

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 11, 2004**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 04/05/11

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two staff members. Leanne Smalley is with the ministerial correspondence area, and Dan Paquette is a student in public relations from Grant MacEwan College. I would ask the members to give them the cordial welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly special visitors in both the members' and the public galleries. I have 160 students from Percy Baxter school in Whitecourt. I think that's the largest delegation we've ever had from one school in this Assembly, half of which are here now, and the other half I'd like to introduce at 2:30: teachers/group leaders Leslee Jodry, Kirsty Greenshields, Jacob VanVliet, parent helpers Cindy Brook, Virginia Kipling, Michelle Vandenhouten, and a lifelong friend of mine, Lynn Starman. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Maskell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to be able to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the hon. members of this Legislature my mother, Stella Bell. My mother is one of those remarkable Alberta pioneers who along with countless others did so much to create this province we're so proud of. She retired just before her 80th birthday, and that was only because her husband and business partner, Woody Bell, died suddenly. They were successful people in the village of Sangudo and area and just couldn't retire. Did I say that already? I'm worried about the Speaker here.

Mom reluctantly left Sangudo and now resides in Edmonton to be closer to three of her children. She has had a couple of hip replacements and may be a little slower, but she's as feisty as ever. When she's told to be careful and slow down, her favourite response is, "Don't put me in a rocking chair."

Mr. Speaker, as we approach our centennial, I want members to know that Mom is from one of Alberta's oldest families and from one of North America's oldest families. Her grandmother, Florence Mowat, is recorded in the 1891 Edmonton section of the Alberta census and her uncle in the 1881 census. On her father's side her family arrived in Massachusetts in 1651.

Accompanying my mother is my sister, Kathy Korol, one of the best door-knocking partners and recruiters of new PC members one could ever want. She's also a very successful businesswoman. They're seated in the public gallery. Mom and Kathy, would you

please rise – and, Mom, carefully – and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: I think the hon. member should be more concerned about what his mother thinks than what the Speaker thinks.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members in the House a young lady who is joining my staff at the constituency office to work as a summer STEP student. Her name is Katharine Julien. She's a native Edmontonian, she's an honours graduate from Old Scona academic high school, and she's currently studying public affairs and policy management at Carleton University. She has brought some experience from Parliament Hill with her, and I want to welcome her to the beautiful Edmonton-Mill Creek constituency office. I would ask all members here to join me in that welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Tannas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. members, today I'd like to acknowledge the service of two employees who have served the Legislative Assembly Office with integrity, dedication, and who have recently announced their impending retirement.

Vivian Loosemore has built a career with *Alberta Hansard*. She joined us in 1977, became managing editor of *Hansard* in 1991 and manager of the public information branch in 2002. In developing and changing with *Alberta Hansard*, Mrs. Loosemore has been witness to the political views and debates of hundreds of MLAs that have shaped the laws in Alberta for close to 30 years. Vivian has recently overseen the transition to the use of digital recording in the production of *Hansard*, ensuring that our operation continues to utilize the most up-to-date technology.

Bill Gano began his career with the public service in 1974, initially working as a programmer in the formative years of the computer age. His career progressed and brought him to the Legislative Assembly Office in 1989 to oversee the development of our computer systems. Bill is the director of two branches: information systems services and financial management and administrative services. He also serves as a senior financial officer and has responsibility for records management, freedom of information and protection of privacy issues. Bill is a founding member of the Canadian Association of Parliamentary Administrators.

I would ask that Vivian and Bill rise in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and receive the recognition and thanks of all members of this House.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. First of all, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview Anna Lund. Anna will be the summer constituency assistant for the Edmonton-Riverview constituency office and has received many awards including the Louise McKinney postsecondary scholarship, the *Edmonton Journal*/dean of arts award of excellence, the dean's list, and these repeatedly. Quite accomplished. She has just completed her fourth-year honours in political science at the University of Alberta, and this fall she's enrolling in her first year of law. Anna is seated in the public gallery. I would ask her to please rise and accept the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to introduce to you and through you to

all members of the Assembly the staff that support me in the Edmonton-Centre constituency office. We have Penny Craig. Penny, if you'd rise. She is the constituency manager. For those of you that have phoned and heard her voice, you would recognize her as an on-air radio personality from a few years back with Edmonton radio stations. Jim Draginda is our outreach worker. He originally started with the *Edmonton Journal* and then changed careers into arts administration and marketing. Lisa Claire Lakaparampil is our summer student this year. Lisa, please rise. Lisa has also worked with me on getting out the youth vote, and she's involved with the women's vote as well.

So I would ask them all to please rise again and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonner: Thank you. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mrs. K. Hryciw, who travelled here today from Thorhild, Alberta. She is the grandmother of our page Andrea Balon and is an avid watcher of the proceedings of the House. Mrs. Hryciw is accompanied by her granddaughter Kristin Balon, Andrea's sister. Kristin is currently entering her third year of nursing at the University of Alberta and resides in the constituency of Edmonton-Glenarry. With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask both Mrs. Hryciw and Kristin to please rise – they are seated in the members' gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

1:40

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

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests this afternoon. The first is a good friend and supporter, Judith Axelson. Judith is a distinguished educator who now has a position at the University of Alberta, but she is also the president of the Edmonton-Mill Woods constituency association and has been since 1993, where she's gearing up for another successful election when it's called provincially.

The second guest, sitting with Judith, is Weslyn Mather. The Mather name is well known and very prominent in Edmonton-Mill Woods, Mr. Speaker. Weslyn is the assistant principal at J. Percy Page high school, where she's been very instrumental in developing the telelearning centre. She's also the nominated Liberal candidate in Edmonton-Mill Woods, where we are working very hard to ensure that she succeeds me in the Legislature. I'd ask Weslyn to wave and I'd ask Judith to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Haley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through to members of the Assembly two very special guests visiting the Legislature today. They are from Singleton, Australia. Steve Hamson has come to Edmonton as the new head coach of the Edmonton Gold rugby team. Steve's advanced international coaching experience should prove beneficial for this team, which will be vying for the Canadian Super League national rugby championship this summer. Simon Lewis is accompanying Steve and hopes to play at an elite level of rugby here in Canada. This being his first trip to Canada and especially to Alberta, I'm sure he will never want to go back to Australia, unless it starts to snow again later today.

I'd like to wish both Steve and Simon and the rest of the Edmonton Gold rugby team, where my legislative assistant, Gerald Proctor, also plays, the best of luck this season as they compete with Calgary in yet another battle of Alberta. That's not quite what Gerald had written in here, but I'm not going to say that I'm hoping Edmonton beats Calgary.

They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you five employees of Alberta Innovation and Science. Among the duties that these individuals do very well in their areas of responsibility is the development of the highly acclaimed Innovation and Science web site. I'd like to introduce to you Lisa Tsen, Cory Payne, Kim Sawada, Zoran Mijajlovic, and Anita Moorey. If they'd please rise and receive the traditional warm greetings of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and to all members of this House two very hard-working young men who have joined us today to observe the proceedings of this House. They're seated in the public gallery. One of them is my constituency assistant, who keeps my office in Edmonton-Strathcona running smoothly. His name is Doug Bailie. Assisting him this summer with the operations of the office thanks to the summer temporary employment program is Roland Schmidt. Mr. Schmidt is in his fourth-year bachelor of arts with a double major in history and philosophy at the University of Alberta. I would like to ask both of them to rise and receive my warm thanks for providing excellent assistance to me and also great services to the constituents of Edmonton-Strathcona. Now I'll ask that my colleagues join with me in welcoming them to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to introduce to you with a great deal of pleasure some members of the Edmonton committee on the National Day of Healing and Reconciliation. They are Shirley Armstrong, Maggie Hodgson, Yi Yi Datar and her daughter Nisha Datar, Maggie Mercredi, Iris Wara, and Geraldine Wardman. They're seated in the public gallery, and I would like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two very hard-working young women who have joined us today. One is my constituency assistant, who helps keep everything on an even keel in Edmonton-Highlands, Ms Mary MacKinnon. Assisting her this summer with the operations of the office thanks to the STEP program is Suzanne MacLeod. Miss MacLeod is going into her final year at the University of Alberta. She's on the dean's list and is completing her bachelor of arts degree with a major in anthropology. She is also an accomplished flutist, performing with the Edmonton Youth Orchestra for the past seven years. I would ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you.

My second introduction of the day, Mr. Speaker, is Mr. Mike Fekete and his grade 5 class. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you this grade 5 class from Rundle school in my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands. They are

accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Mike Fekete, and a parent volunteer.

Mr. Fekete's class is currently learning about the democratic system first-hand, Mr. Speaker. They're launching a campaign to push for mandatory seat belts in school buses. They have developed a petition that they will be taking through the community, and they've written letters to me outlining the reasons why they would like to see seat belts in school buses. I will be tabling these letters later today in the Legislature.

As they move up to grade 6 in the fall, Mr. Fekete will be moving up with them, and they will continue their campaign, their goal being the presentation of a private member's bill in the Legislature, and I have indicated that I am prepared to co-operate with them on that. I'm very proud of their involvement in the democratic process and very pleased to have them rise today and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Appointment of Returning Officers

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is the government's democratic duty to appoint returning officers who will oversee provincial elections in a fair, impartial way to ensure a credible result. Unfortunately, this government has chosen to appoint returning officers with political party connections, throwing the integrity of the next election into doubt, especially in constituencies such as the new Edmonton-Decore, formerly Edmonton-Glengarry, where a recount was required in 2001. My questions are to the Attorney General. Why is this government jeopardizing the integrity of the next election by appointing the former Tory constituency president of Edmonton-Glengarry to be the returning officer for the same constituency, now called Edmonton-Decore?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't suggest for a moment that it imperils the democratic process. Returning officers are people who have experience in the democratic process, understand the democratic process, and understand what it takes to deal with an election.

Ms Blakeman: To the Attorney General: will this government investigate whether it violated its own code of ethics for public service employees by appointing returning officers who have a conflict of interest?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, returning officers are not public employees. They are employees of the Chief Electoral Officer and by definition employees of the Legislature because the Chief Electoral Officer is an officer of this Legislature, not an employee of the government. So a returning officer is not a public employee in that sense and isn't a part of that code.

Secondly, a person taking an oath of office as a returning officer takes an oath of office of neutrality and drops any political involvement that they have at that stage. There are examples across this country of people who've been appointed returning officers. In most cases I would suggest that they've had involvement on one side or the other of the political spectrum. There would be, I would hazard a guess, a number of Liberals who've been appointed as returning officers in this province, perhaps federally, perhaps provincially. I don't know. I don't ask people's political affiliation before I bring forward an order in council appointing someone as a returning

officer. I never have, never will. What's important is that they understand the process, that they're prepared to be neutral in the process, and that they're prepared to take direction from the Chief Electoral Officer, not from the government or anyone else.

1:50

Ms Blakeman: They're actually covered under section 5 of the Election Act.

My third question to the Attorney General: will the minister review the appointments of all the returning officers in light of their Tory party connections?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, by definition, when somebody is appointed a returning officer, they do not have Tory party connections. If they have been involved with political parties, they at that point drop their involvement with the political parties. They work with the Chief Electoral Officer, and they are neutral and cannot have political party involvement. So by definition they are not in conflict of interest or in any other way partisan.

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

Automobile Insurance Reform

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From the beginning auto insurance reform has been one closed-door meeting after another, with the public, those paying the highest insurance rates in the west, being shut out of the debate. Yesterday, after rifts amongst the government's own members became too apparent to ignore, the Premier mused about consulting with his colleagues on the finance standing policy committee to see about making an important May 27 meeting on auto insurance reforms open to the public. My first question is to the Minister of Finance. Is it a policy of this government to hide from public scrutiny when debating contentious issues such as auto insurance reform?

Mrs. Nelson: Mr. Speaker, we've gone through a very lengthy process on this change and reform of insurance within the province of Alberta, and we've had lengthy consultations with stakeholder groups over the last year. We have shared that information I think quite well with the people in this Assembly and with the public. We're in a process right now, since we have passed the legislative framework to put the new structure in place, of pulling together the regulations that back up that legislative package. It's a lengthy process, and we have had a number of very well-attended standing policy committee meetings where our caucus members have been debating the regulations and the recommendations of these regulations, and they've had excellent input.

I can tell you that the process that we follow through our standing policy committees has been very, very successful. Our members have the ability to have that open debate and dialogue back and forth and bring the views of the people that they represent to the table and put them on the table. So the process is governed through our standing policy chairs and our whip's office, and we will continue on with the process that we've used to date. It's been most successful.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how many times have insurance company representatives attended finance standing policy committees compared to representatives of consumers' groups?

Mrs. Nelson: Well, there again, Mr. Speaker, the member obviously hasn't heard or followed the process for our standing policy committees. We have a number of groups for all of the standing policy committees that approach the chairs and ask to make representations to those committees. Quite often those are made in the open. Members of the opposition have even attended those meetings; at least your researchers have. So there have been a number of times when a number of groups have made representation and have been given the opportunity to appear before the standing policy committees. The insurance industry is just one of those many, many hundreds of groups.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that public scrutiny of the government auto insurance reform policy to date is sadly lacking, will this minister now commit to making the May 27 meeting public, not only for members on this side of the House but for members at large?

Mrs. Nelson: Mr. Speaker, we have a process that we follow, but let me make one thing clear. We are a work-in-progress right now. We have not finalized the regulations for this new structure. We have not done a final approval on this new structure. So until such time as our caucus, through our standing policy process, reaches a conclusion that is a recommendation to go to the cabinet and to the caucus, we will not be going out into the public and debating this out there, because we haven't come to a conclusion in our own caucus. So when that happens, we will be delighted to talk to people.

In fact, up to now I've had thousands of letters and phone calls that we have responded to with information, as people have asked us questions on the process of the renewal of the insurance industry within the province and the renewal of the new structure. So we have been responding up to now, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue with that. But no – no – decisions have been made or finalized.

Hamelin Creek Culvert Project

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, when referring to the Hamelin Creek culvert project, there are a number of inconsistencies between the information found in the print version of the *Alberta Gazette* versus the on-line version of the *Alberta Gazette*. The print version documents a cost overrun of 60.45 per cent, whereas the on-line version documents a cost overrun of 60.61 per cent, a difference of almost \$53,000. The date of approval for this cost overrun is also inconsistent, listed as September 30, 2003, in print versus December 8, 2003, on-line, a difference of over two months. My questions are to the Minister of Transportation. Why are there inconsistencies in cost overrun amounts for the Hamelin Creek culvert project?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman obviously pays a lot of attention to all of the information that we put out, and I will take his question under advisement and get back to him tomorrow with the answer in terms of the difference between the two information pieces.

Mr. Bonner: Then at the same time could the minister also find out why there are inconsistencies in the date of the approval for the cost overruns for this project?

Mr. Stelmach: I will undertake to do so.

Mr. Bonner: Also to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that

there were ongoing problems with the Hamelin Creek culvert, why did preliminary engineering reports fail to identify the factors that have led to the current cost overruns?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can't answer that question at this particular time, but I do know that there are other parties involved. Whenever there is a creek crossing, we have to involve the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and also the coastguard gets involved under the navigable waters act. So there are a number of parties we have to consult with before the final decision is made.

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

BSE Compensation Payments

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development promised over two months ago to provide a detailed accounting of who got what in the \$400 million in provincial BSE compensation payments, yet here we are a day or two away from the end of the spring sitting and the minister has still not kept her promise. The government seems to share the same interest as the big U.S. meat-packing companies in hiding the facts from Albertans. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. If the BSE payouts were already 97 per cent complete two months ago, why is the government deliberately delaying the release of the detailed accounting of BSE monies until after the adjournment of the spring sitting of this Legislature?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, the timing of the spring session has absolutely nothing to do with the timing of the release, and obviously this member has some information on the ending date of this Legislature that I don't have. I assume that the House will conclude when the House business is finished.

However, Mr. Speaker, it's a timely question. I asked my department yesterday when we would be ready to release this information. We are on target. We had thought it would take us till late May, early June to conclude it. We still have perhaps a half a dozen accounts that have some work left to be done on them.

I have made one thing clear, and I will stand by that. These accounts will be released when they are complete. I have said that consistently. I was not putting out a partial list. I do not think that that is appropriate, Mr. Speaker.

I will remind the hon. member that on the one program I did bring an update that some 1,564 claims had been settled. I would remind the hon. member, also, that we had five programs that dealt with BSE recovery. It is my intention to release all of them with the exception of the market cow/bull program, which will not conclude until later this year.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the minister promised two months ago that these would be released soon, and I quote, why should anyone accept that she's doing anything other than stalling until the Legislature is finished?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I am certainly not stalling. I have said consistently that we will provide those documents when they're complete, and we will. We have absolutely nothing to hide. Every cheque was made out and is being made out to the owner of the

cattle. Every cheque is going to a person who qualifies under the program guidelines. I will remind the hon. member that we have moved 1.2 million head of fat cattle through the system with those programs.

I will remind the hon. member, with much regret as I do, that we are approaching the anniversary of one of the most devastating – devastating – incidents that has ever occurred in the agricultural community in Canada, and our industry today remains hurting but in business. That was the objective of these programs, Mr. Speaker, and I am proud of the fact that the industry in this province played a leadership role in the design and implementation of these programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister, then, tell the House how many cheques remain to go out and for how much money?

Mrs. McClellan: I think I explained to the hon. member in my last answer that we had I believe about half a dozen accounts that were not completed. Mr. Speaker, we have done a random audit throughout this process. That took a little bit longer, but I think it was necessary. I can't give him the exact number of dollars that remain, because of course with each account it varies. They could be large; they could be minimal.

What I can tell him, again, is that I am proud of the beef industry in this province, who designed the programs to assist the industry. I will remind the hon. member that the people who designed all programs were some 65 individuals from small and large packers, from small and large feedlots, from the five organizations that represent the total beef industry in this province, including the retail industry and, at times, the people who convey these animals. Mr. Speaker, this was truly an industry/government partnership, and it was successful.

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

Sports and Fitness Strategy

Mr. Tannas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the excitement of the current NHL hockey playoffs, Canada's gold medal victory at world hockey, the 2004 Olympics in Athens, and numerous local sporting initiatives, we're reminded of the important role played in our everyday lives and the personal benefits that accrue from active participation in sports and fitness activities. My questions today are to the Minister of Community Development. What positive outcomes can we expect for Alberta arising out of the recent meeting of federal, provincial, and territorial ministers who are responsible for sport?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, I was privileged to attend on behalf of the province of Alberta the recent federal/provincial/territorial ministers of sport meeting in Quebec. At that meeting we made some very significant progress.

The first thing we did was endorsed a new Canadian policy against doping in sports, which affects all of our young athletes.

Secondly, we developed a strategy to increase sport, fitness, and activity levels among all Canadians. Having increased that by about 10 per cent last time, we set a similar target for this year.

Thirdly, we discussed and developed a framework that would

advance the cause of new infrastructure that is needed both indoors and outdoors.

Fourthly, we also talked about a new strategic framework, which we're just finishing off now, regarding our Canadian and in turn our provincial international sports hosting policy so that all bids going forward for these larger events have a fair chance in that they'll be regionally balanced without penalizing provinces, such as Alberta, who have a great reputation for doing the same.

So those are just some of the highlights, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Tannas: Thank you. My supplemental is to the same minister. What policies and plans do you and your department have to encourage more young Albertans to become more involved in sports and fitness activities?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're very engaged as a department and a ministry with the promotion of programs such as SummerActive, which is going on right now, launched in Calgary by myself just last week.

We also provide about \$5.8 million through our Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation specifically towards 77 of our provincial umbrella organizations in sport, most of whom are very much targeted at youth.

Thirdly, I just recently signed a bilateral agreement with the government of Canada that will see \$1.2 million flowing out to some of the underrepresented groups, which include young girls and youth in general. Aboriginals, of course, are included.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we are investing a great deal in projects such as our Alberta Summer Games, which this year will be occurring in High River and Okotoks and the MD of Foothills in July. I believe it's July 22 to July 25. Those Summer Games provide a tremendous showcase for our youth. They function as stepping stones, and we're very proud to sponsor them. I look forward to being down there to unveil them later this summer.

Thank you.

Twinning of Highway 4

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, the change from the eastern route to the western route on the twinning of highway 4 as it goes through Milk River is a bad decision both monetarily and for children's safety. The new western route will close farms, move businesses, and move a portion of the CPR right-of-way. The eastern route does not have nearly the same problems. To the Minister of Transportation: why did the government choose to change the route from the east side of town to the west side when the cost of this change could be up to \$10 million more?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue that the hon. member is referring to was one of the first decisions that as a minister I had to make with respect to routing of the north/south trade corridor. There were tons of information that went into making the final decision. There was a second engineering review by a third party to give us additional information, and we made the decision based on the best evidence available at that particular time.

Just further with respect to the proposed additional cost, Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of the additional cost running into the \$10 million. They looked at the topography of the land. They looked at issues cited around Milk River with their sewage lagoon. There is

also an intersection crossing on a secondary road. All of that information was put together, and that decision was made many years ago.

Mr. Bonner: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that the western route will force highway 501 to go through town, what will be the cost to protect the children from the newly planned route of highway 501, that will go right past their school?

Mr. Stelmach: All of the safety evaluations were made by a number of consultants on that particular project. The information coming back is that the road is safe and that it's going to protect the integrity of the north/south trade corridor, the purpose of which, of course, is to move goods and services as efficiently and as safely as possible.

Mr. Bonner: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that in a private survey done by the residents of Milk River 63 per cent of the residents wanted the east route and only 29 per cent wanted the west route, why is this government choosing to ignore the town's citizens and develop the costly western route?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I personally attended a public meeting. That was probably four years ago, maybe more, when we had made that particular decision. Like I mentioned before, it was one of the first decisions made as I was appointed Minister of Infrastructure, and it was a difficult decision. But, again, it was based on the best information and evidence delivered by professionals in the field that they professed to be professional in.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

2:10 Calgary Ring Road

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago there was a historical announcement in the city of Calgary.

Mr. Norris: The Flames made the playoffs.

Mrs. Ady: Beyond the playoffs, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier, the Minister of Transportation, and the chief of the Tsuu T'ina nation signed an agreement that begins negotiations for a major piece of the ring road around the southeast side of the city of Calgary. Some say that this particular negotiation began some 50 years ago, and for many years this was just a dotted line on the map and called the missing link. While my constituents recognize that this is just the beginning of the process, they have some questions. My questions are for the Minister of Transportation. Can the minister let my constituents know what this request for proposal means? Will we be leasing the land, purchasing the land? Who will have control of this roadway?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the agreement in principle signed by the Premier and the chief of the Tsuu T'ina nation . . . [Several members hummed *Happy Birthday*] It's a good thing we're not going to have 53 questions today.

But getting back to the question, the agreement in principle was reached after considerable negotiation, really, amongst three parties: the city of Calgary, which of course brings its own needs to the table; the First Nations, the Tsuu T'ina nation; and of course the province of Alberta.

What Calgarians and Albertans have told us is that they want total

access and control of the right-of-way. Whenever the road is built, at the end of the day we want total control and access to the road, and this first agreement has given us that. The next step, of course, is to go through the engineering design and to proceed with further negotiations.

The Speaker: For all hon. members, those watching, those listening, and those in the gallery, something happened two seconds ago that perhaps needs an explanation. On this day at a date in the early part of the 20th century the hon. Minister of Transportation was born.

Mrs. Ady: I'd also like to offer the hon. minister a happy birthday.

For my final supplemental. There has been some question about whether this road will be tolled or not. Can the minister let me know whether this is being considered?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, till today I still feel sorry for my mom.

The question about tolls has come up a number of times. This came up as a result of questions posed by the media in the signing ceremony. All the Premier had mentioned at that time – and we support this – is that we're open to all options. It could be a public/private partnership. It could be funded directly by the province. It could be even a capital bond.

One of the issues tied to a toll, of course, would be the existence of an alternative route available to Calgarians to use. They would make the decision whether they want to pay a toll on a new road or use an existing route. The question is: is there a suitable existing route?

That is a question, perhaps, that we'll leave to later in terms of how we fund. There are months and months of negotiations. We anticipate that the detailed engineering study will take about 18 months because, again, we have three balls to balance here. Those are the city, the province, and the First Nations, and the First Nations have certain needs as well. So we'll wait until such time as the preliminary design is done. We'll have a better appreciation of the cost and then proceed from there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Wainwright.

Alberta SuperNet

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Innovation and Science likes to refer to the SuperNet as a highway, but actually the highway that Albertans paid for is more like a P3 toll road. Albertans don't own all of the SuperNet and can't use it without continually paying the companies that are building and servicing it. It's a true government P3: a poorly planned project. My questions are to the Minister of Innovation and Science. Given that the minister has signed a 10-year deal with Axia for all the departments in the government but can't tell us when it begins, can he provide the total on the amount that will be paid to Axia to service the SuperNet for the entire government of Alberta?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, it's always good to get up and talk about the positive benefits that the Alberta SuperNet is going to bring to every region of Alberta.

There are really two elements to the SuperNet project. One, of course, we've talked about at length, and that is the construction of the infrastructure, which would be similar to when you pick up the telephone to talk to somebody. Your voice has to travel over infrastructure. When you log a computer onto the Internet, your data has to travel over an infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. So the Alberta

SuperNet infrastructure is being built across this entire province to provide that infrastructure to every Albertan.

The second element relates to the operation of the network. Mr. Speaker, with that, the government of Alberta has granted a licence to Axia SuperNet Ltd. to operate and maintain the Alberta SuperNet. The term of the agreement – and I couldn't provide this specific information on Thursday when she asked this question last, so I'm glad that she gave me the opportunity today. The contract is effective July 2001, but the 10-year term actually doesn't begin until 33 per cent of the network is finalized and signed over to Axia. That is when the 10-year term begins and goes forward from there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: given that the government owns the extended network, not the core or the edge devices that are required for this network to work, what contingency plan does your ministry have if one of these contracted companies goes under?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, the entire network is under an operating agreement with Axia SuperNet Ltd. It's their responsibility to manage the network. As part of that contract, particularly in the early years as the revenues from the network may not be sufficient to cover the operating cost, Bell West is in fact obligated to provide the operating cost to make sure that we get through the interim period.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have done a very thorough job in signing this contract to make sure that we have all of the possibilities, whatever events might happen – and that's pure speculation – covered. I do commend our department for doing a thorough job on the contract.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: given that your ministry will have to continue to pay Axia millions of dollars each year to run the SuperNet, will the minister now admit that the \$192 million paid for the initial set-up of the SuperNet is in no way a reflection of its total cost to the taxpayer?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, as we've mentioned many times, the infrastructure cost of the contract is \$193 million, and we've explained that before. For illustration on the operating side, currently in our budget estimates we've talked about the \$14 million that the government currently spends on access to data networks. As we move from the AGNpac over to SuperNet, at the same price we'll have more connections, greater bandwidth, and better service.

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

Reliable Water Supplies for Rural Alberta

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents are worried that this is going to be a very dry summer and that they may not have enough water. In recent consultations on rural development my colleague from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and I heard that reliable water supplies for agricultural, industrial, and household use are vital to sustain rural development. My questions are for the Minister of Environment. What is Alberta Environment doing to ensure that reliable water supplies exist in rural Alberta and that our rivers and economies of our smaller communities don't dry up?

Dr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, he raises a very interesting question.

The Speaker: Which one could spend four days on, but to the point, please.

2:20

Dr. Taylor: I was going to ask you how much time you would allow me, but obviously not four days.

We do have, as you are aware, Mr. Speaker, a very unpredictable water supply in Alberta. It has to do with the nature of our runoff in the spring. Early in the spring we get the supplies rushing down the rivers, and we have an agreement with Saskatchewan that commands us to pass on 50 per cent of the natural flow. Most years we would pass on probably 80 per cent, in the 70 to 90 per cent range. We have to conserve water both on the demand side and the supply side. On the supply side conserving water means building storage so that we can in the spring collect some of that runoff that is legitimately ours. So we need to build more storage. What form that will take, we don't know. But to answer some of the member's questions, we need to build more storage.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you. Given that the Battle River is facing increased demands and lower supplies of water, how will the minister ensure that the many groups competing for water supply from this river will have their voices heard?

Dr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we're doing in our water for life strategy is recommending a watershed policy, watershed committees. So on each basin we will establish and we will help fund a watershed committee. On those watershed committees all members of the community will be involved. You'll have industry involved. You'll have the public involved. You'll have the aquatic groups that are interested in aquatic health involved.

A good example of what is done, Mr. Speaker, is the Bow River Basin Council, and that council is made up of a broad spectrum of groups: municipalities, industry, rural municipalities, First Nations. Everybody that has an interest in the Bow River is on that council. Because of that, because of the job that council has done, the Bow River is now one of the healthiest rivers in the world. That's how we see these watershed councils operating: everybody contributing, everybody making decisions, and those decisions coming forward to the government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister consider piping water from the underutilized North Saskatchewan basin to the Battle River basin for the benefit of the people and the economy in that area? [interjections]

Dr. Taylor: Well, the members opposite are just saying no. Mr. Speaker, I will very clearly not just say no. Right now we have the first phase of the Battle River management plan just starting. We expect that it will probably take a year or 18 months to look at a plan, a watershed management plan around the Battle River. To do that, we need to understand the current needs of the Battle River and the aquatic needs and the economic needs of the Battle River. We also need to understand the future aquatic needs and the future needs for economic growth in that Battle River area. Once we understand that, we will look at all options, including piping water from the North Saskatchewan.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. leader of the third party.

Access to Rituximab

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Government efforts to end age discrimination in auto insurance are out of step with its current policy of age discrimination with regard to funding the cancer drug rituximab. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why is the Human Rights Commission and not the Department of Health and Wellness or the Alberta Cancer Board ending up charged with determining whether or not cancer patients regardless of age be funded for treatment associated with the drug rituximab?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, it's the Alberta Cancer Board that is charged with such a responsibility. The Cancer Board is made up of a number of people whose expertise we rely upon to determine what drugs make the most sense for particular age categories of individuals. There may be drugs that are effective for people that are older, and there may be drugs or different therapies that may be available for people who are younger, even though they might suffer from the same kind of diagnosis of a particular type of cancer.

The Alberta Cancer Board tomorrow is going to be dealing with the issue of its current policy of providing rituximab for those over the age of 60, and they are giving consideration to whether or not it should be provided to people under the age of 60. I can assure the hon. member that it is not the government that decides the original policy that rituximab be given to those only over the age of 60. It is based on the best clinical evidence that the Alberta Cancer Board has available to it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that rituximab has been proven to increase life expectancy in virtually all patients and has been prescribed to patients under 60, what action will this government take to ensure that Albertans have universal access to this life-saving treatment?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind members of the Assembly that the Leader of the Opposition's doctorate is not in the matter of medicine. I just want to point that out.

We do rely upon the Alberta Cancer Board to provide their best advice on what drugs should be covered and in what circumstances. For the hon. member to leave the impression here that all of the evidence suggests that rituximab is universally the best thing for all people with cancer I think is not entirely supportable. I again say that we do rely on the expertise of the Alberta Cancer Board to make such decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me rephrase that question then. What action will this government be taking to ensure that Albertans have access to this drug when it is prescribed regardless of their age?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, again the issue is not one's age. The question is: what therapies are best for individuals regardless of their age and regardless of their sex? The fact is that there's no discrimination with respect to this. We rely, again, on the best clinical evidence that's available to the Alberta Cancer Board.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Automobile Insurance Reform (continued)

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After almost a year of trying, the government caucus remains hopelessly divided on its so-called auto insurance reforms. Even government MLAs are admitting now what Albertans have long suspected, that the government will break its promise to deliver premiums for all Alberta drivers on a par with those in provinces with public auto insurance. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Given that successive small "c" conservative governments in other western provinces promised to dismantle public auto only to reverse themselves when confronted by the resulting high premiums, why does this Conservative government stubbornly cling to a private insurance model that will not deliver lower premiums for most drivers?

Mrs. Nelson: Well, Mr. Speaker, when we had the debate on the options a year ago as a caucus and we assessed where we were going, we made the determination that we felt that we wanted the private sector to continue to offer automobile insurance within the province, and we're confident that they can do that job quite effectively.

Now, has it been an easy road? No. Are we completed? No. We're still a work in process, but we are on target for the timetable that we set as a caucus for implementation of a new insurance program within this province. It has been a difficult road. It would be more helpful if the leader of the third party would read the information that we have given through numerous dialogues back and forth and through letters back and forth and help with this process instead of always being on the negative, because it is a process that I believe will be successful, that will meet the goals of having affordable, accessible, available, and comparably priced insurance in the province of Alberta for the consumers.

Dr. Pannu: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what will it take for the government to admit that its so-called auto insurance reforms will inevitably fail to deliver on the government's promise and instead adopt a public insurance model that has delivered lower and more stable premium rates for all drivers in other western provinces?

Mrs. Nelson: Well, Mr. Speaker, when we have come to the completion of our deliberations and we present the package to the people of Alberta, I'm sure that they will agree with our caucus that we have delivered on our promises and we've delivered a package that, again, meets the overall objectives that we've laid out: to have an affordable, accessible, comparably priced insurance package available to all Albertans. That has been our focus.

Dr. Pannu: My final supplementary to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: why is the government waiting till after the adjournment of the spring sitting before making public so-called auto insurance reforms that will not provide rate relief for 80 per cent of Alberta drivers?

Mrs. Nelson: Mr. Speaker, I've made it abundantly clear that we were going to need about 90 days to debate the regulations attached to the legislation that we have passed, and we are on target in that debate. It's a work in progress. We didn't gear it towards when the session may or may not be in. We geared it to the reality of bringing forward a reform package that we could implement by this summer,

and we are on target for doing that. If it's not convenient for the leader of the third party, that's unfortunate.

We have worked very hard on this program, and we will not be rushed into completing it to meet his agenda. We are going to do it right, so we're going to take the time and make sure that we have the right regulations to back up the legislation that we've put in place. If that takes 90 days, it takes 90 days. I'm not going to hurry it up to satisfy that hon. member's agenda.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

2:30 Farm Assessment and Taxation Report

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a recent annual meeting that was well attended by hundreds of Albertans many of the delegates asked about the status of the farm assessment and taxation report recommendations. More recently the mayor of Calgary was questioning the inequity of the current system and how it deals with urban versus rural farmlands. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: could the minister tell me if and when the recommendations of the farm assessment and taxation report will be implemented?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say clearly to the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and also to the hon. members for Little Bow and Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan that they played an important role in terms of collecting data from stakeholders relative to the input of this final report.

Now, it's interesting to know that we wanted to ensure that the taxation process recognized current practice in agriculture, and that's clearly what we heard from the hon. member and his committee. The final report, though, came back. What happened was that as we were ready to take it into the government process, something called BSE occurred, and as we all know, the agriculture industry over the past year has gone through a lot. So at this particular point in time, to the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, we are reviewing the status of it, but certainly we are allowing the dust to settle relative to what the agriculture industry has just gone through in this past year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: would the minister be willing to implement the recommendations as a pilot project in two or three municipalities on a volunteer basis to evaluate the effects of it before implementing it province-wide?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member again, with the information that he's collected, raises a very good point that, certainly, I'll give serious review on relative to the potential of a pilot example to see how this can work in a particular area. I also ask the hon. member if, in fact, he has suggestions on where stakeholders think perhaps this pilot should first start.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Taxation Policy

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent PricewaterhouseCoopers study called Tax Facts and Figures shows that average income earners in Alberta pay more taxes than those in B.C. and Ontario. In fact, the only Albertans who pay the lowest taxes of the provinces are those who make more than \$80,000 a year. To the

Minister of Revenue: why does the Alberta tax advantage only exist for those who make over \$80,000 a year?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, when you look at our business plan, one of the objectives is that the overall personal taxes remain the lowest in this country. It is true that when you look at all the personal tax loads, not just personal income tax itself but all of the taxes that individuals pay, we still remain the lowest among all of the provinces in this country.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will this government drop its flat tax fairy tale and admit that flat taxes unfairly discriminate against middle-income earners?

Mr. Melchin: Well, we're glad, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition is reading his fairy tale books in the evening. This government is not going to stop with respect to having the objective of having the best environment to attract highly skilled people and individuals and all people to come to Alberta for a good place to work and find jobs. It is important that we maintain tax policies that do that. There's no reason why we should penalize those that want to work hard and be industrious and earn income, that just because they make more income, they should be penalized. That's a particular aspect of this tax structure that I'm pleased to say that we will retain.

Dr. Taft: Given that average earners, severely normal people in B.C. and Ontario, pay the lowest taxes because of progressive tax rates, will the Revenue minister return Alberta to a fair, progressive tax rate?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I've just said that it is fair to have a single, simple, fair, uniform tax applied to all. All Albertans should have the opportunity to contribute to the services they receive. In that respect, why should one be penalized, as viewed progressive, by paying more at a higher rate just because they make more money? The Alberta advantage is alive and it's well and it exists in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Small Business

Mr. Lord: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the province released a report called Securing Tomorrow's Prosperity, which talks about a plan to increase Alberta's GDP by upwards of a hundred billion dollars by 2010, which is clearly very exciting news. My question for the Minister of Economic Development is: given that small business is often credited with creating most new jobs and most new wealth and that almost all business is small business, will this plan create a lot more focus on small-business issues and obstacles in order to help more small businesses succeed?

Mr. Norris: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, who I know is a former small businessman like myself and is vitally concerned with the success of small business. Unbeknownst to a lot of members, it might amaze you that some 95 per cent of businesses in Alberta qualify as small businesses. So it is obviously of vital concern in the value-added plan that we look at this, and we have in a number of different ways.

Some of the things the strategy calls for, in specific answer to the member's questions, are to increase management and leadership capacity through training courses, support mentoring and monitoring for small enterprises. We do that through the Business Link here in Edmonton and the Business Link in Calgary. We want to of course continue with our regional economic alliances, Mr. Speaker, which are regional economic alliances throughout the province that focus on small business. Of course, we want to continue working on access to capital, which continues to be one of the concerns brought forward by small businesses, and to that end the Minister of Science and Innovation, the Minister of Revenue, and myself are working on a report to bring back to government. All of these things meant specifically to help small businesses succeed.

Mr. Lord: Again for the same minister: what performance benchmarks and objective measurements such as monitoring small-business success and failure rates will be put in place in coming years to ascertain whether the plan is working or not?

Mr. Norris: Well, let me say this about that, Mr. Speaker: I'm a big fan of benchmarks, as you can well imagine. [interjections] This is a very tough crowd. A tough crowd.

With respect to the hon. member's questions, clearly we wouldn't enter into any government program without having some kind of benchmark, and of course with this program we do, not only in relation to the growth which we've set, taking our target from \$150 billion in GDP to some \$250 billion over the next 10 years, but also in the success rates of small business.

There are a number of ways we can monitor that. Obviously, the number of business bankruptcies, which I'm very pleased to report is down this year over last and down last year over the previous year. Furthermore, the number of business start-ups is a way to monitor this.

Of course, on a microlevel we want to make sure that industry-specific sectors are being targeted and looked at. I would ask the hon. member and all members present to pick up a copy of this wonderful and very helpful government publication called *Securing Tomorrow's Prosperity*. On page 12 you will see outlined what our benchmarks are by industry. They're highlighted for my reference but not for yours, so page 12. If you look at that, Mr. Speaker, you will see that we have set out some very specific benchmarks, which we will endeavour to monitor in the fullness of time, the rigours of the process, and with attention to detail.

Mr. Lord: My final question, Mr. Speaker, is for the Minister of Innovation and Science. Given that small business is often credited with creating most new innovation, what will your department be doing differently for small business in order to secure tomorrow's prosperity?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most of us are familiar with stories where individuals have started out in their garage and built very successful large companies. That kind of innovation we expect out of Alberta and we anticipate will continue to happen.

In Innovation and Science our basic approach is to make sure that we create the right climate for an innovation culture, and that can be around anything from in terms of finding mechanisms that encourage access to capital to helping find mechanisms for companies to commercialize their technology. Mr. Speaker, the strategic plan that the Minister of Economic Development referred to contains strategic directions that show us how we're going to get there.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we go on, let me just say thank you to you, to all of you, for your co-operation both yesterday and today. Yesterday we were able to go through 13 sets of questions. Today we went through 14. That concluded my whole agenda, so that's very, very positive.

A few seconds from now we'll call upon the first of several members. Might we first, though, revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm very honoured to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of young adults who have served as members of the Youth Advisory Panel of Alberta. These are very special young people who have dedicated many long weekends over the past few years towards helping to improve the lives of youth in Alberta. I would ask them all to stand and remain standing as I call their names: Trevor Brown, Jeesan Chowdhury, Chris Kooistra, Daniel Lee, Victoria Molnar, Julie Spatz, Jessica Tanghe, Kimberly Wagner, Mathew Wildcat, Myron Wolf Child.

With them are members of the YAP support team: Cynthia Farmer, Harriet Switzer, Dionne Nobrega, Robin Danyluk, David French, Graeme MacDonald, and Ross Mitchell, and from the Calgary and Edmonton offices of the Children's Advocate, Sherry Wheeler and Donna Servetnyk. I ask that the members of the Assembly join me in extending the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly special visitors in the members' and public galleries. The second half of the students from Percy Baxter school in Whitecourt have joined us, and with them are their group leaders Tammy Lee, Louise Reid, Shirley Bennett, James Muir, Donna Buchanan, Amy and Chris Spink. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Medicine Hat Tigers Hockey Team

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you can plainly see, I rise today confident that my attire in no way contravenes any Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly. That confidence is because unlike last year, or in the case of another hon. member earlier this year, I am not required to wear the jersey of another team because I lost a hockey bet. For you see, this year I won every bet I made thanks to the outstanding success of the Medicine Hat Tigers.

After finishing first in their division during the regular season the Tigers swept through the playoffs with a record of 16 wins and only four losses, including a final round four-game sweep of the Everett Silvertips to capture their first Western Hockey League championship since 1988.

Next week the Tigers will represent the WHL in the Memorial Cup being held this year in Kelowna. The Memorial Cup is emblematic of major junior hockey supremacy in Canada. The

Tigers are proud to have qualified for the fourth time in team history and look forward to bringing home their third cup.

I would like to extend my sincere best wishes to the players and staff as well as the owners, Darrell and Brent Maser; the general manager, Rick Carriere; and the head coach, Willie Desjardins.

What a team they are, Mr. Speaker. This is a team that led the league in scoring. They had seven 20-goal scorers as well as another with 19. All four lines are capable of scoring, and their power play is the most productive in the league. Their aggressive forechecking strikes fear in the hearts of every team they meet, but the Tigers can play defence too. In the playoffs goalie Kevin Nastiuk recorded four shutouts and a goals-against average under two.

Mr. Speaker, this team has shown the rest of the league and will soon show the rest of the country why Medicine Hat fans have supported them with nearly 60 consecutive sellouts. The Medicine Hat Arena is probably the most intimidating place to play hockey in Canada and is without a doubt the loudest barn in the dub. The people of Kelowna are about to experience what it's like to feel the noise of the orange and black.

Go, Tigers, go.

The Speaker: I should also remind the House before I call on the hon. Member for Red Deer-North that there was a unanimous decision of the House compelling the hon. Member for Red Deer-North to undertake a certain gifting to all members in this Assembly. To my knowledge this has not transpired yet.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's still on its way.

Alberta Youth Advisory Panel

Mrs. Jablonski: Today I rise to honour the work and dedication of some very special young people who have served as members of the Youth Advisory Panel, also known as YAP. YAP, formed in June 2000, is a group of youth selected from across Alberta that meets six times annually to provide feedback on proposed recommendations and findings and to suggest improvements to enhance the quality of services to youth. Its key role is to ensure a solid youth perspective on all work done by the Youth Secretariat, of which I am the chairperson.

The members of YAP have played a very important role in a number of critical issues and policy changes for the government of Alberta. They have invested their time and effort on a volunteer basis into the planning and implementation of some very important events related to youth and children for the province.

Some of the discussions and activities that YAP members have participated in over the last few years include children and youth forums and the Future Summit, review of Alberta mental health's report on services for children and youth, review of the Child Welfare Act, review of the youth in transition policy framework, alcohol and drug use among Alberta's youth, FASD, teen pregnancy, the CALM curriculum, and much more.

Today we presented these members with a coat of arms plaque and a special clock to remind them of the time that we spent working together on issues for Alberta's youth. I would like to sincerely thank the following YAP members for their dedication, their honesty, and their hard work: Trevor Brown from Lethbridge, Jeeshan Chowdhury from Edmonton, Jade Humphrey from Grande Prairie, Chris Kooistra from Calgary, Daniel Lee from Calgary, Jen McKinley also from Calgary, Victoria Molnar from Edmonton, Shauna Parks from Calgary, Julie Spatz from Innisfail, Jessica Tanghe from Slave Lake, Kimberly Wagner from Edmonton,

Mathew Wildcat from Hobbema, Myron Wolf Child from Lethbridge.

Mr. Speaker, it has been an honour and a great pleasure for me to have worked with these special YAP members. I ask the members of this Assembly to join me in thanking them for their efforts and wishing each one of them a happy, healthy, and successful future.

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

International Revenues

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I have said before in the House, I have a dream or rather a vision of Alberta as an enterprise: Alberta Inc. History has proven many times over that jurisdictions, even small in population and landscape, become strong and influential when they go beyond their borders. For the benefit of Albertans Alberta needs to grow beyond its borders and go beyond its modest population.

So let's look at public revenue development, for example. Our publicly funded institutions should be allowed, encouraged to look for revenues from international sources to make profits from them in order to fund services inside Alberta.

Let's explore some options here. Let's open our services to the world. When people in the world are attracted to come here and pay for the services Alberta provides, we know that Alberta is the best. Doing so, we increase our capacity and earn good revenues for Alberta. We can also establish our Alberta services in other countries to earn revenues for Albertans. The profit from these free enterprising activities help with Alberta's public expenditures.

For this, I would like to recommend, for example, that the economic development/international trade area capitalize on Alberta's overseas connections to represent and develop more Alberta overseas trade at low cost. We need to market Alberta products and services overseas more aggressively through this yet-to-be-tapped connection.

Thank you.

2:50

Twinning of Highway 4

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, the decision to move the development of the twinned highway 4 from the east side to the west side has many consequences for the small town of Milk River. The government has provided no solid reasoning for this change, and the residents have been fighting this change since it was introduced.

Over the past five years citizens of this town have been trying to get the attention of this government to change its plans for the west side. They have met with the Minister of Transportation, commissioned the redraw of the east side option, taken a survey, and signed petitions to show that this is not what the citizens of the town want. These actions have had no effect on the decision of the government to switch to the west side, a switch that seemed to have occurred suddenly after a visit by the Premier when he met with a few lobbyists in town.

There will be drastic changes to the physical landscape of Milk River because of the highway being built on the west side. There are three farms, and other farm sites will have to be changed. The riverbank will have to be built up against erosion. The railroad lines will have to be moved at a cost of approximately \$1 million per kilometre, plus there will be the additional cost of a new railway bridge. There will have to be the development of secondary roads to replace the old routes, and a private airstrip will have to close. These are just a few examples of the problems that this new route will cause.

The cost of this upgrading will be \$10 million more than the

design prepared by O'Brien Engineering in August of 2000. This design has far less changes to the landscape in the area. By bypassing the town to the east, there would be none of these changes that I mentioned earlier.

The west side proposal will affect the safety of the citizens in town. By moving highway 501 to travel right past the school, it is not safe for the children. This highway will have to cross a four-lane freeway, making it unsafe for drivers that frequently use it to go to town. This is at a time, Mr. Speaker, when the Department of Transportation is eliminating all such crossings that it can in the province.

Before this government finishes developing this section of the highway, it should take a second look at the extra cost it will have to pay for the development. The majority of people of Milk River don't want this development. In a 2001 survey only 29 per cent of the citizens supported this development. It's time the government listened to the citizens of Milk River and the surrounding communities and made the right cost-effective choice of the eastern development for highway 4.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've got two petitions. I table a petition signed by 689 Albertans petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to "introduce legislation declaring a moratorium on any future expansion of Confined Feeding Operations, with a view to phasing out existing operations within the next three years."

Mr. Speaker, the second petition that I table is signed by 90 Albertans petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to "invest a portion of the multi-Billion dollar budget surplus to properly fund education, thereby avoiding layoffs of teachers and staff, ballooning class sizes, program cuts, and closure of schools."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege today to rise and table, first of all, the first tabling of Alberta's Promise Partners' Report, a report that summarizes the first year of activities, highlights the achievements of the partners, and profiles organizations and businesses in Alberta that are in support of our children.

Mr. Speaker, I have yet another tabling, if I may, and that is a letter to *Today's Parent*, a response to the questions that arose from other members of this House, a response, in fact, that we're forwarding to the editor of *Today's Parent* magazine pointing out some of the good things that are happening in child care in Alberta and clarifying some factors that were not taken into account.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, as a subsequent follow-up to the Committee of Supply, April 20, 2004, and the debate on Children's Services estimates I am providing for the benefit of the members the suitable number of copies of answers to questions raised in the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Jonson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following a commitment the Premier made last week before the Public Accounts Committee, I

would like to table on his behalf the summary of expenses for the Premier's mission to India and Hong Kong in January of 2004. I'm providing the requisite five copies of this report.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

Mr. Woloshyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter addressed to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre which is in response to Motion for a Return 80 as amended.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House today to table the appropriate number of copies of 250 letters written by seniors in Red Deer asking that the government of Alberta restore the seniors' exemption from paying Alberta health care premiums, restore the seniors' exemption from paying education tax, restore reasonable costs for long-term care facilities, and restore medical and dental benefits.

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

Mr. Lord: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of four brief tablings. The first is called *The Influence of the Social Pricing of Insurance on Road Safety in British Columbia*. It's extensively indexed in terms of references from numerous studies and provides evidence to the effect that government insurance in B.C. has led to 15,000 more injuries statistically than what might have been expected otherwise.

The second tabling is a document outlining the 10 most common myths as to the so-called benefits of government insurance.

The third tabling is a communication regarding yet another study indicating the much higher vehicle collision rates in provinces that have government insurance versus those that don't; for example, 18 per cent more deaths per capita and 59 per cent more hospital admissions by young males in provinces that have government insurance.

The final tabling is an article by Lawrence Solomon discussing the international experiences of countries that have government insurance versus those that don't.

Suffice to say that based on these reports it seems to me that a vote for government insurance is a vote to see many more of our citizens killed and maimed on our highways.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Bonner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a report entitled *Milk River Hwy 4 Alternate Route Survey* dated March 10, 2001, compiled by Peter McCormick, a professor of political science from Lethbridge.

My second tabling is a tabling of 700 signatures on a petition to urge the government of Alberta to choose "an easterly Milk River bypass route, and abandon the west bypass plan because of increased hazards and delays caused by intersecting rail lines with Highway 4."

Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings. The first one is the appropriate number of copies of a document providing details of the events being held on May 25, 2004, to celebrate the

National Day of Healing and Reconciliation at city hall, Edmonton.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, I'm doing on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands, who has received letters from 18 students from a school in his constituency. Under the guidance of their teacher, Mr. Fekete, the students from Rundle school are becoming active citizens and taking part in the democratic process. Their goal is to have mandatory seat belts installed in school buses. It's with delight that I table these letters from these students for mandatory school bus seat belt legislation.

Thank you.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Mrs. Nelson, Minister of Finance: Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation 2003 annual report and a report entitled General Revenue Fund, Details of Grants, Supplies and Services, Capital Assets and Other, by Payee for the year ended March 31, 2003.

head: 3:00 **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

Alberta's Official Song

17. Mr. Zwozdesky moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to the Alberta Official Song Act, section 8(1), the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Alberta Official Song Committee, tabled by the Minister of Community Development in the Assembly May 6, 2004, and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that a composition entitled *Alberta* by Mary Kieftenbeld of Rivière Qui Barre, Alberta, be proclaimed as the official song for Alberta in conjunction with the province's celebration of its centennial year, 2005.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Before I proceed and actually play the song, Mr. Speaker, and make a few comments of my own, I would like to briefly introduce, if I might, some very special guests who are here in the gallery this afternoon. You've already met her, but I'd like you to meet her again. The composer of *Alberta*, Mary Kieftenbeld, is here with her husband, Ed, and their children Jeremy, Kagen, Haley, and Emma. Also joining us today are Mary's parents, Henry and Kay Colesar, from Calahoo, Alberta, and Mary's two brothers and sister-in-law, also from Calahoo. They are Paul Colesar and Perry Colesar and his wife, Lise.

They are joined today by some hard-working members of my staff who've had an integral role to play in the development of this particular process. I would like to introduce and thank the head of our communications, Kathy Telfer, who is here; Beryl Cullum, who is working specifically on the centennial aspect of our communications; and my ever-faithful and hard-working assistant, Pam Boutilier.

Now, Mary, if you and all of your guests would please rise one more time and accept our very sincere thanks and welcome to the Assembly, I would appreciate it. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, Mary Kieftenbeld is a local singer/songwriter who was born and raised right here in Alberta; in fact, just about 20 minutes northwest of St. Albert toward Morinville, on the west side there, somewhere near Calahoo. She was born into a very musical family, and at the age of six she began her musical journey in the local church. By age 10 she had picked up a guitar and has been singing and playing ever since. She's become a very popular performer not only with her own family but at special graduations,

weddings, anniversaries, local festivals, and conferences. She's also performed live on CBC Radio, on A-Channel, and on stage for the CJCA-hosted Kids Kottage radiothon. She's also still involved in music at two churches in the area.

Last year Mary released her debut CD, *takin' time*, an eclectic mix of songs which she personally composed. It covers many genres, including folk, gospel, country, and easy listening, and I'm so pleased that she's continuing in that vein.

She, of course, does reside near Rivière Qui Barre, and I neglected to mention that she lives there on a farm and puts in her fair share of the family work, I'm sure. So thank you very much, Mary, to you, to your husband, Ed, and to your children, Jeremy, Kagen, Haley, and Emma, for allowing Mom to spend some time saluting this great province.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is fitting now for me to play the entire song so that everyone can hear what it is that they're expected to vote on, and I'll make some closing comments thereafter.

Flatlands, rollin' plains
Clear blue skies, prairie rains;
A tapestry of colours in the fall.
Snow covered mountain tops,
Wheat fields, canola crops;
Alberta has it all.

Alberta is calling me.
Home sweet home, it's where I'm proud to be.
Alberta is calling me.
I'm livin' right and I'm feelin' free.

The fur trade and native men
Started it all, way back when.
We've come a long way since that.
Agriculture, lumberjacks,
Oil derricks, natural gas;
There is no turnin' back.

Alberta is calling me.
Home sweet home, it's where I'm proud to be.
Alberta is calling me.
I'm livin' right and I'm feelin' free.

A culture diverse as it can be.
This is the land of opportunity.
Welcoming friends, night and day.
I pray that that's the way Alberta stays.

Alberta is calling me.
Home sweet home, it's where I'm proud to be.
Alberta is calling me.
I'm livin' right and I'm feelin' free.

In Alberta.

[As recorded by Mary Kieftenbeld]

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, there you have it: *Alberta* by Mary Kieftenbeld.

I want to just point out a few things to all hon. members before we proceed to other speakers and the final vote, if I might very briefly. What we've just listened to, Mr. Speaker, is referred to as a demo version. There's nothing wrong with demo versions; some people spend a lot of time and a lot of money producing them. But I think it needs to be pointed out to everyone that this may or may not be one of the final versions of this song should the Assembly pass it. It's very well produced, and I know Mary spent a lot of time with her musicians doing that, but I wanted to point out that, assuming the Assembly concurs in the selection of the committee, this particular song would become available in several other formats and genres and styles, be it folk or ballad or set for choirs in the church or

school bands or whatever. So that's important to keep in mind.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we all know how difficult it must have been to have tried to encapsulate all of Alberta's wonders in the space of one page in the time frame of about three minutes. In my view, Mary has done that. I'm so glad that the committee that reviewed all of the entries concurred in a unanimous decision on this one particular song.

So I'd like to thank that committee, and I'd like to begin by thanking – I'd sure like to say his name, Mr. Speaker. I know the rules forbid it if I were to say Wayne Cao, the MLA from Calgary-Fort. This is a historic moment, and he's the fellow who introduced a private member's bill in the spring 2001 sitting of this Legislature. It was an idea he had to adopt some type of official song for Alberta in time for our centennial celebrations next year, which of course will mark Alberta's proud entry into the Canadian Confederation. The Alberta Official Song Act then was passed into law in November 2001 as sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. Thereafter, I was privileged to appoint a committee to oversee the process and to select the song that you have just heard and make a recommendation to me for an official song to be adopted.

I want to reiterate my thanks not only to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, who chaired that committee, but I'd also like to sincerely thank the members of his committee, beginning with yourself, Mr. Speaker. You sat as an ex officio member on this committee. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre was a member, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow was a member, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was a member. They were all joined by Barry Allen from the Alberta Recording Industries Association; Carol Dand of the Arts Touring Alliance of Alberta; Kelly Jerrott from Music Alberta; Neil MacGonigill from the Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada; Gary McDonall from the Alberta Recording Industries Association; Gladys Odegard from Music Alberta; Judy Reeds, Arts Touring Alliance of Alberta; and Wayne Saunders, Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada, more commonly known as SOCAN. They were of course enhanced in their work by many members of my staff.

In addition to the individuals I've just mentioned, I'd also like to sincerely thank Al Chapman from our Alberta arts area, who worked very diligently in the preparation and presentation of all of this material. To all the members who are working in the centennial office and elsewhere throughout the department and also with our Alberta Foundation for the Arts, thank you to each and every one of them for their support.

3:10

In the end, Mr. Speaker, a contest was established. You've just heard the selection that came out of that. As Minister of Community Development I also offered a cash prize to the composer of the winning entry and committed to having this song, should it be accepted today, professionally recorded, professionally arranged, and disseminated in a professional manner to many, many other groups and individuals to use throughout this province beginning in 2005.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, what we've just heard today came about after 335 total submissions were reviewed. Those submissions came to us from over 100 different communities in the province of Alberta. I think it tells you and tells me and everyone here how much pride individuals feel in this great province and how much time they were willing to spend to do whatever it took to reflect that in song. No easy task. I want to thank every single person who entered the contest. At another time the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort and I will be discussing some special commemorative way of thanking those particular entrants for their work.

Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude just by saying that this song in my view is a wonderful tribute. It's a tremendous way to show our love, our respect, and our real feelings about the greatest province in Canadian Confederation, one of the best places in the world you could ever be. Mary, you said it all.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, as the chair of the Alberta song committee and on behalf of the committee I want to thank each and every member of the Assembly for the honour that the Assembly entrusted in us to select an official song for Alberta. Most of all, our sincere thanks go to 335 song authors who submitted their creative musical work and over 4,000 Albertans who made inquiries and 12,000 hits on the Internet. My personal thanks go to every member of the Alberta Official Song Committee and the staff in Community Development who worked on this song selection project. Personally, I'd really like to thank the minister for tabling the report today and expressing his enthusiastic feelings for Alberta.

Credits are given to each and every enthusiastic entrant, the members of the Alberta Official Song Committee, the staff of Alberta Community Development, and the music industry representatives who were involved throughout the process. All have contributed to the success of this endeavour.

As I have just said, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta official song centennial selection initiative has drawn large interest from many communities across Alberta. Following the openly publicized process, all entries were adjudicated on the rigorous analysis of lyrics, theme, melody, originality, and composition. The selection process involved a committee that consisted of many highly qualified people from the music industry as well as a few opposition and government MLAs who also qualified.

It was not an easy task, but the Alberta Official Song Committee did its best. The Alberta official song contest presented a unique opportunity through a labour of love for our province to capture Albertans' affection for Alberta. We are grateful for the generosity of Albertans who shared their creations and for the help we received from the music industries, that enabled us to be part of this celebratory and historical effort. I hope to hear all Albertans, our children and our children's children, singing and whistling it one day. It will be delightful to hear Albertans singing Alberta's song outside Alberta as well.

Mr. Speaker and all hon. members, I also have another plan as the minister just mentioned. It's the Alberta centennial songbook. I'm working on a plan to publish in 2005 the Alberta centennial songbook to recognize all authors who have submitted their songs. But due to legal and confidentiality requirements any authors of songs, even already submitted to the contest or not taking part in the contest, need to contact me or their local MLA's office if they wish their song included in this proposed Alberta centennial songbook. I'm also looking for corporate sponsorship for such publication to commemorate and celebrate Alberta's 100th anniversary.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Mary Kieftenbeld, whose song was selected. Last week outside this Chamber I briefly saw her happy family, a typical Albertan family of a caring mother, four beautiful young children, and a hard-working father. Like any other author she expresses her feeling for Alberta and Albertans in her song. Her song covers the magnificent, natural landscape of Alberta, its historical roots up to the present time, and the characteristics and feelings of its people.

Mr. Speaker, it is said that the proof of the pudding is in the eating, so with your permission the proof of a song is in the singing.

I want to conclude this speech by trying to imitate Mary. My style of the song may be different. It goes – I'm trying to catch on a bit here:

Flatlands, rollin' plains
Clear blue skies, prairie rains;
A tapestry of colours in the fall.
Snow covers mountain tops,
Wheat fields, canola crops;
Alberta has it all.

Alberta is calling me.
Home sweet home, it's where I'm proud to be.
Alberta is calling me.
I'm livin' right and feelin' free.

With that I conclude my speech. Thank you.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to say a few words of personal thanks for being involved in this committee. It was a very interesting experience to be involved. I also have to thank the Department of Community Development for the calibre of the private citizens that they got involved on this committee. It was a real honour to be able to work with them.

I also wanted to put in a word of support for the Member for Calgary-Fort in terms of a book of songs. There were fantastic songs that we looked at as part of this committee, and I would like to just give you an idea of the kinds of flavours that were presented to us. There was one that I really enjoyed that was a First World War-type style of song that was really a beautiful lyrical song. There was also another one that had a native motif which was really a fascinating song that had, you know, quite a breadth to it.

Most of all, I would like to thank Mary for her song. It is a song that expresses the incredible beauty of this land that's Alberta, and it also expresses the spirit of Albertans. I want to just thank her very much and encourage you all to support this song.

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

3:20

Mr. Maskell: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and no, hon. member, I'm not going to sing. I do want to rise today also and thank the hon. member for his great idea and the creation of an Alberta song. One of the most enjoyable activities I've experienced while in this Assembly is being on the committee that looked at and listened to all of those wonderful songs that we heard.

You know, this song is not an anthem. Somebody, when they heard it the first time – in fact it was the hon. Member for Medicine Hat – said to me: this isn't an anthem that we're looking at; this song is something that's supposed to be fun, that anybody can sing. Anybody that has ever been to Disneyland and has listened to *It's a Small World* knows that you were singing *It's a Small World* for days afterwards. Well, this is what this song is about. By the time the committee heard it the second time, we were all humming and singing, and it was quite a sound to hear, I can assure you, except for our hon. member here who has operatic training. It was a wonderful experience.

It's the kind of song that is so singable. It doesn't matter whether it's a children's choir or you're in the car with the family on a holiday or whatever. It's such wonderful music. It was an interesting decision we had to make, but I think we absolutely made the right decision.

The people who were on the committee, the people in the business of music, were a fantastic group. The hon. minister in his selection of this committee of people from the entertainment community

certainly made some good ones. For any of you who are a little longer in the tooth, when you have people like Barry Allan from The Rebels and The Nomads and people who are songwriters and producers and all the rest of it – this just wasn't a few private citizens who didn't know a whole lot about the music world. These are the professionals, the leaders in the Alberta arts community and still are very active in the entertainment business.

In the end we were absolutely unanimous in that choice of song. You know, in Alberta we tend to be so reluctant to brag and sing our praises and so on, so that's what this song is all about. I know we've worked on a tartan and flower and grass and a gemstone and all the rest of it, and those are all worthy, I'm sure, but for me the fun one was the Alberta song. You're all going to be humming it this summer when you're driving down that Alberta highway going to one of those great Alberta vacation spots like Barrhead. I'm sure you will be absolutely thrilled to death to sing this.

There are going to be some changes. I know the hon. minister told people that there's the odd bit in the lyrics that made some people a little anxious, but what you saw in the handout isn't the final bid in terms of the lyrics. There's going to be a little alteration, I think. Am I right, hon. minister? No. Okay. I thought I was.

An Hon. Member: Tell us about Barrhead.

Mr. Maskell: About Barrhead? Well, there are Maskells in Barrhead. So, I mean, sensible people there and in Sangudo and so on.

Anyway, I want to thank the hon. member again for his great idea. I'm proud to have been a part of it, and I know that you're all excited about it and are all going to be humming it. It has unanimous support in this Assembly, I'm sure.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. minister to conclude the debate.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you. If there are no other speakers, I'd be happy to do that. I want to just reiterate a couple of things in the two- to three-minute wrap-up that I have.

First of all, thank you to the people who have just spoken, all of whom were members of the committee.

I just want to clarify the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. What I indicated was that there would likely be different lengths and different versions available, some in a 30-second format, some in a one-minute format, and, of course, the main format, because there will be many different uses and applications. Some people will want one verse and one chorus for a certain type of function. All of that we're going to work out with the composer so that she's happy and we're happy, but the main item will be to create the full song in its entirety in many different genres. The others will be one-off applications on a one-off request, but we're not anywhere near that yet.

Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude by simply saying thank you to all the members of this Assembly for their anticipated support. In particular, I want to congratulate the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert for representing the lovely constituency where Mary and her family live. I'm sure he's very thrilled and honoured as was evidenced when we all met together last week.

As a composer and professional musician myself for many, many years, Mr. Speaker, I know how difficult it is to compose to theme, to compose to a specific set of criteria, and to compose to certain length restrictions, but I know that in this particular case the committee couldn't have made a better choice in having found someone's song that suited all of those tight pressures.

In that regard, I hope that you will all support this historic motion and look forward to it coming out in the final produced professional versions very soon, all of which will be very much a centrepiece of our Alberta centennial celebrations.

With that, Mr. Speaker, assuming the support of the house, Alberta would become only the second province in Canada to have its very own official song, as penned by Mary Kieftenbeld of Rivière Qui Barre: *Alberta*.

Thank you again. I look forward to the vote of the House, Mr. Speaker.

[Government Motion 17 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 32
Appropriation Act, 2004

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. Nelson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After listening to that wonderful song, I'd like to follow through with some of the business of the House and move second reading of Bill 32, the Appropriation Act, 2004.

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

Ms Carlson: Yes, I'd like to speak on this. Mr. Speaker and members, I have some concerns about this particular bill. There are some funding areas that have not been taken care of, I don't think, in this particular budget. I think that we should have had more time to debate some of those issues and some of those particular budget areas where we ran out of time during debate. Particularly, I'd like to talk about seniors and seniors' funding.

As most members in this Assembly know, for the past month I've been door-knocking. Over that period of time I have knocked on just over 4,000 doors and I have visited 17 seniors' centres and lodges, and what I've heard from seniors is that they are mad, very angry, and they are scared about their future. They are very mad because they believed 10 years ago, when the cuts started on seniors' funding, that their funding would, too, be reinstated like many other program funding has for other organizations and people and groups, including MLAs, who had their salaries reinstated. But the group that has been completely abandoned by this government, as they feel, are seniors.

When we have heard repeatedly that seniors, including – the Member for Red Deer-North tabled this afternoon some documentation where seniors were asking for reinstatement of many of the funding costs that they used to get, such as eyeglasses, dentures, health care premiums, property tax. When all of that was cut, seniors believed it would be reinstated at some point when this province had the budget, and none of it has been. They have faithfully waited, budget after budget, announcement after announcement, to see when they, too, were going to get their fair share of the wealth of this province only to find out that that hasn't been the case and won't be the case.

3:30

We heard the Seniors minister speaking last week on the budget, when he talked about thresholds. Well, what seniors are most concerned about is that seniors will not be paying a higher cost and that the threshold for what they have to cover won't be lowered beyond what it is, because their incomes have not increased.

The minister talked about the catch-up jump for nursing home costs. Well, what about the catch-up jump for those seniors who are living on pensions that have not significantly increased over the years? He talked about things like incontinence supplies now being a necessary part of the funding for long-term care, but what about the funding for Aids to Daily Living, such as supplies that one senior pays for? Because his housing costs have increased and the Aids to Daily Living has not – he has had a colostomy, and he needs to buy the supplies for that – this fellow is rewashing his bags because he can't afford to buy new ones all the time.

Dr. Massey: It's shameful.

Ms Carlson: It's shameful; it is. As my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods says: it's shameful. It's absolutely reprehensible that we'd be treating seniors like this.

So what is the solution? I have two excellent solutions for this government, and this is my parting gift to this government, actually, these two excellent ideas. [some applause] I hear some clapping about that. Some of you will be glad to see that I'm gone. But these are two great ideas that I'm going to give you that you would be smart to follow up on, as you did with the stability fund that was a great idea that a few of my colleagues and I came up with some years ago.

Here's the first one. [interjection] Edmonton-Highlands, that was an excellent comment.

Here's the first of the great ideas, and that is to establish a seniors' cost-of-living index. Now, I know that this government likes to hide behind the skirts of the federal government whenever they can, whenever they have to make choices that they don't like, but this is a time when you could take the bull by the horns and actually move forward on an issue and take the credit for it, and it would be a very good idea. When you are putting together the Alberta seniors' supplements and the different benefit programs, instead of using the general cost-of-living index calculated by the feds, establish one that would be a seniors' cost-of-living index.

Seniors for the most part have different living expenses than the general population. They're buying one and two potatoes, not 10 pounds of potatoes. They're looking at different kinds of transportation costs. Instead of running their own vehicles, many of them are looking at using taxis, at using the bus service, at using transportation systems like DATS. They have a higher percentage of prescription costs that they have to cover than the general public. Their housing costs are not as flexible as what they are for the rest of the general public. They're fixed by government agencies when they go to live in nursing homes or other kinds of lodges. They buy their groceries in single-serving packages rather than in bulk. It's impossible for them to buy them in bulk because often they're physically incapable of packing those groceries home. So this is the kind of thing that we need to take a look at when we're calculating the cost increases to supplementary programs that this province pays for seniors.

I would respectfully request that they take a look at this, because instead of the very insulting cost-of-living increases that seniors have been given in the past 10 years in comparison to what their living costs have gone up, particularly in terms of housing and prescriptions, instead of thumbing our nose at a whole society who spent their lives working to build this province up, this government could take the initiative and develop a cost-of-living index that was reflective of what the actual costs were for seniors who are living in poverty or very close to poverty in this province right now.

If there is a community that we should be thanking, it is this community. That is the way that we can do this, by ensuring that

they have adequate monies to live on, not at 40 per cent of what their former wages would have been, not a below-the-poverty-line kind of existence, not \$265 a month, which is all they have left over off their pension cheques, which one might think is a lot of money, but when you think about the small percentage that Blue Cross pays for their prescriptions and the pieces that they have to pick up after that – I'm talking to seniors who are never able to buy a present for a grandchild, who have to save for six months to buy a new pair of shoes, who sometimes can't even do that in six months if they have some kind of a chronic disease that requires massive prescriptions month after month, particularly if they're on some of these new drugs and are not covered by any kind of medical package. They are living in dire poverty. They cannot scrape two nickels together at the end of the month. It is abysmal that we as a province have allowed this to happen, and this government can make some changes in that regard.

That brings me to my second excellent suggestion that this government should take up. This is going to be a bonus year for this province. Forty-dollar-a-barrel oil means that you're going to be wallowing in cash very quickly, particularly when we saw the Finance minister come in with a budget that estimated oil revenues very, very low. You're going to have a huge injection of money that you weren't anticipating. Even above what you had coyly put aside to pay off the provincial debt, there's still going to be a huge injection of capital.

I suggest to this government that you take some of that money and set up an endowment fund for seniors so that you can start to pay out on an annual basis some of these costs that you've taken away over the years. If you want these very angry seniors to consider voting for you in the next election, then this is something that you must figure out how to do, how to get the money for those costs like prescription eyeglasses back in their hands. This would be a way to do it.

An endowment fund for seniors has a lot of cachet; it's very marketable. Instead of just one-off funding, which we have criticized so often in this government with the surpluses you have, establish a fund that would be perpetuated year after year to cover these kinds of costs. It would be a very smart way for this government to go, to recognize the importance that seniors have in our community and as a part of our history and to bring their level of living up to just a reasonable standard, not an excessive standard but above poverty lines. That would be a very small thing for this government to do.

I think they should seriously consider doing it because it's not just seniors who are worried about this. It's people my age who are taking care of aging parents. It's families with small children, some without children, who are taking care of aging parents. It's people who are worried about what's going to happen on this slippery slope of seniors' funding in the future for themselves as they age.

If this government doesn't stand up and take notice, the people who are talking to seniors and working with seniors and see the fear in their eyes on a daily basis in terms of trying to understand how they're going to pay for their next prescription or be able to buy their groceries until the end of the month – when they see that fear, they get angry. For the seniors who are angry now, those people are going to use their vote to record that anger, and this government is going to be the recipient of that.

While I don't like to give this government great ideas because I don't think they particularly deserve them, I think that good ideas that put forward the interests of the people of this province should be brought forward as soon as possible, and I think that those are two potential ideas that would go a long way to re-establishing some faith in government that seniors don't have now. And they're not blaming the feds for this. They're blaming this Conservative government and their actions over the past 10 years.

I say to you, "Ignore them at your peril," because they're angry. For the first time ever when I walk to their door, they talk about how mad they are with this level of government and how they will do anything to change this government because they have seen absolutely no payoff or return of any funding that they previously had as a result of actions over the past 10 years. They've had enough, they're completely fed up, and they're going to be voting unless they see some changes being made.

3:40

I was very surprised when we had the Seniors minister up here last Thursday that he talked four times for nearly 20 minutes each time and all during that whole discussion talked about how he wasn't responsible for any of these services being reinstated, that, you know, he did the best he could as the minister and it was not approved by cabinet.

Well, I say that that's not good enough. If that's the best you can do, then you shouldn't be the minister. You should be replaced. We need a minister there who will stand up for seniors and fight for what they need and fight for what they want and fight for them to have their rightful place in this society.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 32, the Appropriation Act, 2004, and I want to start with a few general comments about the bill.

It is interesting that the total revenues are estimated at just below \$23 billion for 2004-05, which seems to be a serious underestimate. This is \$2.3 billion less than forecast revenues of \$25.3 billion in fiscal year '03-04.

Oil and gas revenues in fiscal year '04-05 are estimated to be \$2.7 billion below what they're forecast to be in '03-04. Given the upward movement on oil and gas prices, Mr. Speaker, this is completely misleading.

The government is reducing the general corporate tax rate from 12.5 to 11.5, which is a 9 per cent cut, permanently reducing government revenues by \$142 million. Alberta already has the lowest corporate taxes of any province, and this is a giveaway, Mr. Speaker, pure and simple.

Contrary to some media reports provincial revenue from school property taxes will go up by 5.7 per cent in '04-05. The 2.3 reduction in the mill rate will be more than offset by increases in the value of the assessment base. This is the third straight year that the Provincial Treasurer has broken her 2002 promise to freeze school property taxes at \$1.2 billion.

Surprisingly, Mr. Speaker, in a pre-election budget there are 25 new user fees for such things as outdoor recreation, parks programs, and the maintenance enforcement program; 11 other fees for parks activities; and insurance services are being significantly increased. While the new fees and fee hikes for things like cross-country skiing in Kananaskis Country and provincial parks programs most hit average Albertans, the insurance levies are puzzling given the concerns about the affordability of coverage.

There is mention of some royalty giveaway programs which may be reviewed in light of recent federal government changes, but no specific measures are announced in this budget.

Health care premiums are maintained at current levels for seniors and everyone else. In other words, corporations get tax breaks; seniors and middle-class families get nothing.

Mr. Speaker, I would like at this time to introduce an amendment to the budget, and I'll ask the pages to bring it to the table and distribute it to members.

The Speaker: The hon. member may sit down for a moment. I have not seen this amendment yet.

On the amendment, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 32, Appropriation Act, 2004, be amended by striking out all of the words after “that” and substituting the following. “Bill 32, Appropriation Act, 2004, be not now read a second time because the bill does not adequately provide for the following: a reduction in classroom sizes, comprehensive health care benefits for seniors, and relief for utility consumers.”

Mr. Speaker, this amendment, which would have the effect of defeating the budget that’s been introduced by the Provincial Treasurer, is in effect a nonconfidence motion in the government. If this motion is passed, the government will fall.

Now, Mr. Speaker, hon. members may realize that given the government’s massive majority at the present time, that is unlikely to happen. So, then, why bring forward a nonconfidence motion in the government? Well, based upon the budget and based upon the government’s performance during this session, we felt that it was appropriate to at least put this forward so that even if it were not given adequate consideration by the government members, it would hopefully be considered by the citizens of this province, and the motives behind the amendment would be considered.

What the amendment says is that the bill does not provide for a reduction in classroom sizes, first of all. Now, we know, Mr. Speaker, that the government has committed to implement the commission on education recommendations and that these include adequate funding to bring down the size of classes in the province of Alberta. The Learning Commission document, I think, on balance, was a very well-thought-out and balanced document and could have provided a blueprint for the government to restore some of the damage that it has inflicted on our educational system. Unfortunately, this budget doesn’t deal with that.

What the budget has resulted in is the imminent threat of strike action for the second time in two years by teachers in this province. Far from reducing classroom sizes, far from giving school boards an adequate amount of money to deal with teachers’ issues, contract issues, as well as classroom sizes and to restore the programs that have been cut in the last few years as a result of the government’s programs, the budget brings us back to the brink of labour unrest in the public school system of this province, Mr. Speaker. As such, it completely fails Albertans, and it fails to deliver on the promise of this government to implement the recommendations of the Learning Commission.

Secondly, the question of comprehensive health care benefits for seniors, which have been eliminated by the government. There’s a need, Mr. Speaker, to not only restore those health care benefits which have been cut but to expand them. I note, as well, that the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, Mr. Harper, has now weighed in to the federal campaign with a proposal for benefits for a national drug program. It’s not exactly the kind of national drug program that we would like to see, but it does indicate a direction that ought to be followed.

There can be an improvement in the health benefits which we provide for all Albertans, but in particular seniors ought not to be singled out for cuts as they have been. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has talked quite eloquently this afternoon about the situation facing seniors and the anger among seniors, and much of that goes back to actions of the government, cutting comprehensive programs for dental and eyeglasses as well as their approval of increases for long-term care.

Now, Mr. Speaker, members might be interested to know that the

corporations that provide long-term care in this province are already showing improved bottom lines, and they are attributing that in their annual reports to the generosity of this government in increasing the amount that they can charge for long-term care by about 50 per cent. If the government would like seniors to believe or children of seniors in long-term care to believe that this was necessary in order to improve the care of their parents, they are whistling past the graveyard. Those people in long-term care and their children know that the money has primarily gone towards the bottom lines of the corporations that run nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.

3:50

This perhaps is a model of what the government intends for health care in general, Mr. Speaker, because they have certainly talked about the need to increase the role of private health care corporations in the delivery of general health care, and I think this gives a good example of what we can expect to see should they manage to get away with that particular direction.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I last want to come to the third point in the amendment, and that has to do with relief for utility consumers. We saw before the last election a massive series of programs allegedly to help people deal with the high natural gas and high electricity prices that they were facing. What it was in fact was a massive program to make very serious problems of the government’s own making go away until the government was safely re-elected.

Now, the Premier and other ministers have floated the balloon that we might be looking at more rebate programs again as the election approaches, in this case probably primarily for gasoline. That’s not what we’re talking about. We’re not talking about bribing the voters with their own money. We’re not talking about implementing Bill 1, the first bill of this term that was passed, sponsored by the Premier, that gives the cabinet the authority to give utility rebates or energy rebates of any kind at any time without reference to the Legislature. This bill was in our view an abomination. It’s a bill that we strongly disagree with. We’re not talking about that kind of electoral use of taxpayers’ money to ease the government back into yet another mandate. What we’re talking about are actual steps that should be taken to reduce the prices of electricity and provide some protection for people on the natural gas side as well.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there are many failures of this government. The whole term can be judged a failure, in my view. It’s a litany of broken promises. When electricity deregulation was brought in, the promise was that competition would actually bring down prices. In fact, we’ve seen that the opposite has happened, and the government has taken no steps to reverse that direction. They actually have deepened their commitment to electricity deregulation and have brought in disreputable companies like Direct Energy to replace existing Alberta companies under the guise of providing more choice. Consumers know that it’s not more choice; it’s just a different same choice. Electricity deregulation is one.

The government has failed to bring in anything reasonable in terms of car insurance reductions. In fact, they’ve postponed the freeze until after the projected time for the next provincial election, so Albertans may not know until the election is out of the way that the government is unable to deliver comparable rates to those provinces that have public auto insurance. According to our calculations, by capping personal injury claims at \$4,000, they are able to save about 8 per cent of the cost of insurance, whereas eliminating the profits of private companies would allow savings of up to 35 per cent. So public auto insurance can produce savings.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I really am reluctant to do this, but

relevancy is very important with respect to amendments. There's nothing in here about automobile insurance. Let's move on.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was trying to generalize about broken promises of the government. I accept your advice and will restrict myself to these particular broken promises of the government. There are many.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that it's very clear that the government has failed, and failed miserably, to meet many of the obligations that it itself has undertaken in a broad range of policy areas. I can't think of one major accomplishment of this government that affects the lives of Albertans broadly during this entire term. This budget reflects that. This budget reflects a lack of vision, it reflects a lack of accomplishment, and it represents broken promises on one area of policy after another.

I believe that this government has been here too long. It's time that this government was thrown out, was defeated. I think that even if members opposite aren't going to be persuaded of that at this particular time, the voters will be. The citizens of Alberta are eventually going to say, "Enough is enough. We've had far too much personality. We've had far too many zany antics from the Premier, but we haven't had any real results," and they'll throw the government out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, a five-minute question and comment period, should they wish to be directed toward anything said by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands. None?

Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on the amendment, please.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking in favour of the amendment and with respect to not having adequately provided the reduction in classroom sizes, this is a particularly sore point with parent groups in this city and I suspect with parent groups across the province.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

There was a sequence of events that I think really had parents encouraged. The outcome of the strike resulted in the Learning Commission being appointed. The commission listened to parents, sent out workbooks, and I think parents were generally encouraged that if they took the time to deliberate and to put their ideas down on paper, to appear before the commission, to fill out the commission's workbook, they would get the kinds of recommendations out of the commission that they thought were in the best interests of their children. I think most of them were pleasantly surprised that the document that was produced by the government did reflect their wishes, and in one area in particular that's been a bother to parents and that's with respect to class size.

If you go back to the commission, Mr. Speaker – and this is speaking directly to not adequately providing for a reduction in class size – when the commission report came out, one of the recommendations was that they implement class size guidelines for kindergarten to grade 3. The estimated cost for that over the first three-year phase of the Learning Commission was to be \$111.4 million, and there was to be an estimated one-time cost of \$47 million.

There was a sequence of recommendations: establishing parenting centres, \$10.5 million; implement full-day junior kindergarten programs for children at risk, \$42 million, and that would have implications for class size and what goes on in classrooms; imple-

ment full-day regular kindergarten programs for children at risk, \$21 million; and then there were further recommendations with respect to First Nations and Métis and home liaison workers for them. Again, the program was to provide opportunities for students to learn second languages. The phase-in implementation of technology standards was to be another \$20 million. The total for phase 1 was to be \$224.4 million. The expectation, I think, roughly was that we would see in this budget \$70 million dedicated to putting the recommendations from phase 1 into practice.

4:00

The day that the budget was released, Mr. Speaker, there were a number of parents here in the building, and to say that they were disappointed would be an understatement. They expected that they would be able to go to this budget and look at the business plan and there on the business plan would be the itemization of these items from the Learning Commission's report with a commitment alongside each item as to how far the government was going to go towards implementing those specific items. We talked to a number of those groups, and I can't tell you how disappointed they were at that time that that didn't happen. They were looking for the money, and they were looking for the money to be earmarked for the recommendations from the Learning Commission.

Now, since that has happened, the government's response by the Minister of Learning to the criticism that that didn't happen has been that there has been an increase of \$289 million. If you go through the budget, Mr. Speaker, you can't find an increase of \$289 million because, in fact, \$60 million of that was money that had already previously been announced. So parents who were scrambling through the budget looking for the \$289 million won't and can't find it because it's not there.

More importantly, then, if you take away the \$60 million and end up with a \$230 million increase, they would like to see, because the minister says that the money is there, that \$70 million that was to be earmarked for implementing the Learning Commission's recommendations.

In fact, there isn't \$70 million in that budget. As the allocations to specific boards were put out last week, we saw that there just isn't that kind of money there. For the large urban boards and the large suburban boards, in fact, when you take into account the money that they need for salary grid increases, when you take into account the money that they need because of increased costs, there is very, very little left to implement the recommendations of the Learning Commission. For a number of those boards who had to release teachers last year, class sizes this coming September are going to be the same, or in some cases – and this is particularly true of the large boards – there's going to be an increase in class sizes.

So the budget, I think, has literally failed those parents who were looking and looking hopefully, Mr. Speaker, for a September when there would not only have been the number of teachers hired back that they had been forced to lay off in the previous year, but there would also be a number of extra teachers hired to work towards the reduction of class sizes, as outlined in the Learning Commission's recommendations.

The budget as an instrument of progress with respect to the Learning Commission is a great disappointment, Mr. Speaker, and it's for that reason that I think the amendment has to be supported.

Thank you.

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

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to have a few minutes to get up and address this amendment to our appropria-

tion bill. I don't know; I can't begin to express the level of disappointment I have that you've brought in this ridiculous amendment on what is in fact a really great budget in a really incredibly great place to live. We have absolutely everything in this province, and I despair sometimes that no matter how much we do, it's never enough, it's never right, and everybody can sit back and just take shots at it. I'm just stunned by it.

When you talk about the Learning Commission, which we've really just completed in the last – what? – six or eight months, they came forward with a massive number of recommendations. It's a great study. It's the first time that education had been studied that way in 30 years. I think it was an incredible report that told us that a lot of things are really very good in this system and that there are areas we need to improve on. They suggested – and it was their suggestion, hon. member – that we in fact have five years to try and deal with the implementation of their recommendations, and that is what is happening. Yet here you are saying: well, it didn't all happen at once; it didn't happen fast enough.

You know what? In my riding, through the Speaker, you couldn't even implement this. You cannot because I do not have enough physical infrastructure to deal with the growth that is occurring. In my constituency we have between 7 and 18 per cent growth, and I'm talking about actual population growth. In areas like Langdon, for example, in many portions of Airdrie they've tried very hard to bring in starter homes. We have many, many young families coming in. When you go through some of these neighbourhoods, as I do, I'm just constantly astounded at the number of really tiny little children that aren't even in school yet, let alone that my schools are absolutely packed to the rafters. We opened a brand new school with 12 portables already attached.

I do believe that this is a really important recommendation from the Learning Commission, that we get to a point where the classrooms are smaller. Right now I'm just really happy to have a classroom, you know, and I'm very grateful to my colleagues that I was able to have some funding allocated to my constituency for new schools because we desperately need them. We can't build them fast enough to keep up with the kind of growth rates we're dealing with.

Why do we have growth like this? We have growth like this because we have the single best, most vibrant place in this country to live. That is not a negative. It's just a reality of the fact that we have a booming economy. We're blessed with oil and gas. We're blessed with coal. We're blessed with forest reserves. We've got great farmers. We've struggled with drought and BSE, but we've got all of these other things, the gifts that we've been given in this province, and we cannot just squander them all because we have a surplus. People talk about a surplus like it's a bad thing. A surplus is a gift. It's just a gift.

We have the best health care in Canada. We have the best-paid nurses in Canada. We have the best education system anywhere in the world, and stats bear that out. We have the best-paid teachers anywhere in this country. In Ontario right now the new Ontario Liberal government is in fact trying to figure out how to break all of the campaign promises that they just made a few months ago, the Liberal Party in Ontario that made all these great, grandiose, sweeping promises on how they were just going to show everybody that you can actually spend money you don't have. Well, you can't.

Dr. Massey: It sounds like insurance here.

Ms Haley: You know what? If you want to get up and talk again, you do it, but you don't interrupt me.

Moving right along. [interjections] Yeah? Really? Free insurance?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View has the floor. When she finishes, Standing Order 29 prevails, and you will have an opportunity to ask questions of her. She has the floor, and the chair recognizes her.

The hon. member.

Ms Haley: Thank you. You know, when we talk about everything that we have in Alberta, not only do we no longer have a deficit – and I'm grateful for that – but our debt is almost paid off. We are no longer squandering billions of dollars on interest, which doesn't create any jobs or do anything good for anybody anywhere.

We have the best programs, including the best programs for our seniors. Would I like to see whether we can raise the thresholds for our seniors? Yes, ultimately I would like to see that, but I am also not reluctant to say to you, Mr. Speaker, that I believe that our seniors' programs are pre-eminent anywhere in Canada.

When I talk to my mother, who is 76, and prior to my step-father's death last year – he was a very proud, very right-wing, very strong Albertan who believed that they had been given great opportunities in their life. They didn't have much. They had a small house, you know, that my mom still lives in today. It's a 50-year-old house, and she's happy in this house. She believes that she's never had it so good in her whole life. She is grateful that there is a thing like a co-pay with a \$25 cap on a prescription for the prescriptions that she needs. She and her husband, Bob, needed the health care system in the last couple of years in a big way, and it was there for them. So you will not find a person like my mom talking about how seniors have been taken advantage of or brutalized in some way. She's very proud of this province, living in this province, being a strong member of her community. She volunteers everywhere that she is physically and mentally capable of doing so.

4:10

I cannot believe that I have to sit here, knowing that my mother lives on a very small pension, and listen to how I would somehow abuse my own mother because I'm a government member, that I don't care about senior citizens, that I don't care about children. I mean, it's absolutely ludicrous. You do not have a market on compassion just because you're in a left-wing party, and just because you're in a right-wing party doesn't mean that you don't care about people. It's just ludicrous, the innuendo and the insulting comment that you make about things like that.

Utility relief. Let's talk about utility relief. Please name one other jurisdiction in North America that even has a rebate on anything – on anything – on any kind of gas or oil or coal or wood product.

Ms Carlson: You're gouging our seniors.

Ms Haley: Nobody's gouging anybody.

These resources belong to the people of this province, and they capture all of the royalties on it. It is why we have the lowest income taxes anywhere in this country, and compared to most U.S. states, we're better off. We do not have a sales tax, which most places in North America do in fact have. We have a natural gas rebate that kicks in at \$5.50, which takes some of the pain out of it. Is it perfect? No. But, then, who knew 10 years ago that natural gas would be this high? I think a lot of these things are incredibly important.

We have the best economy in Canada. We have the highest growth rate. We have the lowest unemployment rate. We have the lowest overall taxes. We have in fact an enormous advantage in living here, yet all I hear is the negative, the doom and gloom, the sky is falling. You know, it's like, wow, I must be living in a whole

other place. I leave this place; I go to Airdrie where people are happy. They're working; they've got jobs. Their kids are in school. They can drive on the road. They can go shopping. They've got jobs.

Eleven years ago we had 11.75 per cent unemployment in this province. Airdrie at 16,000 people had over 500 empty homes just sitting there that nobody wanted to buy. That's over. People have moved back to Alberta. They're moving in. We have the highest growth rate of any province in this country. We netted an extra 12,000 people from other provinces across this country last year, yet here we are in the doom and gloom scenario of the opposition. I'm staggered by it. I can't believe it, and I would urge my colleagues to please vote against this ridiculous amendment.

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

Mr. Mason: I have a question, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, the chair did make reference to Standing Order 29, but that applies to the debate. We are dealing with a reasoned amendment, and there is no provision in our Standing Orders right now for your questions.

The chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was some confusion on this. The Speaker, before you came in, in fact said that there was room to ask questions.

I would like to speak, Mr. Speaker, in favour of the amendment. We're not naive to think that an amendment like this would pass this House. We were very clear when we debated among ourselves the appropriateness of bringing forward this amendment. We aren't doing it based on the premise that somehow the amendment will be passed and, therefore, the government will be defeated and we will have an election. We knew all that wouldn't happen.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, on the issue of a budget, a budget that in fact is a statement about the commitments of a government in power with respect to its vision, with respect to its policies, with respect to its commitments to the people of Alberta, it is exceedingly important that this budget be taken seriously, that the government be held to account for . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Acting Speaker: I regret to interject. Hon. members, we are currently in the Assembly and not in committee stage. Members who wish to have a conversation may leave the Assembly and have a conversation outside or take their seats, please. Sorry for the interruption.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Debate Continued

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was speaking to the reason for this reasoned amendment. It's an opportunity to hold this government to account for what this budget contains, what this budget reveals to Albertans about the failure of this government to keep its commitments, to respect its own promises, and to deliver on its own undertakings.

The Minister of Finance has failed the third time in her term as minister by bringing in a budget which fails to deliver to Albertans, Alberta's children first and foremost in this case, class sizes which are affordable, smaller class sizes. This government fully accepted the vast majority of the recommendations of the Learning Commission, which itself, I must say, was the result of a crisis in education that had been created by this government's own policies previous to

the establishment of that commission. But once the commission came up with the recommendation to reduce the class size and start doing that right away, forthwith, the government said: yes, we agree. What do we see in the budget? No money for following down that road.

It's outrageous that a government on the one hand accepts the recommendations of a commission that it appointed itself to reduce class size and then turns around and gives \$142 million in tax cuts to big corporations and says that there's no money to start reducing class size. It says that we need to wait for another year or two or three. We have another four years before we can begin to implement that particular commitment on the part of the government. It's shameful, Mr. Speaker, that the government should be renegeing on its own commitments, on its promises to the children of this province.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, the motion draws attention to the failure of this government to restore to Alberta seniors the benefits that they have earned through their hard work, through lifelong commitment to building this province, to continuing to pay their taxes. Seniors are not people who don't pay their taxes – they pay taxes even now – yet when it comes to the benefits that they so strongly deserve, this government has failed them.

I raised this question during the debate on the estimates, both when we were talking about the Department of Learning estimates and the Department of Seniors estimates, and I was quite astounded to hear the reactions from the government side on this. The minister responsible for Seniors, the minister responsible for Learning, the minister responsible for Government Services, and the minister responsible for utility rates and deregulation of utilities have all failed and failed our seniors, failed our businesses, failed our householders, failed our renters.

When you deregulate and the result is an increase in utility costs for heating, for electricity, you know, it affects everybody. It affects businesses negatively, it affects homeowners, it affects the seniors who live in their own homes and live on stagnant incomes, and it hurts renters. The vast majority of Albertans live in rented accommodations. Their rents are going up thanks to the failed deregulation policies on utilities in this province.

So this government boasts about making this province the best place in the country to live. Yes, Albertans work hard. They are proud to have built this province the way it has been built. What this government is doing is failing them in their expectations. It spends more time in dampening expectations of Albertans rather than meeting those expectations, delivering on those expectations of Albertans. By setting the bar low, any government can of course boast that they've done these things, but this government is guilty of setting the bar so low in a province where people work so hard, where they're so proud of their accomplishments.

It tells them that you've got to live at a level which our neighbouring provinces, who don't have these resources, who don't have the opportunities, have had to accept because they didn't have the choices. We do have choices, Mr. Speaker, and this bill denies those choices to Albertans. That's why this amendment is one that I support, that's why we in the New Democrat caucus brought this amendment forward, and that's why we ask my colleagues in the House to support this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour today to look up in the gallery and see a very good friend of mine. This gentleman participates in actually two southern Alberta constituencies. His MLA is the hon. Member for Highwood, and this gentleman has a business in my constituency of Livingstone-Macleod. Soon the two constituencies will come together, so George Gaschler, who actually lives in Nanton and has a business in Fort Macleod, will all be in Livingstone-Macleod.

In both of these southern Alberta communities, Mr. Speaker, this gentleman is a community leader, very much involved in chamber of commerce. He's had a successful law practice for over 28 years. He is the chair of the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump advisory committee under the Minister of Community Development. He's a proud father of three wonderful children all still in university and a family that really, really enjoys and appreciates the Alberta advantage.

Mr. Gaschler is seated in the members' gallery, and I would have him please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 32
Appropriation Act, 2004
(*continued*)

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can depend on the third party in the House to come up occasionally with these Hail Mary passes, so to speak, and I think with a 74-seat majority, that's certainly what this motion is in trying to bring down the government or give a nonconfidence vote in the budget, but it did generate some back and forth discussion, which is very unusual in this House. I always greatly enjoy it when we're able to engage members of the government in debate.

She raised some interesting points, but I would counter some of the attitudes raised by the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View in that her attitude seems to be: well, in Alberta because everything's so great, you should never strive for anything better. I would think that's exactly what we're supposed to do, is strive for better.

It is about a political ideology that comes underneath and shapes the government's policy. Of course that's what it does. The government has a particular ideology, they're going to follow through on it, and it's going to show up in their policies, including things like the budget. So we're going to have choices made there and priorities placed on things that we in the opposition parties disagree with. That's exactly why you have these kinds of debate in the House.

Do I think it's wrong to bring forward an amendment like this in trying to strive to create conditions that we know Albertans are asking for? No, I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I think that's exactly what should be happening, and for that I commend the Member for Edmonton-Highlands for bringing forward this reasoned amendment.

I think that for my constituents there are certainly two out of three of the issues that are raised in this motion that are of intense interest to them. One is what has happened around utility costs. Of course, with a lot of renters and a lot of low-income renters that's of very

immediate assistance to my constituents. Essentially what we did was go from the most stable, reliable, and cost-effective, cheapest in other words, electricity prices in Alberta through the government's plan for electrical deregulation to some form of ongoing chaos.

The Member for Airdrie-Rocky View said, you know: isn't the province wonderful for offering rebates? I guess that I have to say: why do we have to have rebates? Well, we have to have them because the government got into electrical deregulation and also started to mess around with what was happening with the gas prices. That's why we have to have rebates, and frankly they've got enough money that they can give the rebates.

Now, I would question whether that in the long run is effective wealth management. Are these good management choices in the long run for the future of Albertans?

I note that the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake is getting engaged behind me here and I'm sure will be joining in the discussion soon, aside from just heckling me from two rows back there. That's what's exciting about an amendment like this: it does generate that kind of discussion.

I think some of the other issues and the reason that I would support this amendment is the comprehensive health care benefits for seniors. I have to say that if there were one thing that seniors from all the seniors' groups that I've met with and talked to in the last year have said most consistently – and as the Official Opposition critic for Seniors I've certainly been to a lot of meetings on this – it is the loss of the extended health care benefits, particularly the original loss of the universal benefit program, that is most consistently brought up by seniors as really getting under their skin and irking them these days.

Again, you know, with the choices that the government has made, the seniors feel that they are not coming forward as a priority of the government. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie spoke eloquently about that, and she's been most recently of all of us in here on the doors. I think we could say that a lot of us after three month or four months in here are getting dome disease, but she's actually been on the doors, and that's what they're saying, and I believe her.

So for my constituents in Edmonton-Centre I have to say that two of the three things that are listed in here are of immediate, pressing, and ongoing concern. That is the comprehensive health care benefits for seniors and the relief for utility customers.

The classroom sizes is a different issue for me. My schools are covered under the city centre school program. That was a special program that Edmonton public and Catholic got together on in recognizing what was happening to those inner-city schools and the kind of work that we had to do if we were going to have those kids enjoy the Alberta advantage, let me put it that way. So in many ways my schools have had the advantage of smaller classrooms because so many of the kids that are attending these schools are in need of very specialized individual attention and very small classes. We have been able, through reaching out into the community and partnerships with businesses and a variety of grant programs available through the government, to patch together a fairly extensive program. I don't want to see the day when these grants are all withdrawn.

That in itself is indicative of choices that this government has made, where you have the school system and the hospital system, two public institutions, I'll note, as the biggest competitors in the fundraising sector, competing for dollars against all of those other organizations that were traditionally fundraising for dollars to support their endeavours. The social service agencies and the youth agencies and the sports and recreation agencies and the arts and cultural agencies: all of those were the traditional entrants, and religious and charitable groups as well were all there before. Now our biggest competitors are schools and hospitals, all competing for

that fundraising dollar from the private sector and from individuals' pockets.

4:30

You know, budgets are about choices and priorities, and this government brings forward a budget that very much reflects their priorities. We have things like an emphasis on income trusts, which is very clearly going to allow corporations to pay less corporate income tax. One assumes that there's supposed to be a shift to individual income tax, but when you look at the numbers, you don't see a dollar-for-dollar replacement there.

Choices like a flat tax, a choice of the government. I would argue again that that benefits those that are in the \$80,000-plus range and not those that are middle and lower income. It's a choice the government has made. I would argue that I would make different choices, and I think that they should make different choices. Part of those choices that I would like to see are not reflected in what the government has done and are reflected in this motion that we're talking about.

This budget had no increase for people that are on assured income for the severely handicapped, known as AISH, or on SFI, which I think is now being reworked to be called Alberta Works. No increases there. So no increases for the very low income but much benefit accruing to those with very high income.

One of the other notes I quickly jotted down here was: no restoration of services and programs to the seniors, and I've already talked about the comprehensive health care benefits there.

You know, should we simply stay mum in the opposition because there's a lot of wealth in Alberta? Should we not push forward and push for the things that we hear people telling us they want? And I know that members in the government are hearing it from people. I'm not the only one that these people are speaking to. I see members out at other public rallies that I'm at. I know that they're hearing it from other people.

So I disagree with the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View. I think that's exactly what our job is, to continue to press for improvement in those areas. In doing so, I am willing to support this amendment brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands because it makes those points and because it pushes that envelope, as it should.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I won't be long, but I did want to speak briefly to the amendment because the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, by bringing this amendment in, has specifically addressed items such as the reduction in class sizes, comprehensive health care benefits, and relief for utility consumers. I'm just going to speak to the first, the reduction in class sizes, because in talking about that, there was comment about the Learning Commission report and I think also from Edmonton-Mill Woods extensive comments about the Learning Commission report.

The Learning Commission was one of the best things that we've done in a long time. The learning system hadn't been looked at comprehensively for some 20 years, since the Walter Worth report, I believe. There weren't a lot of surprises in there. There were lots of things that came up in the Learning Commission report that we had talked about with our constituents over time. What was beneficial about the Learning Commission report was the comprehensive look and bringing in experts and that.

There were some 98 recommendations in that report, and they were very good recommendations. Not everybody agreed with all of those recommendations, but I think the speed with which this

government moved to accept most of the recommendations, to only reject two recommendations – and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre says without money. She obviously can't read, because as I read the budget and the three-year business plan, there's some \$650 million more in the education budget over the next three years. Six hundred and fifty million dollars. Now, that's a lot of money.

The Learning Commission did not say that class sizes should be changed in one year. They recognized that every time you make a significant change in the education system, given the size that it is, that costs money and it costs a lot of money, so they suggested phasing those changes in.

We started before this budget phasing those changes in with money put into the learning system back in November, and those changes in November – and school boards will acknowledge this – allowed schools to move this January to put people in classrooms, either more teachers or more aides or more help, and the money in this budget will sustain that change.

Now, will it improve that in a significant amount? Probably not, because there are other issues that have to be addressed. There are issues of negotiations for salaries and things still to be addressed, but the change that was made in January will be sustained by this budget. That change in January was very significant, Mr. Speaker, in my view. We need to move forward with the Learning Commission, and we need to move forward with the funding of the Learning Commission, but it has to be done in a manner which is consistent with sustainability and consistent with balancing the budget.

Six hundred and fifty million dollars over three years for learning is no small change. It's a very significant indication of the priority that has been put on learning in this province, the priority that was stated in our strategic plan, the priority that was stated by our Premier last fall in the Legislature in answer to a question, saying that learning is our number one priority. I'm very proud of that statement. I'm very proud of that statement in our strategic plan that leading in learning is the number one priority because in every study that we've done and every time we've consulted Albertans, they have said that in order to move to the future economy, to build stability in the economy of this province, we need to have all of our children have the opportunity to get an education to build the tools that they will need to seize the opportunities of the future.

This government is committed to that. The budget reflects that. The business plans out three years reflect that in spades. The amount of money that's being put into the plan now is not insignificant. It's a major contribution towards that step forward. What I would ask members to do is don't build unrealistic expectations about what can be done overnight but help build the future by building on the commitments that this government has made to make learning our number one priority and to commit the resources to do so.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands is gesturing to me hoping that there is a provision to close debate. Unfortunately, according to Standing Order 25(2), there is no such provision.

Anybody else wish to speak on the amendment?

[Motion on amendment lost]

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else wish to participate in the debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

Bill 31
Highways Development and Protection Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I read *Hansard* for second reading of Bill 31. Obviously, the minister was very generous in offering briefings to members of the opposition, and my colleague took advantage of that. He makes it clear from his comments that he doesn't have any concerns.

One of the things that's bothering me about this – and maybe I could just get the minister to respond – is that it is allowing the province to take ownership of a number of different roadways in different ways and at different times. Part of what is coming back to me is this sort of ongoing discussion that has been happening between the municipalities and the government around funding of infrastructure.

4:40

Certainly, we've seen in the past – I'm going to have to generalize on some of these statements because I just don't have the backup documentation in front of me here, Mr. Chairman. You know, I can remember things like the mayor of Calgary making quite a stink about infrastructure money and then being successful in prying some additional funds, probably one-time only surplus dollars, out of the government to work on some of the ring roads around the province, which seems to be particularly where the province and the municipalities intersect, if you will, on shared routes.

Here's my worst-case scenario. Let me put it that way. Do we get to a position with the new authorities that are being granted to the minister here to take control or have control or be allocated new control over various roadways and highway systems for the minister to be taking over some of these ring roads and then be denying funding to the cities? So we could end up with a situation where Deerfoot Trail in Calgary, for example, or Anthony Henday here or the Whitemud or the Yellowhead Trail in Edmonton end up being under the control of the government, and they then refuse to allocate money and the municipalities can't do it either because they've lost control over it.

I guess that's my fear because I'm sensing increasing agitation happening between the municipalities and the province. As I follow this in the media, which is where it tends to turn up, the municipalities continue to press the province, saying: "There has been an infrastructure deficit created. We need the money from you the province to help address this." The province is reluctant to allocate the money to that. Then we get into a discussion about who gave up what to get rid of the deficit or contribute to the surplus, and on it goes. There are various sorts of name-calling and downloading accusations on both sides here.

As a city of Edmonton MLA I'm more concerned that we could end up with a situation in my city where my own municipality doesn't have enough money right now and could continue to not have enough money to make sure that its roadways are in good repair. That affects not only people moving around the city but also

things like transportation routes in and out of the city to supply the city, the manufacturing sector, and others that have their goods and services leaving through the transportation routes and coming back in through those routes. That's part of what occurred to me as I looked at what was being anticipated here.

There are other things that don't seem to be any issue at all. They're allowing the telecommunications poles or the underground lines to be laid closer to the roadways. I don't think that that's an issue, and certainly my colleague has made it clear that it wasn't an issue.

The minister is given the right to remove the access road. Bylaws from city council are sent to the minister, and the minister may approve the bylaw in whole or in part. The province can take ownership of any road plans that it cancels within the municipalities that connect with the highways. That's part of what piqued my interest in all of this.

Regulations on highway use for exploration of the Mines and Minerals Act. Changes control of pipelines and other infrastructure surrounding highways into the Minister of Transportation's hands.

That's what I'm seeing here, and that's the question that I put to the Minister of Transportation. I'd like to hear something back from him before I can support the Committee of the Whole or third reading passage of this bill. So if he can speak to that, that would be very helpful.

Thank you.

Ms Evans: Mr. Chairman, I cannot resist responding in part to the concerns raised by the hon. member opposite. In the absence of the legislation in front of me, under the terms of the Municipal Government Act, passed in 1995, the control of the infrastructure within the boundaries of a municipality are at the discretion of the municipality and could not be interfered with. In terms of accountability for a ring road that is, for example, in this capital region, that is shared jurisdictionally between many members.

At one point in 1998 we provided the sum of \$10 million, voted on by every member of the ring road municipalities. Over 20 municipalities, I believe 24, voted the allocation of those funds to that at that time. Albeit the province has been involved in the design of major roads, highways, et cetera, at this point within that context there is a recognition that local authorities clearly have jurisdictional support with the legislation.

So I do not fear any municipal authority having the encroachment of any other level of government on the planning or the direction, if you will, of resources allocated to roads within those boundaries.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak on Bill 31, the Highways Development and Protection Act, in its study in Committee of the Whole. It's a comprehensive bill. It came toward the end of the session, and I was hoping that it would be circulated after it was introduced so that it would provide enough time for careful study of the bill by all parties concerned. That being said, we're proceeding with debate on it in committee. I just wanted to make a few observations, Mr. Chairman.

This bill, Mr. Chairman, Bill 31, really combines two acts, the Public Highways Development Act and the City Transportation Act, into a single framework. This fusion of the two bills into one is I think perhaps guided by considerations with respect to planning, development, and protection of provincial highways and rationalizing, I guess, transportation routes in the province. It makes sense to perhaps bring these acts together in general if it assists in planning.

The concerns that have been expressed – and I think the previous

speakers have spoken to the concerns on both sides of the issue, particularly how the provisions of this act will encroach upon the powers of municipalities and AMDs and whether or not full consultation has been undertaken to ensure that there is a broad-based consensus with respect to the changes that are incorporated in this act. I'm not aware of the extent of those consultations, Mr. Chairman, but I trust that some of those have taken place and that due attention has been paid to the concerns of other levels of government whose decisions may be impacted and affected or encroached upon by the provisions of this bill.

4:50

This bill is certainly quite ambitious. It will probably increase the kilometres of highway that are under the Minister of Transportation in the province. Already I think that we have 32,000 kilometres of highways for which the provincial government is responsible. The question that I have is: what amount if any in terms of kilometres will be added to the provincial responsibility for roads as a result of this bill being passed?

One of the provisions of the bill gives the government the ability to designate highways in urban areas as provincial highways. So I guess the net effect of that would be an increase in the total number of kilometres which become the responsibility of the provincial government. Does that mean, therefore, that once certain highways in urban areas are designated as provincial highways, the total cost of building them and maintaining them and operating them also then becomes the responsibility of the government? It's not clear to me from my reading of the bill that that is the case. So that's a question that I have.

Some other questions. It looks like some new fees may be introduced as a result of the legislation. If so, what might those fees be; what might they be about? What will be the effect of this bill on agreements with municipalities under which some ring roads or other highways and portions thereof are already under construction? I presume that they won't be affected but, again, a question.

How would this bill affect the completion of the Canamex highway? I understand that progress on that particular highway is presently stalled around Milk River. Would this bill have any direct impact on that impasse, on that stalled construction?

What kind of impact would it have on the proposed Fort McMurray rail link? Is that going to be covered under this act, or does it fall outside?

Those are some of the questions that I have, Mr. Chairman.

Another provision which has caught my attention is that any commercial site that ceases to be used as such for one year must apply to the minister for a permit to resume operation. The bill gives the minister the authority to demolish and/or dispose of unsightly, unsafe structures within a certain distance of a controlled highway. Likewise, the minister may remove unauthorized developments. The provisions and the powers that this bill will give the minister all seem to be interesting and in some ways perhaps justifiable, but they also raise questions about the degree to which the parties that are likely to be affected by these new powers being sought by way of this bill by the minister are onside with the changes or not.

Those are some of the questions that I have, Mr. Chairman, and that said, I'll take my seat.

[The clauses of Bill 31 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 33

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2004

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 33 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 34

Income Trusts Liability Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Chairman, on behalf of my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View I would like to offer a few comments on the questions that were brought forward at second reading of Bill 34, the Income Trusts Liability Act. If any of the opposition members have any questions that they'd like followed up, I have a written copy that I'd be happy to provide them with if it would help speed up the debate.

Thank you.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 34, the Income Trusts Liability Act. We've seen this legislation come forward in other provinces. I think that for the most part it's a good idea to start to look at limiting liability for unit holders in income trusts.

We're seeing the income trust sector growing throughout Canada. There are now more than 150 listed on the TSX, and they've got a huge market value, over \$90 billion. They're a significant part of Alberta's business sector, particularly the resource sector, and by companies transforming themselves into income trusts, they can significantly reduce or eliminate their corporate income taxes. They flow through the income directly to the investor, who then pays personal income taxes on that income.

So why is that good? Well, it enables companies to grow their asset base so that they can do more research and development; they can take on larger projects. The benefit for the individual is that as a small individual, a small investor, or as a large investor you have the ability to invest in these companies that you might not otherwise have access to.

Personally, as an investor what do I want to know? I want to know that my liability is limited in that company. So I could buy shares or I could buy a piece of an income trust, and I want to know that if something goes wrong in that company, the liability isn't going to follow me as an investor. That's exactly what happens here.

It doesn't matter to me if the company is paying taxes as long as I'm getting my share of the income, and it comes much faster in an

income trust than it would as a shareholder in a company. The income flows right to you in the year that it's earned as opposed to you having to wait for an asset increase as a shareholder in a company and then you have to sell your shares in order to gain any benefits. This way the money flows right through.

We've seen that this industry has grown, but the regulations haven't kept pace with it. So the need to protect investors is real, and I think it's appropriate for us to see this legislation.

Certainly, the income trust sector has been asking provincial governments to pass legislation confirming that the limited liability flows through to the investors, and that will happen here. The legislation removes the concern that investors could be liable to cover the debts of an insolvent corporation in which they owned income trust units. It puts the income trust unit holders on an equal footing with common share holders, whose liability is limited. So we think that this is a positive place to be, where we strengthen investor protection in Alberta and work toward a more open and accountable reporting mechanism for publicly traded income trusts.

5:00

We support the legislation, but we do have a few questions, Mr. Chairman. This bill is being pushed through the Legislative Assembly before the government consults with stakeholders over the summer. They've made the commitment that they're going to consult, so why wouldn't you hold the legislation over in case we need some changes to be made to it that fall in line with what people are asking for? I would like that question answered before we vote on this bill. Why aren't you having that consultation as you have done in many other cases? Just hold it over the summer, and let's see what falls out of the consultations so that we can do the amendments prior to the bill becoming law. That would be I think a very good idea.

We've seen that the income trust sector has called for this type of legislation. What have investors' rights groups been saying? I haven't seen any documentation from people. We need to know who the government consulted with on the investor side. I would also like to know who has been meeting with the government on this legislation. Have you been meeting with income trust companies, and if so, who are those? What does the Revenue minister expect his participation to be in income trusts over the next 10 to 20 years, and what impact does he believe income trusts will have in this province over that same time period? What could we imagine the future to be with income trusts here in Alberta?

At the very least, I would like to know what the outcomes of the consultations will be. There must be some protocol you've established for getting more information. Are you going to have meetings? Are you just going to put out notices and ask for input? Will the information be available on-line? Will people be able to give their feedback and express their concerns and questions? I think that that would be very good.

This is a move, I think, overall, after those questions are answered, to improve openness and transparency in the stockmarket in Alberta. It's a good move for the government to make. Let's hope that they can include openness and transparency in more of their actions. That would be good.

Mostly what we're seeing here is investor protection, I think, so unless any concerns fall out from the consultations, we're prepared to support it. Once again the consultations happen after the bill passes, but generally speaking I don't think that there are going to be any huge concerns falling out of this. Of course, this government will change everything by regulation if there are, so it doesn't really matter what we have to say about it.

This is one area where we have to start thinking about other

investment opportunities for Alberta companies who want to build and grow. Income trusts are one option. Venture capital is another option and one that so far the government has stalled on. So I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the other ways that we can look beyond providing income to Albertans that is simply based on raw resources. This is the kind of thing we need to think about doing for the future and long-term viability of this province if we want to stay as a leader in Canada and for our part in the global economy.

Mostly it's a step in the right direction. Of course, this government always does things in terms of putting the cart before the horse. We see that here. It would have been really nice to see it after the stakeholder consultations, but having said that, Mr. Chairman, I will be voting for this bill.

[The clauses of Bill 34 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 35

Companies Amendment Act, 2004

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Mr. Hutton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to get up and say a few words about the amendment that we are making. I'm assuming that the members across the way did not allow us to put this through in miscellaneous statutes because they want to open the act and support the Minister of Government Services now and in the future with regard to having an amendment that allows increased research and increased global participation with regard to part 9 of the Companies Act.

There is one other thing. Last night the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said: well, this will mean, perhaps, that a lot more companies will come forward. But it's through the discretion of Executive Council. I would assume it would be an order in council. This minister, I know, would use great discretion, but I'm sure any minister of the Crown would. It would be brought to cabinet and reviewed on its merit. In this case, this company was prepared to leave the province, and it would have meant a number of jobs lost, and anybody who knows the research community knows that this has a tendency to have a snowball effect.

By CIRG staying here, other scientists and other researchers, particularly in the cancer area, will come to where the great research is happening and where the money is. In the case of this company, we certainly didn't want to lose them in Edmonton. To have to open an act to do this, so be it. We've done it, and I'm sure that in the future Executive Council and the minister of the Crown, whichever portfolio it falls under at this present time, the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, the Minister of Government Services, will use discretion.

I encourage all members to support this bill. Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. In response to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, yeah, I'm one of the people that objected to this being in miscellaneous statutes and asked that it be pulled out. He's right. There is a situation that occurred with a company, the Cancer International Research Group. I think that all members involved and on both sides of the House recognized the importance of that group to Edmonton, to the world in fact, and certainly to the area, the sector of cancer research. We all wanted to make sure that this company was able to stay in Edmonton and in Alberta and wanted to work to facilitate that.

My concern was that what the government was proposing to do and in fact is continuing to propose to do wasn't to open a window briefly to allow this company to come through and change the requirements so that it could stay in Alberta, but in fact this is constructing a door through which nonprofit companies that are established under part 9 of the Companies Act can continue to walk. That was my concern.

I went back to both the sponsoring minister and the Minister of Justice and said: okay; what this really needed to have been was a private bill, because that's the parliamentary process that's available to us in this Assembly in Alberta to deal with one-offs. If the issue is a one-off, a special case that we really need to deal with, private bills is the process that's available to us. The problem was that by the time the company realized what it needed to do, it had missed the deadline for the private bills process. It's got a shopping list of criteria that you have to meet in order to bring that private bill before the Assembly, and they had missed the deadlines on that.

I said: no problem. The Official Opposition – we had the agreement of the third party as well – are more than willing to give unanimous consent to facilitate the private bill process for this company. If this one company was what we were trying to do and we were all agreed that we wanted to keep them here, then that was the parliamentary process that was appropriate. I didn't feel that it was appropriate to open the door for everybody else to come if we were really just trying to deal with one company, so I asked that it be pulled out of the miscellaneous statutes.

5:10

In fact, I was very surprised to see exactly the same wording that was in miscellaneous statutes now turn up as the bill. What that signalled to me was in fact that this wasn't about that one company. This wasn't about Cancer International Research Group. It wasn't, because the government did not take advantage of the offer from the Official Opposition to assist it in using the parliamentary process that was available.

What this is really about is that the government wants to have that doorway built forever to allow it to continue behind closed doors through the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make those decisions about what other part 9 companies they will exempt from meeting the residency requirements. That's what it's really about. So I'm glad that I insisted that the bill come forward separately, which, in fact, it has as Bill 35, the Companies Amendment Act, 2004, because it allows us to put all of this on the record here.

I was more than willing to bend over backwards to facilitate the Cancer International Research Group, but that's not what this bill's about. This bill is about making sure that the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which is cabinet, without it bringing it before the Legislative Assembly ever again can continue behind closed doors to make those decisions about exempting residency requirements.

I question that. I've been told, "Oh, everybody's doing it, and residency requirements are a thing of the past, and we're a global community now, and nobody's interested in that any more; we're all changing." Well, I haven't seen the all. I haven't seen the hundreds

of other provinces and states and countries that are supposedly getting involved in this. I'm just looking at Alberta and going: well, as an Alberta MLA am I safeguarding the assets and our processes and structures for other Albertans and for other Alberta companies that are nonprofits incorporated under section 9 here? I think that's not happening.

I'm aware that my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona wants to speak to this, and I will give way for him to get some comments on the record, but my ultimate concern was that this government was being disingenuous about this. It wasn't about this one group. This is about changing things forevermore, and that was my concern with what was being proposed here.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak on Bill 35 in this meeting of the Committee of the Whole. I want to I guess reiterate what's just been said by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

I'm a member of the Private Bills Committee, and I was called by the Member for Edmonton-Centre to seek my consent to waive the time conditions on a party being able to bring a private bill before that committee. I said, "No problem; we'll go out of our way to make it possible for this particular company, this being a nonprofit company doing some important work in the area of research on cancer drugs." I said that we'd do this. Yet that route was not chosen by the government. That would've been the appropriate route.

The act now, it seems to me, will give the government broad powers, without consulting the Legislature, to bring about a major change in the existing legislation, which will now make it possible for companies not to have to meet the 50 per cent condition for membership on its board of directors and residency condition.

So I am not happy for this bill to come forward this way. The appropriate route would have been the Private Bills Committee, and that would have certainly helped this company to come into Alberta to do the research that it needs to do without us opening up the floodgates.

But it seems that the intention behind the request from the government to put it through the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2004, was quite different. It was in fact to amend the existing legislation in quite dramatic form but do it through the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act. That's not what we've been asked to do, and that's why we turned that particular request down. This bill, in my view, really raises all kinds of questions with respect to general direction change in policy, and therefore I'm going to have to vote against it, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 35 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill 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 bills 31, 33, 34, and 35.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Klapstein: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: Bill 31, Bill 33, Bill 34, and Bill 35.

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. In light of the work that's been done today, rather than moving that we adjourn to 8 this evening, I would move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:17 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]