

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 13, 2004**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 04/05/13

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature Anita Singh. Anita is a summer STEP student who is working in my office at McDougall Centre in Calgary. She is in Edmonton to meet some of the staff and officials in my office, who I'm sure she'll be regularly working with over the phone and through e-mail.

Anita is an energetic University of Calgary student who will be starting a master's degree in political science this fall. This past year she spent some time travelling in Japan, and a few years ago she spent a term studying in India as part of her undergraduate degree in political science. It's a pleasure to have this fine young Albertan join my staff for the summer, and I know that she will find the experience both rewarding and challenging.

I would ask that our honoured guest rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Tannas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly an enthusiastic group of young Albertans visiting us today from Millarville community school. They are accompanied by their teacher Mr. Hoffart and by parent volunteers and driver Mr. Shukster, Mrs. Robertson, Mrs. Higgin, and Mr. Brown. They're seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I'd ask them now to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. Renner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week it was my pleasure to rise and advise you of Medicine Hat being home to the best hockey team in the country, and today it's my pleasure to advise all members that we're also the home of some of the best schools in the country, one of which is represented in our Legislature today. Crestwood school is joining us for about the 15th consecutive year. Every year that I have served as the MLA, I've had the pleasure of introducing Crestwood school and their grade 6 students, and this year it is a distinct pleasure for me to do so again.

So if I could introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of 99 visitors, that consists of the grade 6 students from Crestwood school along with their principal, David George; vice-principal Al Tisnic; their teachers Karen Irwin, Bev Slater, Wade Lawson, Kathy Western, and Gary Ziel. They've also been joined on this trip by parent helpers Vince Wong, Danette Heintz, Garth Knight, Jeff Thompson, Theresa Wilde, and Laurel

Hill. Mr. Speaker, if I could ask them to rise – they're in both the members' and visitors' galleries – and receive the warm recognition of all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce 17 grades 5 and 6 students from the Busby school, which is located in the Barrhead-Westlock constituency. They're accompanied this afternoon by teachers and group leaders Nancy Zeise, Tilly Yagos, Kyle Beattie, and parent helpers Dan Vandeborn, Rhonda Breadon, and Keith Bidne. They are seated in the gallery this afternoon, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Learning.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My guests won't be here until 2 o'clock, and I would ask to introduce them at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Norris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on this great Alberta day to introduce to you and through you to the House two gentlemen who are very special to me. They work very hard at keeping me out of trouble in my constituency, and I can assure you that that's a full-time job. I would like to introduce Mr. Shawn Jorgensen, who is our constituency office manager, and our STEP student for the third summer in a row, Mr. Jonah Mozeson. Would you gentlemen please stand up and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very special visitor. Kristopher Knowles is sitting in our members' gallery. Kristopher has a wish, and that is to walk across Canada and spread the message: Don't Take Your Organs to Heaven; Heaven Knows We Need Them Here on Earth. Kristopher has been waiting for a liver for the last 13 years. He is raising awareness about organ donation. He's on day 127 of a 345-day walk that began in his hometown of Sarnia, Ontario. He will be in the city of Edmonton until the 16th of May. He is accompanied by his father, Kelly, and George Marcello, founder of the Step by Step Organ Transplant Association. I would ask that Kristopher, Kelly, and George please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Yankowsky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly the mother and the grandmother of one of our pages, Whitney Haynes. Whitney's grandmother is from Rossland, British Columbia, and is here for Whitney's grade 12 graduation from Austin O'Brien high school. Our guests are seated in your gallery, and I would like to ask them to please stand and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly as I call out their names: Whitney's grandmother, Lois Haynes, and Whitney's mother, Brenda Haynes.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a truly remarkable woman, Mrs. Lesley Miller. On November 21, 2000, Mrs. Miller's husband, Dougald, was severely beaten and left for dead at the bottom of the stairs in an apartment building in Edmonton. Since that time Dougald has been in need of 24-hour care, unable to move or communicate. Mrs. Miller has been by her husband's side providing comfort and fighting for his rights to fair compensation. I cannot imagine what she has gone through, and I wouldn't dare to even pretend to understand the hardships that she and her husband have faced. What I do know is that she is an amazing woman with an amazing spirit. She's in the public gallery. I'd ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the entire Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some individuals that are visiting through a Rotary International exchange program. Both as a member of the Assembly and as a Rotarian and someone who has benefited from the Rotary exchange, it certainly brings home the importance of it. I want to apologize in advance for how their names may come out as opposed to how their parents thought. Will you please join me in welcoming Marcos Chait, Viviana Olivares, Raul Fuentes Howes, Ximena Aguirre, and Christian Lopez. Would they please stand and receive the Assembly's applause.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to introduce Stella Varvis, Erin Miller, Tricia Waddell, and Kim Van Vliet, who are accompanying them as members of the Rotary Club of Edmonton.

1:40

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

Mr. Masyk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to introduce to you and through you my nephew Kirk Hansen, who arrived about an hour ago from High Prairie in the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake's constituency. I'd ask Cricket – that's his alias – to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Calahasen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Leg. Assembly three wonderful people seated in the members' gallery. Originally from Grouard, my hometown, Mr. Albert Brule attends the U of A, has just finished, and is looking forward to working for the summer and going back in the fall. Also, two individuals originally from Gift Lake, Esther Laderoute and her son, Bryce Cunningham. She's attending the Academy of Learning and making sure that she gets an education. Her young son, Bryce, is just truly quite a bright young kid at six years old. I'd like the members of this Assembly to welcome them with a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On what's highly

likely to be the last day of the spring session, I'm pleased to have this opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of the House four very special guests who are seated in the public gallery. Three of them are visiting from British Columbia, from a very small town south of Nakusp called Fauquier. One of my guests, Denise Douglas, recently took on the Campbell Liberals in a long fight to keep free ferry services to her small town. Ms Douglas and her community were successful, and the ferries are running free of tolls. She is here with her children Nadine Douglas and Gareth Douglas and her mother, Nadine Hooper. Nadine Hooper is the mother of Marilyn Hooper, who is our outreach coordinator, and Denise is her sister. I would now ask my guests to please rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly three Edmontonians from the Chilean community: Sonia Varela, Maria Luisa Kobek, and Carlos Parraguez. Like thousands of other Canadians of Chilean ancestry they were forced to flee their homeland because of the brutality and oppression of the Pinochet dictatorship. These three guests are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Norris: Yes. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the House I'd like to introduce a constituent of mine who has joined us in the gallery, Mr. Don Clarke. Attributing it to the Alberta advantage, Don and his wife recently have opened a business in the constituency of Edmonton-McClung, and I'm told it's going extremely well. Don is no stranger to anybody in the House here, but I would like to have him stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Contract Tendering Policy

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are wondering if this government is looking out for taxpayers or looking out for its own friends. In the past two years the health minister awarded over \$250,000 in contracts to the consulting firm of his own former executive assistant, Kelley Charlebois, without going through any competitive tendering process. To the minister of health: what role did the minister play in approving over \$250,000 for these contracts?

Mr. Mar: A very integral one, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister admitted yesterday that there was no competitive tendering process on these contracts, how do Albertans know that they got value for their money?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I'll be happy to talk about that right now. An RFP is not required for contracts under \$100,000. At the beginning of a contract year we try our very best to estimate what we will require in terms of consulting advice and so on. I can assure the

hon. member that when the contract was signed at the beginning of the year, it was for less than \$100,000, but as you can understand and appreciate – and I think most people who operate large enterprises would – the value of a consultant over a period of time may result in them spending a great deal of time on a particular issue in one week and then perhaps no time the following week, but we can't exactly estimate the value of what the total contract plus expenses will be for an entire year.

I can say, Mr. Speaker, that Kelley Charlebois has had many years of experience in government and outside of government. You don't get that kind of training anywhere else, and government doesn't get the kind of advice that we get from this individual from people who have never worked inside government.

An example of a job that would have been given to Kelley Charlebois would be that all of the provinces of the country were asked to put forward a name as a representative to serve as a liaison with the Romanow commission. Now, no report is produced per se by the individual consultants, but I can assure hon. members of this House and Albertans that every province put forward the names of people that they thought would serve well in their capacity as a liaison with the Romanow commission. Other examples exist, Mr. Speaker, of work that he's done. I'm happy to outline it in more detail.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I can assure hon. members that the 250,000 approximate dollars that were spent over a two-year period – it's a lot of money. I acknowledge that. But consider that in the next 15 minutes we'll spend approximately \$250,000 on our health care system, which costs \$8 billion, and if I can improve the quality of the health care system, if I can improve the relationships with our health care providers, if I can improve our relationships with our regional health authorities by spending money on a consultant, I can assure you that I will continue to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. To the same minister. He's described the work of this person. Why not use one of the hundreds – hundreds – of staff in his own department if not simply to reward a friend and supporter?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, we do in fact have many people in our department that work with outside groups, and let me say that we've accomplished a great deal in terms of renewal and reform of our health care system over the period of the last four years. Many people deserve credit, and some of the people that deserve credit work within our own civil service. We pay them credit for the work that's been done.

We also acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that the work is being done by regional health authority chairs, chief executive officers, health professionals, physicians, nurses. There are many people who deserve the credit for the kind of high-quality health care system that we have today. But we also acknowledge that there's a role for outsiders, people from outside of government, to also give us a fresh perspective on some of the policy issues that we may be working on within government.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: can the Premier tell us if other departments follow the same practice as Health and Wellness of awarding untendered contracts over a hundred thousand dollars to former government officials?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I would imagine that all departments of government follow the rules.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the Premier: can he tell us whether in 2003 the \$129,000 in contracts awarded to his former chief of staff, Rod Love, went through the proper tendering process, or did Mr. Love get the same free ride as Mr. Charlebois?

Mr. Klein: Well, first of all, I don't know if Mr. Charlebois got a free ride. I don't think he did. As the hon. minister pointed out, Mr. Charlebois is tremendously knowledgeable in government and in matters related to health. Mr. Love is also very knowledgeable in government matters, Mr. Speaker, and I would imagine that any consulting fees paid to Mr. Love were paid in accordance with the rules set by this Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Can the Premier tell us what reports Rod Love Consulting has completed for government, and will he table them?

Mr. Klein: I can't tell you offhand, Mr. Speaker, but if the hon. member will provide a written question, we'll be glad to provide the answers.

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

1:50

Energy Deregulation

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the EUB approved Direct Energy's application to buy the customers of ATCO, the Minister of Energy said, quote: finally the consumer is going to see some benefit. End of quote. But the only thing the consumer is going to see is even higher prices. Direct Energy's preferred one-year dual contract will charge Albertans 49 per cent more for natural gas and 36 per cent more for electricity than the current regulated rates. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Where are the cheaper prices that this government promised energy deregulation would create?

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, despite the member's anticompetitive attitude it's very clear that the more entrants that enter into a marketplace, the truer you get to a real price. It's also true that only a blind man would've not read events from *The Economist* and newspaper journals all over the world that talk about the changing price of the commodities which Albertans use in the form of electricity and natural gas.

What we do know, unlike other administrations, is that, one, there is no debt associated with this province associated with the prices of either natural gas or electricity; two, providers can provide electricity and natural gas to Albertans across Alberta; three, we do not run the peril of blacking out and we have an adequate supply of electricity across this province; and four, the price of these commodities also benefits Alberta in the terms of royalty income and jobs and unprecedented economic growth.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that even Direct Energy's preferred five-year contract charges 38 per cent

more for natural gas and 21 per cent more for electricity than the regulated rate, what happens to Alberta consumers when the regulated rate option expires on July 1, 2006?

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, his first question says that there is no choice. Then he provides two alternatives, which were not there in the prior world. In fact, I think there's ample evidence that the government has made the right decision in terms of making the private sector accountable, and the private sector is going to find out how appropriate those prices are by the uptake by Albertans on each particular rate offering. That information is fully in the public domain, governed carefully – carefully – by the consumer affairs department, the Government Services department, and the Fair Trading Act. We're going to see what in fact will occur in this market, and we will watch this market very carefully over the period between now and July 2006.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: is locking in to permanent high prices with energy contracts the only way Alberta consumers can guarantee themselves some stability in this whole energy deregulation boondoggle?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, the preamble of the question makes it hypothetical in nature because it is so riddled with errors, but I shall attempt to sort and filter out an area where we can provide information. In fact, we are living on a continent where we've seen higher gas prices, but higher gas prices have also brought unprecedented prosperity and royalty revenue to this province. As natural gas is used by Albertans in the most highly consuming months, there is a program that rebates some of the government royalties back to individual Albertans.

Also, we see in the electricity market, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans enjoy very competitive if not the lowest priced electricity rates across Canada. That's particularly true in jurisdictions where there is not hydro power, that of course has an overwhelming corporate debt guaranteed by each province.

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

Supplementary Prescription Drug Benefit Program

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I shared a podium with Janet Buterman, a young mother fighting cancer who was turned down for the government supplementary drug benefit plan because she owes \$401 in health care premium arrears, which she is duly paying down. Yesterday the minister denied that such a policy exists, yet there it is in black and white on the minister's department web site, which says that only those without health care premium arrears qualify for drug coverage. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that the minister said yesterday that it's policy that individuals are not denied access to the health care system because of an inability to pay, then why does government policy dictate that individuals with health care premium debts don't qualify for prescription drug benefits under this plan?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, as has been my practice being minister of health for almost four years, I will not engage in the particular debate of the circumstances of an individual on the floor of this Assembly. I did ask the hon. member yesterday if he would provide me the name and the details of the particular individual that he was trying

to help. He has still not done so. If he was interested in helping this individual, he has wasted a day in doing so.

Fortunately, I have asked the officials in my department to find out the circumstances of this particular case. I'm committed to helping this individual get on supplementary health insurance, Alberta Blue Cross, for drug coverage. But beyond saying that we are committed to helping this individual, I will simply say that I will not deal with individual cases on the floor of this Assembly. It is not parliamentary.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why can't the minister see that this isn't a problem that can be addressed on a case-by-case basis given that there may be many more Janet Butermans out there suffering in silence?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has more cases he'd like to bring forward, if he provides me with the names of such people, then I'd be happy to deal with it. Otherwise, it strikes me as being an entirely hypothetical question.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the minister: will the government change its coercive policy of denying Albertans like Janet Buterman access to needed prescription drug coverage unless they first pay their health care premium debts in full, and if so, when?

Mr. Mason: That's a question. Answer that question.

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, making it louder doesn't make it a question.

Canmore Nordic Centre

Mrs. Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, the Canmore Nordic Centre in my constituency hosted a number of skiing events during the 1988 Winter Olympic Games, but these facilities, the equipment, and the trails have worn, and there have been no substantial improvements since the centre's construction in 1986. In addition, international standards for cross-country skiing and biathlon have changed, which means that the Canmore Nordic Centre no longer qualifies to host international competitions. Can the Minister of Community Development, whose ministry owns and operates this centre, tell us what he is doing to address this very important issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. There's no doubt about it that the Canmore Nordic Centre has provided tremendous value to Albertans and to visitors and other tourists for the past many years. In fact, the economic impact of that has been very significant, as have the health benefits to all of the users.

However, she's quite correct. The equipment and the trails and the buildings and so on have come to the point where they do need to be visited and repaired and/or replaced in order to make the necessary improvements. Therefore, I did appoint a committee of senior managers from Community Development and I had co-operation from Economic Development and from Alberta Infrastructure to prepare what we call a business case scenario.

The long and short of it all, Mr. Speaker, is that they have now

reviewed every piece of equipment, every trail, every building and provided that business case scenario to us to have a look at, and I'm doing that. It does talk about the need for millions of dollars to replace and upgrade, so we will take some time to review that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this centre is so important to Albertans, to tourists, to the development of high-performance athletes and the hosting of international ski competitions, can we get a more specific answer on how long it'll take to get these much-needed upgrades?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I would like to think that we can probably get that done in a reasonable period of time. I have indicated to some of the people that are putting a bid forward, in fact, to host the World Cup in 2005 that in a perfect world we'd have some answer by the end of June, although I cannot guarantee what the results of the answer will be, because we're talking about potentially upwards of probably \$20 million to achieve what is necessary to elevate the Canmore Nordic Centre back to international standards. As we put that business case forward, it of course has to be balanced in the overall context of other government priorities. So as soon as possible we'll get an answer out.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

2:00 **Victims' Assistance Programs**

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In November 2000 Lesley Miller's husband, Dougald, was brutally beaten and left in 24-hour care for the rest of his life, unable to move or communicate. While the man who beat Dougald gets free room and board in prison, Mrs. Miller continues to struggle with bills for room and board and physiotherapy for her husband. Despite meeting with the Minister of Justice in February of this year, Mrs. Miller has received no word on what this government is prepared to do for her or her husband. My question is to the Minister of Justice. Can the minister explain what he is going to do to help out Mr. and Mrs. Miller?

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

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is truly a tragic situation, and as the member said in his preamble, we have here a situation where a person who is an innocent victim of crime is in a long-term care facility and the person who committed the crime is in jail at the public's expense.

I did meet with Mrs. Miller, as the opposition leader indicated, and I indicated to her that I would conduct a review across government of what we might be able to do, because this is truly one of those situations which does not fit into any of the programs that are available. There isn't a program for this sort of situation. There's the victims of crime fund, which can engage and I believe has engaged. When you talk to the health authorities, the health authorities have some ability to provide coverage for a period of time, and I understand that's been reviewed. Depending on income levels, a person in this position might be able to access AISH. But those are all the things that one has to look at to see whether there's any other way that we can as a government deal with a person in this instance.

As I say, they don't come along very often, thank goodness.

They're tragic when they do. We have to make every effort to see what we can do about it. I've committed to Mrs. Miller that I will conduct that search. I've got a request signed so that I can access those files, which are private files and cannot be accessed. I certainly can't share the results of what I've received, because I don't have permission to do that and wouldn't in any event, but I can indicate that I'm doing everything I can to find a solution to this particular problem.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: exactly what does Mrs. Miller have to do from here on to the end of the process to gain fair and adequate compensation for her husband, who is the victim of such a terrible crime? Exactly what does she have to do?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I'm not at liberty to discuss particular situations. I understand that there is the victims of crime fund, which is available and has been accessed, as I understand it, and that goes some way but doesn't go, perhaps, far enough. We have to look at whether there are ways – and I have to talk with the Solicitor General about that – that we can deal with the victims of crime fund parameters to see whether they can be extended. At present it doesn't look like that's possible without changes to legislation or regulations. So we have to review that.

I do know, Mr. Speaker, that while Mrs. Miller is receiving bills with respect to care on an ongoing basis, there is no pressure being put on with respect to the payment of those bills. So while the fact that she's receiving the bills will weigh heavily on a person's psyche, she I think does have some comfort in knowing that there is nobody actually pursuing payment of those bills at this time.

I need the time to continue to see what we can do, because whether we should or not, we do not have a program in place to deal with the unique circumstances of this particular tragic incident.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then my question will be to the Premier. Will the Premier take it on to make this particular case a priority for his government to resolve as soon as possible?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. Government House Leader and Attorney General has indicated that he is investigating this case, plans to give it his utmost attention. It is a matter that certainly is of priority to the wife of the victim involved and, I would suspect, a matter of priority for the Attorney General. I would suggest to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition: let the Attorney General do his work. Let us deal with it as government, and we will make sure – this is an undertaking – that the wife of the victim will be treated fairly, and the victim will be treated fairly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

Commercial Fishing Industry

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Commercial fishing is very important on some lakes in my constituency. I've been hearing from fishing operators about the compensation program and other changes to the commercial fishing industry. This seems to have taken a long time to develop, so I wonder if the minister can tell us whether real progress is being made on this program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a very good question, a very important question. In fact, like the hon. member says, the process has been around for a long time. I know that in 1990-91 the process started. The commercial fishing industry itself is a very important industry in Alberta for a lot of fishermen, although it's a reasonably small industry. It's about \$5 million. On the other hand, the sport-fishing industry is about a \$350 million industry. So we always have to keep the balance.

What we are proposing here, Mr. Speaker, is to reduce the number of commercial fishing licences. Presently there are over 800 commercial fishing licences, access to 34,000 100-yard nets. What we'd like to do in Alberta to keep the balance is reduce that to about 200 licences, which would hold approximately 18,000 100-yard nets, so that we reduce the pressure on our lakes.

We commenced the program in April. To date over 340 individuals have applied for the compensation package. This process will take three to five years to process, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is for the same minister. What steps are being taken to allow commercial fishing operators to appeal decisions that they feel are unfair or biased with regard to the compensation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a very good question and very important for those people involved in the process. The whole package was developed jointly with the commercial fishing industry. One of the things that they identified as the process moved forward was: will there be an appeal system? It's such a complicated process. Will there be an appeal system for those people that may fall through the cracks in the process? We did put an appeal system in place.

Rev. Abbott: My last supplemental is also for the same minister. How is his department going to ensure that our fisheries benefit from this initiative?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, the number of lakes that we have in Alberta to start with is about 800 to a thousand. It's not like Saskatchewan and Manitoba, where they have a lot more lakes to do commercial fishing and sport fishing. Therefore, we have to be very proactive in managing our lakes.

In fact, this spring we introduced the barbless hooks, as one example. We increased the commercial fishing licence to try and reduce, through the compensation program, the number of commercial fishermen. We ran some pilot projects and other projects like, for an example, improving the spawning areas of the fish by removing some beaver dams. It's working very well.

Hamelin Creek Culvert Project

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, the Hamelin Creek culvert project had \$2.8 million in cost overruns. My questions today are to the Minister of Transportation. Will the minister table in the Assembly supporting documentation for the cost overruns?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we'll provide the hon. member whatever information he requires on this particular project, whatever he requests.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonner: Thank you. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: did the minister consult an engineering firm other than the original firm after the slide to the site occurred?

Mr. Stelmach: The process is that not only is there a consultant assigned to a particular project, but it's also reviewed by our department officials. In this case, Mr. Speaker, it was a geotechnical issue. Once the earth was opened up in placing the culvert, there was additional remedial work that had to be done, and we had to follow up on it to ensure that the culvert was placed correctly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: are members of the Treasury Board required to remove themselves from the approval process for projects that have cost overruns originating from their departments?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, every department is issued a budget, and we operate within those budgets, and at the end of the year the spending of those budgets is also reviewed by the Auditor General. So there are very significant processes in place. The policies are followed by not only cabinet but government as a whole.

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

Achievement Testing

Mr. McClelland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Learning. Recently the Department of Learning announced the intention of retesting at grade 4 certain students who did not do well at provincial achievement exams at the grade 3 level. My question: if this is such a necessary and good idea, why was the initiative so poorly received by school boards and teachers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, in answering this question, I believe the hon. member should have the rationale as to why we're considering doing this. The reason, quite simply, is because there are grade 3 students who, when they do the achievement tests, do not pass the achievement tests, who are not up to grade level, who are not to grade standard.

Mr. Speaker, included in the Learning Commission is a recommendation that all students shall succeed, that all students should learn. What we're attempting to do is to ensure through remediation that this 10 or 15 per cent of students that are not up to grade level are up to grade level by the end of grade 4. So it is extremely important for us first of all to have in place a remediation package so that we can work directly with these students, and that will be done with the particular school boards. Subsequently they need to have an exit exam to ensure that at the end of grade 4 they are up to grade level.

The reason, Mr. Speaker, why it was so poorly received, I believe, is because of the way it was put out. It was put out in a leak from my

department. It was something that was not ready to be put out at that particular time. It's very unfortunate when these leaks do occur.

As the hon. member fully well knows, this is an optional exam this year. The way we introduce all curriculum is optional first. We test it out there. We will be field testing it this year to see if this is the actual exam that is going to benefit, if it's the actual exam that is going to work to help improve the learning of students who did not learn in kindergarten to grade 3.

Mr. McClelland: Well, given that there was a leak that got it out in the first place, what is the department doing to get teachers and educators onside so that this worthwhile and good initiative is well received and does what it's intended to achieve?

Dr. Oberg: That's an excellent question, Mr. Speaker. What we will be doing over the next year is working with school boards, working with teachers to evaluate exactly how successful this initiative has been and will be. I feel very strongly and I think all government members here feel very strongly that every child must succeed in our school system. This is one way that we can ensure that we can show that our children will succeed.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Access to Motor Vehicle Information Database

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The War Amps isn't getting co-operation from private registries to meet the requirements set out by Government Services to allow them to continue accessing driver information for the key tag program. While the War Amps charity struggles to access registry information beyond 2006, the province is allowing most parking lot companies access to that very information. My questions are to the Minister of Government Services. Why is the bar being set so high for a proven charity that raises money for amputees, particularly child amputees?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, this question came forward in the House a couple of weeks ago, and we have worked with War Amps over the years to provide access to the motor vehicle database for their very valuable charitable fundraising purposes. We know the benefits that it gives to young people across this province in terms of making sure that their prosthesis is funded by that particular organization.

Nonprofit groups have been denied access to the motor vehicle database because there are about 8,000 of them across this province, and all fundraisers would love to have access to this. Because of War Amps and their very worthwhile project, keeping in mind the protection of privacy that is required by Albertans and is required in law, we made a special exemption for War Amps. We developed that exemption to give them access to the database until the year 2006, and in between now and 2006 we will work on a consent-based approach so that Albertans can consent to having their names and addresses added to that database that will be developed by War Amps. So we're not denying War Amps anything. As a matter of fact, if anything we are making a special exemption to accommodate War Amps at this time.

It's unfortunate that today I got a letter from War Amps saying that they were going to walk away from the discussions about consent. I have sent them a letter as of this morning asking them to reconsider that. We are still going to appear at the table to try and work this situation out with War Amps, but between now and 2006 they get total access so that they can put their database in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: given that the department is accepting signs in parking lots as implied consent, will it accept a sign at registry offices or a statement on vehicle registration forms as implied consent for the War Amps key tag program?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a partner in this, and it's called the Alberta association of registries. We have 226 registry offices across this province. Part of the negotiation that we would work through with War Amps and that association, because this kind of initiative would involve registry agents' offices, is one of the things that we had hoped to put on the table. It's going to be very difficult to put that on the table if War Amps is not at the table working with us.

I'm hoping that my letter to them today will convince them to come back to the table and work these kinds of arrangements out. The consent-based form that we're looking at would have to be agreed to by all parties. It's not our initiative. This is an initiative where Albertans can participate in a charity of their choice.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: will the minister instruct registry offices to co-operate with the War Amps in order for the charity to meet the department's requirements to obtain registry information? Will they put the sign up?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, when you go to park your car in somebody's parking lot that is owned by them, they have an investment into the land, they have an investment into the equipment, they have an investment into the parking arrangement, and they have a fee to be paid for you parking in that particular lot. That is considered a private parking lot in this province. When you go there and you decide to park in that parking lot, you do so based on their rules, and we want to make sure under these new regulations that the rules are very, very well laid out before you gain access. By gaining access and going into a parking lot, then you have given consent that you go into a parking lot knowing the rules and the regulations by which you're parking.

The reverse of that is the situation with War Amps and getting Albertans' consent to have their names put on their database. They're completely different issues, although they are both based on consent: consent to go in to park your car based on the rules and the regulations, consent to have your name and address given to a charity based on the fact that you know that the charity is going to have your name in their database. So it's consent based, Mr. Speaker.

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

2:20

Labour Relations

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For many years the Merit Contractors Association has been lobbying the Tory government to further tilt the playing field in their favour when bidding on construction contracts in competition with unionized contractors. [some applause] Something obviously supported by many here. A particular target of the Merit Contractors are market enhancement recovery funds, or MERFs. For the past year a Tory-dominated committee has been studying the issue, and this report has now been submitted to the Minister of Human Resources and

Employment. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: given that nonunion contractors are only looking for an advantage vis-à-vis unionized contractors when bidding on construction projects, why is the minister allowing nonunion contractors to dictate changes to the Labour Relations Code?

Mr. Dunford: Well, I think he's just a bit premature with his comments, and it might indicate more than that. Yes, I have received the report. Yes, we are looking at issues of both salting and MERFing. Yes, we will have the government response in the fullness of time.

Mr. Mason: Same old answer, Mr. Speaker.

Why would the minister even consider interfering in the marketplace by ruling out MERF funds, thereby giving an unfair advantage to nonunionized contractors bidding on construction projects?

Mr. Dunford: One of the . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Dunford: I think that one of the key notes of this government, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that we respond to issues that are brought forward. We take a look at them, we analyze them, and then we make a response. Sometimes it's: hey, this is not an issue, and we're not going to deal with it. Sometimes we say: hey, this is an issue, and we will deal with it, and here's how we'll deal with it. We're currently in that area of the process right now where we're still looking at recommendations, and we will make a public announcement at the time the government response is ready. It is not ready right now. So scream and holler all you want; you look good on TV.

Mr. Mason: I'd like to thank the hon. minister.

Given that this is the last day this Assembly will sit for nearly six months, can the minister outline the process and the timeline he plans to use before finalizing the changes, if any, to rules around MERFing and salting in the construction trades?

Mr. Dunford: Way too early to make that kind of commitment. We still have to deal with the government response.

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

Calgary Regional Partnership

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Calgary has taken the initiative to join with other municipalities in the area to form a regional partnership, which will be formally announced tomorrow. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister please explain the benefits of this partnership and what he's doing to support it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is exactly right. The Calgary Regional Partnership is made up of actually 15 municipalities. As I see the young students here today where they work together hand in hand with each other, really this regional partnership is about working together, coming together, collaborating, co-operating to eliminate duplication, and at the same time stretching the tax dollars at the municipal order of government in a way that best serves them. I want to say that tomorrow we're going

to be announcing 700,000 Alberta tax dollars going towards this regional partnership, because it is a very good initiative in stretching that dollar further and helping those municipalities that are involved.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can he tell us if he's prepared to fund other partnerships outside the Calgary region?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important to say that we want to avoid duplication in terms of what is taking place. I also want to say that there are so many municipalities involved in this initiative. I failed to mention that the cities of Airdrie, Calgary, Bighorn, the Tsuu T'ina First Nation, Chestermere, Cochrane, and the MD of Foothills are involved. You may ask me: who else is involved? Strathmore, Turner Valley, Redwood Meadows, Canmore, Black Diamond, the MD of Rocky View. They're all involved.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that the capital region, here in Edmonton, also has an important initiative. The central region also has an initiative. They're coming together, working together, collaborating together to eliminate inefficiency so that we can stretch that dollar to best serve our citizens at the municipal order of government.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

Achievement Testing

(continued)

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's proposal to test grade 3 students who fail to meet a satisfactory standard again at the end of the fourth grade has parents and teachers upset. The pedagogical reasons are lost on almost everyone. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Why, if the government wants to help these children, do they not put in place a diagnostic test at the start of grade 4 that could then be used to plan instruction?

Dr. Oberg: That is part of our strategy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Thank you. If you stay here long enough, good things happen.

My next question is to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Why, when only 28 per cent of Learning Commission workbook respondents supported testing at grade 3, has the government added another test at grade 4?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the issues, I think, that every MLA has heard about, that every person in Alberta has heard about and certainly wants, is that they want all children to succeed. Indeed, the Learning Commission's report is Every Child Learns; Every Child Succeeds.

Some of the people, Mr. Speaker, who are not succeeding are those people in kindergarten to grade 3 who are not at grade level by the end of grade 3. Typically in a provincial achievement test about 10 per cent – 10 to 12 to 15 per cent – of these kids are not there.

It's our job, as the people who control the learning system, as society controls the learning system, to ensure that these kids have the ability to read.

Quite simply, as the hon. member stated, there needs to be a diagnostic test to find out the question: why are these students not learning? Why are they not at grade level at the end of grade 3? Then there needs to be an exit exam at the end of grade 4 which will determine exactly: have they come up to grade level? Have they gained the skills that are necessary in order to compete in the world? Have they gained the necessary skills?

Mr. Speaker, one of the most important things that is shown is that a lot of those people who have problems later on in life, whether it's in school, whether it's in life in general after graduation, are people who did not pick up the basic skills in kindergarten to grade 3. That's what this test is about, and quite simply that's the rationale behind doing it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Thank you. Again to the same minister: is this the first step in a move to have an achievement test at the end of every elementary grade?

Dr. Oberg: No, Mr. Speaker, it isn't. Quite simply, what we are doing here is we are attempting to identify a specific population that has had problems that is not at grade level, and we're attempting to do something about it. I think everyone in Alberta wants every child to learn, every child to succeed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Centennial Project Funding

Mr. Broda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Community Development recently announced new centennial funding for municipalities and community-owned legacy projects. While this is welcome news for communities in my constituency, I've heard concerns about the short timelines to apply for the funding. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. Given that the municipalities and not-for-profit groups were only notified a few weeks ago about this new funding, why wasn't more time given for the application deadlines?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:30

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, thank you, hon. member, for the question. Mr. Speaker, I think the fact is that not-for-profit organizations in the province and in municipalities have been waiting since March 2 of 2001 for the next phase of the centennial program to come around. During the past three years of that window we have heard from about 1,200 potential applicants and informed them that at an appropriate time we will announce phase 3 of the Alberta centennial legacies grant program. We have stayed in touch with them, so it's not as if those particular groups for that program haven't been informed along the way that we were expecting to make progress quickly. That particular program carries about \$16 million, and it has an application deadline of June 15.

The other program, very briefly, is the centennial municipal per capita grant program. That one is almost an automatic grant program that will go out to every incorporated municipality in the province of Alberta, and it has an application deadline of June 30.

Now, all of these figures were contained in the budget announced back in March. We've done the best we can to get it out there quickly. The centennial is coming quickly, and we wanted to respond as quickly as possible.

Mr. Broda: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what process will the minister use to determine which projects will receive centennial funding?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, all projects will be evaluated against the same criteria of merit and ability to accomplish the project, the ability to attract the necessary matching requirement of funds. We're looking for applicants to provide two-thirds, and we will consider up to one-third to a normal maximum of about \$2 million under the centennial legacies phase 3 grant program. Other than that, we will also look at those areas of the province that have not yet received any of these centennial legacy grant funds, and then other related criteria will apply. In a nutshell, that's basically how the process will work.

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

Court Interpretation Services

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ensuring access to court is important to all Albertans. For some men and women whose primary language is not English having access to a language interpreter is critical to ensuring them a fair trial and clear understanding of the laws of our land. I have raised a concern before with the Minister of Justice and Attorney General about the unchanging 20-year-old funding rate paid for language interpreters by Alberta Justice. So my question today: will the minister please provide members of the Assembly with an update on what his department has done to review the current fee structure for the Provincial Court interpreters?

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Access to justice is a very, very important part of our business in the Department of Justice, and making sure that people understand the process and understand what's happening in court is integral to that. I agree that interpreters play an important and essential role in the courts by ensuring that language barriers do not impair the court's ability to take all relevant testimony and evidence into account and, also, that language barriers do not bar an individual from understanding what's happening to them or for them in a court of law.

This hon. member has raised this question with me a number of times, both in the House and in estimates, and I can say to him that we try very hard to make the resources that we have in the Department of Justice go as far as we possibly can. We continually try and bring on new initiatives, but continuing the provision of the infrastructure and the operation of the court system and the rest of the process does take up a lot of resources.

We're constantly reviewing those. We have a committee which is looking at witness management practices. We've asked that committee to look at the issue relative to interpreters, and we hope that we will get from that a recommendation as to what the highest priorities are to ensure that Albertans have access to justice and that language is not a barrier to access to justice.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the minister advise if there is anything that can be done now within the current fee structure to address the concerns of interpreters?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We try to make sure that we have competent interpreters in court. If there's a concern about the availability of a competent interpreter based on the monies that we have available to pay, we can adjust the remuneration on a case-by-case basis, and we do that analysis and make that adjustment.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Hon. members, before I call on the first of four for Members' Statements, let me just say wow. That was very, very good this week, assisting the chair in allowing hon. members to participate. On Monday we had 13 members that could participate; Tuesday, 14; Wednesday, 14; and today, 15. That's an average of 14 a day, or 56 members that could participate. That's really very, very good.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Learning.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and privilege to introduce some guests that I have here today from Brooks. These ladies and gentlemen are from the Holy Family Academy. The teachers that are present are Wayne Lorenz, Mike Fleck, Reg Orich, and Shannon Hurley. The parent helpers, who give an incredible amount of support especially in this particular school, are Denise Amundson, Moe Bell, Rob Bartusek, Caroline Tilley, Theresa Paproski, Debbie LaRocque, Stan Waddell, my neighbour Treena Ramsay, Tracey Waddell, Mrs. Peeters, and Elsie and Robert Craig. The total number of visitors that are here today from Brooks is 70. They're the ones wearing the brilliant orange shirts in the gallery. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Legislative Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Chestermere Lake Middle School EarthKAM Project

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to be able to rise today and offer my sincere congratulations to a group of 36 enthusiastic students from Chestermere Lake middle school and their five staff advisors led by their teacher, Mr. Brian Jackson.

Chestermere Lake middle school is the first school in Canada to participate in the International Space Station's EarthKAM project. EarthKAM is a unique educational initiative that allows students the opportunity to control an on-board camera mounted on the International Space Station. The initiative is sponsored by NASA's Johnson Space Center, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, the University of California in San Diego, and Dr. Sally Ride, the first American woman in the space program.

The week-long International Space Station EarthKAM missions occur about once every three months, and during each mission

participating schools arrange their own mission operation centre, which consists of student teams involved in taking photographs every hour of the mission, charting, recording, and verifying photos of Earth as seen from the International Space Station.

The program helps students learn to recognize and conduct research on features of the Earth in addition to locating the exact geographical location of the images used in maps and atlases. The student requests are collected, compiled, and up-linked to a computer aboard the space station, and the EarthKAM digital camera takes the photos, sends the images back to the computer, and then back to the International Space Station EarthKAM computers on the ground. These photographs are then made available on the web site to the schools as well as to the general public.

Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud of this group of students, their teachers, and the entire Rockyview school division for making science come to life and want to recognize them in the Assembly today for being accepted as a participating school in this great educational opportunity. I wish all the students good luck today in their endeavours as they're doing this while the rest of us earthbound mortals continue to do our work down below the space station.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Canmore IceCats Atom A Hockey Team

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity today to recognize a tenacious and talented group of young constituents who have proven that hard work is often rewarded. The Canmore IceCats cleared the benches and mauled their goalie when they captured the provincial atom A championship on home ice recently.

It was the first time in 22 years that Canmore was chosen as a venue for a provincial hockey championship, and the local team didn't disappoint us. They skated away with an 8-2 win over the Morinville Snipers in the championship game.

Curtis Azevedo, Landis Burr, Alex Cartwright, Owen Ferguson, Davis Fleischer, Marcus Messier, Nils Moser, Ken Naito, David Norris, Jordan Pauls, Luke Philip, Simon Philip, Tanner Sautner, Luke Simpson, and John Stevens exhibited much skill as a team as the IceCats outscored their opponents 58 to 18 during the five games they needed to capture the provincial crown. The team was coached by Peter Philip, Luke Azevedo, Ron Sautner, and Mitch Messier, while David Fleischer was the team's manager.

The five-game winning streak capped an amazing run that the team experienced leading up to the provincials. The IceCats strung together 27 wins in a row before competing for the Alberta title. The last time the team experienced a defeat was in November 2003.

This team deserves to be congratulated for their team effort and their ability to focus on a common goal. Undoubtedly, it was the focus that was a major contributor to this amazing achievement.

In addition to the IceCats team I would also like to congratulate and commend the Canmore Minor Hockey Association and its volunteers for the fantastic work they did in making sure the tournament was a first-class one.

Thank you.

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

2:40 Government Accountability

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This spring session of the Legislature has made one point very clear: it's time for more accountability from this government. The Alberta Liberals

have responded with some guidelines for the government to follow. I'll call it six steps toward greater accountability.

One, the government should bring in a lobbyist registry so the public knows who is meeting and getting the ear of the Premier, his ministers, and staff.

Two, bring in rules on how taxpayers' money is spent on hosting. Alberta should introduce rules like Ontario's, which set guidelines and define appropriate spending and prohibit lavish dinners and spending on alcohol.

Three, Alberta has a freedom of information act. It's time to use it properly. Taxpayers and their representatives, such as the Official Opposition, should be able to obtain information from the government without the artificial barriers of delay, costs, and omissions from the Premier, his ministers, or staff.

Four, the government should be more accountable for how it spends taxpayers' money on travel. Most Albertans are careful with their own money. They expect the same caution from government.

Five, all information on government expenses should be accessible, detailed, and released in a timely manner. We suggest posting on the Internet.

Six, don't mix government business, party business, and pleasure. The government must clearly account for what source of money it uses for what activity.

An Alberta Liberal government would follow these six simple steps. Will the current government?

Thank you.

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

Democracy in Alberta

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this House I've often spoken about the need to strengthen democracy in this province through such means as all-party policy committees and proportional representation. In light of the events over the last few weeks and days I think democracy needs a lot more to be done in this province now.

A week ago the Premier made comments that seemed to many to support Pinochet's bloody 1973 coup, which ended a long tradition of democratic rule and governance in Chile. This week the Premier deepened the insult when he said that Chilean socialists had brought the unintended consequences upon themselves. The implication was that supporters of the democratically elected President Allende had brought Pinochet's brutality upon themselves and that the victims of torture and abuse deserved retribution for electing a government committed to democracy and social justice.

One thing the Premier could have learned but didn't from his recent trip to India, Mr. Speaker, is unconditional respect, respect without reservation for the electoral choices citizens make in a democracy. This week's comments show a chilling lack of respect for democratic processes, and Albertans must wonder what other ways of avoiding or submerging democracy are supported by the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, this week a local radio station played a harmless prank on the Premier. Within a day the station had not only apologized but had produced \$1,000 for a charity of the Premier's choosing. This timely act of contrition stands in stark contrast to the Premier's belligerent refusal to offer a sincere apology to the thousands of Chileans who fled their homeland because of fears of disappearances, torture, and murder at the hands of Pinochet's regime.

On behalf of the New Democrat opposition I would like to echo and amplify calls for a sincere and full apology to Alberta's Chilean

community by the Premier. I would also suggest that the Premier consider making his own thousand dollar contribution to a charity of the Chilean community's choice. It is the least he can do to show regret for his affront to democracy in general, to Chilean democracy in particular, and for his apparent approval of Pinochet's brutal coup.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2) to give notice that on the next sitting day of the Assembly I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 162, 164 through 168, 174 through 180, 183 through 205, and 207, 208, 209, and 210.

Thank you.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. They are responses to outstanding questions asked by the MLA for Edmonton-Centre, the MLA for Calgary-Egmont, and the MLA for Edmonton-Highlands during Committee of Supply with respect to Gaming and the Alberta lottery fund estimates.

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

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in question period I promised to provide the Member for Edmonton-Centre a more specific response to a question, and I table that today.

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling responses to questions raised during Committee of Supply estimates of the Department of Justice which I hadn't fully responded to during the Committee of Supply. Those were questions raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Four quick tablings today. First, copies of my response to Written Question 3.

Secondly, copies of the government's response to written questions 6, 7, 8, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, 34, 46, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 72, 73, 80, and 81.

Third, copies of the government's response to motions for returns 16, 17, 50, 51, 54, 63, 74, 76, 77, 106, 107, 124, 125, 126, 127, 144, 145, and 206.

Also, copies of the government's response to motions for returns 34, 46, 66, 69, 93, 94, 96, 97, 98, 99, 174, 175, 176, 178, 179, 180, 189, 197, 200, 201, 202, and 203.

Where appropriate, copies of the aforementioned tablings have now been provided to the House leader of the Official Opposition for distribution to her various members who raised those questions.

Thank you.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to table responses to questions raised during Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development budget estimates in Committee of Supply on April 19. These

were questions that I was unable to respond to at the time. Therefore, I'm ensuring that they get the answers, and I've forwarded these responses to the Leader of the Opposition as well.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the great pleasure of tabling copies of a letter congratulating Kent Gigliuk, Paul Waisman, Josh Cockburn, Adam Peter, and Jordie Weich, all members of the Red Deer Heritage Lanes junior boys team for winning the YBC five-pin national championship in St. John's, Newfoundland, on May 3, 2004. This Alberta junior boys team is coached by Greg Gigliuk. They will display their gold medals at their home club, Heritage Lanes, in Red Deer. I know that we are all very proud of the accomplishments of Alberta's junior boys team.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling this afternoon, and it is documentation from the Alberta Construction Association in regard to MERFs, or market enhancement recovery funds.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a special report from the British publication *Guardian Weekly's* internet edition called *Guardian Unlimited*, published on March 3, 2000. The document entitled *Victims of a Brutal Regime* bears witness to the 3,197 people who were tortured, murdered, or simply disappeared in Chile during Pinochet's 17-year regime.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of an open letter dated May 11, 2004, from Patricia Pasten addressed to the Premier regarding his recent remarks on Pinochet. Ms Pasten states that the Premier has insulted the Chilean community and she is awaiting a public apology.

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

2:50

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter from Kim Robinson, who is a tourist from Ontario who visited the GuZoo Animal Farm in Three Hills and noted that "the overall state of the facility was one of disorder," that animals didn't have potable water, and a number of other observations while she was there.

Thank you very much.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Mr. Norris, Minister of Economic Development, the report entitled *Securing Tomorrow's Prosperity: Sustaining the Alberta Advantage*.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. In accordance with Standing Order 7(5) I would ask the Government House Leader to please share the projected government business for the upcoming week.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no projected government business for the upcoming week. We anticipate that this might be the last day of the session. The Order Paper is clean.

Privilege

Inflammatory Language

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday at the conclusion of the Routine just prior to Orders of the Day there was an exchange between hon. members, and at that point in time the hon. Minister of Finance indicated to the House that she would be rising today on a question of privilege.

Standing Order 15(2) indicates that a member wishing to raise such shall give notice. I view that as notice given, so it meets the intent if the hon. Minister of Finance wants to proceed.

Mrs. Nelson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 15(1) to raise a point of privilege pertaining to comments made in this Assembly yesterday afternoon, May 12, 2004, by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I refer to *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms*, sixth edition, page 25, and *Erskine May*, 21st edition, page 69. Both of these authorities clearly confirm that a member should never feel harassed in the performance of their duties.

Yesterday I was harassed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Mr. Speaker, during the publicly televised question period in this House the member opposite questioned my performance as a minister of the Crown. In posing his question, he referred to a statement allegedly made by me during my appearance before the Public Accounts Committee earlier in the day.

As chair of that select standing committee of the Legislature the member opposite has a special responsibility to report to this House on the actions and activities of the committee. A member of the Assembly who is appointed chair of a select committee is held to a high standard of truth and integrity because of their position of privilege. Furthermore, there is an expectation that he will report on those activities in a manner that is fair and accurate. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it is his obligation to do so.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday in his question the member opposite failed to fulfill any of those expectations or obligations. In deliberately doing what he did, he has inferred and compromised my abilities to function as a minister of the Crown and, as a result, deliberately misled this House and the viewing public about my statements earlier in the day in Public Accounts.

I refer you, Mr. Speaker, to page 1389 of *Hansard*, dated May 12, 2004. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar stated:

The Finance minister in an astonishing display of mismanagement admitted to the Public Accounts Committee this morning that she fumbled the ball on skyrocketing auto insurance rates when she indicated that she didn't know her department was rubber-stamping rate increases that led to a record high 59 per cent rise in auto insurance premiums for average Albertans.

Now, I refer to the *Hansard* from the Public Accounts meeting of May 12, 2004, at 9:05 a.m. In response to a question from the Member for Edmonton-Centre about the number of insurance rate increases approved by the Automobile Insurance Board in 2002 I replied:

That's why I brought the issue forward, and that's why we're making a change. That's not acceptable. That's why you saw in here that we already identified that we had a problem. We've got to make a change because that's not an acceptable process, watching those kinds of increases occur without challenge. So we're going to have to regulate. When I saw this happen, we started to make the correction at that point.

That's the Hansard Blues transcript of my comments to the Public Accounts Committee, Mr. Speaker.

Clearly, there's absolutely no similarity between the Hansard Blues record of what transpired in Public Accounts earlier in the day and the misleading and inaccurate portrayal uttered by the member opposite during question period yesterday. Not only did the member opposite distort the comments I made during Public Accounts, but he misled this House by providing erroneous information that clearly is not on the record from that meeting. Further, Mr. Speaker, that erroneous and misleading information was broadcast live on television throughout the province.

There can be no doubt that this was deliberate and premeditated. Yesterday as he rose in this House, the hon. member clearly read from his prepared script as he proceeded to misrepresent my earlier statement. He didn't just ad lib from the top of his head; he had it written down in advance. By his deliberate actions, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has breached my privileges as a member of this House.

During the normal give-and-take of a question period it's not uncommon for the debate to become heated and for words to fly across the Chamber that question the performance of a minister. However, it is entirely a different matter for the chair of a select standing committee to rise in this House and report that a minister has made self-incriminating comments to that committee. It is also a different matter when the chair of that committee declares to this House that statements were made during a meeting of the select committee that clearly were not.

Mr. Speaker, you have pointed out to all members of this Assembly that when a transgression occurs, a sincere apology from the member responsible is traditionally accepted by the offended party, and that is certainly the practice of this House. But I would submit that the words offered by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar fell well short of what could be considered sincere.

This chair of the select committee made his allegations on live television for all to hear, not to mention the school groups watching from the galleries. His meagre words of contrite apology came well after the televised question period, only when the members of the House and a few gallery guests were gathered to see that the record was set straight.

Mr. Speaker, I submit that the chair of a select standing committee of the Legislative Assembly should be held to a higher standard of conduct than this. Therefore, I hope that you will find that a prima facie case of privilege does exist in this matter and that I may proceed to have the Assembly assist me in clearing my name of this accusation.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my role as the House leader for the Official Opposition I have to say that I am surprised to hear that the minister is bringing a case of privilege given that the remarks from Edmonton-Gold Bar were clearly withdrawn and an apology was offered at the first opportunity to do so. That appears in the *Hansard* for May 12, 2004, on page 1397. So as a student of parliamentary process my interest is piqued on how a point of privilege can be called on comments that have been withdrawn and an apology offered.

3:00

Additionally, I was expecting that should a privilege case be brought by the minister, notice according to 15(2) of the Standing Orders of this Assembly would be followed. I understand that the Speaker has already made comments on that, but I will, begging the indulgence of the Speaker, note that 15(2) says

A member wishing to raise a question of privilege shall give written notice containing a brief statement of the question to the Speaker and, if practicable, to any person whose conduct may be called into question, at least two hours before the opening of the sitting and, before the Orders of the Day.

I expected to see some sharing of that notice in a written form with the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

In fact, I note that this was upheld during a case of privilege that was brought in April of 2003. If I refer to the pages in *Hansard* between 1240 and 1244, the Speaker in fact reprimands a member of the opposition for not having provided that written notice to the person that was involved and named in the privilege. So I would argue that proper notice was not extended according to the intent of Standing Order 15(2).

Now, I did my best to take notes while I listened to the case that was presented by the Minister of Finance, but as this is the first time I've been able to hear the full content of the accusation, I would refer to Standing Order 15(3) and 15(4) and ask that the response on behalf of the member be heard on the next sitting day of the Assembly. I cite two examples of precedents for the Speaker in delaying the response on behalf of the member, those being the 29th of April, 2003, appearing on page 1288 of *Hansard*, and also one from the 19th of November, 2002, appearing on page 1387 of *Hansard*. That will allow me time to review the citations that have been brought forward by the Minister of Finance and to be able to vigorously answer and respond on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I would ask the Speaker's support in delaying that response to the next sitting day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Anyone else want to participate or offer anything today? Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would like to participate, but if it's to be put over, I would prefer to participate after we've heard the response.

The Speaker: My statement was: anybody else today?

Well, our privilege rules are very, very clear, and Standing Order 15(6) indicates that the Speaker may allow such debate as he deems appropriate in order to determine whether a case is before us. It would seem to me that the hon. Minister of Finance has moved today on the matter in which she has chosen to move and has presented that document to the Assembly to be added to the words issued in the Assembly yesterday, and on the next occasion on which this Assembly shall meet, opportunity will be offered to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to present his case. This matter will be dealt with by the chair.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 32 Appropriation Act, 2004

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. Nelson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to move third reading of Bill 32, the Appropriation Act, 2004.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Much earlier than I had anticipated. However, pursuant to Government Motion 7 agreed to February 18, 2004, I move that the Assembly stand adjourned.

The Speaker: Hon. members, just a bit of information for you before we declare that motion in place. With the private members' bills having been passed this spring, under our rules of democratic reform established in September of 1993, we now have arrived at an extremely unique situation anywhere in the parliamentary world in

that this Assembly has now provided that 37 private members' public bills will receive royal assent. That is incredible.

It's approximately 97 minutes after 1:30 o'clock today. So in this session, the Fourth Session of the 25th Legislature, we will have now sat for approximately 12,225 minutes, and this will be the third time since 1971 – only the third time since 1971 – that all government bills appearing on the Order Paper have actually been dealt with, the other two years being 1996 and 2001.

So, hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 7 agreed to on February 18, 2004, the House stands adjourned.

I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very safe, safe summer.

[Pursuant to Government Motion 7 the Assembly adjourned at 3:07 p.m.]