on this glorious Alberta day to talk about something near and dear to all of our hearts. As a lifelong Albertan I'm very proud today to recognize our incredibly hardworking Edmonton Oilers and Calgary Flames. These teams' efforts have simply been outstanding during the year and during the play-offs. The Oilers have played extremely well, giving their best and, in doing so, providing us with some outstanding hockey. Edmontonians have been overwhelmingly supportive of their team. Sold-out crowds have rocked the Skyreach Centre, and sound barrier breaking cheers and applause are there every night, and in true Alberta style they just as enthusiastically cheered the anthem of our U.S. visitors.

It's great to say, Mr. Speaker, that in Alberta we have two world-class hockey teams, the Edmonton Oilers and the Calgary Flames. As well as providing Albertans with superb entertainment, the Oilers and the Flames are ambassadors for Alberta and the world, promoting our province throughout North America and indeed the world, and both teams have value-added impacts upon our economy. The benefits include taxation dollars to all levels of government as well as numerous spin-off jobs in food, merchandising, retailing, and of course the sale of beer. This coupled with the crowds attending the games circulates money throughout the cities and keeps our healthy economy vibrant. From all perspectives it's a winning arrangement for Edmonton, Calgary, and the province of Alberta.

On behalf of all Albertans I would like the Edmonton Oilers to know that we'll be cheering for them, and even though we're not in Dallas, I know that because we are so fervent, you'll hear us all the way from Edmonton.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We in the Official Opposition are proud to stand and recognize the Edmonton Oilers Hockey Club and the numerous benefits this club brings to Alberta. The play-off series between the Oilers and the Dallas Stars has been fierce. With the series tied at two games each, tonight the game in Dallas will be playing in most Alberta homes, restaurants, and sports bars.

Each time the Oilers score a goal on the ice, the Alberta economy heats up a notch. A world-class hockey club coupled with world-class hockey fans means numerous opportunities for economic growth and diversification in the province. From producing and selling souvenirs to drawing people into Edmonton hotels, the Oilers keep our economy moving.

Alberta is especially blessed, though, because we have two great hockey teams. That means twice the impact on our economy and twice the chance of a home team making it into the play-offs. The Calgary Flames and their fans also do their part to keep Alberta's economy pumping and vibrant.

The hockey tradition in Alberta will continue long into the future. The battle of Alberta followed by the first-round play-off battle between the Oilers and the Stars will keep Albertans watching for many years to come.

Good luck to the Oilers tonight. We are sure they will bring home a win to Albertans.

head: **Oral Question Period**

Northlands Ad Campaign

Dr. Nicol: Mr. Speaker, the budget introduced last week saw the horse racing industry get a 12 percent increase in funding, and the government continues to give Northlands over \$7 million. This money is being spent on expensive half-page ads promoting the horse racing industry in the context of belittling the conflict in the Middle East through the horse Free Drop. The ad contains quotes such as "the jackals of revenge smell nothing but the sweet bouquet of Free Drop's Jihad" and "the infidel mercenary driver is all about lies." To the Premier: how can the Premier justify allowing taxpayer dollars to be spent on such deeply offensive ads?

1:40

Mr. Klein: First of all, Mr. Speaker, they are not taxpayers' dollars.

In answer to the question, this ad was placed by Northlands and not Horse Racing Alberta, as we understand, because we've done an investigation into this. I agree with the leader of the Liberal opposition that it is a pretty tasteless advertisement, and I encourage those who want to complain to contact Northlands.

I don't think that the Liberals would want this government to begin censoring advertisements by nonprofit organizations, whether or not they receive public dollars, and I would remind the hon. leader of the Liberal Party that virtually all nonprofit organizations receive one form of government dollars or another. I know that through the community facilities enhancement program many of those nonprofits are agencies of the United Way but also receive government dollars, so I don't think that the Liberals would want to impose censorship.

Having said that, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission has advertising guidelines for racing entertainment centres, and this is a racing entertainment centre. I understand that the Minister of Gaming is going to have the commission's regulatory division take a look at this ad to see if it is within those guidelines.

Mr. Speaker, just so the record is clear, this government respects all Albertans of Iraqi and Middle East descent, and we deeply sympathize with innocent Iraqis who were killed or injured in the recent war, and I will certainly ask the Minister of Gaming to look into this advertisement.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Nicol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Premier for that.

Will you table the results of the inquiry in the House so we can know what the Minister of Gaming found out?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I have no problem doing that. I think that this is a very public issue in that the ad is public, in that the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition raised this matter in a public forum, i.e. the Legislature. Therefore, I see no reason why the results of this investigation ought not to be tabled in this Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Nicol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to go to my second question, if I might.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Democracy in the Provincial Government

Dr. Nicol: The Premier has been musing about creating a fire wall around Alberta. All the while this government is creating a fire wall between itself and Albertans. The events of the past few weeks have proven that Alberta is experiencing a democratic deficit. It's been shown that government members are taking advantage of all-expense-paid lobbying functions. Democratically elected local boards have been scrapped, and political concepts such as controlled free votes are being vented out of thin air. To the Premier: given that these lobbying events affect government policy, will the Premier ask the government whip to table a list of those groups which have and will be hosting these functions?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the preamble sort of caught me off guard because it relates in no way, shape, or form to the question, but I don't have a problem with the list being provided. As a matter of fact, I don't have a problem either with the Liberals being invited to these receptions, and I understand that they are indeed invited to some of the receptions, either in conjunction with government MLAs or separately. They have no problem whatsoever. I attend the odd reception or two, and I see lots of Liberals at those receptions, and you know, they have a drink in one hand and hors d'oeuvres in the other hand just like everyone else.

Dr. Nicol: Will the Premier commit to democracy today and reinstate the process of electing regional health authorities?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, no. No.

Dr. Nicol: Given that the term "controlled free vote" actually means toe the line, how can this Premier ask other jurisdictions to become more democratic when his government doesn't follow that advice themselves?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, how we conduct our caucus, I would venture to say, is none of their business. We do not get involved in their caucus matters, nor do we get involved in any way, shape, or form in how they conduct their meetings, nor are we interested. But I will share with the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition how the government caucus deals with issues. We deal with issues as a caucus and in a democratic manner. In other words, caucus reaches consensus as to how we should approach a particular issue, and on this particular issue it was decided as a caucus, not in an autocratic or dictatorial sense, that we would vote in favour of the motion except for those who were vehement in their opposition to the electoral boundary guidelines. That was the decision of the caucus, not my decision but of the caucus.

Calgary Regional Health Authority

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier confirmed the obvious: the executive positions of the Calgary health region are little more than a patronage playground for Tory favourites. In fact, the Premier enjoyed regaling this Assembly with a story of political patronage, boasting how he helped his former deputy minister become the Calgary health region's CEO and claiming that Calgarians got a

bargain because this man did not make half a million dollars or more a year. To the Premier: given that the Premier found it astounding that a CEO of a health region would earn \$500,000, how does he justify that his former deputy minister earns \$500,000 as CEO of the Calgary health region?

Mr. Klein: I don't know what he earns right now, but he certainly didn't start out at that wage. I think his salary was something in the range of \$300,000 a year, which isn't a bad salary.

An Hon. Member: It's a really good salary.

Mr. Klein: No. It's a reasonable salary. It's quite reasonable in terms of what the Liberals would like to see, and that is to spend from \$500,000 to \$700,000 for a person from outside the province who doesn't know the system to come in and run the regional health authority. That is their idea. But that is typical Parkland Institute thinking, you know: no expert is good enough from Alberta; go and hire someone from someplace else. Even though this hon. member is a university professor and academic himself, he doesn't even believe in his own findings. They have to get a professional opinion from someplace else. That is typical Liberal, socialist thinking, Mr. Speaker, that contributes to the rising cost of government, but they could care less.

Ms Carlson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.
The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Well, again to the Premier. The Premier is right. There have been some good raises in this man's package.

Given the sharp criticisms of the Calgary health region from the Motta inquiry, how does the Premier justify the CEO of the Calgary health region, his former deputy minister, receiving a whopping \$50,000 raise last year alone?

Mr. Klein: That is entirely up to the Calgary regional health authority. I'm sure that had that CEO been working for the Liberals and had they been the government, that increase would probably be \$150,000 a year.

Dr. Taft: Again to the Premier: will the Premier disclose to this House how much is being paid by the Calgary health region to his former chief of staff, and can he confirm that his former chief of staff advised the Calgary health region on communications and public relations?

Mr. Klein: He probably does, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if that information is under FOIP or is FOIPable under the rules, but I don't think that there's any secret. I'll tell you what: I would rather have my former chief of staff giving me information and good advice than any Liberal. As a matter of fact, that's why they're at seven members, because they took advice from ill-informed consultants.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Federal/Provincial Relations

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whenever this government gets into any trouble, it looks to find an outside enemy to blame all of its problems on. A favourite target often is the federal govern-

ment. When energy bills get too high, the Premier talks about separation. When the government gets caught raising taxes or receives a scathing report into the Calgary health authority, they speak about putting up a fire wall. To the Premier: given that this government has already studied and rejected the major planks of the so-called fire wall letter, why is the Premier wasting any time on it other than in the hopes of providing yet another distraction from the business of governing this province?

1:50

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, again, this is a caucus matter and ostensibly a party matter, but I guess it relates to government in some way or another and, quite frankly, is none of their business. We don't get involved in the NDs' business. We don't get involved in their, well, little caucus at all, and we don't care how they strategize and how they go out and stir up the unions and militant activity and so on. We know that they do it, but we don't care how they do it.

This again was a situation that was brought up at the party conference, and obviously they were not invited, nor did they bother even to find out what went on at the party annual general meeting. This was a discussion at the party annual general meeting. None of your business what goes on unless you want to make it your business. Then that will be a decision of caucus as to whether we want to invite you in, and I don't think we would.

Mr. Speaker, we will take all the information gleaned from the party convention and the discussion on Alberta's role in Confederation to a meeting of our caucus to decide as a party and perhaps as a government what we want to do vis-à-vis Alberta's role in Confederation. It's as simple as that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the somewhat incensed Premier: why is the government more interested in talking about the \$1 billion wasted on the federal gun registry than it is in talking about \$4 billion to \$5 billion wasted on electricity deregulation?

Mr. Klein: No money has been wasted on electrical deregulation. There have been no taxpayers' dollars allocated to electricity deregulation, Mr. Speaker, but if the ND opposition thinks that it's right to waste \$1 billion – waste, down the drain – on the gun registry, I would challenge them to stand up and say so.

Dr. Pannu: To the Premier again, Mr. Speaker: given that the Calgary public board of education is facing a \$32 billion shortfall, when a judge calls the Calgary health authority under siege and in crisis, shouldn't the Premier be looking after his own backyard rather than picking fights with the neighbours?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'm not picking a fight with anyone. What our message is to the federal government is that we want to be a strong and meaningful member of the Canadian family. We want the federal government to understand and recognize the contribution that this province makes to Confederation, but we also want the federal government to understand some of the frustrations amongst the majority of Albertans, not the minority, not the very small minority that support the socialists, but the majority of Albertans, who have major concerns over the absolutely sinful waste of money, the billion dollars on the gun registry, who have concerns over the fact that we have in this province elected two Senators through a duly democratic process, over the Canadian Wheat Board, which is highly discriminatory, over the Kyoto protocol that was implemented. The

resolution passed in the House of Commons without any consultation with the province. And the list goes on. Albertans who contribute so much through equalization payments, so much more than they get back, are saying to Mr. Dion and Mr. Chrétien: listen to us. These are the concerns of the majority, not the Liberal minority, not the ND minority but the Conservative majority in this province. Listen to us. That's all we're saying.

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

Telemarketing Fraud

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Telemarketing fraud in Canada has risen steadily over the past five years. According to a recent *W5* program, Canada is considered to be a haven for telemarketing con artists, who use this activity to take tens of thousands of dollars from unsuspecting citizens. It's been reported that organized crime is becoming involved in this fraud to a great extent because of the easy money and lenient laws and punishments. My first question is to the Minister of Seniors. What advice can be given to my constituents, especially seniors, when they receive a telemarketing call?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Woloshyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in 2001 the Ministry of Seniors along with Children's Services, Alberta Government Services, Solicitor General, and 11 community groups developed a fraud awareness package directed at seniors and seniors' caregivers. The package is called *If in Doubt, Check It Out*, and it's targeting all sorts of fraud, one of which is the telemarketing aspect of it. What I would suggest in short to the hon. member is for anybody, not only a senior, who receives telemarketing solicitations: unless they know 100 percent what it's about, say no. Don't give out your credit card number, don't give out personal information, and then phone the police or, if you still have concerns, consumer affairs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you. My second question is to the Minister of Government Services. What protection from telemarketers does the Alberta government give?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If an Albertan is sold something by a telemarketer, like a product or a service, and they are dissatisfied with that product or service or feel that they have been misled by a telemarketer, the Fair Trading Act in Alberta protects those consumers. Should they be dissatisfied, then they can call our consumer protection branch, and we will investigate. If through the investigation we find that an offence has been made to the Fair Trading Act, we will go through the process of convicting. Telemarketers that would do that type of thing would be subject to a \$100,000 fine and/or two years in jail.

If consumers out there would like to see their name come off a telemarketer's list – the telemarketers in Canada are licensed under the CRTC – the consumers can phone or write the CRTC and ask to be taken off that telemarketer's list. As well, the Direct Marketing Council of Canada will also assist consumers in getting their names off a list. Albertans can call our 1-877-427-4088 line and get the numbers for Alberta consumer protection, for the CRTC, and for the Canadian Direct Marketing Association.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you. My third question is to the Solicitor General. What is the Alberta Solicitor General's department doing in response to telemarketing fraud?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good question that the member has brought up, and it's an important one. It's an unfortunate truth about telemarketing fraud: it is a crime that affects seniors mostly. As part of our focus on crime prevention my department supports the Heads Up Fraud Prevention Association, and in 2001 we gave Heads Up a \$10,000 crime prevention grant to develop awareness programs and to expand to 20 new Wise Owl programs across Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Wise Owl works directly with seniors to increase awareness about fraud and decrease victimization. Telemarketing fraud is an important focus of both the Heads Up and Wise Owl programs, and my department, as the Minister of Seniors has mentioned, is working together with 11 other members in regard to the Seniors Fraud Awareness Committee, and the goal of the committee is to prevent seniors from becoming victims of fraud by increasing their awareness about types of crime. This is a huge concern to this government, and we will continue to work together with our partners.

Calgary Regional Health Authority

(continued)

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier stated that the priority for Calgary was the construction of a new children's hospital. However, in 1998 the Premier said, and I quote: clearly, southeast Calgary has been identified as one of the fastest growing areas, and that's where the next hospital should be built. To the Premier: since the Premier himself identified a hospital in southeast Calgary as a priority five years ago, how does the Premier respond to Vince Motta's father, who said, and I quote: if we had a hospital in the south, I bet Vince would be with us.

2:00

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'm still of the opinion – this is my personal opinion – that, yes, the southern part of Calgary is growing at a very, very fast pace. Indeed, the Calgary regional health authority has identified the southeast sector as the next area for a hospital, but in the interim they also identified the children's hospital as a priority. We agreed with them and have committed funds to the children's hospital. Now, if the hon. member is suggesting that we should abandon the children's hospital and direct the health authority to divert the funds to the southeast hospital and infringe on their decision-making abilities, then stand up and say so.

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, can the Premier explain why Calgarians were forced to choose between a new children's hospital and a badly needed full-service hospital in the southeast?

Mr. Klein: Well, Calgarians are not being forced to choose. Since 1998 the only public comment – and I don't get a lot of cards and letters on this particular issue – has arisen since the Motta situation. We will investigate, certainly, the judge's findings, do a complete analysis of the ruling, and respond to the recommendations as fast as we possibly can.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: if it is all right to blow up or close three hospitals at the same time in Calgary, what's wrong with building two new hospitals at the same time in Calgary?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the list at my fingertips, but first of all we didn't blow up a hospital. We blew down a hospital. It was imploded. It wasn't blown up. That was done after careful consultation and consideration by both the medical profession and the administration of the Calgary regional health authority at that particular time, and it was done for a specific reason. That hospital was imploded, the Holy Cross was closed, and the Grace hospital was relocated, not closed down but relocated to the Foothills hospital site. The two hospitals that were actually closed were closed to allow the Calgary regional hospital authority to open new, modern beds, many of which had never been used before, 700 beds, the equivalent of two hospitals, in existing facilities; i.e., the Loughheed hospital, the Foothills hospital, and the Rockyview. So, in fact, what the hon. member is suggesting has occurred: we opened up the equivalent of two new hospitals in terms of new beds.

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

Lynnview Ridge

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the great honour of serving the residents of the Ogden-Lynnwood community. This area stretches along the beautiful Bow River and has a history dating back to the very early days of Calgary and even long before that. A number of the residents have requested the provincial government to investigate whether the Lynnview Ridge area was a possible buffalo jump and aboriginal campsite at one time. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. Could the minister clarify for us his department's plan to evaluate Lynnview Ridge as a possible historic resource?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to tell the member that staff from my heritage resources management branch did in fact do a preliminary visit and examination of the site in mid-March, just a month or so ago. We know from that visit that that particular location has had some significant impact from a previous commercial development there, an oil storage facility, plus some redevelopment for real estate purposes that has been done. So there's been significant disturbance, if you will, to the site.

But I should also tell the member that down in the valley below there is Beaverdam Flats Park. There are some oral histories that abound that suggest there might have been some evidence of some kinds of campsites by aboriginal groups in the past, likely thousands of years ago, but none of it is conclusive. In any event, that area is under the jurisdiction of the city of Calgary, and they have indicated to us that they will work with us should they plan any further disturbances to that area in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us if this is the only evidence of possible buffalo hunt activity in the area?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, briefly, Mr. Speaker, there are varying kinds of evidence all around and throughout Calgary. There are probably over a thousand different locations that at one point or another

according to oral history might have had some significant buffalo traffic, if you will. This may well have been one of the sites. Some of the areas go back 8,000 to 9,000 years ago, and it's difficult after all of that time to really finitely determine which other sites might be of historical significance. But we do have a process in place to have that investigated.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental question is to the same minister. How can local residents pursue their interest in having the history of this site commemorated?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation. They have a very capable staff. There are grants available. They'd certainly be welcome to contact staff at that branch, and I'd be happy to give the member the phone number later to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Child Care Workers' Safety

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today's fifth question was provided for us by Karen Collier, the mother of Sharla Collier, a child care worker who was killed last November in Lethbridge. Karen Collier still has many policy questions that she needs answered. My first question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. What is the minister doing to protect child care workers that are supposed to accept violence in the workplace?

Mr. Dunford: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the areas that we became concerned about a number of years ago – actually, it happened to another young woman that had grown up in Lethbridge but was actually murdered on a work site in Calgary – of course was to look into the whole situation about working alone. Now, what we did through that investigation – and it was quite an extensive investigation – was that we determined that the fact of working alone, while somewhat hazardous, wasn't necessarily the full danger. So we put into place some regulations then that if an employer had an employee working alone, there were some things that had to be done. For an example, it required a hazard assessment, it required to make sure that the employee was aware of the hazards that were in existence, and then thirdly provided for a means of communication should that employee get into some difficulty.

So when the situation then happened in Lethbridge with the child care worker, we were of course involved in the investigation. Our policy has not changed. We have actually posted an order requiring the employer to ensure that given these kinds of situations the working-alone regulations would be adhered to, and as a matter of fact we have an ongoing investigation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Children's Services. What is the minister doing to make sure another child doesn't fall through the cracks and present a risk to himself and others?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to, in the follow-

through with the answer given by the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, just make an observation to this Assembly. At the time we completed our special case review relative to the findings of the Collier case, a most regrettable and a most tragic case, we were well aware that this case was before the courts. To be case specific, point specific relative to this case would be totally inappropriate for me as minister, but I would like to just make this observation. Every day, 24/7, 365 days a year the contracts we define for agencies and the work that we do with our social workers and the training that they receive is geared to make sure of worker safety and the best interests of the child.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Thank you. Again to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: how is Workplace Health and Safety monitoring agencies like the one Sharla worked for to ensure that health and safety guidelines are followed?

Mr. Dunford: We have a protocol that we use, Mr. Speaker, in terms of inspections. I want to indicate, though, to the hon. member but also to the House and to the Alberta public generally that because of this case we haven't targeted any of the personal care situations that are here in the province. We have an ongoing investigation, as I mentioned in my first response this afternoon, but it is certainly a part of our obligation in making sure that the working-alone regulation is followed by employers in this province to do periodic checks on a random basis.

I must say to all employers and employees that might be listening today to make sure that they take this situation seriously because if an unfortunate incident like what happened to Miss Collier was to happen again, one of the first questions we're going to be asking is: okay; where are the rules governing working alone? Where is the hazard assessment? Where is the written material that ensures that you've made your employees aware, then, of the particular hazard, and what is the specific device that you're using for employees to be able to communicate with the employer?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Cormorant Control Project

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. In 2002 this House passed the fisheries amendment act which I introduced to address the problems with the decreasing fish populations. It is my understanding that the minister's department has plans to carry out a project to decrease cormorant populations in Alberta, which, by the way, would be a most welcome initiative in the Lac La Biche area. Can the minister please provide us with details of this plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. I'd be happy to provide some detail on our cormorant control project in the Lac La Biche area. The project is a comprehensive plan that's part of our overall plan in sports and commercial fisheries management in Alberta.

In relation to cormorants, Mr. Speaker, there are over 15,000 cormorant nests and about 62 nesting areas across the province, but

about 50 percent of those cormorant nests are in the Lac La Biche area itself. My department, of course, heard from many people as to their continued concern about the negative impact cormorants may have in both the sports and commercial fisheries. We are launching a five-year pilot project to study their impact on the fisheries, and we also intend to control the population by oiling cormorant eggs in some areas to restrict the hatching of eggs. Of course, as we do this, we'll monitor closely and gather data as we move forward working closely with our biologists.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental and my next question to the same minister: how will this control pilot project be monitored during the next five-year period, and what information are you hoping to acquire?

Mr. Cardinal: Of course, Mr. Speaker, this is a very important project. The member mentioned monitoring. It is very important as we move forward with the pilot project that we monitor closely so we do the right things for Albertans. The issue has been boiling for a number of years and surfacing as a problem across the province. The biologists in my department have been doing studies, have been monitoring the process as we move forward and will continue doing that.

Mr. Danyluk: My final question, Mr. Speaker. In fact, there needs to be a conclusive study on the amount and the species of fish that cormorants do eat in the northeast area. What research was conducted before this decision was made for the pilot project?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, one of the areas we research, of course, is the population, which has increased drastically in Alberta. In fact, fish research conducted both in Ontario and New York gave us some understanding as to what negative impacts the cormorant population has in certain jurisdictions. We will also be working closely with the University of Alberta, of course, and our biologists in designing the project as we move forward. Again I'd like to stress that we will monitor it very closely.

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

Bow River Fish Ladder

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fish ladder at Carseland on the Bow River is used every spring by rainbow trout and many other fish. They use the ladder to swim upstream to the small creeks and ponds where they spawn. In fact, the rainbow trout run is currently near its yearly peak. Unfortunately, the province has chosen this time to replace the fish ladder, an operation that will keep the ladder closed for at least another week. This will be damaging not only to the fish population but also to all those Albertans who fish on the Bow. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Why has your department allowed this ladder replacement to proceed at precisely the time when the trout need this ladder the most?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, in fact, that concern has just been brought to my attention by a number of MLAs, and I've agreed either to go visit the project immediately or deal with the issue immediately.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the minister for that answer.

To him as well: what scientific evidence did the minister consult so as to disrupt the spawning of these trout at exactly the time when they're most vulnerable?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, I'll be honest. The issue was brought to my attention just recently, and I've agreed to deal with it immediately.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, he has only one week to rectify the problem. Does he think he can do that within the next week, while the fish are spawning?

Mr. Cardinal: Not like the Liberals, Mr. Speaker, who would take a year to do it, we'll do it immediately.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Municipal Financing Corporation

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association recently wrote the Premier with concerns that proposed changes to the Municipal Financing Corporation will allow private business to borrow from the same pool of money at the same rate as municipalities and other local authorities. The AUMA expressed disappointment with the lack of consultation with municipalities on the proposed changes and urged the government to reverse them. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Is it the government's intention to allow P3 entities that may own approved hospitals or other public infrastructure to borrow from the new Alberta capital finance authority, in competition with the municipalities and other local authorities?

Mrs. Nelson: Mr. Speaker, the AMFC is an entity that was created through legislation, and clearly if the hon. member will go to the act, he will see that there is a list of shareholders that are involved in the AMFC, and those are the people who are able through regulation to make financial arrangements with the lending institution itself. There would not be the opportunity for those that were not members of the shareholder list to participate in AMFC. It is there for a specific purpose, and it has been very, very successful. I do believe that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has had a subsequent meeting with the group and dialogued on this, so I'd ask him to supplement the answer.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Finance has indicated, I spoke to the president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association yesterday. I would like to clarify, based on what was said yesterday by the hon. member, number one, that when we met, the meeting was positive, and they are extremely pleased. Contrary to the document that the hon. member held up, that does not in any way, shape, or form reflect anything that the AUMA said, and that was reaffirmed yesterday by the president of the AUMA.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and that had nothing to do with the question.

Just to be clear, is the Minister of Finance then categorically ruling out the possibility of a policy change of the government that might lead to P3 entities being able to borrow from the new capital finance authority?

Mrs. Nelson: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to make it again abundantly clear that AMFC is an entity that's created through legislation, and it clearly lists the shareholders who are involved in the corporation, and there are rules attached to it. It is very rigidly governed, and there's no anticipation of making changes to that. We did make a change last year when we did allow the three airport authorities to participate in the organization, but we do not have any further changes that are moving forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While this is indeed welcome news, why did the government fail to consult with AUMA on the proposed changes to the Municipal Financing Corporation?

Mrs. Nelson: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have any proposed changes other than an administrative change, that is before the House now.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Rathgeber: Mr. Speaker, Budget 2003 contains welcome tax cuts to corporations in the amount of \$94 million. However, government spending is up to \$20.8 billion, and at \$6,420 per capita some groups argue that we have the highest spending in the country. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. Is the minister not concerned that these spending habits are going to compromise the Alberta advantage?

Mrs. Nelson: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta advantage has been applauded from coast to coast, from east to west to north to south, and it's an advantage that we are very fortunate to have in this province. Yes, we do have a large resource revenue side of the equation that we count on. Yes, we do have large revenues. Yes, we do have expenditures. But in this year's budget we were able to maintain a 4.9 percent increase in spending on the operating of programs in the province.

Let's look at the Alberta advantage that is actually here, Mr. Speaker. We enjoy the lowest overall tax regime in all of Canada. We have the best competition rate in all of Canada. We have a government that has had 10 consecutive balanced budgets, 10 years. We have reduced our accumulated debt in this province by 80 percent. No other province could do that. We will be the first province to be debt free. We have the highest spending per capita in Canada for learning in this province. All of these are advantages to Albertans. Then this year, in addition to that, we have recognized the need to have our advantage enhanced by putting \$5.5 billion into infrastructure and transportation programs to further enhance the Alberta advantage within this province. I don't think Albertans are complaining. In fact, I think they're very proud to be part of that Alberta advantage.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rathgeber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when are Alberta families going to enjoy tax cuts comparable to those recently announced to Alberta corporations?

Mrs. Nelson: Well, clearly, Mr. Speaker, when we started to be able to move into a different fiscal structure, we were able to announce the reductions in personal income taxes and a new tax regime. We have a single rate of taxation within this province, which makes us the envy of all other provinces. We also have the highest personal exemption in the country in the province of Alberta. Last year and this year we were able to make sure that we inflation-proofed that personal exemption so that we maintained that tax advantage. That was at a cost of \$130 million. Albertans are enjoying lower taxes on the personal side.

Now, at the same time, we did announce that we were going to be reducing corporate taxes, and we could only do that when it was affordable. We had to go at a slower pace than we did with the personal tax reductions, but this year we were able to proceed and continue with some of our corporate tax reductions to the tune of \$94 million.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rathgeber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, also to the Minister of Finance: with debt servicing costs of \$465 million per year, when is this government going to make debt repayment a higher priority so that further tax relief can be offered to individual Albertans?

Mrs. Nelson: Well, Mr. Speaker, striking the right balance by dealing with all of the pressures that come to a government is sometimes difficult. This year we were able to report that we were over 10 years ahead of the scheduled debt retirement legislative package that had been put forward by our government. In fact, over 80 percent of our debt had already been retired. In the last few years we have been putting dollars from additional operating surpluses into an account to pay off our debt as it comes due. I've said in this House many times: I cannot pay our debt off faster than we are today. So it makes sense for us to recognize the fact that we'll use dollars that we've put away in the debt retirement account to retire debt this year and partway through next year. In the meantime, we will invest in very much needed infrastructure and transportation, and getting that balance is critical. Albertans have asked us to do that, and we have listened, and we are responding.

Seniors' Lodges

Ms Blakeman: A number of seniors' lodges are struggling to maintain the same level of service. Costs are rising, provincial grants remain the same as 1995, and the province no longer provides sustained capital funding for new units. My questions today are to the Minister of Seniors. Why has the minister chosen to continue the government funding freeze for seniors' lodges for almost a decade while their costs have continued to rise?

Mr. Woloshyn: Mr. Speaker, that's a relatively good question, but we have to keep in mind that the lodges are operated by lodge authorities, and a good number of them are owned by the province. Yes, some authorities are entering into financial difficulty, and we are working with those people to see how we can best address the problem.

The preamble to the question was totally wrong. Seniors are not in jeopardy. Seniors are receiving good service in the lodges. We have been working with the lodge authorities to ensure that the rents being paid are fair and equitable and that there is in fact a proper cash flow. I might add that under the current system some lodge authorities have surpluses, some have shortfalls, some requisition

municipalities, and some do not. We are currently working with two or three major lodge authorities to see how we can best address the problems.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Why does the minister continue to fund an unequal and lesser rate to larger management bodies given that they have higher expenditures, especially in the cities?

Mr. Woloshyn: Again a thorough lack of research. A few years ago the lodges in Lethbridge, Edmonton, and Calgary because of their size came forward saying that their costs were much lower due to their economies of scale and that the rural lodges were smaller and had higher costs. That was agreed upon. That system of differential funding, in my mind, is fair, it's equitable, and it recognizes the different needs of different areas. All lodges have increased costs, urban and rural.

With respect to construction, Mr. Speaker, the lodge improvement program as administered by Infrastructure has been putting millions of dollars into lodge renovations on an annual basis for the past number of years in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Given that some municipalities are expressing extreme concern that they have had to take on more debt to build new lodges and to finance soaring operation costs, why is the minister putting municipalities in a position that the province would never accept for itself?

Mr. Woloshyn: That is true. Some lodge authorities who choose to expand have gone forward and borrowed money. I must say that these borrowings have to be approved by the ministry. They have to be endorsed by the supporting municipalities who are part of the overall operation. We do give them the flexibility of making the decisions and try to ensure that the decisions are the right ones. We certainly don't want a community who wants, needs the lodges and whose municipalities support that to be stopped by the minister because he feels differently. The soaring costs of operations are a concern, and we are trying to address those.

2:30head: Members' Statements

The Budget Race

Mr. Mason: It's a field of five racing at the Legislature track for the Government Priorities Cup. It's the Budget Race.

They're at the post, and they're off. Taking an early lead is Better Health Care. Gonna get away second is the favourite, Public Schools. Racing in third is the 1 to 5 choice, Cheap Power, and on the outside are long shots Corporate Tax Cuts and Horse Racing Subsidy.

Into the first turn Better Health Care is dropping behind. Public Schools is setting the pace with Corporate Tax Cuts and Horse Racing Subsidy coming on strong on the outside. Cheap Power is falling behind.

Coming out of the turn it's Public Schools with Corporate Tax Cuts and Horse Racing Subsidy close on his heels. Next, Better Health Care and Cheap Power dropping further behind. Corporate Tax Cuts on the outside moving up on Public Schools. Corporate Tax Cuts taking the lead. Horse Racing Subsidy overtaking Public Schools, who is faltering badly. Better Health Care is next with Cheap Power falling almost completely out of sight. Pacing with the

lead now is Corporate Tax Cuts. Holding the lead to five is Horse Racing Subsidy. Public Schools, who looked good at the start, is falling back. Next, the 500 to 1 shot, Better Health Care. Cheap Power is not even on the horizon.

Into the final turn it's Corporate Tax Cuts and Horse Racing Subsidy neck and neck. Further back, Public Schools with Better Health Care, and Cheap Power may not even place. Corporate Tax Cuts, Horse Racing Subsidy. No, it's Corporate Tax Cuts, Horse Racing Subsidy.

It's down to the wire, and the winner is Corporate Tax Cuts, taking in a purse of \$94 million. Horse Racing Subsidy gets a consolation prize of \$37 million. Public Schools, Better Health Care, and Cheap Power finish out of the money.

Better luck next year.

Public/Private Partnerships

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry. This House has been warned repeatedly about the dangers of financing public infrastructure through public/private partnerships. Not only is this method of financing more expensive to the taxpayer, but it takes local control of these buildings from communities and places it in the hands of profit-driven corporations.

Some members of this House undoubtedly think that my opposition to P3 financing is simply an ideological and rash reaction. This couldn't be further from the truth. There's been a considerable amount of research into the practical application of P3s, and there is a large amount of supporting evidence that P3 financing has cost taxpayers more and has decreased the value and service citizens receive for their money. Examples such as the Confederation Bridge in the Maritimes, Evergreen Park school in New Brunswick, P3-financed schools in Nova Scotia, the Hamptons project in Calgary, and many projects in Britain, Australia, and U.S. have shown that P3 financing just doesn't work. In fact, it can't work.

We all know that Alberta has a credit rating that makes corporations green with envy. We can borrow money at a rate far lower than any corporation ever could. Thus, when a corporation borrows money to finance a P3, it borrows at a higher rate than the provincial government. The corporation then passes the added cost on to Alberta taxpayers. Moreover, P3s mean that Albertans have to pay for the profit margin of the financing corporation and the added costs of a new middleman. The bottom line is this: if we need new infrastructure, it's cheaper to borrow the money ourselves rather than let a corporation do it for us.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are best served by publicly financed infrastructure. The schools, hospitals, and the very House we use today stand as proud testaments to the fact that there is no substituting for public money and control over public infrastructure, testaments we might not now have if they were built using P3 financing.

I urge all of my colleagues in this House to remember that public buildings are meant for the people and not for profit.

Thank you.

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

Alberta Research Council

Ms Graham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Increasingly in various circles in the province, particularly in government, there is a growing realization that we must extract much more value from our financial investment in research and development in the province. Innovation is the key to this situation: converting ideas into products and services and shortening the time to commercialization. A strong

innovation system ideally consists of more applied research, stronger ties between the private sector, institutions, and all levels of government, and higher rates of technology commercialization, and this is, in fact, our government's vision for a stronger and healthier value-added economy.

The Alberta Research Council, with which I am proudly associated as chair of the board, is a key player in Alberta's innovation system. ARC as the major performer of applied research in the province is in the unique position to bridge the gap between knowledge and technology and the marketplace. ARC has been progressive in its approach to technology commercialization, seeking out opportunities to work with others to forge profitable and mutually beneficial ventures.

One of ARC's new initiatives involves strengthening ties with colleges and technical institutes in the province. Together the Alberta Association of Colleges and Technical Institutes and ARC are collaborating to investigate ways to enhance the role of colleges and institutes in innovation in Canada, and as part of this effort I will be visiting colleges across the province to help promote the need to build Alberta's innovation capacity through strengthened ties with our colleges. My first visit will be to Olds College on April 29.

In expanding the innovation system in Alberta we are only limited by our imagination. ARC is working hard to help achieve a stronger, brighter future for all Albertans through efforts such as I have just described.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Stan Reynolds

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to honour a great Albertan: Stan Reynolds. Mr. Reynolds is the man behind many of the fascinating pieces at the Reynolds-Alberta Museum in Wetaskiwin.

Early in his life Stan Reynolds began buying and collecting cars. He subsequently donated his collection of cars to the museum so that everybody could partake in their rarity and beauty. Mr. Reynolds has contributed over \$11 million in donations to the museum that bears his name, and the community of Wetaskiwin is grateful for his involvement in both the museum and the community.

Yesterday it was my honour to be present when the Friends of Reynolds-Alberta Museum presented a video called *Stan Reynolds - The Great Collector*. The video is a biography of Mr. Reynolds' life, and it shows the spirit of collecting he so wonderfully embodies. Mr. Reynolds was a guest of honour at yesterday's screening, which took place at the museum, and many people from the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency were there to pay tribute to the classic car collector.

In the video Mr. Reynolds stated, and I quote: when I started collecting, I had no idea there would be an increase in value. This is my life work; rather than see it destroyed, I wanted to preserve it. End quote. This attitude is the reason why the Reynolds-Alberta Museum exists and continues to remain extremely popular. I encourage all hon. members to go out to the museum to take in the wide assortment of classic cars, airplanes, and machinery.

I would like to extend warm congratulations to Stan Reynolds on his life's work and thank him for his vision, dedication, and valuable collections on display at Reynolds-Alberta Museum.

Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. members, the majority of members in the House

today were not in the Assembly when the Assembly did not have part of its Routine, Members' Statements and Recognitions, and when these changes were made, they were made in such a way as to afford an opportunity for hon. members to wax eloquent on a subject matter that they wanted. The last two members were recognized, were met with great decorum in the House, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed and the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. There was no interference, no heckling, no statements. That could not be said the same way for the first two hon. members who were recognized this afternoon. It's a forum of decorum, and I would really encourage you to remember again why we have this and what is expected of us when we do have it.

head: **Presenting Reports by**
Standing and Special Committees

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

Ms Graham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on Private Bills has had certain bills under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that the following private bill proceed: Bill Pr. 1, Sisters of St. Joseph of the Province of Alberta Statutes Repeal Act.

The committee also recommends that the following private bill proceed with an amendment: Bill Pr. 2, Forest Lawn Bible College Act. As part of this report I will be tabling five copies of the amendment proposed for this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I request the concurrence of the Assembly in this report.

The Speaker: Do the hon. members agree?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Opposed? It's concurred.

2:40head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a document in which 212 Calgarians petition this Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to do the following three things:

1. To immediately withdraw the draft management plan for the Evan-Thomas Provincial Recreation Area and revise it so as to disallow any further commercial or residential development of the Kananaskis Valley;
2. To redesignate the Evan-Thomas Provincial Recreation Area and adjacent unprotected public lands as a Provincial Park, with those parts currently undeveloped designated as Wildland Provincial Park;
3. To maintain Kananaskis Country in a natural state that provides high quality wildlife habitat and nature-based recreational opportunities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice to the Assembly that since Monday next is a holiday, there will be no notice of written questions or motions for returns until a week from today.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to be able to table with the House today five copies of the 25th Legislature MLA receptions list that has been co-ordinated – and I emphasize the word “co-ordinated” – through my office by a number of groups around the province that have asked to meet with MLAs on issues that are near and dear to their hearts. The list includes things like the Chambers of Commerce, Grant MacEwan College, Telus, the University of Alberta, and the Long Term Care Association. These are the ones that we attend if we choose during session on Wednesday nights. I'm pleased to do this. I gave it to the press last week. I gave it to the press last year. There's nothing that I'm ashamed of here, and if everybody would prefer we not co-ordinate these, that's just fine. They will continue to happen whether I co-ordinate them or not.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter from Ms Shirley Reid, issues co-chair, Canadian Federation of University Women Alberta Council, addressed to the Premier. I received a copy of it. Ms Reid is urging all levels of government to work collaboratively in a nonconfrontational manner to adopt and implement the Romanow report recommendations as soon as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Mayor George Rogers, the president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, dated March 31, 2003, addressed to the Premier. The AUMA is urging the provincial government to stop the passage of Bill 20, the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation Amendment Act, 2003.

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

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise with a handful of tablings today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a letter sent today to the Minister of Health and Wellness concerning issues of toxic mold at the Foothills hospital in Calgary.

The second is copies of a postcard calling for “fully funded high quality public education now” from a Mark Glover of Edmonton.

The next is copies of letters to the Minister of Learning and to the Premier expressing concern over cutbacks in public school education in the province.

The next is a letter written by the Windsor Park School Council to the Premier and the Minister of Learning and to me expressing concern over elementary school class sizes and funding.

Finally, copies of postcards calling for fully funded public education. Barbara Krahn says, “Fund the arbitrated settlement fully,” and the other says, “Show you have a vision for this province by making the future of its youth a priority.”

Thank you.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Carlson: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, at this time I would ask that the Deputy Government House Leader share next week's projected government business with us.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, Easter Monday will be a holiday, so there will be no sitting.

Tuesday afternoon will be designated Committee of Supply for Seniors. Tuesday evening will be designated Committee of Supply for Economic Development and, if time permits, second reading of bills 18, 12, 28, 29, 31, and 32, and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply, the opposition has designated the Department of Finance, and we'll do that plus anything else that time might permit as per the Order Paper. Wednesday evening Committee of Supply will be Municipal Affairs and, if time permits, second reading on bills 18, 12, 28, 29, 31, 32, depending again on progress made the day before, and possibly Committee of the Whole for bills 6, 10, 14, and 16, and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday afternoon under Government Bills and Orders Committee of Supply will consider the Department of Infrastructure. That's it for now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on a point of order.

Point of Order
Allegations against Members
Imputing Motives

Ms Carlson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I stand on Standing Order 23(h) and (i) with regard to an exchange between the Member for Edmonton-Riverview and the Premier during question period today. In answer to the question from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview the Premier once again today made numerous allegations and talked about hypothetical situations. I don't have the Blues in front of me, but the essence of the comments that the Premier made was that he believed the Liberals would want to pay outrageous amounts of money to CEOs from somewhere outside of the province. This both indicates a hypothetical situation and makes an allegation and then imputes false motives to us by indicating that we would do this when in fact the only people actually paying outrageous salaries in this province are the Premier and his government.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've been in this Assembly for a long time, and I've heard all kinds of different things that get said from time to time both officially and/or across the bow. We only need to look at some of the preambles, for example, which are highly inflammatory and far more damaging attempts at cutting than anything I heard the Premier say today for certain. I think the Premier made some reference to the fact that the Liberal opposition had some ill-informed consultants going into the previous election. I think election results might or might not bear that out. So I would suggest that consideration be given to the tempo and gusto of the debate that took place this afternoon and hope that others might agree and that you might rule in your wisdom, of course, that this is merely a question of interpretation more than it is a point of order.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that this is the second consecutive day the Premier has made completely unfounded allegations about our intentions. I refer you to *Hansard* yesterday in which, among other things, he said, "What the Liberals want [is] to hire someone from out of province at an inflated salary, because it fits in with the traditional patterns of unreasonable, unaccountable, Liberal spending."

Now, we have in no way, shape, or form advocated or considered what the Premier alleged yesterday. Because of our good graces we let that one pass, but today he repeated the allegation, and I think there needs to be an end brought to this line of false accusation and imputing of motives by the Premier against us.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 23(h) says, "makes allegations against another member." Standing Order 23(i) says, "imputes false or unavowed motives to another member." The operative rules and the operative words in these two Standing Orders are "another member."

What was said was the following: "It's quite reasonable in terms of what the Liberals would like to see," and then it goes on to say, "and that is to spend." That is not against another member. Interesting use of words.

Actually, I anticipated an entirely different point of order. That was not a point of order. There could have been two. First of all, the Premier could have raised one against the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview when the member was asking someone to justify something. The purpose of question period is to deal with government policy. The other one could have gone the other way: would impute motives in terms of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview might have taken a point of order with the Premier when the hon. Premier said, "He doesn't even believe in his own findings." That certainly would have been imputing motives. But neither one was right, so we move on.

I hope the Easter bunny will be good to everybody this weekend.

2:50head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'll call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2003-04**

Environment

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Dr. Taylor: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to talk about my estimates today. I'm going to keep my comments brief. It is Thursday afternoon and it is a long weekend, so I'm going to keep my comments brief.

So maybe there is some hope that we can take some questions, and definitely we will provide written responses to anything I don't answer. That's been my history. The opposition has got full answers to all their questions if I don't respond to all of them here. I guarantee you that you will get full answers on both sides. Both opposition parties will get full answers to all their questions if I don't respond here, so I just want to assure the members of that, because I have in the past found the time very valuable. I've tried to be honest with the members of the opposition and will continue to do that today.

So it is a pleasure, Mr. Chairman, for me to be able to address the issues around environment and the Department of Environment. This is my third set of estimates. For the first one, perhaps, I was just made minister, so it could be rightly laid at the feet of somebody else. But certainly the last one and this one are mine, and the department is moving in the direction that we need them to move. I want to say that being Minister of Environment has been a tremendous learning experience for me. I mean, it's just incredible how much I've learned around environmental issues, environmental law and so on, and that's because I have excellent staff.

I've got a really fantastic staff, and I've really received many, many compliments from my colleagues in the House. Even some opposition members have complimented my staff as to how co-operative my staff has been in answering questions and dealing with their issues, other than, of course, one member. All the other members in the House are very complimentary towards my staff. So as we move forward, I look forward to that kind of working relationship the staff has with the MLAs of all parties out in the field.

Now, as it happens, many of the issues happen in rural Alberta, so we tend to run into, on the whole, more Conservative MLAs in rural Alberta, but we have dealt with an issue in the Leader of the Opposition's riding in terms of a cattle and truck wash. He approached me on those issues, and I believe we answered his questions. It's in Little Bow's riding.

Mr. McFarland: I'm his MLA.

Dr. Taylor: Oh. Well, there you go. The hon. Member for Little Bow is the MLA for the Leader of the Opposition. That's good to know because the next time when the Leader of the Opposition asks me a question, I should tell him to refer it to his MLA and then the MLA can ask me the question. Certainly that might be a better process, and I'd be pleased to work in that fashion if the Leader of the Opposition would like to.

We are moving in the direction that we need to move, Mr. Chair. We have had some shift in how we manage our environmental and enforcement programs. The philosophy that we're trying to drive is one of education, one of leadership. As I've said many times in the past, if we have to fine somebody, if we have to charge somebody, then the mess has already been made. From my perspective and many persons' perspectives it's much better to actually prevent the mess. Now, if we have to charge, we will continue to charge, but, as I say, at that stage there's already been environmental damage, and we prefer not to get to that stage. So we will continue trying to educate Albertans, educate Alberta companies, so that they don't do the environmental damage.

I did release to the House some time ago our enforcement actions of the previous year, and I don't have it with me, unfortunately, but I can remember that there were millions – millions – of dollars in fines. So we do enforce when we have to and it's necessary, and that is certainly something that we have to do. When we enforce, we'll do it heavy and we'll do it hard. I'd, as I say, prefer to educate before so you don't have to enforce, but some cases we have to enforce, and we'll continue to do that.

We are dealing with a number of major issues, Mr. Chair. We're certainly dealing with climate change issues, and that has been a major emphasis of the department. We're also dealing next year with water issues, and as we move forward, some of our budget is going to be devoted to water strategy and how we deal with significant issues around water.

Those are two major issues we're dealing with. Water for Life I've talked about in this House and had some excellent questions from the member opposite, the Lady in Red I guess I could say. That's not impolite, I don't think, in the House because I'm not using her name. [interjection] Excellent song I might say about *Lady in Red* as well. As we move forward, we will continue to address these important issues.

We have got an increase in budget this year, Mr. Chair. Some of the increase in budget will be going forward with the Water for Life strategy. Other areas are certainly going to be increased in the budget as well, so as we move forward we will continue to deal with important environmental issues that affect Albertans and affect Alberta's environments. All Albertans, including myself, want to leave the smallest footprint possible on the environment.

An Hon. Member: You know what they say about small feet.

Dr. Taylor: No, I don't know what they say about small feet, Mr. Minister. Perhaps you'd like to get up and tell me what they say about small feet.

Certainly, as we move forward, Mr. Chair, we intend to continue to enforce environmental regulation and at the same time educate the population and deal with these significant issues that we're dealing with as the Department of Environment.

I'll stop there. As I said, Mr. Chair, I intend to keep my comments brief, and hopefully we can answer briefly some of the questions from the member opposite, as I said, the lovely Lady in Red, and we'll go forward from there.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Compliments aren't going to help this, Minister; sorry. But I would really like to compliment the minister's staff. They have been very co-operative, and we do get good information from them when we ask for it, and they have been very helpful in a number of areas. I would set a challenge for the minister, though. We actually get more information from the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development's department, so perhaps he could take that as a challenge for the next year in terms of keeping us informed on the issues. But your staff is excellent. They're very friendly to deal with. They answer our questions in a very reasonable time frame. We often get briefings on information that is helpful to us as we move forward.

3:00

The format for today. Now, I'm torn between the minister who's asking for an early release day and other ministers who are asking me to be particularly tough on this minister. It's tough to do both, but I expect that we can probably wrap this up by 5 o'clock. I'm going to start by asking for the minister to develop some issues that we have talked about in question period that we don't really get an opportunity to, I don't think, get full information on, given the format of question period. Then my other colleagues will go through a list of questions that are more specific on the dollar amounts in the budget. If we don't get through those this afternoon, then we will of course pass them on to the minister in writing, and we have always gotten good responses and timely responses to those written questions.

The first two issues that I would like you to spend some time talking about for us, if you can, are your current policy on interbasin water transfers and your position on a retrofit fund from an environmental perspective on energy.

Dr. Taylor: Well, let me talk first about the interbasin transfers, Mr. Chairman. We have legislation in the province that prevents interbasin transfers, and as a result even a small interbasin transfer is prevented by legislation. So if we want to do it, then we must bring forward a special act to the Legislature.

Last year you saw us bring – I can't remember the number or the name of the act. I'm going to call it the Red Deer water act or something like that. What it was, Mr. Chairman, was a special act to the Legislature to allow interbasin transfer in the Red Deer area. Essentially what it was, briefly, was to allow Red Deer to provide drinking water to a number of other communities out of the Red Deer River, which is in the South Saskatchewan River basin, and some of the communities discharge their wastewater into the Battle River, which is the North Saskatchewan. Although it's treated water in both cases, that still remained an interbasin transfer, so as a result we brought through special legislation to do it.

I don't see any effort and I have no desire to change that legislation. We will leave that legislation where it is because I think that if interbasin transfer is going to occur, then it needs to be very up front and there needs to be a very good discussion of it in this House. That's why if it would occur, then we'd need legislation to do that. I don't have right today any other plans to do any interbasin transfers. I do those only on the request from the communities. This one act that we did do was based on the request from a whole series of communities in central Alberta that are involved with the water supply system there. As I said, as of today I don't have any other requests to do any more interbasin transfers. I don't think it's acceptable. I don't think it's economically viable to even talk about large interbasin transfers from the north to the south. I mean, you'd need a special act here. I've got to be careful what I say because I don't want to give the impression that I'm going to do it or have any ideas of doing it. If at some stage it would happen in the future, it would have to be discussed here, but I have no plans to do that. I think that it's just uneconomical at the present time to do it, and there's not enough known about it, a whole series of issues around it. So I don't see that happening, at least as long as my tenure as the Environment minister.

The second issue was around energy and energy efficiencies. I'm working at the present time with Climate Change Central, and we fund Climate Change Central. We fund their operational costs to the tune of about \$2 million a year. In this budget I have some new money that could be made available to Climate Change Central; it's about 2 and a half million dollars.

I think that the member raises a good issue around encouragement of energy efficiency. I don't believe that it's the government's job to do that. We might disagree, and that's a philosophical and ideological position. I understand that, and that's just my philosophical and ideological position. I don't think the government should be in the business of giving loans, loan guarantees, or grants to individuals. However, Climate Change Central – and I've talked to Climate Change Central and talked as recently as last night about it in a speech in Calgary – may be a body that might be able to do that, and I asked them to give me a proposal. We've started this office, and we're funding this office – I think it's called Energy Solutions – and I've suggested to them that one of the opportunities that they have is to develop an energy efficiency fund of some sort that would be no-interest or low-interest loans. Moreover, I've suggested that if we got a proposal from them, we could look at putting some of this extra money into a fund like that at Climate Change Central that would then do it.

Now, I further suggested to them that there should be private-sector money that would be interested in matching our money. If a company sells energy-efficient furnaces, why wouldn't you contribute some money to a fund like that, promote your product, matching dollars? Why wouldn't insulators contribute to a fund like that? Why wouldn't people that have more energy-efficient windows contribute to a fund like that? You could develop quite a large fund for either zero-interest or low-interest loans that then would be a revolving fund.

I have suggested that to Climate Change Central. They do have their own board, and we'll have to wait and see what kind of response we get. I think that would be an appropriate place to do it with matching dollars in a fund from the private sector. Climate Change Central has been very efficient in getting matching dollars. For every dollar we gave them last year, they got between \$4 and \$10 from the private sector. So if we put a million dollars into a fund like this, if they'd get the same kind of match, then they'd have between \$4 million and \$10 million. That's the way I would look at it, and I understand, you know, that the member may disagree with

me on my ideological viewpoints, but I guess at the present time I'm the minister.

Thank you.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that on that particular issue the minister and I aren't that far away in thinking, but maybe that's an interpretation. I think Climate Change Central is primarily an arm of the government, so if you give them the money, it's still the government paying out.

A hint for Climate Change Central and this minister is that if you take a look at the retrofit programs that have been established in the States, they have been almost 100 percent funded by energy companies. I think that if you're looking for matching moneys, that's also an area to take a look at.

Could the minister now talk for a little while about what we have heard from a number of people and organizations as to what seems to be a building area of concern, and that's the Ministry of Environment moving to codes of practice? We see some of that happening in I believe it's Bill 36, and there are some concerns around that. So if he could talk about why they're going there and how he thinks that's a better system for us to have rather than the more traditional methods, I'd appreciate it.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Taylor: Thank you. I might make just one comment about my last response. One of the things that you could do on an energy fund or, you know, a retrofit fund is you could actually structure it so the people could pay back the fund out of their energy savings, and I suggested that to the director of Climate Change Central just last night. As I say, I don't control what they do.

In terms of codes of practice I'll use a specific example, Mr. Chairman, because I think you can generalize from that specific example to the larger case. Let me use the example of well site reclamation. We have today in this province 28,000 abandoned well sites that need reclamation certificates done on them. We have in the neighbourhood of 14,000 abandoned pipelines that need reclamation certificates and I think 8,000 or so abandoned batteries. I'm just going by memory. So that's over 40,000 units of those three sorts that need reclamation certificates done on them. As well as that, at present we have 155,000 active wells that are going to need rec certificates done.

Now, since either '63 or '67, I believe, the Department of Environment has issued 40,000 rec certificates. So essentially in almost 40 years we've issued 40,000 rec certificates. Well, we've already got a backlog of over 40,000, so we couldn't possibly hire enough staff to actually catch up. We have a significant issue. We can do about 1,700 a year. That's what we can actually do. If you look at 1,700, over 40,000 to do, you can see that there is a very significant backlog and significant time frame involved plus the 155,000 active wells that are going to need to be reclaimed as well.

3:10

So what we're working on with the industry is a code of practice. We've contracted the Alberta Research Council to come up with very clear standards, not subjective standards but objective standards as to what a well site reclamation should look like. The Alberta Research Council is doing that for us. They've got a fellow that's doing it I believe from the University of Alberta that has worked 30 years in the reclamation business and very clearly understands that. I can't think of his name offhand, but I could get that for the member

if she wanted it. I know that if she would check on his background, he is a very credible person.

So now what we're talking to the industry about – we get these objective standards, and then we're looking at a methodology of allowing the industry to hire a reclamation specialist. That might be an agrologist with experience in this area. That might be an engineer with experience in this area. It could be any number of specialists. We have rec specialists that come out of the colleges in this province, so it could be any number of specialists. The oil company or a gas company would contract them. They would do the reclamation, certify it.

Now what we would ask is that when they submit the certification to the government of Alberta, they would also submit a copy of all those papers to the landowner or whoever is in control of the land. Right now an oil company or a gas company can submit a rec certificate and the owner of the land doesn't know it's even submitted. So at the same time as they submit it to the Department of Environment with some kind of professional stamp on it, I'd compare it. One of the things we do is construction in our private sector. So when I get a blueprint done, we get it stamped by an engineer. The engineer puts a stamp on it and says: yes, this blueprint is acceptable. We take it to city council, and city council looks at Pat McNally's stamp on the blueprint and says: "Yes, McNally Engineering and Associates has stamped this. Go ahead. Your blueprint is okay." That's the kind of thing we're looking at, a professional designation, a professional organization in the background so that if there is a problem on the blueprint or on the rec certificate, there's an organization there that has penalties, and as well we would have the ability as the Department of Environment to withdraw your right to any more of these reclamation certificates.

So then what would happen is the papers go to us, they go to the landowner, land lessee, whoever it is, and with the documents that the landowner gets, there's going to be some document of some sort – we don't have the wording yet – that indicates that the landowner has to sign. If they don't like what has been done, then they would send that into the Department of Environment on this document, and then we would automatically go out and inspect.

As well, we will audit many different sites. I mean, if I ask my guys in the field, they'll tell me, you know, who the good companies are and who the bad companies are. They know that. Certainly, some companies won't get audited as much as other companies, and we will audit the companies that perhaps haven't been as good in the past. But if they're not doing it properly, remember that you've got a rec specialist that could lose his professional designation. So there's a certain incentive for them if that's the way they're going to make a living.

So what that will allow us to do under a code of practice is really get through a number of rec certificates and reclamations much quicker – it's still going to take a number of years to catch up – because you're going to have different people doing it in the Department of Environment. We will still continue to do the 1,700 to 2,000 inspections every year out in the field, but they're going to be auditing inspections as opposed to, you know, writing rec certificate inspections. We're still in some negotiations with the industry and the various groups on this. We're looking at some things. Right now you only have a five-year liability as a company. We're looking at quite a long extension of that liability, which the companies are prepared to give. We're looking at 20- to 25-year liability.

The other thing that can happen with this new methodology is that a director of the Department of Environment can pull the rec certificate at any time. He can't do that now. Once you're given a rec certificate, it's there. The Department of Environment will be

able to pull that rec certificate at any time, so it's a real incentive again for the companies to do a good job and for the rec specialists to do a good job up front, because if it gets pulled, there are going to be substantial costs, almost a penalty that the company will have to pay to the Department of Environment to go through the process again. So there are lots of incentives to do it through the code of practice the first time and do it right the first time. So that's what we're looking at. That's a very specific example of a code of practice, but we're looking at, you know, things like that for different areas.

Hopefully that gives you some idea of where we're going.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the minister for those answers. When you talked about the ARC, it reminded me of a question that I had for you. I think the ARC does an excellent job, and they're working on some great projects. The last time I was there, they were talking about coal bed methane recovery, so if you could give me an update from your perspective on how close they are to actually figuring out a way to recover it and what impact you believe that will have in the near future.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Taylor: Thank you. ARC does an excellent job. I actually used to be chair of that organization, and then I was the minister in charge of the organization. I can speak very highly of the Alberta Research Council, and I will say that they have an excellent chair right now, probably a much better chair than I was. He keeps pushing the ARC and getting it moving forward.

Dr. Oberg: No doubt about that.

Dr. Taylor: "No doubt about that," says the Minister of Learning. He's certainly better looking than I am, anyway, Mr. Learning Minister.

The ARC and coal bed methane. Actually, we have about 24 or 25 wells that are presently getting methane from coal in the experimental process, many of them in my constituency. They're actually right now working on some experimental wells to do that, so I think it's pretty close. It's interesting to note that we have more reserves of natural gas in the coal bed methane today than we do of what I would call traditional natural gas. There are huge amounts of natural gas or methane in coal beds. So it's going to be an interesting experience to try and get it out. As I say, there are some experimental projects going on right now. I can't remember if it's 24 or 43 wells, but a few experimental wells are drilled and are working. So as we go forward, I would expect to see more.

One of the issues around coal bed methane is water though. In some of the coal there's potable water. So it becomes a significant issue as to how you handle that potable water. In my constituency some of these wells are into potable water. So it's an issue they're trying to figure out: can they get the water out without damaging it and then put it back down, or exactly how are they going to deal with it? I mean, the Minister of Innovation and Science or the Minister of Energy would perhaps be a better one to answer this, but I think that from my perspective one of the big issues is figuring out how to deal with the water. Not all water in coal bed methane is potable – there's lots of brackish water too – but we have to figure out an appropriate way to deal with potable water.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think we need to learn how to deal with the brackish water as well in order to keep it contained and then put back wherever it's going to be put back.

So my next questions are really around water. That was a great wish list that you brought out for the water for life strategy. I would like to see everything in there implemented. How soon do you think you'll be able to give us some preliminary findings of what there is? Aside from that, are you making some progress on a water audit for Alberta? I think that's a very important thing to do. Also with regard to water is there any more discussion about preventing water from becoming a commodity under NAFTA? Are any of those discussions happening with your department?

3:20

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, do you want to respond?

Dr. Taylor: Yes, I do. I'm just making a note. My memory isn't as good as it used to be, and if I don't make some notes as to her questions, I'll forget them. Water audit was a question.

The first question was: interesting wish list. No, I don't think it's a wish list, Mr. Chairman. As the members will see in the fall, I think it's actually going to be a water strategy. What you will see coming back in the fall will be time lines and budgets associated with those time lines. Now, obviously, this is a long-term, 15- to 20-year process, I think, so you're going to see long time lines, but you will see budgets, and as we go forward into the next business-planning cycle, for the issues that we have to deal with in 2003-2004 under the water strategy, you will see budget requests. Because we do three-year budget cycles, you'll see the time lines. For anything within that three-year time line you're going to see budget requests. This is not a wish list that's going to end up on a shelf; this is going to have numbers and time lines.

Now, does that mean I'm going to get everything I want from our good Minister of Finance and Treasury Board? The Minister of Learning, who sits on Treasury Board, is nodding his head in the affirmative, so hopefully we will find that to be true. I will do absolutely the best I can to convince my colleagues. I think everybody in the House, all my colleagues and everybody in the opposition, recognizes the importance of a water strategy. I think most Albertans do as well, and I'll be doing the best I can to try and get money in the budget to meet the time lines in the three-year business plan cycle. But as I say, there will be time lines and there will be budget numbers. I guess we will see how successful I am in the future at getting that money. I mean, certainly, if I have my way, I'll get it, but as I say, as you know, member, there are many demands on money in government, so you don't always get everything you want.

A water audit is a significant and interesting issue. We have a pretty good idea of the surface water, where it is and the amount. We can monitor that pretty closely. What we don't have a good idea of generally around the province is the underground water, or groundwater. We don't know, really, in most places in the province where it is, how much there is, or what quality it is. In the Edson area we've got a pretty good idea. I think we've just released a scientific study, that has just been put out or is just coming out, on groundwater and surface water in the Canmore area, and in the Milk River basin we've got a pretty good idea. So in some really small, small portions of the province we have a good water audit on groundwater, but we need to do more of that. It's going to be part of our water strategy. It costs money.

As well, there's a lot of information out there that we're not collecting. Anytime somebody licenses a well, they have to provide us with information on flows. We have hundreds of wells licensed

every year. Every time an oil company drills and uses water, they have to have a licence for a well and they have to provide information on flows. So the oil industry has a lot of good information on water, and we've got to figure out how to make their information on their computers compatible with the way we can collect information on our computers. As much of a technology guru as I am, you're going to need better people than I am to figure that out, but we have people working on it, talking to the oil industry right now on how to get the information from the well licensing into a system to better understand groundwater.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Are you monitoring it?

Dr. Taylor: No. Actually, we're doing more than just monitoring. We're taking action in this case, Mr. Chair. It's moving forward. So that's where the water audit is.

Water commodity under NAFTA. My understanding, not being a lawyer, is that as long as we don't bulk export water to the U.S., then it's not an issue, and we have no intention as a government. We have legislation against bulk exports of water to the United States. If we were to start that – I have no plans to start that – I mean, can you imagine the legitimate screams of Albertans, when we really have significant water supply issues in the province, if we tried to export water to the United States? We only have one river. The Milk River, as you know, runs in from Montana and back into the U.S. No, there are no plans to do bulk water exports to the U.S., and I can't see it happening for the foreseeable future – ever, really.

Dr. Oberg: As long as we stay in Canada.

Dr. Taylor: Well, the Minister of Learning suggests "as long as we stay in Canada." Hopefully, we will always stay in Canada, so I can't see it happening.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Earlier today the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had the pleasure of introducing his twin brother. Well, I am very pleased to announce that my mini me has indeed arrived in the members' gallery, and I would like to introduce to you and through you my younger brother, Mr. Adam Lukaszuk.

head: **Main Estimates 2003-04**

Environment (continued)

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now would seem to be an appropriate time to talk about the Milk River Ridge dam. I've read through the material. It seems to me that nothing has changed in terms of the last time they talked about this being an internationally significant grassland that serves as habitat for several rare or threatened species. The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has

offered to take me on a tour of that site this summer perhaps in the hopes of changing my mind. I'll be very happy to go out and take a look at it. I do think that dams are always an expensive choice and that we generally have other options, and I would like the minister to comment on it from his department's perspective but also perhaps from the other implications it has in that region of the province: who it's going to serve, the economic benefit. Try and convince me that it's a good idea.

Dr. Taylor: Well, I won't try and convince you that it's a good idea, because I don't think it's possible to convince you that it's a good idea, but I'll try and give you some rationale for why we're doing it.

As you know, we're doing a study. I can't remember the exact cost: \$240,000 or \$250,000. I should say that our chief financial officer, Stew Churlish, is in the House. He could probably tell us the exact dollars. My communications director is in the House as well, Val Mellesmoen. My executive assistant, Ken Faulkner, is in the House. I'd say that the toughest job of all of them would be my communications director. She has a tough job trying to control what I say on occasion. So I give them all credit; they all do good work for us.

Back to the point in question. We were asked again by a group from that area, the Milk River water users association, whatever their appropriate name is, to take another look at it. I said I would only take another look at it if they contributed, you know, some of the money for the study, because if there's no community buy-in, then why should we put the money out? Sure enough, they went back, and they came up with a substantial amount of money for small communities and contributed to the study. So that's one issue, just to let you know that they have committed dollars to it.

The other thing that makes this different is that the Americans are interested. We have in Montana a siphon system from the St. Mary River to the Milk River, and that siphon system is about I think 23 miles long. It's long, anyway. It needs about a hundred million dollars worth of repair. As I said, the Milk River comes in and flows back into Montana. In the Havre, Montana, area they're irrigating about 85,000 acres from the Milk River, but because the siphon system is old – and that's actually an interbasin transfer, because the St. Mary River ends up in Hudson Bay; the Milk River ends up in the Gulf of Mexico. So if you want a big interbasin transfer, that's one. You know, nobody's died from it yet, but we won't get into that argument. So there are these massive siphons. They haven't had much work done to them, and they've been there since 1908, I believe, so they need some massive work done in the neighbourhood of a hundred million dollars.

So the Americans are now interested because they have to stop the irrigation in Havre usually by June 1 because the Milk River goes dry. The Milk River would not flow all year if it weren't for the siphons from the St. Mary River. It actually dries up. Two years ago, in 2001, when we had the severest drought in the south of Alberta and there wasn't enough water in the St. Mary River to keep the siphons running, then the Milk River did dry up and you could walk across the Milk River on solid ground. You didn't have to walk on water to get across. So the siphons keep it running. So that's another difference. The Americans are now interested.

The study is more than just about a dam. The study is also looking at off-stream storage. Unfortunately, I have to agree with you that it appears at least that big dams aren't economically or environmentally – you can't do them right now. It doesn't make sense.

3:30

Mr. Mason: Who are you, and where's the real Minister of Environment?

Dr. Taylor: I'm the real Minister of Environment, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands. Okay.

As I say, I tend to agree with you. The Meridian dam isn't going to work. At least in my life span I don't think it's going to work either economically or environmentally.

Now, the one difference in this is that if there ever were to be a dam built, it's a very small dam and not a very expensive dam according to the Milk River water users. So we're looking at that. Will small dams be both economically and environmentally affordable? I don't know. But we're also looking at off-stream storage because in discussions with the environmental movement they're more in favour of off-stream storage than onstream dams. So how the study is going to come out I don't know. They are looking at not just dams but off-stream storage as well.

I really believe that as we move forward, we're going to have to look at more off-stream storage and how we deal with water because the Milk River like the South Saskatchewan and North Saskatchewan – we have to provide 50 percent of the natural flow to either Saskatchewan or the U.S. When the Milk River is running, we're still providing about 85 percent of the natural flow into the U.S. So the Americans would certainly be concerned if we were to build a dam and just provide them 50 percent because that would shrink their irrigation possibilities even further.

We did have an interesting meeting in Milk River. The Americans were there. The federal Bureau of Land Management was there, very senior people, I think out of Cheyenne, Wyoming. The equivalent Montana people were there as well. They want to be involved in the study, so we are involving them and keeping the Americans informed. So that may make a difference. They've indicated that they may be willing to fund some of any project if it suits their needs as well, so that might make a difference as to the economics at least. We don't know the environmental effects, but this study is looking at the environmental effects as well. So that's where that project is. We hope to have results probably by either the end of June or the middle of July.

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

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise to engage the Minister of Environment in some discussion about his budget. I would like to, I guess, begin by talking about the budgetary increase of 11 and a half percent. I would note that the department has still not caught up to 2001-02, particularly in the area of environmental leadership, and I'd like to know what programs have been cut or reduced since 2001-02.

In terms of water I'm curious about what action the department is taking to improve water treatment in towns like Gleichen. I know that water is a serious concern across the province, but good, safe drinking water should be an essential part of the life of every Alberta community. There have been a number of issues brought to our attention with respect to the quality of drinking water in certain areas of the province and often on reserves. This has been brought to our attention by a number of native organizations, that there are serious deficiencies in certain parts of the province.

I'd like to know as well what the status is of the proposed water tax and also would like to know about the metering of domestic water use. I know that comparing the cities of Edmonton and Calgary over the years when Edmonton had water metering and Calgary didn't have mandatory water meters – I'm not sure if they do now or not; I suspect they do – it was clear that water usage per capita in Edmonton was consistently lower. So I guess, in my view, a water meter is the number one water conservation device that you can have, and I certainly feel that the government should move to

ensure that water meters are mandatory in Alberta municipalities. I think that would go a long way toward reducing consumption. So if the minister can report on the status of that issue, I'd be very interested. [interjection] Do you want me to stop now?

Dr. Taylor: Yeah. I'll get too far behind you.

Let me respond quickly to a couple of the points the member has made. The metering issue is a significant issue, and he's correct. Metering is one of the most important things we can do for conservation, and I'll use the city of Calgary, where half the city is metered; half the city is not metered. The half of the city that is not metered uses double the water. Calgary has brought in a 15-year plan to do everything with water meters, but I'm saying that that's not quick enough. Part of our water strategy, that you can look at on our web site, I believe has to have a major emphasis on conservation, and part of the emphasis on conservation has to be, you know, getting meters in Calgary quicker than a 15-year process. If we end up with the final strategy looking like the draft strategy, then it's something we need to take action on and work on.

In terms of a water tax we've never proposed a water tax as a government. We did have a water forum, and we did hear from thousands of Albertans, and one of the issues that Albertans raised was: should there be a price on water? It appears from the information that we've got that it's about a 50-50 split. You've got about 50 percent of the folks saying, "Yeah, you should have a charge for water other than your conveyance charges that you pay now" and about 50 percent saying no because they don't want another tax grab, and I agree to some extent with the ones that don't want another tax grab. If there were to be any charge for water, I would not support it unless it went into a designated fund for water infrastructure, and I say: if.

So if you look at our draft water strategy, one of the statements we've asked people to respond to – it might even be on page 34 if I remember correctly – is: develop and implement a water pricing process or something like that. We're going to get feedback on that, and hopefully it'll be interesting. But as I've said repeatedly in the public and in the press, everybody agrees on the need for a strategy. You go out and talk to any Albertan, talk to all of you folks in the opposition, even all of my colleagues, and they all agree on a need for a strategy, but once we bring a strategy forward, it's going to be very interesting to try and get general agreement on a strategy. That's not just from the opposition but from some of my own colleagues as well.

So it's going to be interesting on some of these issues, but I believe it's necessary to do. I believe it's necessary to have the discussion. I can tell you that we're the only jurisdiction in North America that's trying to do a broad water strategy like this that includes both drinking water, you know, maintaining healthy aquatic systems. California is probably as far advanced as anybody in water thinking, and they haven't had a broad strategy. They've dealt basically with irrigation: irrigation water and irrigation supplies. So it's going to be an interesting discussion as we go forward. But as I said earlier, the final draft will be out September-ish, and we will have time lines and budgets on that final draft, so you can look forward to that.

3:40

In terms of water treatment and quality of water on native reserves, that's very clearly a federal issue, and we would encourage the federal government to be more responsible in terms of how they do water treatment on reserves. We would work with them. We volunteered and will continue to volunteer to work with them on that, to improve the quality of drinking water.

Now, drinking water in a more general area in rural Alberta is also a very interesting and important issue. The best example I can use is Walsh, which is in my constituency. There's been a four-year boil order in Walsh. There are about 15 houses at last count when I was there that have about 63 people in them. We spent over a million dollars on a water treatment facility, and it's not working. The first engineering firm has said that they've done all they can do, and they've vacated the space, so to speak, and there's another engineering firm in there. But it is a very significant issue. As I said, a four-year boil water order, probably the longest in the province, in my constituency, so I'm very familiar with water issues in rural Alberta.

One of the real hopes I see for that is to actually go to regional water systems. You see us doing that in the Red Deer area. I met with people from Grande Prairie yesterday that want to go to a regional system there, and I think that in rural Alberta to try and work through regional water systems is probably the way to go. So if you look once again at my constituency, Medicine Hat, a city of 55,000 people, has a big plant and they can put out high-quality drinking water. Well, Bow Island has a treatment facility, Seven Persons has a treatment facility, Etzikom has a treatment facility, Foremost has a treatment facility, and Walsh has a treatment facility. So I've got approximately five small treatment facilities. It doesn't matter what we do there; those folks cannot afford to pay for the quality of water that you're going to get out of the Medicine Hat system. So it makes more sense, instead of us putting millions and millions and millions of dollars into those small treatment facilities, to put a pipeline from Medicine Hat.

To give you an example, this is the number that was quoted to me from Grande Prairie yesterday. Now, I haven't checked them out. I met with the Grande Prairie councillors and from Sexsmith, the county around Grande Prairie, and the city of Grande Prairie. For Sexsmith I think the cost is \$30 million to upgrade their water system. Well, they're telling me that for \$30 million or \$40 million – and I can't remember what the exact figure is – you can have a pipeline from Grande Prairie to do this. That includes the county; it includes Sexsmith; it would include other small communities out there.

I know that the Minister of Transportation, whose budget would be going to this area, is strongly supportive of regional water systems, and he's assured me that he's going to have a lot of money in his budget next year to do regional water systems. Of course, he has to convince Treasury Board as well, and sometimes that's not as easily done as said.

That's what I see as a response to drinking water in rural areas, I think: regional systems.

Now I'll stop there.

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

An Hon. Member: Riverview.

Mr. Mason: He just cut me off, and I was . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I just want to make sure that there's a clear understanding. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands had the floor. The minister interjected and said that he wanted to respond because he had not finished taking full notes. So I'm not sure if the Member for Edmonton-Highlands has completed his remarks. Have you?

Mr. Mason: No, not yet.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Then let's let him finish his remarks, and then we'll recognize you.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. [interjection] I can stand up and look the Minister of Economic Development straight in the forehead.

I appreciate the minister's comments on regional water because we're certainly familiar with that in the Edmonton area. Since Edmonton kind of screws up the North Saskatchewan for people downstream, it only makes sense that Edmonton should locate its water treatment plants upstream of the wastewater and then pump the water downstream.

I want to ask the minister about the export of water. I know that the strategy isn't finished and so on, but I wonder if he can give us any idea as to whether or not the government is considering interbasin transfers that might facilitate the export of water. I would note that Alberta is relatively short of water compared to other provinces and would certainly be very concerned if our American neighbours were able to persuade the government to export water.

I'd like to know about the plans for the oil and gas industry. The oil and gas industry was licensed by Alberta Environment to use 438 billion cubic metres of water in 2002. Only 58 billion cubic metres were actually injected, or this was at least according to a newspaper article recently. I know that the government has talked about alternatives to freshwater injection, but I'd like to know if those are practical now and what action the government is taking to speed up the alternatives if not to limit the use of water for partially depleted wells. I forget the technical term, but it's injected to squeeze out more of the oil in a depleted field.

Just to finish on water, I'd also like to ask about the impact of some of the intensive livestock operations on the incidence of E coli in groundwater and whether or not the government is monitoring that and if they're monitoring it, what they've actually found.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Taylor: Thanks. Just on the export of water. I was asked by a Liberal member, and I'll reply briefly. There's a law against the export of water. We have no plans, zero plans, as a government to do interbasin transfer to export water. We have a water supply issue, and I've said repeatedly that unless we have a major water strategy within 10 to 15 years, we're not going to have enough water for Alberta. It would make absolutely no sense, zero sense, to try and export water. So there are no plans to do that, period, ever.

Oil and gas are licensed for about 3.5 percent of the water in the province. Municipalities, irrigation are licensed for much more. But that doesn't mean that the oil and gas industry can't do things better. One of the issues is that what you're licensed for and what you use are two different things.

At present, today, as we speak, we're working with the oil and gas industry. We've hired a consultant to determine exactly how much water they're actually using. So that's your first step: determine how much water they're using, what kind of water it is. Is it potable? Is it brackish? That's the first step. The next step that we foresee happening once we have that information – we should have their information by the end of June – is actually setting up a protocol and a group of people, including the various industries, to look at how and what technology is available to reduce the use particularly of potable water. So that's where we're going. We do have a plan to go forward with it.

The oil and gas industry is being very co-operative, and as we move forward, one area we will be looking at specifically with this group of individuals is their utilization of water. We'll put a number of people on that group to work with them, and as I say, they are co-operating. They understand the necessity of developing new

technologies to reduce their utilization of potable water both in injection and in the oil sands, because the oil sands use huge amounts of water as well. So in the oil sands they're experimenting with different kinds of flood. Instead of steam or water flood they're experimenting with propane flood, they're experimenting with some solvent flood, and the one I found most interesting was fire flood. I saw a model. There's a company in Calgary. I can't remember the name. Ken is mouthing the name to me.

3:50

An Hon. Member: Fire Floods Are Us.

Dr. Taylor: Fire Floods Are Us. No, it's not Fire Floods Are Us. CMG or something. They're actually doing modeling on fire floods. One of the kind of fascinating issues is that they do three-dimensional computer models, and you actually see the fire flood going through the existing oil sands. They go out and drill wells and then tell you where the sands are. One of the problems with the fire flood, of course, is that sometimes they have trouble putting the fire out once they've got it started underground. So they've got some issues to figure out around that, but they realize the need to work on other methodologies. That's moving forward, I think, as a direct result of our water strategy and drawing attention to it.

The intensive livestock industry and water. Essentially, all we do with the intensive livestock industry is license a well; okay? The NRCB licenses the operation, so we go in and license the well and require the intensive livestock operator to monitor wells. I can think of one that was just done in my constituency. It's an intensive hog operation, and what Alberta Environment required was the hog operation to monitor all neighbours' wells in a significant area around to see the drawdown or see if there was any pollution coming, as well as to have a number of monitoring wells around the hog operation that are monitored or audited . . .

An Hon. Member: In this case it's legitimate.

Dr. Taylor: Yes, in this case it's legitimate. They're monitored on a regular basis, and the water is sent for testing. So, yes, we are doing that as necessary and where necessary.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A handful of questions. I appreciate the minister's back-and-forth responses here. It makes it more interesting for all of us, I'm sure. This is, I hope we would all agree, a very important department and requires strong leadership and a tremendously farsighted vision, I think, for the leader. So I look forward to many good things from the minister and look forward to his comments here.

I will cluster my questions into some specific areas here. The business plans are useful, and the budget is – well, it is what it is. One of the frustrations with government budgets is that they tend to be at such a general level that it's hard to know the details, and that's why the minister's responses are so helpful.

Of pressing concern – and I worry that this is going to become potentially a huge issue; we've raised the issue a few times in question period – is West Nile virus. Maybe I'm more sensitized to it because of the SARS outbreak right now and watching the impacts of that, but I think that West Nile virus could within months be a huge story in this province. I think of its impact on recreational activities, people going out camping or golfing or whatever, its impact on economics, tourism, forestry. You think of the workers who are sent out into the bush and how many mosquito bites they

get, so there are real risks there. We have raised from time to time issues of mosquito control, and it's a dilemma. I think we all recognize that this is not an easy issue at all.

I guess that what I'm going to ask the minister is this. Is there any place in his budget and business plan or elsewhere in the government for an interdepartmental centre, a task force or some equivalent to that that could be ramped up more or less instantly if we find that two or three months from now there's a real crisis around the West Nile virus? I have read recently that the form that's turning up in Canada is the most virulent form of the disease. Is there any provision in his business plans or his budget for some ability to suddenly rise to action on this issue?

Dr. Taylor: Well, let me start by saying: this is a significant issue. I don't understand all the science around it, but I do understand, unfortunately, that apparently if there is West Nile, the most likely place it's going to occur is in southern Alberta, and that's because of the heavy irrigation and the water and the high temperatures. Apparently, that's what those kinds of mosquitoes like. There are a number of different varieties of mosquitoes. Only certain varieties carry West Nile, so that's why you can only kill it in the adult population. That's why spraying programs don't make sense.

But there are a number of other things, and this is really a partnership between the department of health and Alberta Environment and some others. The department of health minister could probably give you more information. There are a number of things that you can do as an individual. One, you should make sure you don't have standing water in your backyard or in your neighbourhood, you know, if you can get rid of any standing water or possible breeding places for mosquitoes. It's going to have to be, quite frankly, a lot of self-protection. I know that there are some plans to go forward with education programs that we can put out there: you know, mosquito spray with deet in it, wearing long sleeves, just being aware of all the different self-protective measures, staying in screened houses if possible, and so on. So there's a lot of self-protection education that we have to do.

In terms of funds I don't have a specific fund. I can't comment on what the ministry of health has, but I do have in my budget disaster funds that aren't specified, obviously, because we don't know. Hopefully, there are no disasters, but we do have hazard and risk management funds, and certainly if something major was happening, some of these funds could be very quickly diverted because this would be hazard and it would be risk management. In partnership with the department of health these funds could be diverted. As I say, they're there to do exactly that. So that's where we could immediately get dollars for it.

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

Mr. McClelland: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just have one quick question for the minister. Before the question, an observation. I realize that this is merely an observation, but if municipalities had to get their input water downstream and their effluent went in upstream, it might seriously change the amount of interest that went into treating the effluent. It's just an observation. I know it's impractical, but it is an observation.

My question, though, has to do with storm water and the drought that we've experienced and the concern that people have that we may be entering a period of prolonged drought, and this has been the case as made by some. Are we giving consideration to trapping storm water, or has there been any additional interest in saving storm and runoff water because of our experience in the drought?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Taylor: Thank you. Let me comment on your first observation. Actually, the water that goes back into the rivers from tertiary plants – I mean, people say that you can drink it. I wouldn't necessarily want to try and drink it. I've never seen anybody drink it, but some of the technology people say that you can actually drink it. So for out of a tertiary treatment system like you have in Edmonton, it's a very good system. I see the Sergeant-at-Arms looking at me with amazement on his face. He might want to try and drink it. I don't know if he would or not, but it's supposed to be that clean. I think that as we move to tertiary treatment plants, that issue is eliminated to a large extent.

Now, in terms of collecting storm water, storm water all ends up eventually back in our rivers and streams, so it's a matter of getting and storing more water. As I said, on all our river basins we have a 50 percent issue to Saskatchewan or the U.S. North Saskatchewan: I would suspect we're flowing 90 percent to 95 percent into Saskatchewan at most times. Even in 2001 when we had the severe drought in the south, we flowed 57 percent of the South Saskatchewan into Saskatchewan, so there was still 7 percent we could have captured. But the question is: how do you capture that in environmentally and economically sustainable ways? That's what we're trying to work on. We've got these watershed management committees. The North Saskatchewan has one. Certainly, it's a huge issue, and we just need to figure out how to do it, and I don't have an answer on how to do it.

4:00

Dr. Taft: The minister just mentioned the North Saskatchewan River valley water basin management system, and my next three questions all relate to those activities. The first one could also relate to other areas, but it has to do with the very clearly observed diminishing of the glaciers in the mountains, which are one of the sources of the North Saskatchewan and of a number of other rivers. One only needs to hike into the glaciers in some of the national parks to see how much they have receded, and, well, there's very clear evidence that they're continuing to recede.

My first question has to do with any work that's being undertaken through this budget to look at the long-term implications of the shrinking of the glaciers on the eastern slopes, the glaciers that serve as sources for some of our major rivers.

The second question has to do with Lake Wabamun, which is in the North Saskatchewan River drainage basin, and is I think probably the most heavily studied lake in the province, or certainly one of them, because of the heavy concentration of power plants and coal mines right around the lake as well as CNR's transcontinental line and a lot of recreational use. There are concerns. I hear them in my constituency because a number of my constituents are cottage owners there. There are very serious concerns about the quality of the water, the presence of heavy metals such as copper and mercury, which have entered the lake through the emissions from the nearby power plants. So any comments the minister has on his awareness of quality of water issues at the lake and the monitoring or auditing programs they may have around that lake and, frankly, any other lakes in that vicinity. There are, actually, a number of lakes around there.

Finally, any comments relating to Lake Wabamun about the attempts to restore the water levels to the historic levels. TransAlta has been trying for years to successfully transfer water from the North Saskatchewan River into the lake. They spent \$15 million or \$20 million, I think, on a water transfer plant that didn't initially succeed because it couldn't clean the water sufficiently. The trend

of that lake in the last several years has been calamitously down. Any comments or initiatives the minister has on the level of the lake.

Finally, the North Saskatchewan River valley itself, which runs right through the middle of my constituency. There are questions around the ongoing quality of the water, issues around the construction of the new bridge that's part of Anthony Henday Drive. There are concerns that the last bridge that was constructed across the North Saskatchewan River, which was the LRT bridge, quite badly and permanently disrupted the river bottom, which was potentially one of the areas where sturgeon used to breed in that river.

My understanding is that the sturgeon population of the North Saskatchewan River is in real distress, that when they do samples of the sturgeon population, you can find adults – and these fish tend to live very long – but there are no juvenile or new sturgeon in the river. So any comments about ongoing activities of the department to restore the quality of the North Saskatchewan River.

That completes my set of questions on the North Saskatchewan River basin. Thank you.

Dr. Taylor: With the sturgeon really you'd want to ask the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, unless the cormorants are getting them or something. I'm not sure. But, you know, he's got a treatment for cormorants.

The fish and bridges issue is largely a federal issue because if you have a waterway that has fish in it, that's under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, so any bridge that would have to be built is going to have to satisfy the needs of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on habitat concerns. I can't comment on how they are going to respond to that. But certainly in terms of the overall water quality, if you look at our water strategy, we're proposing several levels of water management authorities, and in the south they've been more active and are further developed.

I might use the Bow River Basin Council as an example. In the last number of years the quality of water in the Bow River has improved dramatically, and that's because there's a Bow River Basin Council that's made up of stakeholders. It's got the municipalities on it. It's got environmental groups on it. It's got the industry groups that are around the Bow River on it and so on. We fund that group. We're prepared to fund other basin management groups as well.

There's been perceived to be more of a need in the south, not necessarily more of an actual need but more of a perceived need. It's the same thing on the South Saskatchewan. There's a very active South Saskatchewan River basin group. I think that will happen on the North Saskatchewan as well as people become more aware, and I think the water strategy is going to drive that. So we see a very valuable role for groups like, I think they call themselves, the North Saskatchewan River valley authority or something. We see a valuable role for that. I'm not sure if you're familiar with CASA. What we're proposing is an overall water body like CASA for the province in our draft strategy. But we really do see that these groups perform a valuable service.

I think that as the issues become more visible, then you're going to have more interest in the North Saskatchewan basin. My interpretation of what happens right now is that when people see the rivers going down and a much lower supply of water, then they get concerned, but in the North Saskatchewan you always have, for a southerner anyway, this huge volume of water rushing down there, so you haven't raised the same level of concern. But people are becoming more aware of the issues, and I think you'll see that kind of thing improving with the development of the basin council around the North Saskatchewan.

Lake Wabamun is an interesting issue. As you say, it's the most

studied lake in Alberta in terms of the lake levels. In five years they'll be back to normal. The EAB has actually ruled and said that under the present regime and the fact that the transfer plant is now working, they will be able to put 10 percent more of the average level back into the lake within a five-year period. So I guess time will tell on that, but it appears to be working. Lake levels will be going up and are going up.

In terms of the heavy metals and so on – you're an ex-academic, so you'll appreciate this – there's another study ongoing as we speak. This is being conducted by TransAlta and scientists actually at the University of Alberta to just try and figure out what's going on. We really don't know at the present time, so I don't know what else you do but another study. So that's where that one is.

In terms of receding glaciers, it's an interesting issue because some glaciers are increasing in size and some glaciers are receding, and it raises a whole series of issues around adaptation to climate change. Whether you accept climate change or don't accept that there are human causes to climate change, you can see the receding of the glaciers. As much as I'd like to make more snow, I can't make more snow.

Mr. Mason: But you can snow us.

Dr. Taylor: Well, I can try and snow you, the Member from Edmonton-Highlands has suggested, but actually I'm not trying to do that right now, no.

There are some glaciers growing back in the mountains of B.C., and there are some glaciers growing in Greenland. That doesn't help us, but there's a mixed message on glaciers. The member is quite correct that the ones that feed our rivers are receding. What's causing the receding glaciers? Perhaps it's some warming, although we have a study that we're just doing right now on weather patterns across Canada and in Alberta and looking at historical data.

4:10

This is just initial yet, so I don't want to make it a final thing, but it appears that the hottest decade from the time records have been kept in the last hundred years was the '30s. As I say, those are the initial results as I understand them, but I wouldn't like to be quoted because that's just the initial, not the final. So we actually have that happening in trying to understand weather patterns.

Once again, it's a professor at the University of Alberta that's doing that for us, and hopefully we'll have those results available to release that study looking at weather patterns and severe weather patterns, you know, severe weather occurrences. As I say, this gentleman at the U of A is looking at that, and hopefully by the summertime – it depends how long the academic community takes. I can be as hopeful as I want, but both of us are familiar with academic communities. Sometimes you don't want to overdo your hopes.

An Hon. Member: He's trying to bore you to death.

Dr. Taylor: I'm trying to give them accurate information, Minister, not trying to bore them to death.

We do need to have a serious look at adaptation around climate change, because all our research and all the efforts being put into, you know, trying to stop climate change – okay; we're going to reduce emissions – well, you're not. Climate goes through natural cycles and occurring cycles, and we need to do as much as we can as individuals to reduce our contribution to it. I absolutely agree. But they're still cycles, and you can look at the geological history of the world, and it's there. So the question is: how do we adapt? We need

to spend more time talking about adaptation to some of these issues, in my mind.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Mrs. Gordon: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To the Minister of Environment: I would firstly like to congratulate you. I think the ministry that you're involved in is a tough one. I think that there are a lot of issues, and I do congratulate you for the way that you embrace your ministry. I find you very easy to talk to, straight-forward. You will give the answers. You enthusiastically, as demonstrated this afternoon, are presenting the picture of your department, so congratulations.

You talked about interbasin transfers, that will be something that we'll be dealing with more and more in the future, and I couldn't agree with you more. I don't want to put you on the spot, hon. minister, but the communities that I represent have recently gone through an interbasin transfer with the Red Deer River, which you certainly understood and very, very quickly made sure would happen through legislation that was passed last session. However, it becomes more and more difficult to deal with this from the municipal perspective with the cost of doing some of this. These communities will be piping water from the Red Deer River. In the Lacombe area this is a necessity. The aquifer is not there. There is a severe need for water. However, regardless of what you do in this type of thing, it's very, very costly.

Do you see in the future, with direction coming possibly from your department along with the Minister of Transportation, who does look after a lot of the dollar amounts that go to municipalities for wastewater and these types of projects, where we will have to look at how we are going to help these communities to ensure that they do have water? In this particular consortium the cost will be upwards of \$14 million, which is a great deal of money to come up with all of a sudden right now, when it's needed, to ensure that the residents have water, and it is something we're going to have to wrestle with as more of the province deals with this.

I have a great appreciation for the high benchmark we put on many of the environmental issues. It's very important, particularly with drinking water and a lot of other areas, that we do have a high benchmark. However, it's becoming harder and harder for municipalities to reach this benchmark. Also, with the advanced technology and more education to do with environmental issues, this benchmark often changes very, very quickly, and what was a known technology that cost dollars to put in just a couple or three years ago, all of a sudden now changes and the requirements change, and of course that will cost the municipalities and their taxpayers more money. This is something that I think a lot of municipalities are wrestling with. How are we as a government going to correlate and work with this between your department as regulators and other departments that are on the end that finance part of these projects?

Thank you, hon. minister.

Dr. Taylor: Some excellent points have been raised here, and I'll try and respond to them. The first one in regard to the specific instance in the Red Deer water project, I absolutely am convinced that we have to go to regional water systems. I believe we need to make it a priority of this government, and I will be doing my best to convince the government of that. Obviously, it's the government or members of this caucus, that we both sit on, that decide how much money Transportation has to do these things. So it's going to be a significant job for both the Minister of Transportation and myself to convince this caucus that regional water systems are the only way to go as we move forward.

Ms Carlson: What does that mean? Explain that.

Dr. Taylor: What?

Ms Carlson: A regional water system.

Dr. Taylor: Oh, a regional water system. I'll give you an example of one around Red Deer, where you have a major urban area that has a very high-level treatment system. Instead of spending a lot of money on little treatment systems in Lacombe or Blackfalds – I'm not sure of all the communities there – you actually upgrade the Red Deer system and pipe the high-quality drinking water out to the system.

Yesterday I met with folks from Grande Prairie. They want to upgrade Grande Prairie's system and pipe it out to Sexsmith. Does anybody here know if county of Grande Prairie is the right name?

Mrs. Gordon: It's the county of Grande Prairie.

Dr. Taylor: The county of Grande Prairie and the little communities around there. So you have one high-level treatment facility. It doesn't matter. You're never going to be able to have the same level of treatment in Sexsmith that you have in Grande Prairie simply because of the volume of water and the costs involved. So that's what I mean by regional systems.

So as we go forward in the next year, hon. member, we must convince our caucus, our cabinet, and our Treasury Board of the necessity of spending money on regional water systems. There's no doubt in my mind.

We actually have a good example of that as well – I haven't mentioned it – in southern Alberta, the South East Alberta Water Co-op, and that's a pipeline. The regional system is going to go from Chin Lakes – and Chin Lakes is just south of Lethbridge – right across to Manyberries. That's basically across the extreme south. It's going through places like Foremost, Etzikom, so the extreme south of the province, crossing the whole bottom of the province. It's raw water, mind you, not treated water, and the cost is being split one-third, one-third, one-third. It's being split one-third by the people who benefit from it, one-third by the federal government, one-third by the provincial government. The total cost of that project is going to be someplace between \$25 million and \$35 million. We hope to have pipe in the ground this fall. That was one scheme driven by the local community, just as the Red Deer one was and just as the Grande Prairie one is. I think we have to move into those systems. It'll only make sense, and although it might cost you more up front, it saves money in the long term. So we've got to think in a little longer term perspective on these issues and particularly in the Red Deer one. It's going to save huge amounts of money in the long term.

High benchmarks is an interesting question. I'm going to give you a very practical example of this. Right now our regulation says that you can have particulate matter – turbidity I guess is the right word, which is particulate matter – up to .5 parts per million, and the technology is now available to go to .3 and to .1. Now, interesting question. I've asked the AMD and C to come back to me on this. It's not hard for Edmonton, Calgary, and Medicine Hat to go there. Okay? They're probably there already. It's just the nature of their plants. They're big plants. They're more efficient and so on. But for the Bow Islands and the Foremosts and the Seven Persons, I mean, it's impossible. Bow Island, for instance, has already borrowed to the max. For them to go to .3 is going to be a significant cost.

I've asked the AAMD and C to come back to me with an approach

or a position. Should we say, "You're not getting sick at .5 today"? I mean, we don't have people across this province getting sick from water. We've got strong standards, the strongest in Canada actually. So if you don't get sick at .5 and the technology is there to go .3 and .1, shouldn't we let that be a community decision? If it's not a community decision, should the provincial government pay for it? So I've asked the AAMD and C to come back to me – they're going to discuss some of these issues – and just talk about this issue, because it is a significant cost to upgrade technology.

4:20

The other thing we're going to do – we've got some money in our budget to do it – is a risk assessment of all our water treatment facilities across the province. There may be some in rural Alberta that can meet these tighter standards, but it's in the way they're being operated. One of the problems, of course, is to get qualified operators to go to Duchess or qualified operators to go to Etzikom. So we're looking at creative ways. One of the ways is to use SuperNet to help us in our monitoring of water treatment plants across the province. So we're trying to be creative. We're looking at a number of different options as we move forward.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This has been an interesting exchange between the hon. Minister of Environment and various members of this Assembly, but I, too, have questions in regard to this year's budget. Going through the budget line by line, I am puzzled, certainly, by where I would find the information in regard to how much money is being collected, if any, by the Department of Environment. I've been led to believe that there is money being collected in water rights or royalties, so to speak, from hydraulic pressure behind the dams that generate electricity at the Brazeau and Ram River dams. How much money is the Department of Environment collecting, if any? Where would I find it in the revenue category, and is it true, if there is money being collected, that it is being used to offset the cost of irrigation in southern Alberta?

Dr. Taylor: Interesting question.

Mr. MacDonald: Interesting question indeed.

Dr. Taylor: Conspiracy theory.

Mr. MacDonald: No. The hon. minister may say that it's a conspiracy theory, and I certainly don't have the correspondence with me, but I've been led to believe from previous correspondence with this government that that is indeed the case. I need to have this clarified, and I need to know how much money is involved in this.

Also, I'm curious to know: where in the budget is the pool of money for land reclamation for old and abandoned coal mines? There are many old and abandoned coal mines in this province, some of which are located perhaps within a two- or three-kilometre ride from this Assembly along both the north and south banks of the North Saskatchewan River. Does this fund still exist that people can access for land reclamation projects? If a landowner was to find a sinkhole on their property that would be there as a result of an abandoned coal mine or coal mine shaft, is there a fund where they can access money to fill in and make sure this sinkhole does not grow even larger? Certainly, for instance, in the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands there are old abandoned coal mines.

Mr. Mason: Lots.

Mr. MacDonald: Lots, I'm told.

Mr. Mason: And in Drumheller.

Mr. MacDonald: Certainly in Drumheller there are. Yes.

If I could have an answer to those questions, I would be grateful.

Also, while we're on the issue of coal, how much is the Department of Environment spending to help out with the costs of the clean coal technology research that is currently going on in Los Alamos, New Mexico, at the huge American laboratory there? How much are we paying for that? Where, also, would I find that in the hon. minister's budget?

Also in regard to clean coal technology, how much research is going on in this province, and if the department is co-operating with other government departments or private agencies, what is going on in regard to studies to reduce the cost of capture and compression of CO₂ gases, for instance, at coal-fired generating stations? Is the department actively involved in that with the private sector, and if we are actively involved in that, how much money are we spending, and what is the target to reduce costs, say, per tonne of captured emissions? Certainly, it would be wonderful if we could reduce that to the point where we could capture this CO₂ economically and use it for enhanced oil recovery. If that would be the policy goal of this government, would this government consider at some time incenting, through perhaps the royalty regime, enhanced oil recovery through the use of CO₂ sequestration from coal-fired power plants?

There are some other items at this time, Mr. Chairman, that I would like to get on the record in regard to the business plan. Now, the business plan of the Department of Environment on page 140 contains the vision, mission, and preamble to the three-year business plan of the ministry, and maintaining economic prosperity figures prominently in these statements. This exposes the ministry's predisposition towards responsible environmental stewardship until that stewardship interferes with economic prosperity. In this budget the government recognizes that the natural resource revenue will be declining because of declining production numbers. The next big industry, I think, in this province will be the tourism industry, and the Environment minister has a duty to ensure that we have pristine areas left to enhance our future tourism industry. However, to what extent does the ministry take into account the economic ramifications of these policies? Would it be fair to say that the ministry is often more interested in financial impacts than environmental impacts?

On page 142 in the business plan it is interesting to note that it states that the ministry would like to "influence inter-provincial, national and international water initiatives and agreements to protect Alberta's water resources." What specific plans does the ministry have to influence these initiatives?

Now, also on page 142 of the business plan it states that the ministry would like to "influence national and international climate change strategies and agreements." What is the ministry planning to influence Canada's ratification of the Kyoto accord? What precisely do you have in mind in regard to the Kyoto accord? We all recognize in this Assembly that an air shed respects no provincial boundary and no international boundary, and we're all in this together, and we can't stick our head in the sand and pretend there's nothing going on. There is something going on: global warming. The evidence is conclusive. It is a reality. When you look at other departments and the amount of money that was spent on drought relief for farmers and you look at the extra money used to fight forest fires, we've got to look at the big picture here. If we were to do that on annual basis, as climate change affected this province from south to north, it would be advisable to consider the long-term implications of climate change.

4:30

Now, members across the way can make light of global warming if they wish, but it's the limited tax dollars of this province that are being used to provide emergency relief to affected areas of this province. And what's going to be next? Water. Water is the big issue. One only has to go into the Rockies, our own Canadian Rockies, our own Alberta Rockies, and look at where the glaciers were when we were teenagers and where they are now. In some American states where the Rockies go down, like through Montana, there are no glaciers in some places where there were snow-capped peaks 20 years ago. This is the reality, and we can't have blinders or blinkers on. You know, perhaps we're hanging out with the horse set too often and we have blinkers on, political blinkers.

Dr. Taylor: Better than hanging out with a horse's ass.

Mr. MacDonald: The hon. minister talked about the back end of a horse, and I'm certain that he would be quite familiar with that end of a horse. I can be assured of that, Mr. Chairman.

Now, when we look at Kyoto, we have to recognize that the world hasn't stopped and we are going to continue to be a prosperous partner in Canada and we're going to continue to be a player in the international community. With our wealth comes duty and responsibility, and that duty and responsibility mean showing leadership to curtail global warming. Much to my surprise not a couple of weeks past I saw – and I didn't even have to open the paper – on the front page that Suncor is expressing another vote of confidence in this province and the Kyoto accord by announcing I believe it was a \$3 billion project to expand so that they can recover more synthetic crude from, as George Bush calls them, the tar pits. When you think of George Bush and you think of the American economy and you think of just how stable Alberta is when you compare it to Venezuela, which has a lot of economic interest in the Gulf states as far as providing petroleum products – crude exports from Venezuela to the Gulf coast are significant – and you look at the economic chaos in Nigeria and you look at the internal governments of some of the Soviet republics, Alberta is a good place to invest. Hopefully, it's going to continue to be a good place to invest.

Now, with the Kyoto accord that investment will continue, and I think we should look at ways – and this is where the minister's department can play a significant role in the development in this province of technologies that will allow for the economic capture and compression of flue gas streams. That flue gas stream from a coal-fired plant can be utilized for enhanced oil recovery. CO₂ is a commodity in America. It is being imported from America to Saskatchewan by none other than EnCana. I would encourage all hon. members of this Assembly to get from the library and read the oil and gas journals. Some states in America don't have enough compressed, captured CO₂ for enhanced oil recovery. The minister could really show leadership, and we could have a technological revolution in this province that would allow for the export of this technology and another way for us to increase our prosperity and our base.

With those comments I'll take my seat. Thank you.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Chairman, I expect somebody to answer the questions. Could we have a ruling on what's going to happen in this case? [interjections] Well, he's asked his questions. I'll ask the next set of questions. Mr. Chairman, my next question is on the Tire Recycling Management Association of Alberta, which is a DAO, a delegated administrative organization. The reason I think this question is well answered by the Minister of Learning is because this is a DAO that has buckets of money. I see that the Minister of

Infrastructure has raised his head. I know that he, too, likes this particular organization, and if you can't answer the question, I know he can.

This is where our \$4 tire fee goes. They've been collecting that money for a long time. The province in co-operation with this organization, this DAO, has done a very good job of getting rid of all the old tires in the province, and we no longer have a surplus. In fact, some companies are importing used tires from other jurisdictions in order to meet the kinds of quotas they have for providing different kinds of products on the market.

My question with regard to this is: now that we no longer have a surplus and now that we see that they've got buckets of money, don't you think that we should turn your auditors loose on them, Minister of Learning, and just make sure we're getting the best bang for the buck?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the estimates are for the Department of Environment.

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Chairman, I was just going to add that anytime the hon. minister would like my team of very good operational reviewers to work with him, I'd be more than happy to supply them to him.

Dr. Taylor: Well, I'd like to thank the Minister of Learning for that fine offer. I'd have to ask him: am I going to have to pay him for his fine people? If he will guarantee me that I don't have to provide money for his budget, I've got lots of work for them to do. So we'll talk about that later.

In terms of the TRMA it's an interesting issue because they do have a surplus, as you correctly identified, but they have come back with a program of research largely. I can tell you that I put some pressure on them. I told them that a surplus the size they were running was unacceptable. You need basically nine months to a year's surplus so that if you ever had to close the board down, you'd have that long to close it down, which would be in the neighbourhood, I think, of \$6 million to \$8 million, going by memory.

So they've come back with a research program. For instance, they're researching adding ground tires to asphalt because in Arizona they apparently get an extra 10 years before they have to resurface the asphalt if the ground tires are in the asphalt. Now, we know that it works in Arizona, but our climate is substantially different. So we have a situation where we've done some in Edmonton; I'm not exactly sure where. I think it was out on the road toward Sherwood Park. I don't know my streets very well because I just don't drive much in Edmonton. Also, in Calgary we're doing some projects. So that's one of the things they're trying to do.

4:40

The other thing we're looking at or having some interesting initial discussions on is broadening the mandate of TRMA because we've got problems around electrical recycling. We don't have anybody actually recycling computers, in particular computer screens. I can't remember how much lead, but there's a significant amount of lead, two or three pounds, in every computer monitor, and those are mostly ending up in the landfills right now. There is a possibility to recycle those, but we need to create a recycling program for electrical waste, largely computers. So we're having, as I say, very initial discussions talking about: can we broaden that mandate and have that board develop a broader mandate in terms of waste management, in terms of other recycling issues? That's where we're going with it. Certainly, it's interesting right now for them.

We are recognized, quite frankly, as leaders in recycling with the TRMA, the AUOMA, the Used Oil Management Association, and the recycling of bottles. People actually come in from other

jurisdictions to look at how we're doing that, and the TRMA people from around the world have come in to monitor how we do the TRMA, why it works and how it works. Just because things are working doesn't mean that it can't be made better, and we are working particularly with the TRMA to make it better.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Chairman, I have two questions. The first: is the Minister of Environment going to answer the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's questions?

Secondly, I haven't had a chance to look at the Tire Recycling Management Association's statements recently, but the last time I did, they spent an extraordinary amount of money on fees for lawyers. Can you comment on that? Do you do efficiency audits in any of these DAOs?

Dr. Taylor: I can't comment on the budget line items because their delegated administrative authorities are not included in my estimates. So I really can't. I mean, I can find out, but I'm not that familiar with their actual line items.

In terms of answering the other member's questions, I mean, how do you answer irrational questions and irrational statements? Some of the things weren't even to do with my ministry. He's talking about research that he should properly address to the Minister of Innovation and Science. Talk about Los Alamos should properly be addressed to the Ministry of Innovation and Science. Particular questions on revenues: page 129 of the budget will answer his revenue questions. Page 127 will answer his reclamation questions.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My next question has to do with Swan Hills. The ticker is still ticking on that in terms of how much money has been spent, more than \$500 million. The Minister of Environment, I believe, still funds the provision for the site remediation there, while the rest of the dollars that may or may not be allocated go to SRD. Can you tell us whether there's been any change in the provision that you've got and what your expectations are from that plant from an environmental perspective? Are they operating more efficiently and cleaner than in the past?

Dr. Taylor: We have a special waste management program as part of our budget. My understanding is that if Swan Hills were to close down, it would be cleaned up.

You're going to hear my personal opinion on this now. I think we have to look at Swan Hills very much as a public utility. You know, we pay for our garbage in Edmonton or Medicine Hat. I pay a levy in Medicine Hat, and I'm sure you do pay in Edmonton a levy on your municipal bill. It's all in one in Medicine Hat. The utilities, gas and water and electricity, are all on one bill, but we pay a levy for garbage. I think we need to look at Swan Hills like that. It is a public utility. We need it to get rid of this very toxic material. There's not a lot of it, but we need it to get rid of that very toxic material that we produce in this province. The Minister of Infrastructure could comment further, but it's my understanding that there will be no future operational costs to taxpayers as we go forward on the Swan Hills issue. If that is in fact correct, the Minister of Infrastructure can identify that. I don't know if his estimates have been up yet or not, but when they come up, you could ask him that. It's my understanding that we shouldn't have to put government money into it, but if we do, I would not object because I look at it as a public utility, just as I pay for my waste collection in Medicine Hat or you pay for it in Edmonton.

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

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Three more questions to throw at the minister. The first has to do with the environmental impact assessments for freeway design or for transportation corridors, and I'm reflecting back on comments and a discussion I had with the Minister of Transportation at Public Accounts the other day. The specific issue was this: the Canamex corridor from Grande Prairie down to the U.S. border hits various choke points in Edmonton and Calgary and so on. I know, for example, that design for the Anthony Henday road is changing, but there still are provisions in there for a number of stops along that major arterial. So all the trucks and cars come to a stop and then they proceed, and then they stop and proceed. This is not a facetious question. There are genuine environmental impacts from a massive amount of traffic, a big road like that, well over a hundred thousand vehicles a day starting and stopping, starting and stopping. I'm just wondering if the minister is aware of any efforts under his department to do what amounts to an environmental impact assessment, particularly of the Anthony Henday Drive and the rest of the Canamex corridor.

The second point. This one also is of concern to some of my constituents, the Inland Cement plant in Edmonton. This is an issue that's come up from time to time. If the minister could update our information on the monitoring activities or the policing activities, whatever we want to call them, of emissions from that plant. It's a sensitive spot for many people.

Finally, I've heard some concern raised by farmers in central Alberta about the potential – and it may be no more than a rumour; I don't know – of draining wetlands in central Alberta west of highway 2, probably in the Battle River basin. I'm not sure for what purpose, for access to more water or whatever. If the minister knows anything about that or if there are any provisions for that in the plans here, I'd appreciate that information.

Thank you.

Dr. Taylor: Interesting question on highways, and the best way I can answer that is with an actual development that's happening right now in St. Albert. There's a big highway going by or a ring road – and I don't know the name of it – but it's actually going near a protected area. We've asked the city of St. Albert to provide us with information on how they're going to handle the information on possible or potential damage to the protected area, and we will continue to do this.

I'm going by recollection here, so if I'm wrong, we'll get you a better written answer. Highways don't come under EIAs, but there are engineering regulations, and there are regulations as to appropriate ways to build highways so that they do as little damage as possible to the environment. [interjection] Well, to a large extent vehicle emissions are controlled by the federal government, but one of the things I'm speculating on and have speculated on is that there is technology available that you can put on the side of the road and measure the emissions of vehicles that go by. We've checked with the technology manufacturers in California. Because of the Canadian position on Kyoto we need to measure greenhouse gases as well. The technology won't measure greenhouse gases yet, but they're working towards that. What I would like to do, once the technology gets there, is put that on roadsides, measure your vehicle as you go by, and if you're not meeting standards – and if you don't keep your vehicle in tune, you won't meet certain emission standards – then send you a letter and say, "You know, you should get your vehicle tuned up" – it's not a penalty phase; it's not like photoradar, but it is information and education – and explain to you that you're probably using this much gasoline now and that if you get your vehicle tuned, you'll use this much. So there's an economic incentive to do that.

So in terms of highways that's what we're looking at.

4:50

Mr. Stelmach: More interchanges.

Dr. Taylor: Pardon me?

Mr. Stelmach: Free flow.

Dr. Taylor: Free flow, more interchanges, the Minister of Transportation says, and that certainly would help as well rather than, as you say, stopping and starting. Obviously, when you accelerate from a stop, you're producing more emissions. So the Minister of Transportation is quite correct. I was pleased to see that the Minister of Transportation granted us some money for another interchange in Medicine Hat so we can actually have the free flow and much cleaner air in Medicine Hat.

In terms of Inland certainly Inland has to put on a baghouse, and the baghouse will be put on. They have a time frame to put that on. If they have – I'm going by memory here – more than six or 10 trips in one year, they have to put the baghouse on immediately. Otherwise, they've got 18 months to do it. So the baghouse will go on Inland and will collect the nasty stuff, and there will be fewer emissions coming out of Inland Cement once that baghouse is up and running than there is presently utilizing natural gas. So it will actually be cleaner. There's no doubt about it.

Draining wetlands. If anybody were to drain an existing wetland, they'd have to receive permission from Alberta Environment, and quite frankly communities have zoning regulations around this as well. But if they want to, they'd have to receive permission from Alberta Environment, and we would have to evaluate every situation on its own.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We continually have concerns raised with us from people in the community about, generally speaking, environmental assurance. People say that there aren't enough investigators. They say that there aren't enough inspectors. So if the minister could comment on that. Obviously, there's no more money allocated for that this year again. So you must feel that you have enough people out there in the field, and I know that you've identified that your people in the field know who the good operators are and who the bad operators are and that they focus on the bad operators, but that doesn't seem to satisfy a lot of people out in the community. So could you comment on why you think you have enough?

Dr. Taylor: Well, I believe we have enough inspectors out there. Obviously, you can look at the document I mentioned earlier and look at the fines that have been placed on various people and various companies as we move forward. As I said earlier, you know, fining people, enforcement, is not the preferred way because you already have some kind of nasty effect on the environment. So, once again, you'll see us moving more and more money to environmental assurance, which is education and being proactive, and certainly that's what we want to do. As I said earlier, we will enforce where necessary and we will fine where necessary. One of the high-profile ones we've got going right now is the city of Edmonton.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Chairman, we haven't talked about air quality or air monitoring yet. You talk in your business plan about how you'd like to expand and enhance that. What do you expect to do?

Dr. Taylor: Well, right now we're working with the private sector.

We're going to do a southern Alberta air shed. That is just starting as we speak, and we see moving to other air sheds. This is the first one we're doing as an experiment with the private sector to see how it works, because their technology is better than some of the technology that is currently owned by Alberta Environment.

What we've done in the south is we've got all of the communities involved, we've got the private sector involved, and we've got Alberta Environment involved in a partnership. As I say, it's going to be basically from Lethbridge east, a southern air shed plan that's in process right now. If that works, we'll be doing more.

As you know, we have the Fort air shed. We've got one around Edmonton. As well, we've increased our number of monitoring vehicles. We've got one more in Calgary. We're working on one more in Edmonton. So that will give us two more monitoring vehicles in the province.

Ms Carlson: The next question I have is with regard to rapid responses to emergencies and especially with concern about airborne contaminants. Particularly I'm interested in sour gas leaks. We had that one incident this year where a lot of people said that they could smell sour gas, that they weren't notified until after they'd notified the department. That incident was by Caroline. It seemed like there was some kind of a problem. If it was a communication problem or if the emergency response plan wasn't properly conducted or wasn't well enough in place, could you talk about that?

Dr. Taylor: Well, the experience in Caroline is an interesting experience. One of the problems in Caroline is that it was such a small leak. The company couldn't readily identify where it was occurring, but I will say that a follow-up investigation did show that all the emergency procedures went in and the communications did follow the protocol that we have for a sour gas leak. As I say, the follow-up investigation showed that everything was done appropriately in the appropriate time frame. Now, would we have liked to see the leak closed down quicker? Of course we would, but they've got their people and technology there and identified the leak. It was an extremely small leak and difficult to find.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Chairman, the one area in this budget that does look like it's getting more money this year is the communications budget within the ministry. Could you tell us what you plan to spend that money on?

Dr. Taylor: Actually, the new dollars for communications reflect the actual cost of the communications department. In the past the costs weren't adequately reflected in the budget, so we moved some money around in the department. What we're trying to do is be more transparent and actually reflect the actual costs of the communications. So overall they won't be spending any more money than last year; we're just showing it under communications.

Dr. Oberg: Because he needs it.

Ms Carlson: Because he needs it. I agree with you, Minister of Learning. Sometimes he does need it. You could talk more rather than less, and it's helpful, like you have this afternoon. Given that the Minister of Environment did lobby me to get home to his Easter chocolate and turkey dinner sooner rather than later and he has been very open with his debate this afternoon and answered the questions with the exception of one of my colleagues, I think that I will now submit the rest of the questions we have in writing and call for the vote.

The Deputy Chair: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Environment for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2004, are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Agreed to:
 Operating Expense and
 Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$115,646,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Chair, I would move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to her

Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2004, for the following departments.

Main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2004.

Environment: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$115,646,000.

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

5:00

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a great week with lots of good progress, particularly in the Department of Environment today. I just want to take a moment to extend very best wishes to those people who are celebrating Easter this weekend as I will be, and to all others who are celebrating something else, may they enjoy a very nice long weekend as well.

That having been said, I would move that we now call it 5:30 and that pursuant to Standing Order 3(4)(a) regarding Easter Monday the Assembly do stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 22.

[Motion carried; at 5:01 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]