

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 27, 2004**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 04/04/27

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Learning.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the Minister of Education from the Basque Country in Spain. The Hon. Anjeles Iztueta is here, and with her in the Speaker's gallery is a delegation which includes education officials from the Basque Country: Abel Ariznabarreta – and I do really apologize for my pronunciation of those names – who is the Vice-Minister of Education; Amaia Goikoetxea, who is the press and public relations adviser; Josu Sierra, who is the director of the Basque Institute for Research and Evaluation in Education.

Minister Iztueta and her delegation have come to Alberta to learn more about our learning system. They will be examining our best practices and some of our new initiatives that contribute to the success of Alberta's learning system. I'm proud to share with the Assembly that it was the high achievement of Alberta's students both nationally and internationally, in particular the success of the students in the PISA 2000 assessment, that initially captured the Basques' attention.

I'd like to thank Minister Iztueta and her delegation for the opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences, and I will say that we had an absolutely delightful lunch today while talking about our respective education systems. I would ask Minister Iztueta and her delegation to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly four individuals from Tanzania who are studying here in Alberta as part of the Canadian International Development Agency ethics promotion project in Tanzania in collaboration with the University of Calgary: Mrs. Adieu Nyondo, director, and Mr. Peter Mushi, administrative officer, both of the ethics division, office of Public Service Management; Mr. Cathlex Makawia, inquiry officer, and Mr. Waziri Kipacha, inquiry officer, both of the Ethics Secretariat, President's Office of the Ethics Commissioner. Escorting them are Mr. Don Hamilton, Alberta Ethics Commissioner, and his senior administrator, Ms Karen South. [Remarks in Swahili]

Mr. Speaker, my remarks in Swahili translate as follows. With your permission I would like to extend to our honoured guests a very warm welcome to our fine province of Alberta and this great Legislative Assembly. I hope that when they return home, they take back with them fond memories of our province and are able to implement their learnings in developing good governance in Tanzania.

Mr. Speaker, our guests are in your gallery. They have now risen, and I request this Assembly to accord them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of guests to introduce. I'll do the first one on behalf of my colleague from Athabasca-Wabasca. There are 34 students and a number of group leaders and teachers and parent helpers from Mistassiniy school in Wabasca. I'll just name the teachers and group leaders, and I'd ask that they stand as I name them: Mrs. Christine Gullion, Ms Doreen Gullion, Ms Joanna Schroeder, Mr. Bruce Joudrey, Mr. Leon McLeod, Shaina Merriue, Kelly Auger, Jesse Auger, T.G. Taron, Kaine Young, Terrance Alook, and all the students from the Mistassiniy school in Wabasca. I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I also have the great pleasure of introducing to you and to Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of students from Roland Michener secondary school. We have 37 visitors. I'd ask that they stand as I introduce the teachers and group leaders: Tracey Crain, Gail Nelson, Rose Barore, Mike Sowada, Kris Reucker. They're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: The first Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Government Aircraft

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to opposition questions yesterday on government flights the Premier mentioned that "what we try to do is make sure that the plane is loaded." Well, according to the government's own passenger manifests, this is hardly ever the case. Indeed, in 2002 nearly one-quarter of the flights taken by the government had only one or two people on them out of a maximum of a seven- to 36-person capacity. My questions are to the Premier. How can the Premier claim that 128 flights with only one person on them is cost-effective?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it is wrong and misleading, to say the least, to say that a King Air 200 or a King Air 350 holds – whatever she mentioned – 30 or 36 people. One aircraft holds six people; the other aircraft holds eight people, nine if someone sits on the toilet seat. The Dash 8, which is used to transport people to do energy sales in Calgary and forestry crews and others, is never used unless there are more than at least 10 passengers. So the hon. member is misleading this Legislature and the Alberta public by saying that government aircraft accommodate in excess of 30 passengers. That simply is not true.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Premier: how can the Premier claim that 239 flights with only two people on them is cost-effective?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it depends on where you're going. Indeed, many of the members from Calgary and the surrounding region fly to Edmonton and fly commercially, and that is hardly cost-effective to go to the International Airport and pay the price – I don't know

what a ticket is right now, but I understand it's fairly expensive – and then take a cab or rent a car or pay the parking fees to have a car there and to drive it.

There is a matter of convenience as well. I don't apologize, not one single bit, for this afternoon, for instance, going to Calgary. I don't know who is going to be on the airplane with me. I book it and invite anyone who wants to come along to Calgary. They can come on the aircraft. I have to be in Calgary, and there is no way – there's no way – that I'm going to leave here at 3 o'clock, when I have my obligatory scrum with the media, to arrive at the International Airport – I have to be in Calgary by 5; that means I have to be down there by 4 o'clock – and wait around an hour, when I can go 10 minutes to the City Centre Airport, which they didn't defend, by the way, as Edmontonians, and get the aircraft and be in Calgary. So it is a matter of convenience.

Believe me, to put one's rear end in a seat and go back and forth to Calgary or to Oyen or to all points in this province is not a luxury. I'll tell you that for sure.

1:40

Ms Blakeman: Edmonton voted against the City Centre.

My final question to the Premier: given that on January 31, 2002, there were 14 flights within Alberta on the government aircraft, six between Calgary and Edmonton and one of those carrying a backbench MLA flying solo, how is this filling the plane?

Mr. Klein: It happens, and it's wide open, Mr. Speaker. What would the Liberals have us do: have these planes and park them? Park them? We want to keep them in the air. The best use of an aircraft is when the aircraft is flying. The worst use is to park it.

I'll have the hon. minister comment.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I don't know about that particular day, but let me tell you what very often happens and likely what happened in this case. At times the aircraft will go to Calgary, and people will stay there. We keep a list of people that are in Calgary that want to fly back to Edmonton. If that individual that was on the aircraft coming back to Edmonton had gone back in some other way, then the plane deadheads back to Edmonton empty. So is there anything wrong with one person coming back when in fact they need a ride back to Edmonton?

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Water Use for Enhanced Oil Recovery

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's water for life strategy isn't worth the recycled paper it's printed on. Today industry, communities, and farmers were looking to the Environment minister for clear rules on the use of potable water by industry for injection. Instead, we got a clear message from the Minister of Energy that water is not for life but rather for industry. My questions are to the Premier. Why is your government putting the fox in charge of the henhouse by allowing industry to voluntarily monitor its own use of potable water?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister had a news conference on this issue today in which the preliminary report, as I understand it, on practices that remove water from the water cycle, primarily oil field injection, was discussed.

Before I have the hon. Minister of Environment respond, I wish the Liberals would stop pretending that there are easy answers to

every public policy question. And they do. If they ever, God forbid, got into government, they would learn that that is not the case. These are difficult situations.

The government, quite briefly, has struck a provincial committee of stakeholders, including the energy sector. This is not the fox being in charge of the henhouse. This is meaningful consultation. It involves environmental agencies and advocacy groups. Are they suggesting that these environmental agencies and advocacy groups are part of the fox that guards the henhouse? If they are, then stand up and say so. The stakeholder group included rural municipalities to look at this extremely complicated issue.

Relative to the details I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Dr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Premier. I would point out that what we had today was a preliminary report that we have consensus on. This is a consensus-based process, and I would remind the opposition that flaring will be reduced probably by over 80 per cent because of consensus. I would remind the opposition that we have the toughest standards in North America on emissions coming from coal-fired plants because of consensus. So consensus works.

I pointed out very clearly at the press conference – and this member obviously didn't listen at the press conference either – that we will have a final report by June 30. In regard to the specific issue that she identified, I will . . .

The Speaker: Hon. minister, you will have another chance. We'll just keep the question period going.

The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: when is the government going to invest the research and resources into making CO₂ injection economically and technologically viable?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting question. Certainly, there is technology available, and there is the ingenuity fund that can be used to enhance and develop research into the use of CO₂ for oilfield injection. It's my understanding from speaking to industry leaders that the technology now, although it exists, is very, very expensive. It's uneconomical at this time, but as research and development progress, I'm sure that this technology will become less expensive.

I will ask perhaps the hon. Minister of Energy, because he's been involved with this issue, and maybe the Minister of Innovation and Science to respond.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, this is the only jurisdiction in Canada that is taking active steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. One of those components is carbon dioxide sequestration, or storing CO₂ in areas below the ground.

There is a substantial flood going on in Saskatchewan. It's called the Weyburn miscible CO₂ flood. This has replaced water in some cases, or it's mixed with water. We co-operate with the province of Saskatchewan and with EnCana, the company that's responsible for this.

Do you know where they get their carbon dioxide from now? They buy it from the United States. So what has to happen, Mr. Speaker, is that we have to get the carbon dioxide. It has to be sourced; it has to be piped; it has to be cleaned up. There are a whole bunch of steps other than just saying something off the top of your head that says: CO₂ when stored. Lots to be done. We're on the file.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Premier: when will this government get serious about its water for life strategy and put a moratorium on its use of potable water for injection?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. minister indicated, there is a process right now involving all stakeholders, including environmental advocacy groups, industry, and municipalities, to look at this complicated issue.

I would remind all hon. members that while this issue is one that's important to Albertans and obviously to the opposition – it certainly is to this government – it represents a fairly small portion of the province's water. I'm given to understand that only 4 per cent of Alberta's total water allocations, including both surface and groundwater, is used in ways that remove it from the water cycle.

Mr. Speaker, looking at that in context, we allow over 50 per cent of the water that comes down the east slopes of the Rocky Mountains to flow freely into Saskatchewan and other jurisdictions.

An Hon. Member: That's by treaty.

Mr. Klein: We allow much more than 50 per cent. We are obligated to send 50 per cent. We send far more than 50 per cent. So this is to put it into context.

But we do understand that even that 4 per cent is an issue that needs to be dealt with, and the hon. minister is dealing with it.

The Speaker: Sorry, hon. minister. We've now spent seven minutes on this set. I've got 15 members who want to raise a question, and we're getting into a debate.

Coal Bed Methane Development

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, clearly the hon. Minister of Energy is calling the shots when it comes to water management and industry. This is troubling news for stakeholders concerned over this government's incompetence on coal bed methane development. Coal bed methane could be and should be Alberta's next big energy bonanza if it is done right. My first question is to the Premier. Will the Premier guarantee that no – not one – freshwater source in Alberta will be contaminated as a result of coal bed methane developments?

1:50

Mr. Klein: Again, that is a very interesting question. I've asked the Minister of Energy to provide me with some information, and he has quite capably. Indeed, I've spoken with EnCana, one of the companies doing major development relative to coal bed methane.

I'm given to understand that unlike the Powder River basin project in Wyoming where, indeed, extraction of gas from coal bed produced a lot of waste water and there were problems disposing of this water, the coal bed methane development, ostensibly, in Alberta – and I don't know to what extent – involves dry coal, and it doesn't involve water. I'm given assurances that the processes used here are entirely different and much safer than those that were used in Wyoming.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Environment: given that no two coal bed methane basins in Alberta are the same, what is the chemical composition of the saline, or brackish, water that is produced as a result of coal bed methane production?

Dr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a PhD in psychology, not

chemistry, and even with my PhD in psychology it doesn't help me understand him. Certainly, that's a question that I can't answer here, but we will get that technical chemistry-based information and provide it to the member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. My third question is to the Minister of Energy. Will this government promise to preserve water for future generations and place a moratorium on coal bed methane drilling until Albertans see for themselves – if this hon. minister doesn't know, hopefully someone else does – what kind . . .

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Practices

The Speaker: Hon. member. Hon. member, please. Now, hold on. The second question that the hon. member raised had nothing to do with government policy. I could have ruled it out. So having said that, please don't then extrapolate from the fact that you were given the right to proceed with your second question that the hon. minister doesn't know. This is this baiting that goes back and forth. I've got 15 members who want to ask questions. I'm going to keep this thing going along. Let's deal with policy.

The hon. Minister of Energy to respond.

Coal Bed Methane Development (continued)

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly can't speak on behalf of all government. I can speak personally about my commitment to future generations of Albertans to ensure that not only is there water here but that there is a healthy lifestyle, there are sufficient resources, and there are sufficient jobs created so that they can get educated in this place, they can live here, they can raise families here and maybe sit in this Legislature some day.

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

Calgary Courthouse

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Information that I released earlier today reveals that the P3 partners involved in the Calgary court centre project consortium had contributed over \$21,000 to the Alberta PC fund in the last three years. No wonder this government is continuing negotiations with this consortium for a drastically scaled back court centre rather than cancelling the flawed bidding process and starting over. My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier please explain why the BPC consortium, with its close political connections to this government, wasn't sent packing when it became obvious that they had lowballed their bid to win a project now facing cost overruns of 67 per cent?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, you know, I don't know to what steps and to what depths the opposition parties are willing to sink to find something. The suggestion in the ND press release is that this company, BPC – and I thought it was Kingsway or something – donated \$21,000 over three years to the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party. Over three years. First of all, I don't advise myself of who makes donations and who doesn't. Maybe the Liberals and the NDs do because they get so few donations that they monitor every single penny that comes in, but I don't. I leave that up to the party's finance committee.

Mr. Speaker, companies in this province compete for, win, or lose

government contracts, and they do this all the time regardless of whether they contribute to the PC Party, the Liberals, or the NDs. Now, the Calgary courthouse project is moving ahead through an open and transparent bidding process. It's an innovative approach in that it's a P3 initiative and that it's been carefully reviewed every step of the way.

Now, here's where the ND press release is totally and absolutely wrong, misleading. Mr. Speaker, when we saw that the costs were going up on this particular project, we revisited it, and now the costs, instead of \$500 million, are back to \$300 million, the original price. Even at a reduced scope we are confident that we can build an excellent facility that attends to the needs of Calgarians and consolidates the Provincial Court and the Court of Queen's Bench.

Mr. Mason: Can the Premier please confirm for this House that the new courthouse, the scaled back version, will in fact not contain all of the elements that it was originally planned for?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what it will or will not contain other than courthouse facilities. I'll have the hon. Minister of Infrastructure respond.

Mr. Lund: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's terribly unfortunate that the New Democratic Party would go to the extent that they've now gone because, quite frankly, what they have said is simply not factual. The whole process was so open and transparent right from the start when we put out a request for interest and then a request for qualifications and then a request for proposal. There were three companies that replied to the request for proposals. We took the lowest one and then worked with them, and as a matter of fact the price came down through the negotiations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the government yaps on about the transparency of this process, in order to make sure that Albertans aren't getting taken for a ride, will the government table in this Assembly the project estimates of the two bids that were rejected as well as the results of the so-called dummy bid as well as the process that was used to evaluate them?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll leave that up to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I noticed on the back page – well, I don't pay much attention to the front page of an ND news release, but the back page . . .

Mr. Mason: Yes, you do. Yes, you do.

Mr. Klein: Well, I happened to have it here because it was on the desk of my colleague the hon. Attorney General and Government House Leader. So I was able to pick it up and look in absolute amazement and disbelief at how a press release could be so misleading. And then I saw: New Democrat opposition. I said: well, there you go.

Now, I just looked at the back page, and here BPC as a company made no donations. I understand that some partners did. GWLRA donated \$3,750 over two years. Cana Construction donated \$5,000 to the 2001 election, and for that we are truly grateful. Kasian Kennedy, the architectural firm, donated \$4,700 in 2003, \$4,500 in 2002, and \$2,000 in 2001. SNC-Lavalin ProFac property operations donated the huge sum of \$1,000.

Mr. Speaker, you know, it goes from the sublime to the absolutely

ridiculous, but again, when you're dealing with an ND press release, how can you expect anything more?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

2:00 Oil Sands Royalty Regime

Mr. Yankowsky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents and Albertans have questions about the royalty regime as it applies to the Alberta tar sands projects. Recently we have been hearing about Suncor wanting their Firebag project included for royalty purposes with their Steepbank project. Also, Albertans are starting to ask questions in regard to the actual revenue Alberta is realizing from the tar sands, especially in light of demands for more infrastructure. My questions are all to the Minister of Energy. Could the minister tell this Assembly: what is the present royalty rate, and how is it applied to tar sands projects?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's an important question because the member refers to what is an area of Alberta larger than the state of South Carolina on which much of our future revenue depends. But it is not conventional oil and gas exploration; it is mining. With mining comes a large and substantial investment. Billions and billions of dollars must be spent in order to extract that resource, then take the resource and convert it, take the sulphur out of it, and turn it into crude that is marketable at today's prices.

In order to facilitate the movement of investment into this area to develop these oil sands, Mr. Speaker, we applied in 1996 a generic royalty regime. This means that 1 per cent of all the company's revenues from its investment are subject to royalties. We charge that 1 per cent rate. When those investments are paid out, we then take the revenue minus the cost and charge 25 per cent on that rate, and that rate occurs at the time of payout.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yankowsky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Are any projects at or nearing payout that will soon be paying a higher royalty rate?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, at present the department has on file some 52 projects paying royalty under the oil sands royalty regime. Of that, 37 are in prepayment status; 15 are in postpayment status. I don't want to get into the individuals, because a lot of that is proprietary commercial information, but I can say that the removal of the machinery and equipment tax in 1995 combined with the generic oil sands royalty regime has resulted in some 50 billion plus dollars' worth of investment.

This investment, if I can put the numbers forward, in projected payout, all by 2017, if you assume 1 per cent inflation, means that the price of oil would be \$60 a barrel. Roughly a \$10 spread for operating puts us at \$50. At \$12 for operating, that's \$38. Twenty-five per cent of \$38 is nine and a half dollars. At 3 million barrels a day, Mr. Speaker, that's \$11 billion a year that is contributed to the coffers of Albertans for their building, for their use, for their development.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yankowsky: Thank you. To the same minister again: what is the present cash flow that Albertans are realizing from the tar sands projects per day?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, that's a good question. I can say that for

the 2003 production year the 37 prepayment projects paid \$8.1 million in royalties, and the 15 postpayment projects paid over \$217 million in royalties.

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

Firebag Oil Sands Development

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firebag is an in situ oil sands development which will increase Suncor's oil production to more than one-half a million barrels per day in the next six to seven years. This government currently classifies Firebag as a separate project from Suncor's existing operations, while Suncor believes that Firebag is an expansion of its existing operations. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. What information is this government using to determine that Firebag is separate from the existing Suncor operations north of Fort McMurray?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, we use the terms and conditions and details as outlined in the oil sands royalty regulation.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: will this dispute harm future investor confidence in future northern Alberta tar sands developments?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, the oil sands royalty regulation has proven to not only stimulate investment today but to stimulate investment as far back as 1996, will continue to stimulate investment, and will continue to ensure that Albertans share in this great resource as well as the companies that are in there mining the resource.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: what is the difference in royalties payable by Suncor to the people of Alberta if Firebag is classified as a separate project?

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a question subject to a great many variables. Those variables are as tangible as the changing price of oil, which changes on a daily basis, when suicide bombers are found close to oil field terminals on the coast of Iraq, to holes drying up in the North Sea. We don't know how that will specifically impact it. We don't know what's going to happen with future construction costs and how they will change with respect to labour rates, budgeting, engineering procurement, and contracting. So, in fact, it is impossible to give a definitive impact.

But let me finish the question by saying that we do know we have the right regulation. We also know that we have the right companies up there and that they're developing this resource in an environmentally responsible fashion.

The Speaker: The hon. minister to supplement.

Mr. Norris: Yeah. I would just like to supplement the Minister of Energy. I'm sure that he wanted to tell people, but the actual amount of construction that's estimated or underway in the next 10 years is \$70 billion, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Norris: Seventy billion, and that translates to about \$3 billion or \$4 billion per year. The hon. member's question to the minister doesn't translate into what's happening now, and I thought I'd put that on the table.

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

Edmonton City Centre Airport

Mr. Rathgeber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Edmonton City Centre Airport is located within the Edmonton-Calder constituency. A recently released airport consultation report recommends continuation of 10-passenger flights' access to and from the airport. My questions are for the Minister of Economic Development. Since his department participated in the consultation group, what steps is his department taking to ensure that the Edmonton airports authority follows the recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjections] The hon. minister has the floor. [interjections]

Mr. Norris: Apparently, I don't.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, you do have the floor. You've been recognized now three times.

Mr. Norris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. member for the question and, before I give an answer, would like to make reference to the outstanding work done by the Member for Peace River, the chairman of the Northern Alberta Development Council, who did an awful lot to bring this issue to the front.

As every member here knows, the committee has finished its work, Mr. Speaker, and is reviewing the recommendations. We're very, very pleased with the process that took place not only through our department but through the Member for Peace River, who is on the committee. Obviously, we feel very, very strongly about the importance of that airport for economic development not only for northern Alberta but for all Alberta. This is Alberta's capital city, and it came out loud and clear that that was a big concern.

The process, as I understand it now, will be that the authority is reviewing all the recommendations. Where we can work and are working with the hon. Minister of Justice is on enforcement rules. One of the complaints was that if some of the planes are capped at 10 seats and 10 passengers, why isn't that happening? So with the Minister of Transportation we're looking at that. But our ongoing role in this now is to observe what comes out of the airport authority's recommendations, and at that point the committee is still in place to act on any future suggestions, Mr. Speaker.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rathgeber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: if 19-passenger planes are landing and taking off at the airport, why can they only have 10 passengers on board?

Mr. Norris: Well, that's a very good question, Mr. Speaker. Our government planes are actually not part of the equation, and some clarification might be good for the hon. members opposite. What the airport authority had talked about at the outset was never the charter flights, the medevacs, or the government planes. What they were talking about is scheduled flights, which is what we're talking about. So if they want more information, I'm happy to provide it.

The issue as such is I guess one of economics. Whether the planes that are flying are able to do so economically at a 10-seat or 19-seat capacity remains to be seen, but the understanding that we have is that it's cheaper to fly a 19-seat plane. The airport authority wanted

a 10-seat cap so as not to cannibalize activity out at the International Airport in Leduc, and that made some sense.

So the reality of it is that if both sides are going to work together to promote what I believe is a remarkable economic jewel, they're going to have to come to a compromise, and that was the compromise that was suggested with the exception, Mr. Speaker, of High Level and Fort Chipewyan, where it was indicated that they may have more of a compelling case to have 19-seat planes with 19 passengers due to the length of time to fly in and out. That's something that's being reviewed as well.

So the answer to the hon. member's question is that it's one of economics, but it's certainly something that we're going to stay on until it's concluded.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rathgeber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the minister assure that both runways at the City Centre Airport will remain open?

Mr. Norris: Well, clearly, no, I can't, but I can certainly say that we are vitally concerned that the suggestion that one of the runways should be shut down was put out there. Clearly, anybody who's involved in aviation knows that after a certain degree of wind either way, 20 knots I believe, it makes one of the runways very difficult to land on.

The suggestion that one or the other should be shut down was not received well by the consultation group, and as such they recommended that both be left open. Our belief, Mr. Speaker, is that in order for that airport to remain viable and to continue in the future, both must remain open. So the committee that the Deputy Minister of Economic Development and the Member for Peace River sit on will continue to push for both runways being open because it's just that important.

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

Daycare Accreditation Policy

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hope of the new daycare accreditation policy rests on adequate funding to support implementation. With wages less than \$8.50 an hour and the highest staff turnover rate in the country, we could see the promise of accreditation lost. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. What good will accreditation do if no one is willing to work in a field with such low pay scales?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to reflect on the article in the parent magazine that so poorly quoted the issues surrounding accreditation, daycare, and costs in Alberta. There was a reference point to the lack of opportunity to sustain qualified daycare staff. In this House I will be tabling what will be sent to *Today's Parent* and talk about the actual truth of the matter as it relates to the funding for daycare, the experience for daycare. Fundamentally, the comparisons across the country in that study were evaluated on the basis of children from zero to 12 years of age, and we count those children that we are providing care to between zero and six years of age. So there was a flaw in the gathering of the data right off the bat, and I want to make that perfectly clear.

In terms of salaries and standards and the accreditation process we have looked at the opportunity for contracted service providers to engage a qualified accreditation authority to come in and evaluate

the quality service standards. But today, Mr. Speaker, we are not only looking at daycares and day homes but for all of those people through parent resource centres or other preschool/early-years programs to have some type of accreditation standard to make sure that parents and children and families are engaged and that staff are qualified and well trained.

Mr. Speaker, the short answer for the hon. member opposite is that I will table exactly what our intentions are on qualifications, and I will provide what we're currently doing on the training of qualified staff.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a question of wages.

How will the current small income supplements to parents result in better qualified care workers, required under the accreditation, actually being hired?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, while it will rest finally with each individual service provider, the amounts that we're providing aren't all that will be done. The supports for training, the supports for building qualified personnel, the other kinds of service provisions and supports that will be provided will assist in enabling those service providers themselves to pay a higher wage. The very minimum that was provided at the outset was recognizing the willingness of each daycare and day home to get involved in the process, but we have yet to achieve accreditation. We have yet to deliver more than what the current programming has required. An accreditation in the system will require significantly more supports provided by the providers, and at that time then we will be evaluating what the salary differential is from today's rates and see if we've achieved success.

Mr. Speaker, on the level 3s, admittedly, I think we can do better, but again it's the providers of that daycare as opposed to this government paying those people that are delivering the service.

Dr. Massey: A third question to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: when will the government commit funds to improve the current meagre daycare resources so that those qualified daycare workers are actually able to do their job?

Ms Evans: Let's be clear that the provision of funds or the lack thereof is not something that inhibits a person from doing the job of taking care of children. That is not something that stops people from doing it, nor do any of those daycare workers tell you that because they're paid more, they'll do better at the job.

Let's be clear that when we have got the full accreditation process in place, then the evaluation about the credits and the standards will be maintained. Last year we provided \$6 million for the system of daycares and day homes. We've added almost double that fund this year.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are extra resources, and the accreditation isn't complete yet. We're at the outset of this process, and I think we'll be well satisfied that we've achieved results by the time people are fully accredited.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Seniors' Benefits Program

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Funding to the Alberta seniors' benefits program was increased in Budget 2004 by \$21 million, yet the seniors haven't seen any positive changes to their

benefits. To the Minister of Seniors: as a result of this increase, are there any plans in place to increase the thresholds for the Alberta seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Woloshyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2004 increases the benefits program to some \$199 million. With respect to the \$21 million increase \$11 million will be used to accommodate new entrants to the program as well as to deal with the increased support in the long-term care accommodation rates. The remaining \$10 million will be added to the seniors' program, but currently we are looking at where we can get the best effect with the \$10 million to ensure that the largest number of people get the support that they should get.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. How does the ministry arrive at the thresholds, and who did the ministry consult with to arrive at the current threshold levels?

Mr. Woloshyn: Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that the Alberta seniors' benefits program was designed to act as a supplement to the federal financial assistance provided through old age security and guaranteed income supplement. The original thresholds for the program were established in 1993-94, and that was done through consultations directly with seniors and with a variety of seniors' organizations. The current thresholds are reviewed on an annual basis, and we continue to monitor the costs that the seniors are facing, costs such as increases in utilities, taxes, cost of living, and so on. Whenever possible we make adjustments to the program, depending upon our ability to get resources and the ability to show the need. I might point out that during the last 10 years the thresholds have changed several times.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. How do the seniors' benefits in Alberta, the richest province in Canada, compare to those of other provinces?

Mr. Woloshyn: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say at the outset that Alberta's benefits program compares extremely favourably with the other provinces. For example, we have a maximum of \$235 per month for seniors who are not in long-term care. Seniors in long-term care get much more. No other province offers as high a cash benefit to low-income seniors, and in fact some provinces don't have any cash benefit for seniors, no program similar to this.

In addition, our eligibility thresholds are currently very generous. An individual senior whose income is under \$18,850 would be eligible for the beginning of cash benefits; \$28,740 is the threshold for couples. Approximately 126,000, or 38 per cent of all the seniors in Alberta, do receive a cash benefit. If you add to that, Mr. Speaker, the number of seniors who get some health care premium exemptions, that number rises to 56 per cent of all the seniors.

In addition, seniors on the benefits program are eligible for special-needs assistance. Alberta is the only province with that program. Mr. Speaker, this year's budget allocates some \$33 million to that program. The number of individuals who have become eligible increased to some 35,000 last year. I might point out that

some provinces have no support for seniors at any level for dental, no support for optical, no support for hearing aids. Not all provinces but some provinces don't have those. We are quite generous in how we support our special-needs seniors. I might add also that about 1 in 3 of the seniors in this province receive some support with their housing.

Mr. Speaker, I'll close by saying that the Alberta seniors portion of the budget is \$250 million for the whole package, and to that you have to add what Alberta Health puts in, and that comes to well over a billion dollars for seniors.

Highway Safety

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, as the road construction industry swings into high gear for the summer, public safety is a major concern for construction workers working on or near Alberta highways. To the Minister of Transportation: what policies is the government undertaking to enhance the safety of construction workers who work on the province's highways, bridges, and overpasses?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a number of projects that we're working on co-operatively with various municipalities and the contractors in the province. One of them is RIP, which is really rest in peace. It's a sign of a cross, trying to impress upon Albertans to please not rush through a construction zone; there may be a construction worker that may not see the oncoming car or lose attention while they're working on the site. So that's just one of the many media campaigns that we'll see occurring in the province.

Mr. Bonner: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: does the minister not have the power under the rules of the road, section 112 of the Traffic Safety Act, to govern the utilization of highways and the use and operation of vehicles on Alberta highways?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the law is in place. It is a matter of communicating to Albertans that they should obey the rules of the road, that they should pay attention while they're on a public highway and have respect for those individuals that are employed in making our highways much better and improving the infrastructure in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonner: Yes. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: with the authority granted the minister under rules of the road, section 112, will the minister then implement a reduction of speed on roadways and areas where emergency vehicles are attending to an incident and have their flashing lights in operation?

Mr. Stelmach: He's referring to a section that's defining emergency vehicles, and there is a private member's bill before the House looking at bringing about some amendments to the current legislation. [interjection] I hear the hon. member insisting on talking over there. Obviously, he must need the practice. He's not listening.

What we are looking at is the total definition of emergency vehicle and then looking at how we can make those particular circumstances, when emergency vehicles are out there, much safer and looking at incorporating construction zones at the same particular time.

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

Utilities Deregulation

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just before Christmas the province's Energy and Utilities Board quietly allowed Direct Energy to add an extra \$40 million a year on the gas and electricity bills of Albertans as part of the deal to buy ATCO's retail business. Now that Direct Energy has finalized this deal with ATCO, the city of Calgary is challenging the decision to approve these extra charges in court. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Why is it that with every additional step down the government's utility deregulation road Albertans are being asked to pay more, not less, for so-called competition and customer choice?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, this particular charge was put forward as a result of the passage of Bill 19, which was the final step in the natural gas competitive market restructuring that started in 1986 and culminated in 2003.

The member, if he wasn't here, should have been here to attentively listen to the debate and determine why the bill was passed and what benefits should accrue from that. [interjections] Now, instead of listening to the reply, just as listening to the debate, they choose to heckle. I can't make them listen, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, no answer by the minister.

Again let me try. How does the minister keep his nose from growing in peddling the fiction that Direct Energy's entry into Alberta is beneficial to consumers when the cold hard truth is that an extra \$40 million per year is quietly being added to customers' utility bills?

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is not quietly being added to utility bills. That was a very clear decision made by the EUB. They publish their decisions. One decision is just like the other decision, and they make no differentiation. It's posted on a web site. We do know that the separation of the ability to market this product and the ability to deliver this product through distribution has represented a 10-cent a day charge put forth, approved by the EUB.

The EUB has also asked for a detailed study from Direct Energy to examine those costs to determine if they're prudent, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, if you look at being able to purchase rates that are now combined, as I said yesterday in the House—I hate to go forward and recap it, but because they won't listen, I guess I'm forced to use the good time of this good House to do that. Those rates combined with the flexibility in marketing should more than override any additional cost that was publicly approved through a legislated process in a matter of a press release posted on a web site, nothing surreptitious, nothing designed to put one company ahead of another but just simple good, hard, honest, open, transparent legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:30

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary to the same minister: will the minister or the government order its toothless Utilities Consumer Advocate to support the city of Calgary's attempt to overturn the EUB decision to allow these extra charges, and if not, why not?

Speaker's Ruling Sub Judice Rule

The Speaker: Hold on, please. The hon. leader of the third party in raising his first question indicated that there was a court action. The difficulty the chair has in understanding this is determining whether

or not this is sub judice. If the hon. member now in his third question is asking for a minister of the Crown to interfere in an ongoing court process, that clearly is not within the rules of the Assembly.

Now, the difficulty the chair has: the chair does not know if this is actually before the courts or not and usually would turn to the Attorney General for some guidance with respect to this.

Mr. Hancock: Far be it from me to contradict the chair, but the Attorney General also does not know every court case that has been filed in the province of Alberta on any given day.

The Speaker: There was no contradiction. It was a matter of guidance to the chair with respect to sub judice matters.

Now, the hon. minister.

Utilities Deregulation

(continued)

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, I think it's only appropriate that we finish this line of questioning by saying that the member is asking the wrong minister. The Utilities Consumer Advocate is directly placed with the Minister of Government Services.

So had the member listened to debate on Bill 19, had the member followed the discussions in the EUB and the posting on the web site and the transparency in the decision, and had the member read the report from the Bolger commission, the advisory council on electrical issues, that showed the creation of a utility advocate, he would be up to date in Kansas City. Mr. Speaker, he's long and lost somewhere in NDP land.

The Speaker: Did the hon. Minister of Government Services want to supplement this final answer?

Mr. Coutts: No.

The Speaker: No. Okay.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of four members to participate.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Jim Dixon

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 21 the members of this Assembly and the Alberta public service lost a trusted friend, a colleague, and a leader with the passing of former Public Service Commissioner, Mr. Jim Dixon. His career in the public service spanned more than 35 years, including 25 as Alberta's Public Service Commissioner.

Jim began his long career with the Alberta government in the 1960s. His extensive career in human resources with the personnel administration office and his strong leadership within the Alberta government earned Jim the deepest respect from everyone he worked with. Jim brought vision and integrity to the public service. He was a leader not through his exercise of authority but through his example of competence, reason, and influence.

As Alberta's top human resource executive Jim positioned the Alberta public service to succeed through decades of challenge and change. A man of renowned talent and insight he created and implemented innovative human resource policies which positioned the government of Alberta as a preferred employer. This is demon-

strated by the creation of the award-winning corporate human resource development strategy under his leadership. It was one of the first cross-ministry initiatives and remains a key administrative initiative today.

Over his career Jim was involved in many rounds of bargaining since the first collective agreement was reached with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees in 1975. His characteristic sense of balance, respect, and fairness contributed to Alberta's prolonged productive relations with the union. Jim's colleagues across Canada looked to him for his wisdom and counsel. Thanks to Jim's leadership and abilities the Alberta public service has rightfully gained a reputation for excellence across Canada.

Jim was also a dedicated family man. I'm sure that you, Mr. Speaker, and all Members of the Legislative Assembly will join me in extending our deepest condolences to his wife, Pat, his two children, Jay and Julie, and to other family members, colleagues, and friends.

Jim Dixon's legacy of achievement in this province will live on for many years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Education Week

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From the time we're born through to enjoying our grandchildren in our golden years, every day is an opportunity to learn, be it an elementary school classroom, a lecture hall on a postsecondary campus, or perhaps seniors learning to install new software on their home computer or maybe just trying a recipe for the first time. Lifelong learning results.

This week, April 25 until May 1, is Education Week. This year's theme is The Learning Edge in recognition of the fact that Alberta's learning system, its students, and its educators continue to be among the best in the world.

Mr. Speaker, learning is a priority for Albertans. Education Week is an opportunity to celebrate learning successes that are taking place throughout Alberta and recognize everyone who contributes to Alberta's leading edge in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary learning systems.

These successes exist because of the partnerships between government, institutions, school boards, teachers, parents, and students. They also exist because of the special dedication of professionals that devote their lives to the formation and education of all of our children.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's knowledge-based economy and society requires innovative, well-educated, well-mannered, skilled, and adaptive citizens. The people of Alberta have long recognized that learning is the cornerstone of Alberta's future. Those involved in the learning system today have an awesome responsibility to help model and preserve the values and attitudes of successful Albertans and nurture the calling from within of their children for tomorrow's promise.

I hope that everyone will take time this week to celebrate learning, to thank those who contribute to our world-class education system, and to make Education Week special for everyone involved. Mr. Speaker, hug your teacher today.

Thank you.

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

Internationalization of Alberta

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a dream or rather a vision

for Alberta: an internationalized and competitively enterprising Alberta with its operational focus on being the most efficient, effective, economical, and ethical.

Why does Alberta need internationalization? History has many times over proven that a country, even small in population and landscape, becomes strong and influential when it goes beyond its borders. Historical city states such as Athens, Changan, Rome, Carthage, Venice became prosperous when they traded beyond their borders. Small countries such as Portugal, Spain, England, Holland roamed the world beyond their borders to become influential all over the globe. Recently small jurisdictions like Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Switzerland have become respected economic world powers when they go beyond their borders. Many businesses that started out very modestly locally became big enterprises only when they went international.

For the benefit of Albertans Alberta needs to grow beyond its borders and go beyond its modest population. Let's look at public revenue development, for example. Alberta needs to go international, beyond our 3 million Albertans and 30 million Canadians. Let's obtain international revenues for Alberta. Our public institutions should be allowed and encouraged to look for revenues from international sources as our population is very modest and we want to maintain a low tax environment.

In general, a public strategy for dealing with continuous growth is to build extra or buffer capacity on top of the public capacity with private and international resources for the use of clients who pay. This extra capacity is turned over to our local public use as our public needs grow. It is a buffer we can count on for our tight public system, assuring our citizens that when they need it, it will be there. It is also the revenue earner for the public systems.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

2:40

Education Week

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I join the Member for Calgary-Egmont in recognizing Education Week, which runs from April 25 to May 1. The theme this year is Public Education: The Learning Edge, which is especially fitting for Alberta public and separate schools who are learning to do more innovative programs with less funding.

Alberta teachers and principals have striven to respond to parents with new alternative programs to meet the needs of all children. In the process they have redefined public education. School boards have responded to a desire by communities to have local control over school resources in order to meet local needs by introducing school-based budgeting, which allows principals and parents to decide how resources should best be used in their own schools.

Competition from private schools in the late 1970s encouraged school boards to offer programs that were as good as those in private institutions. Plans entailed eliminating school boundaries, allowing students to attend any school in a district, offering alternative programs such as dynamic arts and athletics, and inviting independent schools to join school boards.

Alberta schools are not rigid cookie-cutter copies of one another. Parents and students have a wide selection of programming from which to choose thanks to the creativity and dedication of principals, teachers, school officials, parents, students, and the support of the Alberta public. In Alberta there are choices of modified school calendars, year-round schooling, and specialized programs such as academics, arts, or athletics.

During this Education Week we must take time to reflect on the

value of a strong public education system not only to the young people it moulds into productive citizens but also to society as a whole. It's not good enough for Alberta children to have a right to an education. All Alberta children must have the right to an excellent public education.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Ms Graham: Yes, 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 with amendments: Bill Pr. 4, Northwest Bible College Amendment Act, 2004. As part of this report I will be tabling five copies of the proposed amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I request the concurrence of the Assembly in these recommendations.

The Speaker: Shall I call the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Opposed? Carried.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of the Law Society of Alberta annual report 2003. The mission of the Law Society of Alberta is to serve and protect the public interest. They promote a high standard of legal service and professional conduct. I appreciate the work that the members of the Law Society do in the community and their commitment to providing excellent service. Their feedback is always valuable as we work together to achieve the best possible legal system for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, many of us here sometimes indulge in humour with respect to lawyer jokes, but I like to take every opportunity that I can when speaking in public to thank members of the legal profession for the work that they do in our community organizations, not-for-profit organizations, and elsewhere on a pro bono, or free, basis to help improve our communities.

The Speaker: No other tablings?

The chair would like to table a letter he received at 11:30 this morning from the Opposition House Leader concerning certain events that occurred in the Assembly yesterday in conjunction with comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar during his tabling and a subsequent point of order raised by the Minister of Infrastructure. As well, I'm tabling a handwritten note from the Minister of Community Development respecting this matter.

**Speaker's Ruling
Parliamentary Language**

The Speaker: I would like to make some comments as well with respect to these events that occurred yesterday. I indicated a little

earlier that I received at 11:30 a.m. a letter from the Opposition House Leader concerning certain events that occurred in the Assembly yesterday in connection with comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar during his tabling and a subsequent point of order raised by the Minister of Infrastructure. Both the Government House Leader and the Minister of Community Development were copied on the letter sent earlier today. As this is the last tabling under this item of business, I want to make some comments about the contents of the letter.

The chair should explain that essentially the Official Opposition House Leader takes exception to the manner in which the point of order was raised and some comments by the Deputy Government House Leader. First, as hon. members who have been here for at least three years will know, certain things develop quickly in this place, and the atmosphere can become very, very heated at times. In the chair's view that was the case yesterday when the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar made some comments in connection with his tabling which carried on the exchange from question period. The Minister of Infrastructure took exception and raised a point of order, which was dealt with by the chair by essentially saying that there was no point of order.

During the discussion the Deputy Government House Leader made some comments which the chair did not hear as a result of certain activities in the House – not only did the chair not hear, certain table officers did not hear – but which were found on pages 1020 and 1021 of yesterday's *Hansard*. The Deputy Government House Leader said, "Will you stop for a second and shut up and listen, please." Clearly, this is unparliamentary, and the chair appreciates the fact that the Deputy Government House Leader has indicated an apology by way of a handwritten note that he said that he had provided to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on a first-name basis.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader also indicated that he will have his comments withdrawn. How might that occur? We'll come to that in just a second. Then we'll call on the hon. Government House Leader to in fact withdraw those comments on behalf of the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Members must know that this chair is absolutely committed to preserving order and decorum in this Assembly, but the chair is also aware of the games that go on in this place. He has been here since 1979. He's observed nearly all of the games, not to suggest that there aren't some new ones being invented on a daily basis, but he has seen them. He's been victimized by some and has been perpetrator of some. As the chair noted yesterday and will repeat again today, tablings should just be tabled without comment. That started the whole incident. The chair has also said many times that members know that they can do better.

**Speaker's Ruling
Oral Question Period Practices**

The Speaker: Now, the chair has absolutely no difficulty standing up ad nauseam and intervening in the dealings of this Assembly, but he has also said on many, many occasions that in essence this would completely bring to a halt the question period in this Assembly. There must be an ebb and flow.

Today let me just give you three examples of when there could have been interventions and questions could have been ruled out. There was one on the third question that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona raised. After the first question the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona said that there was a matter before the courts. Well, clearly, we know that if certain matters are before the courts, subject to certain interpretations of our sub judice rule, specifically Standing Order 23(g)(ii), those questions could just very

easily have been ruled out, and they would not have been applicable, and they should not have been proceeded with.

Hon. members will know as well that *Beauchesne* 411(1) basically says that there's no provision in the question period for legal interpretations to be given by ministers themselves. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry on several occasions asked the hon. Minister of Transportation to provide a legal interpretation with respect to a certain question. Well, those questions could have been ruled out, but under the wide-ranging guise of government policy they were let proceed.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder raised two questions. One, he wanted to know about airplane seats being 10 or 19. Subject to correction the chair is unaware of any law passed by the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta which will determine the number of seats that are applicable to aircraft in the province of Alberta. Neither is the chair aware that the province of Alberta owns the Edmonton City Centre Airport and has any jurisdiction whatsoever in terms of either of the two runways operating within the city of Edmonton at the City Centre Airport. Yet questions were raised; policy was presumably wide ranging.

There's an ebb and flow; there's a give and take. However, there is no great difficulty in the chair's purview of applying all the rules. It would make a very, very different Legislative Assembly. But subject to wide consultation of all 83 members, that will not occur in the interim.

The hon. Government House Leader.

2:50

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you indicated, the Deputy Government House Leader, the Minister of Community Development, had provided a handwritten note, and in that handwritten note he indicates, in reference to the comment that he made, "However, it was also inappropriate" – I'll delete the part in brackets – "for me to use the words 'shut up'" and "I will have my comment withdrawn!" He specifically asked that I rise on his behalf, withdraw those comments and apologize for them.

Mr. Speaker, on my own initiative, not on behalf of the Minister of Community Development, I would just say that I can understand how one is tempted to make comments of that type because sometimes when you are speaking and there are interjections, it's really difficult to concentrate. That does not, however, in any way suggest that one should use words like "shut up" in this House, and the hon. minister has ask that I withdraw those remarks and apologize on his behalf.

The Speaker: Just one addendum to that. If all hon. members would read their own Standing Orders, Standing Order 13(4)(b), and ask themselves what it really means. When the chair has given a certain person recognition to speak, what does that mean for all other members?

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

head: **Main Estimates 2004-05**

Solicitor General

The Deputy Chair: As per our Standing Order the first hour will be

allocated between the minister and members of the opposition, following which anybody else may participate.

The hon. Solicitor General.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to present the Alberta Solicitor General business plan for 2004 to 2007. Before I begin, I would like to introduce members of my executive committee and senior officials who are attending the meeting with me today: the Deputy Solicitor General, Jim Nichols; Bob Dunster, my ADM of public security; Arnold Galet, ADM of correctional services; Dan Mercer, assistant deputy minister of strategic services; Don Mottershead, chief information officer and executive director of strategic management services; Shawkat Sabur, senior financial officer and executive director of financial services; Maureen Geres, my executive assistant; and Debbie Malloy, my special adviser.

Mr. Chairman, these people are incredibly dedicated to what they do. Their support over the last three years has made my job a lot . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Solicitor General, just for the record, just for correction: you are presenting not only the business plans but also the estimates for 2004-2005.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: You may proceed.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes, Mr. Chair. Thanks. I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge all the staff that work in the Solicitor General area also. They do an unbelievable job in sometimes very difficult situations.

Mr. Chair, I'll open with a few remarks and then respond to any questions that might come up from the House. To the extent that either time does not permit or I'm unable to answer questions in sufficient detail, we'll certainly be prepared to respond in writing to any questions that were not addressed.

The Financial Management Commission recommended that the ministerial business plan and estimates address our strategic priorities rather than activities and operational manners. I'm sure you have noticed, along with other government ministries, that we have responded to this direction by developing a more strategically focused plan that reflects our priorities.

Our vision and mission statement remain unchanged. We have a vision of a province where Albertans feel safe in their homes and in their communities. The ministry works to achieve this vision through joint initiatives with community partners and through its participation in cross-ministry policy initiatives.

While we have not changed our core businesses, they have been aligned more closely with our goals. Under the core businesses of policing and crime prevention is goal 1, "ensure safe communities in Alberta," \$179 million, 52 per cent of our budget. Under the core business of victims programs and services is goal 2, "provide services to victims and ensure that they have a more meaningful role in the criminal justice system," \$12 million, 3 per cent of our budget. Under our third core business – custody, supervision, and rehabilitative opportunities for offenders – are goal 3, "facilitate the rehabilitation of offenders," and goal 4, "ensure secure and efficient custody, community supervision and transportation of offenders," \$138.9 million, 40 per cent of our budget. Under the core business of security services is goal 5, "ensure the safety of Albertans by providing government security services and crisis management planning," \$16.4 million, 5 per cent of our budget.

As I've already alluded to, our 2004-2007 ministry business plan outlines our strategic priorities for the next three years. These

priorities rise from our environmental scanning process and from consultation with Albertans through three major reviews that we have undertaken over the past several years. Our seven strategic priorities for 2004-2007, the main drivers for action, include action on the MLA reviews, crime prevention, organized crime and terrorism, offender management, children and youth initiatives, aboriginal initiatives, and utilization of emerging technologies.

With regard to our strategic priority of taking action on all three MLA reviews, we recently released both the policing and corrections reviews, with the victims review coming in due course. For example, Mr. Chair, we recognize that towns and cities are experiencing serious financial problems in meeting their policing needs, so we are adding \$58 million in extra funding to bolster policing services in the province, a 50 per cent increase in spending on policing programs. This boosts spending on policing programs to \$174 million for 2004-2005. Likewise, as part of the response to the corrections review we are set to hire more probation officers, launch an electronic monitoring pilot project, and implement a smoking ban in adult jails.

In order to meet our financial targets back in 2002-2003, a significant part of the crime prevention and restorative justice program budgets were eliminated. I'm happy to say that crime prevention and restorative justice grants will be restored. My ministry will work towards addressing the strategic priority of crime prevention through continued community partnership, agreement with provincial crime prevention associations, and adjustments to crime prevention and restorative justice program funding.

Another one of our strategic priorities is organized crime and terrorism. If we are to maintain our safe communities, we must strengthen our police resources to bring these groups to justice.

Back in June 2003 Treasury Board provided funding to move forward with the implementation of the integrated response to organized crime and gang units in Alberta, commonly known as IROC. IROC is unique in that it will not replace any existing enforcement efforts. Instead, it will conduct investigations currently difficult to undertake because of the complexity of the scope.

This unit will be in addition to the continuing efforts of the Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, CISA. The security and information management unit, SIM, developed under the 2002-05 business plan, will enhance security information, risk awareness, and develop and implement counterterrorism strategies. Together, IROC, CISA, and the SIM unit will go a long way towards addressing crime and terrorism.

We are working towards a number of initiatives that address the strategic priority of offender management. We are furthering the development of the youth justice committee program and working closely with other departments and agencies to divert individuals with mental illness away from the criminal justice system. We are also looking towards expanding the availability of domestic violence treatment programs, in addition to working with Children's Services to prepare a provincial-wide response to family violence.

In support of the strategic priority of children and youth initiatives we are preparing a strategy with law enforcement agencies and government departments to address all types of child exploitation, including child pornography, child prostitution, family abuse, and Internet crimes.

Another priority from my ministry as well as a cross-ministry priority initiative is the aboriginal policy initiative. In co-operation with the federal government and First Nations communities we are developing a strategy to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of First Nations policing in this province.

For the strategic priority of utilization of emerging technology we are evaluating a project that we are involved in with Alberta Justice

on the implementation of video conferencing for first appearances and setting final trial dates at the Edmonton Remand Centre and the Calgary Young Offender Centre. Video conferencing is intended to enhance the safety of the public, staff, witnesses, and the accused, because fewer prisoners need to be transported to and from court. If the pilot project is successful – and it does look like it is successful – we are looking towards implementation across the province.

3:00

As with the rest of our business plan over the past year we have also worked to enhance the strategic focus of our performance measures, attempting to move away from the operational or output measures. Our focus is now more on measuring the long-term outcomes of the goal. Several measures which have appeared in previous ministry business plans have been removed from this year's business plan in an attempt to enhance the strategic focus of this document. These include public satisfaction with police, number of victim service initiatives, and successful transportation of prisoners to court. Although all these measures have been removed from the business plan, we will continue monitoring our performance in these areas to ensure that we continue to provide satisfactory performance.

The 2004-2007 business plan financials, the financial content of our business plan, reflect Treasury Board's approval over the past year as well as federally funded programs and funds for continuing core programs and services. The Alberta Solicitor General's budget for 2004-2005 is \$334.4 million. This is an increase of \$62.6 million over last year's comparable forecast and \$66.1 million over last year's comparable budget. This is almost a 25 per cent increase in program funding.

Overall spending on policing and crime prevention will increase by \$61.2 million over the 2003-04 budget. We have heard the concerns from communities across the province. We have come to an agreement with the municipalities. Funding for supervision and rehabilitation of offenders has increased by \$3.5 million and continues to account for roughly 40 per cent of our total budget. There is also increased funding of \$0.9 million for protective services and counterterrorism operations.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my comments on the 2004-07 Solicitor General business plan and estimates. Our strategic business planning and budget decisions are all guided by and focused on making Albertans feel safe in their homes and their communities, and I'd be pleased to address any questions regarding the plan and will provide a written answer to any questions not fully covered today.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the minister for her opening comments and thanks and welcome as well to the staff that are joining us in the gallery.

I know that in the past I've been accused of speaking very quickly and giving a barrage of information, and I hadn't quite understood that until now. I didn't catch everything that the minister said. I did try and take notes, and I'll apologize in advance if I repeat something that in fact she has already provided information on.

I'm just going to give the minister an overview of the categories of issues that I'd like to discuss with her today. We have about two and a quarter hours. I'm hoping, unless there is participation from other members, after the initial discussion of performance measurements and core businesses, to do a give-and-take on much shorter exchanges so that we can get into the detail of specific categories, sort of three or four minutes from me and three or four minutes from the minister, if that's possible. It may not be, in which case we'll revert to the usual 20-minute style.

Essentially, the categories I'm discussing today – there are some questions and comments around performance measurements and core businesses; then some discussion around the remand centre, the corrections review, including the phone policy, the smoking policy, electronic monitoring, young offenders, private prisons, and alcohol-addiction treatment; then some discussion around victims of crime, going on to integrated organized crime, the sex offender registry, the MLA policing review, and Amber Alert.

I tried to slow down for the folks taking notes. I hope that's better.

I'll refer the minister to page 334 of the estimates book. Specifically referencing vote 2.2.1, crime prevention, in which there is an increase, it looks really impressive on the page. In fact, it comes out to \$1.1 million. I'd like the minister to please provide some detail on what's included in that increase, if I could get a list of the programs that are going to be funded or expanded, allocations of money to each of those programs so that I have an idea of where that increase in money is going. So I'm really looking for an expansion of detail, and she may want to provide that in writing.

Also on page 334 of the estimates book, reference 2.2.2, provincial policing programs, there is an increase there. It looks like \$19 million. Yes. Again I'm looking for a detailed breakdown there. This is where I'm assuming that the costs for additional protective wear, high-tech equipment, training of officers, that sort of thing is coming under. So not only the detail on what is anticipated in this increase but also what we're looking for for the rest of the '04-07 business cycle. I find the detail helpful to avoid misunderstandings, and the more detail the minister is able to give, the more I'm likely to understand the examples and the direction that the minister is going.

I'd now like to look at vote 2.2.4, policing assistance to municipalities. Now, this is a new amount of money. It's not showing up in previous budgets, and I'd like confirmation. I've heard various numbers tumbled about, and I'd like to get some confirmation, please, around this number. Is this reflecting the \$16 million that was from the unconditional municipal grants through Municipal Affairs, that the \$16 million came from that and is somehow rolled into additional money and shows up as the \$37 million? It is a new entry into the budget line item, so I would like a breakout, please, of how that \$37 million is arrived at and, specifically, if it includes the \$16 million that previously was under the Municipal Affairs budget under unconditional municipal grants, which, in fact, is how policing was paid for in many municipalities prior to the changes introduced by the Solicitor General.

There's also a new reference, 2.2.5, special policing assistance. I would like a detailed breakdown of where that money is going. Where is it being allocated? Is there a formula? Can we look forward to that formula being in place for a number of years? Is it allocated to specific sizes of municipalities that are receiving it, or is this covering some of the special units that she discussed, like IROC? What exactly is it being used for? Again, it has not appeared in the budget previously. It is a new vote, and I would like the detailed breakdown on it.

Maybe I'll stop there, and let the minister answer that, unless she prefers to do it, because it is detailed, in writing. Then I'll go on to the Edmonton Remand Centre category.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Chairman, some of her questions are quite in depth, obviously. We'd be pleased to provide the answers to you in writing, hon. member. I could start with some and then provide you with some, but my staff, as I indicated earlier, is great and would be pleased to provide you with things in writing.

You are right in some of your questions that you've asked in

regard to the reinstatement of crime prevention programs and what new initiatives are planned in the area of crime prevention. You know, if you recall several years ago, because you've been the critic, it was in our budget at one point in time. Then when we had to make some difficult decisions in our budget, it's one of the things that we had to let go. What we're planning on doing with the crime prevention is similar to what was done in the past. People with crime prevention initiatives that they feel are important to their community will apply, and it will be distributed on a grant basis.

3:10

Restorative justice is a philosophy that we believe focuses on understanding crime and acts against individuals. Again we're looking at restoring some sort of grant process where they can apply for restorative justice. It's something that we're currently working on. The community is excited about bringing back the grants. It's a decision that we made, and it's a good decision, and we hope that many of the communities that participate in regard to crime prevention and restorative justice are looking forward to the establishment back of those particular grants.

I'm like you. As you were talking very quickly, I was trying to grab some of your questions. Yes, we've got new money in policing, and we believe it's a substantial increase for policing. It's something that we've worked long and hard on. It's something, in consultation with the AUMA and the AAMD and C, that they came to an agreement with over 30 years. We knew that policing was a priority for every community in this province. The first thing we did was take the level from 2,500 and raise it to 5,000, and we're providing a grant of \$16 per capita back to the community. That's a significant increase for a lot of communities in this province, and they're pleased with it.

I'm going to ask the hon. member to talk, and I'll continue to write and try and answer some of your questions. If I miss anything, please tell me till I get going here.

Ms Blakeman: Sure. Happy to oblige. I'm just picking up on one specific question on the comments that you've made. I'm assuming that this is under crime prevention, the 2.2.1 vote, and that's specific to the Edmonton restorative justice centre. I guess what I'm looking for is whether an agency like that would be in line for operating grants; in other words, if that's a sort of general administrative grant to help them run all of their programs or whether what's being contemplated is a project grant that organizations like that would have to apply for and would only be eligible for a small amount of funding to cover something very specific that they're offering. I'm urging the minister to consider the wider general funding of operational grants, but I'm interested to hear what the choice is that's been made there.

I think that there's a larger argument that I won't spend a lot of time on now. If we want these agencies to do this work and in some cases pick up programs and services the government used to provide, we need to be willing to provide them with stable, predictable long-term funding. Kind of lurching from project to project, year to year, and having to redesign everything that they're offering in order to fit into new project funding guidelines is certainly one way to use the administrator's time, but I think there are other good uses that could be put into delivering the programs. So I'll wait to see what the answer is on that one.

I'm going to go on and talk a bit now about the Edmonton Remand Centre. I have questioned the minister a couple of times in question period about the condition of the Edmonton Remand Centre, and I'd like to go more into detail about what the minister is considering addressing and how she plans on alleviating the situation that's been created there.

Just as a brief recap, we're now in a situation where people who have served time in the Remand Centre, which is essentially a holding facility – this is prior to court or during the court process; they have not been convicted of anything. Generally, if they are convicted, the judges will allocate two-for-one time. So for every one day served in the Remand Centre, they get credit for two days, and that is taken off their sentence. In at least one instance – I think there's only one at this point, but I could be wrong – the judge recently gave three-for-one time. So for every day served in the Remand Centre awaiting trial, that particular individual was credited with three days that were taken off their sentence to be served in a provincial correctional facility.

We certainly do have a problem with the Edmonton Remand Centre. I've heard the minister say: "Well, you know, nothing we can do about it. We don't create them. We just have to deal with them once they come out." But I respond equally that the minister is the minister responsible for this and has to deal with the conditions. Some of those conditions – they've been documented other places – have been described as Third World.

There's a significant problem with overcrowding, with the number of inmates. Sorry; inmates is the wrong word because that indicates that they've been convicted of something, and in fact they haven't. The number of people being held there is far above and beyond what the Edmonton Remand Centre was designed to handle. There are a lot of complaints and concerns around a lack of fresh air, complaints around poor food quality, complaints and a lot of concern around the lack of exercise. All of this usually can be explained by the fact that there are so many people in that facility, and it wasn't built to provide, you know, high-quality, hot food to the number of people that are currently in there. It was built to deal with considerably fewer people.

Some of the things that I'm being told by people that work in the field and who know enough that I will take their word for it is that inmates instruct their lawyers to plead guilty in order to get them out of the Remand Centre because they can't hack one more day, which I find appalling and also hard to believe. I don't know that if I were in a facility, I would be willing to barter away my freedom, but I think that also underlines to me how desperately people do not want to have to spend any more time in the Remand Centre if that's what they're considering.

I think that, if I may paraphrase the minister, there's been an indication from her that people don't end up in the Remand Centre if they're angels, that there's a reason why they're not released on their own recognizance, why they, in fact, are remanded to the Remand Centre. I think I have the minister saying: you know, they've got a previous conviction, or there's a reason for them being there.

But the Solicitor General, I'm sure, is aware that having a previous conviction does not mean that a given person is guilty this time. Really, the recidivism rates simply don't support that. We do tend to do that a lot. We've got that phrase about: well, round up the usual suspects. Well, fine. The police go out and they round up all the people that they know of that were convicted last time of something, but when we actually look at the recidivism rates, that simply is not supported. We still, ultimately, are in a society where we say that you are innocent until proven guilty.

Who tend to be the people who cannot meet the tests set by release on your own recognizance? Well, there are two tests there. One is that the person is a danger to themselves, and the second is that there's a likely failure to appear. What are some of the ways that they ascertain that failure to appear? Well, things like a current address. Do you have a stable home? Do you have a place to go to? If we can't find you, you're going to make us want to hold you in

one place so we do know where you are. Okay. Well, another way is: do you have a job? Again, is there a place where we can go and find you when we need to find you if for some reason you have not appeared? Or do you have money? Money means that you can in fact set bail, and it'll be in your interest to show up and get your cash bond back.

3:20

Well, who are the people that are least likely to have a permanent home address or a job or ready cash? Those people are most likely to be homeless. In this society they're likely to be aboriginal, and quite often they are mentally ill. Those, in fact, are the people that we have in our Remand Centre in a lot of cases. Those are the ones that don't meet that test of permanent address, job, ready cash.

Yes, there are gang members in there, and we certainly just went through an episode where there were a lot of gang members in the Edmonton Remand Centre. But I'm questioning, given the overcrowding in those circumstances, whether we've really got the people in there that it was intended to have in there or whether in fact, without really paying attention, we've gone a long way down a road where we now look around and go, "Gee, that's not really who should be in there: the homeless, a disproportionate number of aboriginal people, and the mentally ill." We're using the Remand Centre as a shelter in that case but a very restrictive shelter and, given that these people are still innocent until proven guilty, quite unfair.

I'm looking to see what short-term action the minister is taking to alleviate the conditions at the Edmonton Remand Centre. I had asked her the questions in question period. I did bring forward suggestions that had been brought to me about moving some of the people that have been remanded there for a longer period of time to Fort Saskatchewan, to one of the closed wings there. If it was, you know, longer than a month or two that they were expected to be in, they could be housed there, or they could be taken there and bused back in or something like that.

But there are really two questions with this. What short-term action is the minister taking to alleviate the conditions that are actually there? Those are the ones that I'm talking about: Third World conditions, overcrowding, lack of fresh air, poor food quality, lack of exercise. What long-term action is the minister taking to alleviate the conditions at the Edmonton Remand Centre?

When I look at the budget, what I'm seeing is that there's about a 3 per cent increase to corrections overall, and that's appearing on page 335 of the estimates book. I'm assuming that the 3 per cent is not in there to cover changes to the Edmonton Remand Centre. Perhaps the minister can confirm, then, that there is no money to deal with this problem and that we can expect it to get worse. I guess that starts to involve the Minister of Justice, who I get to deal with tomorrow, about how he's going to start to handle even four-for-one time or, potentially, cases being thrown out, because there's an argument there that people have been treated cruelly.

A couple of other specific policies are coming out of the corrections review. Would the minister like me to stop so that she could respond to the Remand Centre or keep going?

Mrs. Forsyth: Whatever is easier for you is fine by me.

Ms Blakeman: I'll stop.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thanks, Mr. Chairman. The first thing the hon. member talked about was restorative justice. In response to the '99

Alberta Summit on Justice the department at the time under the Attorney General developed the community justice policy, that was based on restorative justice principles.

The policy aimed to make restorative justice processes more widely available in the province, if you remember.

With the recent provincial announcement of new and increased funding, the \$1 million that we're looking at has been made available for crime prevention and restorative justice programming. The department is looking at renewing the community justice policy as a framework which will guide us in the allocation of new money for restorative justice. I know that doesn't exactly answer your question, because you mentioned I believe it was the Edmonton restorative justice centre, on operational. They're all things we're developing, but at this time I would have to say that it's probably all going to be on a grant basis. They'll have to apply for restorative justice grant funds that will be accessible, similar to what we had in the past. I believe that's the way we're going.

The member talked a lot about the Remand Centre and the overcrowding, and I appreciate that this is something that's dear to her heart. You know, I have to say to her that in the remand centres right across the country the populations are going up. So really it's nothing that's unique to Alberta and something that we have to deal with. I think that one of the things I clearly want to make sure that everybody understands – and I know the member understands – is that we do not send people to the remand centres. We have to deal with the people that are sent to us by the courts.

One of the recommendations that was in the corrections review was the establishment of a judiciary committee where you hear from the probation officers and things like that and try and establish maybe a working relationship with the judiciary and talk about some of the things that are concerned.

I know that she's brought it up to me in question period, and it's something, as I indicated a little earlier, that's dear to her heart, but again, you know, it's important to understand that we have to deal with the people that are sent to us in the remand. They are sent to us, and it's the courts that make that decision. So you can't put up a no vacancy sign – and I've said this in the House – but we try and deal with them as best we can with a very dignified, humane, as kind as we can policy.

We have reconfigured the interior of the building to make better use of the space we have. It's important that you understand that the population varies in the Remand Centre day to day, and what we're finding is that the average stay in the remand is approximately 13 days. We also have a special unit for those in long-term remand because of lengthy trials. They have single cells, and we've provided greater freedom.

I can tell you that the number one priority for corrections is a new remand centre, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it's a number one priority for Albertans. I want to be cautious on some of my answers, because as you're well aware, we're dealing with this in front of the courts. But Albertans have continually told us over and over again that their priorities are a new hospital, schools. I can tell you that the priority in my riding is a hospital in the deep southeast, where the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw and I live. It certainly, unfortunately, isn't a new remand centre.

We have been also dealing with considering how we can deal with this and long-term options, and one of the things that we're trying to do is that remanded offenders who are sentenced but facing other charges are sent to the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre. They're carefully selected when they're sent there, and they're low risk. We certainly can't jeopardize public security by putting maximum security remanded offenders in there, because it's not designed to do that.

We're doing the best we can to accommodate the people that we're dealing with and that are sent there. As I explained to you earlier, the population changes day by day, and we have tried to reconfigure the Remand Centre and tried to deal with some of our people at Fort Saskatchewan in some of the empty units. I know that you've asked me that in the past.

I'll let you continue.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Just a couple of follow-ups, responding to the minister's comments on the Remand Centre.

Yes, I understand that the issue around overcrowding in remand centres is taking place across the country. Nonetheless, I'm looking to the minister for her plans on what's going to happen in Alberta. Yes, she doesn't send people to the Remand Centre, but what I think and what I'm sensing is that there is a concern over public safety. People wouldn't like to see cases punted out of court or people with significantly reduced sentences, once they've been sentenced, because of the conditions that are in place based on choices that this government has made.

3:30

What is the horizon on a new remand centre? Obviously, the minister has thought about it. What is the horizon we're looking at? Are we looking at five years? Are we looking at 10 years? Are we looking at 25 years? I think this needs to become part of the public discussion if we are at the point where courts are making decisions about time served. The onus is on this minister to be making those decisions. So I'm going to put that question back on the table.

Out of the corrections review – I'm pretty sure it's the corrections review. There was a change in the phone policy in which there's a \$1.85 charge now being charged against the recipient of phone calls made from people in provincial facilities. I could be wrong here. It could be out of the Remand Centre. I'm wondering what the rationale was behind that. What I see happening here is that there is a definitive bias against those people that are incarcerated or remanded that have less resources or with families that have less resources.

Essentially, for anybody that's poor in this day and age getting a phone is darn tough to do because the phone companies now require a fairly significant deposit, whether you've got a history with them or not. You can have a perfect history and still be levied a \$300 to \$500 sign-up fee, a deposit to get a phone. In many cases working low-income or poor families don't in fact have phones. They often have those pay-as-you-go cell phones. They use it for those emergency phone calls, and that's all they use it for. But my understanding is that this policy specifically prohibits calls to cell phones.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

Has the minister now set up a policy where someone that has been remanded or incarcerated in fact could not contact their family if the family doesn't have a regular phone, if all they have is a pay-as-you-go cell phone? I'm assuming – but I'm looking for clarification from the minister – that that was not what she was trying to accomplish. But that is, it appears, what in fact is the outcome. Is there any anticipation of changes to that?

I understand that the point of this was to stop harassing phone calls and stalking phone calls, and frankly I don't like getting those phone calls from the Remand Centre at 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning or 10 o'clock on a Friday night from somebody that's been

remanded there and because I'm the Justice critic, they're going to phone me and think I'm going to get them out of jail. I don't like those phone calls either. Okay? But I think that what we've done here is cut off someone's nose to spite their face. When we're looking for the conditions that help people not offend or help them exhibit good behaviour, strong role modelling, one of those things is support of family, and if we cut them off from family, how are we accomplishing that?

I'm moving on here to the no-smoking policy. I would like the minister to detail, please – and, again, she may want to provide me with written material here, particularly if a policy does exist – how the no-smoking policy is going to be implemented. I'm looking for: what is the phase-in time? Is there a target date that's set, and then six months in advance programs start to kick in and notices and group sessions and availability of smoking cessation programs and encouragement of people that are remanded or incarcerated to take advantage of that? What's the anticipated rollout of this program?

I'd also be interested in how the minister plans to deal with an anticipated black market in cigarettes. Having quit smoking and recognizing myself as a lifelong recovering addict to nicotine, I understand how addictive nicotine is. It's more addictive than heroin, and I understand what that does to people. And, by the way, I approve. I've been pushing for a no-smoking policy in all provincial buildings, and I think they need to be the same, and the prisons are one of the places that it needs to happen. So no misunderstandings here that I'm saying that this shouldn't be instituted. It should.

What I'm looking for is: how's it going to roll out? Two, how's the minister planning on dealing with a black market? Once there's this supply and demand – and that works even inside prisons and remand centres. Once you can't have it any more, everybody wants it and they want to pay more for it. So a \$10 pack of cigarettes will likely be in the hundred dollar range. What's in place or planned to deal with that black market? What's in place or planned in helping or anticipating those addicts that are going to look for alternatives? And they will be looking for those alternatives. I'm back to reminding you about being more addictive than heroin.

Finally, as the minister mentioned, most of the people that are incarcerated in provincial facilities are in there for 13 days. Frankly, some smokers might be able to just make it through in the 13 days and they're out. But how is that being worked in? How is the fact of what the average length of stay is being worked in with the no-smoking policy and rolling out, one presumes, smoking cessation.

I'm going to go on to electronic monitoring, which was also included under the corrections review. I'd like to hear from the minister: what is the goal? What is the minister trying to achieve that she is using electronic monitoring to achieve?

I would argue that if the goal is to protect the public, then the only thing we have that is provable repeatedly in protecting the public is effective treatment programs for people that are on probation or parole situations. That is the only thing that has been proven over time to be effective. Electronic monitoring does nothing to protect public safety, absolutely nothing. It just tells you where the bracelet is, and the jury is definitely out on the success of this program.

So I'm curious as to what the ministry was looking at: what studies, what reviews, what literature reviews, what cost-benefit analysis? What were you looking at that brought you to a decision that you wanted to pursue this? Why do I not see with equal vigour treatment programs that include things like job skills, literacy, other treatment programs that we know reduce recidivism? You know, if somebody can get a job and have a decent life and a paycheque, that's easier than committing crime and being incarcerated. And literacy is a huge part of that, and numeracy goes along with it, of

course, and other programs that help people to literally get on their feet.

On the one hand, the government has got this Alberta Works, and we're going to give people a hand up and not a handout and the other rhetoric that they use there, but I don't see that reflected in the choices that are being made in the Solicitor General's department. So I'm interested in the policy discussion that points staff members and the minister toward implementation of programs like electronic monitoring versus implementation of treatment programs around literacy, job skills, and that sort of thing.

I'll pause now and allow the minister to offer comment on my last question on the remand centre and on the corrections review phone policy, smoking policy, and electronic monitoring.

Thank you.

3:40

The Acting Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thanks, Mr. Chair. The hon. member started talking, first of all, about phones. We currently have phones in our correctional facilities, and one of the recommendations in regard to the correction review was to expand those phones, and we are doing that. We had tenders close in December, and we're moving forward to a fully integrated system expected to be in place by the summer.

I think it's important, first of all, to understand that there are no charges – no charges – for calls to the lawyer, the Ombudsman, agencies such as the John Howard Society, Elizabeth Fry Society, and so on. You are correct; there is a \$1.85 charge per call. We are well aware of the cell phones that don't accept these charges of \$1.85, and we've thought a great deal about that. But we also believe that if someone is in the Remand Centre and they need to talk to their family, then, you know, they can make some arrangements for that call to take place, whether it's at a friend's house or whatever they can.

On the charges themselves if we have somebody – and you referred to that – that doesn't have the money to be able to accept the call, we certainly will make arrangements for those individuals and have no problem making those particular arrangements for those individuals that, you know, feel that their family on the other end can't afford the call, et cetera. I mean, we're not going to cut them off from the world, for goodness' sake.

The no-smoking policy that you referred to and you've indicated you support is something we've been watching for some time now. It was another recommendation from the correction review. We've been watching what's been happening around the country and how they've been dealing with no smoking, and so far this has been fairly successful. We hope to implement this policy by the end of September. People will be well aware that the correctional facilities in this province and the Remand Centre are smoke-free. We think it's important.

One of the things we've noticed by watching what's going on around other jurisdictions and what they have told us is the fact that it was important to give ample notice. So we were going to do that. We will move into that on September 30. That will be the roll-out. There'll be good notification for everybody that the facilities are going to be smoke-free.

The black market cigarettes is in my mind no different than what we try and deal with in our centres on drugs. We've got wonderful correction officers that do an incredible job in this province on a daily basis, and they'll be monitoring the black market cigarettes. The AUPE supports this initiative, so the correction officers that work in the facilities are well aware of some of the issues that they're going to have to face.

Yes, we're looking at smoking cessation. You asked about that. One of the things that we had found in one of the jurisdictions – I'm sorry; I'm not exactly sure – is that popcorn was working really well, believe it or not, so they were providing popcorn. That surprised me, but that's one of the things that they found. Yes, we're definitely looking at smoking cessation, to provide our offenders with that.

You're right. It's a terrible, terrible addiction, and it's something that we're going to take time to put into effect and be able to make sure that it rolls out, as you say, fairly smoothly so that people know when they are coming into our facilities that they're smoke-free. Again, I want to emphasize the fact that we've monitored what's happened across the country.

The last thing you talked about was electronic monitoring and why we're doing that. Again, one of the recommendations that is contained in the correction review that was done by three of our members, who did a remarkable job and looked a lot at what was happening across the country within the correctional facilities – and, yes, again we're looking at a pilot project. Which way we go is yet to be determined. But I said, again, it's going to be a pilot project. We want to have a pilot project to see if it's successful or not.

The offenders that are subject to electronic monitoring are those sentenced by the court who will be serving their sentences in the community, and as such they've already been determined to not pose a risk to the public. I think the advantage of the electronic monitoring is that the technology provides an immediate notification if an offender fails to comply with their curfew by leaving their residence, and this also provides solid evidence for the probation officers to use in proceeding with violations against that particular offender. Once it's been determined that the offender has breached a condition of the court order, then the police have the authority to arrest and detain that particular offender.

We have been talking to British Columbia and will continue to talk to them because they have electronic monitoring in their province, and I think it's a good idea to always talk to your neighbours or people and see if they think they're effective and if they're worthwhile and if they're useful. I want to emphasize again that it's a pilot project. It's not going provincial. We want to see if it's working. If it works, great. If it doesn't, then, you know, we'll have to look at something else.

Thanks.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you to the minister for those responses.

With the electronic monitoring pilot project I understand that it's a pilot project; I understand that you're going to monitor it. I am still interested in what background you considered or looked at or reviewed – studies, reports, literature reviews, cost-benefit analyses, whatever – that brought you to this point where you thought you might do this. I understand that you've spoken to people in B.C., and if that was what you did and all you did, fine. Let me know that. Otherwise, I'm interested in knowing what those reports and studies were, and I'd love to get a copy of what you were looking at that pointed you in that direction.

Before I move off corrections, once again I will ask the minister if she has any plans to institute harm reduction strategies in provincial facilities, because this is a protection for the staff and a protection for the individuals. It's been noted before that the likelihood is that they are incarcerated for 13 days or less, and we are still running the likelihood or the opportunity to be infecting people who will have served their time and be out in two weeks. We run the risk of infecting them with hep C or worse because there are no harm reduction strategies in our provincial facilities.

So I will ask the minister again and I'll probably continue to ask

the minister as long as I'm the critic on regular interviews how she's planning on addressing this. I know that she searches for drugs more often, and I know that she has made punishment for people that smuggle drugs in and use drugs well known in the system. Fine, but I am looking at the other side of that coin, which is around harm reduction strategies.

I'm looking at moving on to young offenders. When I look at strategic priority 5 appearing on page 387 of the business plan, it's noting:

Children and Youth Initiatives. Youth are our future and we are working to protect them from becoming victims of crime, holding them appropriately accountable when they commit a crime, encouraging and facilitating rehabilitation, as well as preventing future offending.

This links to goals 1, 2, 3, and 4.

I am curious what the thought process was, what the decision-making/policy-making process was that led the Solicitor General to the changes in closing the young offender centres in Medicine Hat and Red Deer for a couple of reasons. We now move the young person further away from their support systems, given what we've got about the \$1.85 charge and if they don't have the wherewithal to insist that their legal aid lawyer get in touch with the family and tell the family to go down the street to the neighbour's place at such and such a time, at such and such a place so that the kid can phone them and the neighbour or friend can accept the \$1.85 charge. I am curious about why these decisions were made, because other facilities, in fact, were less well used, like the alcoholic treatment camp. It was kept over, but this was closed.

3:50

The second issue that's been raised with me around this is around officers' time and transport to move a young – I don't know that they'd be a young offender at that point – person charged with a crime. If they can't hold them in Red Deer, for example, because that facility is now closed, then they're going to have to be transported to Edmonton.

So it's 11 o'clock on a Friday night. You've got a young person that you've picked up. You think there's a problem here. They're going to be charged with some kind of crime, and you can't hold them in Red Deer. So what are we going to do? Well, you're going to have to transport them to Edmonton or Calgary, one presumes. I don't know if policies allow you to put that young person in a squad car with one officer or whether you need two officers, so potentially you've got one or two officers and a car now spending a round trip driving time of three hours to move that young person to either Edmonton or Calgary.

Not that I would ever believe that police would be anything else than absolutely rigorous in enforcement, but even I can look at that and go: hmm. What's the officer going to do? Go back to their supervisor and say: "Gee, Supe, sorry; the rest of my shift I'm gone; I'm busy because I'm going to drive this kid to Edmonton, book him in there, turn around, and drive back; booking time and everything included, probably looking at five hours, so my shift is done; see ya; I'm on the road"?

I'm wondering if we aren't setting ourselves up for a position where, oops, we just look the other way as soon as we realize the age, that they're under 18, and that we would have to spend this amount of time and resources. So I'm wondering: what was the logic behind that decision? How much money are we saving by closing that centre versus the amount of money we're going to have to spend sending that police car and gas, frankly, and wear and tear on the vehicle, and the officers' time, whether it's one or two officers, to ship him off to Edmonton or Calgary, plus the booking time, and lose them out of performing their duties in Red Deer or

surrounding area. The logic in this is escaping me, so I'm looking for the details of how this particular idea was arrived at.

Also as part of the corrections review I note that there's been no definitive answer coming from the department around private prisons. There's a sort of: well, we'll continue to monitor this and think about it; it might be possible. I'm interested why there is not a definitive answer: no, we're not going to go there.

Without exception everything I've looked at around private prison use in the United States and other countries has been not a happy situation, where we end up with, you know, delays in reporting escapes to the local community, recidivism rates, more complaints, more court cases around their treatment, et cetera. It's just not worked. I'm wondering why the minister keeps leaving the door open on that one, keeps leaving the back gate open, saying: well, you know, we're going to continue to look at it or monitor it or consider it. Why can't the minister just go: "No, we're not going there. For sure we're not going there in what this business plan covers to 2007"? What is the interest? What is the draw? What studies is she looking at that tell her that she wants to keep that door open to be able to move to private prisons?

At the same time, we see a discussion around provision of private security services, which is kind of a stepping stone for some people. Privatization of police and security and public safety services is how that all gets rolled in in some people's minds. So I'm just continuing to be really curious about why, when there's been I think fairly clear direction from the public that they don't want this, this government continues to consider it and to leave the door open. So what's she looking at that I'm not looking at? If she is looking at something specific, could I get a copy, please?

I'd like to move on and talk about the victims of crime fund. Now, it is referenced on page 337 and 338 of the estimates, and what I'm starting to piece together from this – and the minister, I'm sure, will tell me if I'm misreading this or misunderstanding it. This fund is designed to give grants to various victims' services programs and also to offer financial compensation to victims and to help with expenses related to judicial operations that could be incurred by victims. There's a 15 per cent surcharge that is levied on fines against people that have been convicted, and the money collected from this goes into the fund. I actually was at the launching of the original fund when I was with the Advisory Council on Women's Issues. I think this fund is configured slightly differently, but I do remember the intentions behind the first one. The victims of crime fund also seems to have some sort of joint federal/provincial part to it.

When I look at this year's estimates, there appears to be a surplus that's being expected of around \$6 million. There's also a forecast surplus from last year of around \$6 million, and the year before that, in 2002-2003, there was a surplus of \$3.8 million. So there is money accumulating in this account, and it's accumulating year after year. Now, the accumulated surplus doesn't show up in the books that I'm looking at, in the estimates books, for example. So, one, I'd like confirmation that there are these surpluses accumulating and that I have the numbers right. What I have is \$6.2 million surplus this year, \$6.16 million from last year, and in '02-03, \$3.8 million.

I want to know where these surpluses are going. Are they going back into general revenue? Are they being directed to some other program? Are they part of the money for some of the other funds that we've discussed here that are new funds, crime prevention or something like that? See, I'm remembering that original one, and with the original version that money sat there. It sat in that fund for victims of crime.

I am very interested in this because I know that the Member for

Calgary-Shaw under the direction of the Solicitor General did a consultation on the victims of crime fund, and I know that there were recommendations that came from it. I don't know what the recommendations are because they haven't been released.

Once again, the water torture method of releasing information is the favourite method of this particular Solicitor General. It took two years to get the MLA review of the Police Act out. It took almost two years to get the corrections review. I'm wondering how long it's going to take us to get the victims of crime fund.

Now, I think there are 35 or 38 recommendations that came out of the victims of crime fund consultation. I'm wondering: if there's a surplus sitting there and if you add the \$3.8 million, the \$6.16 million, and the \$6.2 million, we've got \$16.16 million sitting in a surplus fund there, if it is in fact sitting in a surplus fund and hasn't gone back into general revenue. I don't think you can do that legally because that money was levied on fines and has to be used for what it was collected for. So it must be sitting there somewhere, but the minister can confirm that with me.

4:00

So we've got recommendations that are made by Calgary-Shaw. We don't know what they are. There are some 16 million dollars that are sitting in a fund. Now, why are we not seeing that \$16 million used to implement the 35 recommendations? If we are, then what's the delay?

I, off the top of my head, can't remember when the victims of crime consultation was done, but I think it's been at least a year now. We have organizations out there that could really use this money, and I'm going to talk about one of the sectors that could really use some of this money. Why is it being sat on? Why is there a delay in implementing this? What is it that we're waiting for or studying or doing a cost-benefit analysis on before this money is released when we have organizations and individuals that I'm sure can make use of it? I'm just interested in what the policy is that's being developed that would hold this money for an extended period of time.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I'm going to reference page 16 of the minister's annual report, the most recent one that's available. When I reference information that's available in that annual report and I look at what's available in the business plan and in the estimates, some interesting things start to come up. This is basically a discussion around performance measurements. On page 16 of the annual report we've got the goal to "facilitate the rehabilitation of offenders," and a number of measures and targets and results appear. When I look at page 388 of the business plan, the goals from the previous year are not carried forward, but we are getting a reduction in the target. I'm curious about that.

Percentage of cases of adult probation sentences successfully completed did not meet the targets set at 70 per cent in the '02-03 year. The actual result was 66 per cent. When we look at that carried forward . . . I'll use another example. On page 388 we've got the one about people feeling that they're safe walking alone at night in their neighbourhood. Now, when you look at the annual report, the target there was 80 per cent, and 77 per cent of the people felt they were comfortable. When I look at the target carried forward in the business plan '04-07, the target has gone to 82 per cent. That's good. So we're expecting that one to go up. It stays flat at 82 per cent.

Now, the other one. When we look at the "outcome of correctional sanctions: successful completion of adult probation" and the percentage of "offenders involved in work, education, treatment or

life management programs,” that one was at 90 per cent and the number of hours of community service was at a million. When I look at what’s appearing on page 390, the supervision cases that were successful was at 66 per cent. The target for this year is being dropped from 70 per cent to 65 per cent, and I’m wondering why the minister is dropping the target.

The target percentage of offenders “involved in work, education, treatment or life management programs” was 90 per cent in ’02-03. The target for ’04-05 is 80 per cent, 10 per cent less. What’s leading to a 10 per cent reduction in the target? And it stays flat at that 80 per cent.

When I look at the target number of hours of community service at a million, offenders actually completed a total of 827,900 – I’m going to round up there – hours of work. But we’ve now got the target dropping from a million to 825,000. These are the targets that the minister kept, and I know that there were targets that were jettisoned, so I’m just curious about why there’s such a downgrading of expectations for performance in the ministry. It looks like things are being reduced so that they’re easier to achieve. That’s what it looks like, but I’m sure the minister can tell me why those choices were made.

The references for that last discussion are page 16 of the annual report ’02-03 and reference back to page 390 of the business plan and 388 matching with 15.

Now, page 385 of the business plan, Significant Opportunities and Challenges. There are special challenges presented by the use of the Internet for criminal . . . [Ms Blakeman’s speaking time expired] Oh, I’m going to have to let the minister respond.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, just for your information the one hour that was allocated has passed quite some time ago, so if anybody else wishes to participate, the chair will recognize those individuals.

The hon. Solicitor General.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We’ve had a lot of questions thrown at us for the last 20 minutes, so I’ll endeavour to answer what I can and again my commitment to obviously get you some answers in writing.

The first thing that the hon. member talked about was her harm reduction strategies, and I think she said that she will continue to talk about harm reduction strategies. I guess, for me, I have to understand what she considers harm reduction strategies. If I recall some questions during question period some time ago about a needle exchange program and bleach – I’m on that kind of same track – I have to again emphasize that we don’t support drugs in jail and we are concerned about the safety of our corrections officers, and I’m not going to change my mind on this. My number one priority is my correction officers and their safety.

What we try to focus on is education, prevention, and withdrawal of the drugs. Every offender that comes into our facility is assessed for their unique needs when they are admitted. It’s sad, but it’s true that most of the offenders that come into our facility have an addiction one way or another, whether it’s drugs or whether it’s smoking or whether it’s alcohol, so we try and provide programs to help them.

We offer several different programs. It can be a core addiction awareness program that’s available in our correctional facilities. Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, life management programs are offered, and we’ve got a New Dawn program for First Nations offenders offered at our Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre. We provide awareness programs that address unique needs

of impaired drivers and First Nations offenders. And we’ve got the Alsike centre that you alluded to some time ago, wondering why it had not been closed, but it’s something that’s very, very successful. The other thing that I’d like to mention is that offenders who are on medically supervised methadone programs upon admission are kept on that program under medical supervision. They are maintained on that program while they are in our facilities.

We have done our utmost to keep drugs out of jail, and it starts with the Corrections Amendment Act and some legislation and dealing with that in providing our facilities drug-free. We announced a little while ago about our drug dog. It’s a problem. It’s something that needs to be addressed. Utopia would be a drug-free jail, but we don’t tolerate drugs in our jail. Yet we try and help the people who are in our facilities deal with their drug addictions.

4:10

I want to emphasize again that my number one priority is the protection of my correction officers. I need to make sure that they’re safe at all times when they’re at our facilities. So starting a needle exchange program isn’t going to happen while I’m the minister responsible.

You talked for some time about our closing our centres. You referred to, actually, Medicine Hat Young Offender Centre, Red Deer, and we’ve also made a decision to close the Lethbridge Young Offender Centre. Difficult decisions; very difficult decisions.

You alluded to some smart remark about the minister taking her time on her reports. Well, I’m going to tell you that this minister takes that time to make sure that she’s doing the right thing and to make sure that she has the funding available to be able to do these. You know, you have hard-working MLAs that go out. They work their little hearts and souls out in regard to a review, come back, and they provide you with all sorts of recommendations. Well, with those recommendations come expectations, and with those expectations usually comes money.

So, yes, the corrections report was a two-year process. I wouldn’t say that I sat on it. I would say that I was monitoring all along some of the recommendations that were made in that report. That goes to the closure of Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer young offender centres, work camps.

I can tell you that this province and many, many other provinces across this country and our Attorney General and Minister of Justice have been advocating since even before I arrived on the scene about the huge number of conditional sentences we’re dealing with in this province and the huge number of intermittent sentences we’re doing in this province. If you do not have the offenders in the facility, then why keep the facility open? I mean, we’re talking five, four, six. While I appreciate that a young person should be near their family, we have many, many offenders in this province that, whether they’re in Lloydminster or Peace River, their family has to travel. We have to do what we can to look at what’s happening generally across this country.

You know, the unfortunate thing is that when we looked at closing the work camps, we had feedback about that and the wonderful job that the offenders did at these work camps. No question; absolutely no question. That goes to the community service hours that you talked about when you said: you had one million; now you have 827,000. Well, unfortunately I don’t have the minimum offenders to be able to do all of those community services hours. I think we’ve accomplished a huge amount of community services hours.

I was driving home a couple of weeks ago from a function, and the offenders were out on Deerfoot cleaning it up. So we’re trying to accommodate, when we have the ability, to have offenders working out in the community. They like to do that. The public likes to see them do that. They do a remarkable job.

You talked about private prisons and why I won't just close the door. Well, I guess it's always nice to watch what's happening. The corrections committee went down, and they looked at the private facilities that are in Ontario, and they didn't say privatize. What I believe they said – and I don't have the report in front of me – was to monitor on a continuing basis.

You know, I may be wrong, but it's always okay to watch what's happening across the country. It's okay to watch what other provinces are doing. It's okay to monitor and see what they're doing. If you're asking if I'm going to privatization of prisons tomorrow, no, but I'm going to monitor and see what other jurisdictions are doing. You know, it never hurts to keep the door open and watch what's happening. I think it's important.

You alluded to the fact that you've never seen anything good happen in regard to private prisons. I don't disagree with you, but it doesn't hurt to continue to watch and see what's happening, as I explained. Will I privatize tomorrow? No. But I think it's something where you learn from what other people are doing. You learn from their experiences. You learn if it's working or if it's not working. The corrections review committee, I believe, in their report said to watch what's happening.

You talked a lot about the victims of crime fund, and I think it's important first of all for me to make it very clear that victims are a priority for this government. I think it's important for Albertans or anyone who reads *Hansard* to know that the funding for victims of crime comes from a portion of fine revenue, and you understand that. That means that how much is going into the victims of crime fund is unknown every year, and it depends on how much and how large the fines are on a yearly basis.

Will every dollar we receive go to victims? Absolutely. Yes. Every dollar that we receive goes to victims. Will we distribute every year the same amount that we received during that year? No. It's simply because fine revenues are unpredictable. We hold back a portion so that we'll have stable funding for next year, and I think that's good financial management.

When we look back over the last four or five years, the number of victims receiving financial awards has increased almost every year. I think that's good but sad in some way, because when you see that we're increasing the funding every year for victims, it means that we still have victims. But we will continue to support the victims of this province, and the number of victim programs that we support, I must say, has also increased every year.

You alluded to the victims of crime consultation, and I've said that we'll respond to that report. One of the things that I want to do and I'm waiting to do is our involvement on family violence on I believe it's May 7. I want to listen to what they have to say. I know from reading *Hansard* that you brought up about the sexual assault centres, which was good, and the co-ordination. By listening about family violence and going to hear what the people say and spending the day listening to what they have to say, what the round-table has to say, there might be some relevant discussion around that.

I think that one of our priorities on victims is to establish a 10-year strategic direction for victims' programs and services – you will like that – and to ensure that, obviously, the victims have a meaningful role in the criminal justice system, and it's a priority.

I want to assure you that the victims of crime fund is a regulated fund and is separate from the government's core voted budget, and all of the monies or funds are dedicated to victim programs and services. The money that is in that particular program is not diverted to any other programs.

The one last thing I want to say is that as a result of the increased fund for policing, law enforcement is going to be stepped up, and hopefully we'll have fewer victims, and I think that's a good thing.

To see fewer people applying for funds means that we're dealing with them, that fewer things are happening to them. I don't know, hon. member, if that will ever happen. I guess that if you don't have victims, then you certainly don't have crime, and that would be something that I think is important.

I will let you or the other hon. members continue with your questions.

4:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Learning.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I have a very simple question for the hon. minister, and I know it's certainly something that she is concerned about. It has to do with the drug detection issues that she was mentioning. One of the things that apparently happened today, in watching the news, was that a truck of anhydrous ammonia was stolen. One of the issues about anhydrous ammonia is that certainly it can lead to things such as explosions.

One of the other very important uses of anhydrous ammonia, though, is in the making of crystal meth, and anhydrous ammonia combined with lithium is one of the ways that crystal meth is manufactured. I'd like the hon. minister's comment on the whole manufacturing of crystal meth and whether or not she feels that this potentially could be a severe problem, considering that an amount of anhydrous ammonia was stolen, and how in direct relation to her budget something like this would impact her budget.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, the minister has brought something up that we've been monitoring for a bit. We're well aware of the theft of the tanker truck, and we're well aware of the contents of the truck, of what's involved, and he referred to the ammonia. Yes, he's correct. It's one of the main ingredients in meth, and it's one of the things that we're concerned about, and that means meth, period.

Alberta has taken the lead in how it's dealing with meth in this province. I had the honour to be able to go to the States on sort of a three-day trip to several states on how they're dealing with meth, and they've acknowledged that Alberta has taken the lead on this to try and get in front of the problem instead of behind.

We have been very vigilant on the stolen truck that the minister alluded to. Our SIM unit is watching it very carefully. We're working very closely with the RCMP. We're well aware of what it can be used for. It also is fertilizer, obviously, for fertilizing farmers' fields. It's something that we're watching and have been keeping very close contact on with the SIM unit and our RCMP.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I just wanted to go back very quickly to something I heard the minister say that's puzzling me, and this is around the surpluses in the victims of crime fund. She seemed to be saying that we could be having fewer victims and fewer crimes and less money going in there.

There are two issues that arise. When I look at the comparables that are supplied on page 338 of the estimates, in fact in '02-'03 the revenue for the victims of crime fund was \$13,700,000. The actual forecast for that in '03-'04 is going to be \$18 million and the estimates for '04-'05 at \$18,105,000. So there's certainly an expectation of increasing amounts of money going in here.

When I looked at the minister's explanation around the surplus building, she seemed to be saying: well, there's a holdback because we get differing amounts of money every year.

Mrs. Forsyth: Crimes are unpredictable.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I'm just looking at a fairly regular increase in the amount of revenue. Even if you wanted to say, "Well, okay; let's get as close as we can, and we'll commit to spending \$13 million" – that was from almost two years ago now – "and let's keep it at that," that's still not going to account for what's being done in this budget. You've got revenue coming in of \$18,105,000. You are expecting to expend \$11,870,000. You're creating a surplus of \$6.2 million. That's almost 50 per cent of what you're spending. That's way more than a sustainability fund, way more, and you've now done that for three years running.

So you're socking away a lot of bucks under the mattress here, Minister, that really need to be spent in assisting all of these groups out there. I don't understand the argument that's put forward by the minister that somehow there needs to be an almost 50 per cent holdback to account for a variation in the money that's being received as revenue into this account. Obviously, it's not a variation. It continues to increase, but I'm not seeing a corresponding increase in the money going out. So that explanation didn't make sense.

As well, if the minister is now waiting for the family violence round-table on May 7, can she not give us some indication that's a little narrower window about when we can expect to see the victims of crime fund consultation report released? Please, let's be reasonable. I think we're a year out now. Can we not get some kind of indication? Would it be fall? Could it be before November, before December? Something. She must know what is being anticipated. The recommendations are in. Even I know there are 30 some odd of them. We've talked about the amount of money that's available here. I hear her saying that we want to be careful, but how careful? You've had an awful lot of time to consider this. Can you not give us some window of expectation about when that would be out?

My thanks to my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona for allowing me to leap in and just get that little bit on the record.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and provide some relief to my hard-working colleague from Edmonton-Centre, who's been on her feet for a considerable time.

I have some general observations to start with as we move along in our discussion and debate on the estimates for the Solicitor General's department. In looking, Mr. Chairman, at the business plan for the ministry and looking in particular at page 387, under Strategies, 1.1, the first item is of course to "implement a Policing Strategy incorporating the approved recommendations of the MLA Policing Review Committee Report." There are four bullets under this. I'd like the minister to perhaps comment on how these four bullets, these four strategies or action plans, if you wish, are reflected in the 2004-2005 budget.

One particular item here – it may not have a direct relationship to the budgetary allocations, but the minister might want to comment on it – is: "Promotes citizen oversight of policing in Alberta." Clearly, the minister accepts this issue in principle. Yet when I look at the news release from the minister's department dated I believe it's March 26, she has turned down the one important recommendation of the committee on policing, which has to do with the committee's recommendation for an Alberta policing secretariat to investigate complaints and oversee police services and police commissions. While the minister accepts the need for enhanced civilian oversight of police services, she has rejected the specific recommendation of the committee regarding the establishment of the Alberta policing secretariat to investigate those complaints against police.

So my question to the minister is: what alternative does she have

in mind? She does agree with the principle, yet the mechanism proposed is something that she has rejected. What specific alternative plans does she have with respect to making sure that the recommendation that she accepts in principle takes public policy form, and what will that public policy form be? That's one question there.

4:30

I'll move on to some other questions. There is a news release, the same news release as a matter of fact, where the headline is Provincial Policing Standards and Enhanced Civilian Oversight Coming for Alberta Police Services. With respect to the first part of this commitment, having to do with establishing policing standards, I've been looking at the persistent way in which the Auditor General's department has been urging the government and the department to establish policing standards. I have from the 2002-2003 Auditor General's report some observations that I would like to share with the minister. I'm sure she's familiar with them, but it's good to reiterate them so that they're on the record.

In this respect, the findings of the Auditor General, which are stated on page 273 of the annual report for 2002-2003, say the following: "Progress is not satisfactory on this recommendation." That's the recommendation with respect to the need to establish policing standards. This recommendation was made by the Auditor General's office over several previous years.

The manual has not yet been issued. The delay in issuing the manual is a result of the Ministry decision to wait for the government response to the committee's recommendations because the response to some recommendations in the report may impact the manual. While the MLA report was released publicly in July 2002 . . .

Over a year and a half ago now, Mr. Chairman.

. . . the MLA committee subsequently conducted further consultations on its recommendations.

I acknowledge that.

These further consultations resulted in a supplementary report being issued by the committee in late 2002.

So we are nearly 16, 17 months from the time that the second report, the supplementary report, has been available to the department and to the minister.

The statement from the Auditor General's department goes on to say that "the government is currently considering its response to the initial and supplementary MLA reports; however, the response date is uncertain."

Now, when I look at the news release dated March 26, 2004, there's still uncertainty about the dates and about the manual and its preparation and its release. So my question to the minister is: are we any more certain now about the response date? It's not clear to me that that date is specified here in the latest news release from the minister's office.

The Auditor General observes that "the Ministry intends to issue the manual once the government response to the recommendations in the MLA report is known." Now I guess we know the government's response. I think that it is stated in this news release of March 26, 2004. With the exception of two or three recommendations, the rest of the recommendations of the MLA report are accepted. Given that that acceptance has been indicated by the department, when is the manual to be released?

Now, the Auditor General further states that "the Ministry also needs to obtain funding to proceed with the audits of police services. There is no date as to when audits of policing standards will commence." My question again is: does the current budget, the budget for 2004-2005, the estimates that we're debating today, include the money that the minister was waiting for in order to undertake audits

of policing standards? If the money has been allocated in this budget, when will these audits commence?

These are questions which are raised by the Auditor General, and I'm sure the minister would like to respond to these. Under Implications and Risks the reason, I suppose, that the Auditor General wants to give for urging the department and the minister to take action on enforcement of policing standards is that "until the plan is implemented, the Ministry does not know whether police services meet the province's minimum policing standards. Public safety could be at risk." That's the concluding statement, so there's lots at stake. How long will Albertans have to wait before they see some action along these lines, which, in the judgment of the Auditor General, is needed in order to make sure that public safety is secured for Albertans?

I will just sit down with these questions, and perhaps the minister would like to respond.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you. I want to answer the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre's question. If I've confused her, I apologize for that.

Will every dollar that we receive go to the victims? Yes. Will we distribute in a year the same amount we receive during that year? The answer is no. Why? Because the fine revenue is unpredictable. We hold a portion back so that we have stable funding for the next year. So it's important for us to understand.

Yes, it's increased, and there's no question it's increased, but with the work that we're doing with the Minister of Transportation, in the future you can't continue to count on high fine revenues. The work we're trying to do with the Minister of Transportation is to provide the roads and our citizens that drive those roads safety. So we're hoping that we don't have to count on the revenues.

I want to go for a minute to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, who talked about several things. First of all, he talked about goal 1, strategy 1.1, in regard to the implementation of a policing strategy "incorporating the approved recommendations of the MLA Policing Review Committee Report," that, first of all, talks about enhanced provincial leadership in policing, about sustainable funding for policing and restructuring responsibility for policing and promoting citizens' oversight of policing in Alberta.

We've accepted the majority of the recommendations, as you're well aware, of that report. One of them you referred to is on citizens' oversight. I've also said that I'm not accepting that particular recommendation in the report, but I also support citizens' oversight. I think it's important for us to establish and ensure a fair, objective, and impartial investigation into the complaints against police.

I have to say that as the Solicitor General for the last three years I'm honoured, first of all, to be in this position and, secondly, that the police in this province do an incredible, incredible job in very, very difficult situations. I've been on many, many ride-alongs with them, and honestly I can't even explain what they do on call after call.

4:40

I think the objective of citizens' oversight is to enhance the credibility of the process and to obviously ensure public confidence that there is a proper review of the conduct of members of the police department. We will be working on that over the summer and hope we'll have legislation ready in the fall. I think it's important for us to understand that the system that we have in place right now works, and I believe it works. But it's a huge process of education so that

people understand that there is a mechanism in place for them to complain.

The police in this province do an unbelievable, remarkable job. I think that what's unfortunately happened lately are some of the things that have come out in regard to allegations against the Edmonton police from something 20 years ago and how it was dealt with then. How it was dealt with then and how you deal with it now – again, I want to say that there is a process in place that's credible and ensures that the public feel confident in how the complaint was established. So we are working on it and hope to, as I said, have legislation ready in the fall.

The police report that was done by the committee talked about several things that we're working on. One of the key things that has been very well accepted in this province is the establishment of a centre of excellence, and we're working on that currently. I will be putting together a committee to look at the centre of excellence. We believe that it's not only bricks and mortar. We can utilize the centre of excellence with distance learning, et cetera.

So we'll be putting together a working committee on how they see the centre of excellence. That will be the stakeholders that we think are part and parcel of that centre of excellence. We'll ask the Minister of Learning to participate, obviously the police. We will have colleges, the university, anybody that we believe is a stakeholder in opening up and talking about the centre of excellence.

You talked about standards. I want to assure the member that the standards manual has gone out, and the police now have the standards manual. You refer to the Auditor General talking about that. All the police in the province now have a standards manual to operate from. We want to make sure that the standards manual is followed, and we will be doing audits and looking at if they're following the standards. We're looking forward to that.

I think that's all I have actually: the centre of excellence, citizens' oversight, standards, and the audits you referred to.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of questions and perhaps a comment with respect to the hon. Minister of Learning and his question on how the crystal meth situation might affect this particular minister's budget. It came to mind that that may end up being more of a health-related issue in the long term. Perhaps if we could get the Graydon report released, we might find some answers to that.

More to the topic, on page 385, under Significant Opportunities and Challenges, there is some information that the crime rate in Alberta had increased by 2 and a half per cent in 2002. My question on that particular issue is: is there any more recent information, and can we from the information have some idea of whether this is a trend? That type of an increase, 2 and a half per cent, seems on the surface to be quite large, so I'm wondering if there's more recent information and if, in fact, that appears to be a trend.

The second concern that I have comes in the area of effective provincial crisis management planning. There is an issue with respect to that, and of course it's addressed in there as well that we do have some very, very serious cross-border connections, not only in our transportation system but certainly with respect to energy supply and security and that type of thing. Alberta has been shown to be a leader in this initiative, and I'm wondering if the Solicitor General's department is prepared or will prepare itself to engage with other states and provinces with respect to a more collaborative effort. I believe that certainly now the U.S. Energy Council and PNWER both have cross-border initiatives, and I'm wondering if there could be some co-operation there.

My last comment and question is with respect to aboriginal policing. We do have I think some successful First Nations policing initiatives in the province. However, in certain circumstances these initiatives come to an end in a rather rapid fashion. In other words, you have perhaps an on-reserve police detachment this week, and next week you don't have one. It puts quite a load on other policing resources in certain areas. The initiative, of course, says that they would like to enhance "the effectiveness of policing on First Nations communities." I wonder if there could be a bit more explanation as to how you see that happening.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member alluded to the issue of meth and the Graydon report and the release. I have enough issues on my plate worrying about his report, to be quite frank, but I know it's one of the reports that the Premier has talked about releasing.

Overall in western Canada the crime rate is down, but that doesn't mean that we should be less vigilant. We continue to monitor what's happening in this province. I mean, it doesn't take anybody to read in the news what's happening with organized crime and some of the issues that we're dealing with with organized crime. I think it was important. One of the reasons why we established the IROC is because of what we're finding out.

If I would have sat down with any of my rural colleagues three years ago, we would have been talking about their mailbox being vandalized or a piece of their farm equipment being vandalized, but now we're seeing organized crime moving into the rural areas. Our colleague from Drayton Valley has a huge problem with methamphetamines in his riding, and there are several other areas within that corridor that are dealing with meth. So it's the rural areas that are trying to adjust with some of the bigger, if I may use the term, city crime that we need to work on.

He talked about the crisis management planning. Alberta is way ahead on that, further ahead than any other province in this country. In fact, the federal minister announced a national security plan today with I think it was \$690 million in regard to securing an open society, and they talked about borders and things.

We're very, very lucky in this province. After 9-11 the Premier put together a ministerial task force in regard to dealing with terrorism, that was chaired by the Member for Ponoka-Rimbey, and right from the gate, because it's the critical infrastructure that we have to deal with in our oil, we've been vigilant.

4:50

I know I kicked off a conference – I believe it's going to be two years in November – and the minister for security at the time, the hon. Minister Easter, was here. He was very, very impressed with what we were dealing with at the conference and said to us at that particular time: why would I even invent the wheel considering what Alberta has done in regard to dealing with crisis management? So we have been very, very active in that, and it talks about the borders.

I know Ottawa has been down looking at our centre that we share with the Minister of Municipal Affairs. They were very, very impressed, and they talk about in their press release, which I don't have handy, establishing the centre, exactly what Alberta has here. I think that is something that is a compliment to Alberta. We have as the security task force taken a number of steps to deal with some of your security questions, and it goes back to the Alberta crisis management plan that we've established. We've gone out and talked to our partners. We've established a state-of-the-art crisis manage-

ment operations centre for when we determine that there's a terrorist threat.

I keep referring back to the people, not only in my department, that have done an incredible job monitoring what's going on around the world with the terrorist activities under our SIM unit and their contacts that they have established with CSIS and how they can at all times know what's going on in this world in regard to terrorism. It's great, but it also can be at times very frightening. One just has to look at the borders and see what's happening.

One of the things that Alberta has done is talked to our partners in the United States, and I think that's important. I know that shortly after 9-11 I had the opportunity to discuss in detail and at length with the FBI what's happening and our borders.

So I think Alberta is as planned as we can be in regard to what you discussed with our borders. All of our partners, whether it's oil related or it's transportation or it's anything to do with the border, are always vigilant about what's happening. I don't want to get into too many details, obviously. It's working. They're on top of everything and doing a very good job at what they are doing with the SIM unit and all of the other counterterrorism.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A few more questions to the minister. I would like to invite the minister's attention back to the business plan, page 388. Under Strategies 1.6 and 1.8 are the two items which I have brief questions on and would like the minister to comment on. At 1.6 it says, "Reinstate crime prevention and restorative justice program funding to support the Provincial Crime Prevention Strategy and the Community Justice Policy."

Now, I notice that on page 334 in the budget document crime prevention has got about \$1.1 million extra in the current year's budget, if I'm reading it right. The two actions mentioned here in 1.6 are the community justice policy and the provincial crime prevention strategy. How does this \$1.1 million additional allocation in the budget break down for each of these two categories? Or is there more than just these two things that are covered under crime prevention and therefore the increase is also distributed to more than just these two activities? I'm not sure, so I'd like the minister to comment on that.

The second question has to do with 1.8: "Work in partnership with Children's Services to develop an integrated province-wide response to family violence." I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre asked some questions in that regard already. I see that that strategy certainly focuses on partnership, but in terms of resources that might have been allocated in this budget, I'm wondering if the minister has in fact made some budgetary commitments to give substance to this commitment for the strategic action that she mentions here.

While I'm up on my feet, may I have a few other questions, Mr. Chairman, with your permission and with the minister's concurrence? The minister, of course, has said repeatedly how our government has put new money back into policing to assist municipalities to do their job, and \$58 million dollars in new funding to bolster policing services is indicated in the minister's March 26 news release. This, of course, includes \$16.5 million that the municipalities were already getting, so it seems to me as if the government is giving with one hand and then taking away with the other hand. That \$16.5 million has disappeared now from the budgets of municipalities because it's been taken away and then reallocated in terms of government money.

The second point I want to make about this is let's not forget that this new money in a sense is restoration, and only in part, of what the municipalities used to get until about '95-96 when all these policing

grants were taken away. So my question to the minister is this. It will be difficult, I'm sure – it would be difficult if I were sitting in her place – to answer this question right now, but I'd like to get an answer to it, maybe a written answer. What was the amount of government funding for policing purposes in the mid-90s to municipalities? How does the new funding now as indicated in this budget, which was a resumption, in a sense, or restoration of part of that, compare to the total amount of money that municipalities used to get for policing purposes, say, eight years ago, when this was discontinued? I sympathize with the minister if she doesn't have an answer for it. She can certainly provide it to me later.

I must make another observation here. I'm very pleased that the government has made a commitment to pick up the costs of policing for all communities now up to, I guess, 5,000 strong? Right. I certainly support that and commend the government for doing that.

Another question. This question arises from a quick look that I had at the amount of money that the city of Edmonton would be getting, new money for policing purposes. The city will receive new money for policing estimated at about \$10.7 million, but this is offset by a reduction of about \$5.3 million in the municipal unconditional grant received from the province. So the annual increase is for a net of about \$5.4 million. I just wonder how much the city of Edmonton was receiving, say, in '96 when this grant was discontinued. I'm sure you'd like to get an answer to this question for yourself, and I certainly would like to know how this amount compares.

5:00

The question of sustainability. You know, we want to of course provide sustainable funding, sustainable both from the point of view of what the government thinks it can afford but also in terms of providing adequate policing services, which the municipalities are responsible for but need sustainable funding from this government to do, so they determine the adequacy of funding in order to make our communities safe, which is the title, I guess, of the business plan that I am referring to under the core businesses: policing and crime prevention and ensuring safe communities in Alberta. After all, if the goal is to make sure that our communities are safe, then surely I think that we have to ask the question about the adequacy of funding that municipalities get from the provincial government to achieve that goal.

Perhaps one or two other questions here. I'll let the minister speak to those questions while I'm looking at my notes. If I have a question, I'll ask again.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to respond to the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. He asked a question about aboriginal policing, which I had on another piece of paper. I apologize; I wasn't ignoring him. He's brought up an interesting issue in regard to the aboriginal policing model. We have some very, very, very successful aboriginal police forces in this province who are doing an incredible job, and we've had some struggles with some aboriginal policing in the province also. The government is committed to an aboriginal policing model; aboriginal policing is important.

We were at a function a few weeks ago at the Blood tribe. They have put in what they think is a successful idea in regard to aboriginal policing, and that's having elders travel with one of the aboriginal police officers. They were quite proud of the initiative and quite excited about the initiative. It will be interesting to see.

I was at a graduation in Regina a couple of months ago. It was the

first graduating all-aboriginal police force, which was initiated by my department. I'd love to take credit for it. It wasn't me. It was a fellow who works very hard in our department by the name of Ron Hepperle. That was something that he was pushing. He said to me three years ago: Minister, if I get this together and I put it together, you have to promise me that you'll be at the first graduating class of the aboriginal police force. And he did. It was very, very nice to be there. All of those aboriginal police officers that graduated came back to Alberta, which was especially nice to see, because they're from Alberta. They're going back to Alberta, and it's quite exciting.

We have signed several tripartite agreements, and we're also working on some community tripartite agreements with some of our aboriginal police forces that have been struggling in regard to aboriginal policing. We're not going to give up on them. We think they're an integral part of the community. We think it's important. They know their communities best. We will continue to be with them on their successes, and we will be with them on their failures and continue to help them work through some of the struggles that they have. So I hope that answers some of your questions.

The hon. member asked about the crime prevention grants, and I did answer, I think, some of the questions when Edmonton-Centre asked them. We're pleased to be able to put approximately a million dollars back into crime prevention/restorative justice, and I mentioned earlier that in 1999 under the Minister of Justice the department developed a community justice policy based on restorative justice principles. The policy aimed to make restorative justice processes more widely available in the province.

With the recent announcement of the new and increased funding we have made available a million dollars for crime prevention and restorative justice programming, and the department is currently reviewing the community justice policy as a framework to guide the allocation of new money. My visualization is that it'll be through a grant and that people will apply. I think they're the most important, and they know their community best. So if there is a problem in Edmonton-Strathcona and your Block Watch decides that they want to put together a program, then I think they know the needs of your particular constituency or community better than anybody and will be able to apply for a grant. That's how I visualize it, and I think that's the way we'll move. I hope that answers that.

You talked about our partnership on family violence. I think one of the things that we in government have to be committed to do is partnering instead of putting up silos all the time. Although family violence is the responsibility of the Children's Services minister, I think there are numerous departments that it spills onto, mine and the policing end, obviously. We have spent time training our police officers on how to deal with family violence relationships. You asked: is there any money in the budget at this particular time for family violence resources? Well, resources can be looked at as two things. If you mean resources as far as staff to train, we will continue to do that. Staff to work with our partners? Yes. If you're talking about a dollar value, no.

Certainly looking forward to the family violence day on May 7. The Children's Services minister has done an incredible job of putting this together. It's going to be well attended. It's going to be well worth spending the day listening to people about what they have to say. I'm looking forward to what comes out of that particular family violence day.

You talked about the police funding, and I'm sorry. I would like to get into dollars. I think the unconditional grant previously was \$32 million. I could be wrong, so I'd rather have my department talk to you and send you some information. Yes, part of the funding that we're talking about is the 16 and a half million dollars that was transferred and appreciated very much from the Minister of Municipi-

pal Affairs. The money, the 16 and a half million that was under Municipal Affairs, was an unconditional grant. I want everyone in the House to understand that one of the recommendations of the AUMA and the AAMD and C, who worked very hard in regard to a funding model, was that the unconditional grant come back under the Solicitor General and be a conditional grant because, like anything, if a grant is unconditional, it doesn't necessarily mean it has to be spent on policing.

You talked about Edmonton. Their new per capita grant total is \$10.7 million; \$5.3 million of that was a portion of the unconditional grant, which is now a conditional grant, which means that it has to be spent on policing. The other \$5.4 million is new funding under the \$16 per capita. I also think it's important to understand that we've continued to spend \$2.4 million on CISA funding, which is the intelligence gathering for the police on the organized crime and other activities that are going on in this province. Plus we have given the integrated response to organized crime, IROC, an additional commitment of \$5.2 million, I believe. That is a joint operation with the RCMP and police, separate and apart from the funding that they're already receiving and the money that they're using in regard to what they're doing with gang activity in their particular riding.

5:10

We sometimes forget about that, but that is a huge, huge amount of money and dollar value for a big problem that a lot of the major cities are dealing with in regard to organized crime. So we're providing them with some additional money. The IROC teams are working with CISA. CISA's doing the intelligence gathering; IROC is providing them with the information. I look forward to seeing some very, very good work done and some takedowns in regard to what's happening in this province by the IROC team. So I think it's something that we have to keep in mind.

Is it enough for policing? Probably not. I don't think that you'll ever have enough for policing, because when you have a rich and vibrant province like the province of Alberta and the organized crime and gang activity that we're seeing in this province – we're seeing an increase in meth – it's something new every day. The only thing we can do is continue to be vigilant, continue to watch what's happening, continue to support the police as much as we can, and, obviously, continue to carry on discussions with the police in this province.

We've got a good working relationship. I'm going to a meeting in the next couple of weeks once again with the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police. I meet with them twice a year – they bring forward the concerns of the policing communities that they represent – and still continue to talk to the police in this province. So we will continue to watch, listen to what they have to say, be vigilant, and continue to work on their behalf.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's rare that I get up to speak on some of my colleagues' budgets, but I think I'd like to bring up some issues and some concerns and some kudos.

I want to first of all thank the minister and her staff from the northern communities regarding the dollars for policing. The municipalities that have really been concerned about the costs, most specifically Slave Lake and High Prairie, have really suffered a lot in terms of the dollars that were coming. So I want to say a special thank you to the Solicitor General for being able to alleviate those concerns. I also want to thank the minister for her support for aboriginal issues.

One of the things that I do have is: what strategy do you have to alleviate the high numbers in jails?

Aboriginal policing. I know you brought out some of their concerns. As Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development I'm concerned about what we will be doing regarding aboriginal policing. I just heard that you were giving a status on what's happening with that, but any help that you can provide would be helpful.

The Indian Regional Council is one of the best police services in Alberta. They never complain. They always work with us to service their people. They have done really great things and tried to live within their means, but they're having some problems now. In fact, they were the first ones ever established, in 1992-93. I think it was '93-94 that the late Chief Walter Twinn came to speak with the Premier and suggested that this was probably one of the greatest things that could happen. So I'm just trying to find out what we can do to make sure that they continue to have their aboriginal policing and what can be done.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the question.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$334,425,000
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The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report the estimates of the Department of the Solicitor General and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2005, for the following department.

Solicitor General: operating expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$334,425,000.
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The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 8 p.m., at which time we'll reconvene in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:16 p.m.]

