

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 16, 2005** 1:30 p.m.
Date: 05/03/16
[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 responsibility 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. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you 17 grade 6 students from Neerlandia public Christian school, which is located in the Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock constituency. They are accompanied this afternoon by teacher Mr. Jim Bosma, parents Mr. Eugene De Groot, Mrs. Carol Elgersma, Mr. Kevin Gelderman, Mrs. Karin Siegle, Mr. Ken Wood, and Mrs. Anita Veldhuisen. They are seated in the gallery this afternoon. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 46 students from New Sarepta elementary school accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Lynne Chalmers and Miss Tessa Hornbeck, assistant Mrs. Horvey, and parents Mrs. Linda Harke, Sherry Metrunec, Mrs. Koziol, Mrs. Dykstra, Mrs. De Pew, Mrs. Sloan, Mrs. McKinney, and Mrs. Ogonoski. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the hon. members of this Assembly a gentleman seated in the members' gallery who has been a friend of mine for many years. He's been a councillor for the MD of Taber for the last 10 years. For seven years he's been on the Alberta board of FCSS, and he's recently been elected as president of the AAMD and C. This man has been a good friend of mine and worked many years in municipal politics with me. I'd like you to please ask Don Johnson to rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 16 students from NorQuest College, located in the Edmonton-Glenora constituency. They are in an English as a second language program. Their teacher is Debbie Stephen. Just to give you an idea of their backgrounds, they are from Afghanistan, Iran, China, Taiwan, Rwanda, Palestine, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine, Israel, Russia, and Pakistan. I invite them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the new chief of staff for the NDP opposition, Debbie Clark. Some of you may know Debbie through her work as executive administrator and registrar of the Alberta Assessors' Association. Joining Debbie today are her parents, Mike and Lorette Spilchen, long-time New Democrat supporters and formerly of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, where they owned a business. They now reside in Canora, Saskatchewan. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others at this time? A little later there will be some additional ones.

Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: Our historic vignette of the day, hon. members. On March 16, 1967, the portrait of Roberta Catherine MacAdams Price was presented to the Alberta Legislature to honour her achievements. She was one of the two first women elected to the Alberta Legislative Assembly on June 7, 1917, and she was the first woman to introduce a piece of legislation in what was then known as the British Empire. She was elected as Roberta MacAdams as a nonpartisan MLA to represent the province at large in the 1917 election.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Ambulance Services

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Albertans expect good management from their government, but they are struggling to find it. Not only did this government mismanage the transfer of ambulance services, now they've made a mess of their makeshift \$55 million solution. Seventy-seven of 149 Alberta municipalities will be facing a budget shortfall because of the failed ambulance transfer. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what is this government going to do to help these 77 municipalities climb out of the financial hole this government's ambulance transfer has dug for them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government takes very seriously the role and responsibilities associated with municipalities and see ourselves clearly as partners with municipalities. With respect to the issue of ambulances Municipal Affairs and myself as the minister of that department are working very closely with the minister of health to ensure that issues related to municipalities are dealt with as fairly and equitably as they possibly can be.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Well, then, to the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that ambulance services cost more to deliver in rural areas, why did the government put rural Alberta at a disadvantage by providing assistance on a per capita basis?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we spent a very intense several days examining options, looking at per capita funding, looking at actual costs submitted to regional health authorities from the municipali-

ties, evaluating the way to manage it most effectively. Some of the municipalities, rural and medium- and small-sized municipalities, in fact did not deliver ambulance services. They contracted it from somebody else. To give carte blanche funding without carefully having an opportunity to examine the impacts may have been unfair, but the best way to do it was on a per capita basis and to look at the opportunity this year with the technical committee, to examine each and every case and see whether we could improve upon it for the next year.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. So, then, to the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency: given that the transfer of ambulance services is such a glaring example of failed restructuring and government inefficiency, what role will this minister's department play in improving the efficiency and structure of ambulance services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that the health minister had a very tough decision to make and did a very good job on the decision she did make.

I want to understand from some questions that were asked yesterday. At the time when the ambulance review was done in 2002, total ambulance cost in the province of Alberta was around \$115 million. Of that, the municipal portion was roughly \$40 million. Forty million from the province, \$22 million from patients that took rides in ambulances, and about another \$9 million to \$10 million that came from the federal government, which was mostly aboriginal. That's the \$115 million, and that was the total cost at the time. But remember that \$40 million of that was all that municipalities paid. They've never been paid any different for that, and now we're giving them \$55 million.

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

1:40 Restructuring and Government Efficiency

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to its website the Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency is focused on "how government and its reporting entities can better provide services to Albertans." This minister so far has refused to look into the mess surrounding the budget process, refused to look into taxpayer dollars wasted on flights, and now apparently is refusing to look into the transfer of ambulance services. So to that same minister: other than SuperNet what files is his department working on, and what is their cost?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want you to know that SuperNet is going to be a huge advantage to Albertans. It is especially going to be an advantage to rural Alberta, and it goes along with the rural initiatives that this government has. At this point in time it's so important to get the SuperNet done that I am focusing most of my energies and time on the SuperNet.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. To the same minister: what was the cost of establishing the Department of Restructuring and Government Efficiency?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, that, I think, is a budget item, but I will say this. I don't know if the members across the floor understand that this ministry wasn't a brand spanking new ministry. It's new in name and it's new in form, but there was some restructuring done before the ministry started. We have a large portion, Alberta Corporate Service Centre, that's in this ministry, that we're working on diligently to find efficiencies in. The corporate chief information officer was also moved over, and that was about 1,350 employees.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: why won't the Premier himself take responsibility for government structure and efficiency, cut the taxpayers' losses by transferring SuperNet back to Innovation and Science, and simply eliminate the Department of Restructuring and Government Efficiency? Why won't he do that?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the department of restructuring is moving along very well indeed. I'm pleased with the progress and anxiously await the minister's report. Perhaps he can update us, bring us up to date on what the department is all about.

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

Health Resource Centre

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October the Calgary health region contracted with the Health Resource Centre to do hip and knee surgeries. Despite the fact these procedures would cost more than they would in the public system, the Premier called this contracting out "a health care success story." But it's now been revealed that not only do these procedures cost more, but the wait-lists are longer at the Health Resource Centre. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that wait times for hip surgery are longer at the Health Resource Centre than in any other facility in Calgary, does the minister consider this contract a health care success story?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I applaud the Calgary health region for making every attempt to reduce the length of time people were waiting for surgery. While there are still issues with the wait list, those are issues that the health region is working to address. We haven't done a complete evaluation of the effectiveness of that contract. To be critical of a region who is attempting to move patients forward into the system to get the service they require is really not the way to approach improving the health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: are the wait lists longer at the Health Resource Centre because its private clients like the WCB, who pays a premium, are being served before patients from the public system?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, that has always been the case.

Ms Blakeman: Again to the same minister: given that procedures

that are done at the Health Resource Centre cost more and waiting lists are longer, will the minister do the logical thing and increase capacity in the public system and cancel this private surgical contract?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's jumping to conclusions, and this minister isn't prepared to jump to conclusions. We have to take a look at all of the issues surrounding the health care system. Number one, this is a very good health care system. Number two, the region in Calgary is planning to add beds. The exponential growth in Alberta is probably unprecedented anywhere else in Canada. Number three, the issue of leveraging some of these surgeries in an attempt to reduce waiting lists was something – if the hon. member opposite really had a case, wouldn't we have heard about it when it happened during the election?

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Ambulance Services (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, they certainly heard about it from us.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday I informed the House that the city of Red Deer is short millions in provincial ambulance funding. Today the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association is saying that the Conservatives' so-called \$55 million fix announced last week still leaves Calgary \$4.3 million short and Lethbridge \$2.7 million short. In fact, more than half of AUMA's member municipalities are facing shortfalls because of Tory ambulance bungling. To the Premier: can the Premier explain why this government has so badly botched the ambulance transfer that municipal taxpayers will end up being saddled with at least \$12 million in extra ambulance costs come the 1st of April?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the hon. member, a botch of the ambulance service changeover to make it part of health as opposed to a transportation service, which I don't know if that's what the opposition wants, would have been to go to the \$128 million program. Had we proceeded with the program at the costs that had escalated so dramatically, I suspect there would have been yelling and screaming and stamping and fuming and storming on the part of the opposition.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that during the election we brought it to the government's and the public's attention that they were lowballing the ambulance costs, why is the Premier now perplexed that the costs are in fact so high?

Mr. Klein: Perplexed? Because it was to be really quite simple. The original context – and I'm sure the Official Opposition agrees – is that ambulance services are now an integral part of health services, the front line, the first responders, and ambulances for the most part are travelling hospitals. The paramedics and the EMTs are highly trained individuals able to administer certain kinds of medicine and certainly more than primary first aid. So it was decided that ambulance services should be part of the health system as opposed to an array of services offered throughout the province. Some were municipal services, some were in conjunction with fire departments, some were volunteer services, some were private operators, and what we wanted to do was to achieve a co-ordination of services under the regional health authorities. That's all we

wanted to do. That was the first step. I don't know where it would have taken us from there. To me, that didn't require a tremendous amount of rocket science.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When will this government admit that its own shoddy research led to the lowballing of ambulance transfer costs, and when can municipalities expect to see a funding plan that doesn't leave their citizens facing property tax increases to pay for the government's mistakes?

Mr. Klein: If that question is to me, Mr. Speaker, we're doing our best to compensate municipalities. The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has this file on her table, and I'll ask her to respond.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, over this next year while we look at the discovery projects, I think more of the information will come to light. We hope to keep progressing. But I think that what we are doing today and a very rational assessment of it will illuminate why many of the earlier reports that were filed with Municipal Affairs from municipalities did not account for all of the costs that were made available to the regional health authorities at the time that the transfer was intended to be complete, and that is part of the crux of the problem. So we will elucidate that over these next few months, and we're working very diligently to get that in place.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, may I remind this Assembly that last year \$65 million, \$55 million that we gave to municipalities and \$10 million that we gave to the discovery projects, was in fact not paid to them, so there is extra compensation for ground ambulance to municipalities this year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Definition of Marriage

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in June 2003 our Premier spoke out for Albertans, and he said:

The law in Alberta is very clear, notwithstanding how some people might feel about it, it's very clear. It's as clear as crystal. If there is any move to sanctify and legalize same-sex marriages, we will use the notwithstanding clause. Period. End of story.

On March 23, 2005, this government's Marriage Amendment Act will expire. My question is to the Premier. Regardless of what the courts and the federal Parliament are doing, will this government show leadership by re-enacting the Alberta Marriage Amendment Act, renewing the definition of marriage as between a man and a woman and using the notwithstanding clause before it expires?

Mr. Klein: Relative to the hon. member's stand on the traditional definition of marriage, we agree with him entirely.

I'm going to have the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General respond relative to the legalities of this case, but the hon. member knows full well that whether the notwithstanding clause stays or whether it goes, it can't be defended, and that's what I'll have the hon. minister talk to.

I would like to just take a moment, Mr. Speaker, to talk about what we have done. Perhaps I can do that during the second supplementary.

Mr. Hinman: Is this government prepared to clearly state that

notwithstanding any federal court or parliamentary decision it will not solemnize any marriage within Alberta other than those which are between one man and one woman?

Mr. Klein: A very interesting question. I agree with the tone and the intent of the hon. member's question, but relative to the legalities I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Mr. Speaker, last December the Supreme Court ruled in a Marriage Act reference that was brought by the federal government. In essence, that case says this: the federal government, not the provincial government, has the jurisdiction with respect to the definition of marriage. That is why at this point in time the federal government has before its Parliament an act relative to the definition of marriage. It is also very clear that a province cannot use the notwithstanding clause relative to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms with respect to matters that are not within its jurisdiction. Therefore, the province does not have the power to use the notwithstanding clause in the Charter relative to the definition of marriage.

Mr. Hinman: Will this government stand up to Ottawa for the traditions and customs of Albertans by just saying no to changes in the definition of marriage, just as Quebec has said no to Ottawa in defence of its traditions and customs?

Mr. Klein: Quebec has said no to Ottawa relative to a number of issues over which it has constitutional authority.

Mr. Speaker, again, we agree with the tone and the intent of the hon. member's questions. Relative to the legalities he's quite clear on the legal matters, and the Attorney General and Justice minister has explained them quite well.

Mr. Speaker, we have continually defended the traditional definition of marriage. We believe that it's deeply rooted in history, culture, and religion. We have continually fought changes to the traditional definition of marriage, now a bill before the House of Commons. I have personally written to every MP – every MP; all 300-and-some-odd MPs – I've written to the Prime Minister asking him to allow a free vote, and I've urged all members of the House of Commons to vote no or to at least amend the legislation to include a notwithstanding clause. We are also encouraging all Alberta people to contact their MPs, and I would encourage this member to talk to the Liberal caucus and have the Liberal caucus talk to the federal government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Métis Hunting Rights

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The spring grizzly bear hunt in Alberta is based on the scientific management of our bear population, and the number of permits issued each year is strictly limited to achieve a sustainable grizzly population. My concern is the effect that the new interim Métis harvesting agreement may have on Alberta's grizzly conservation programs, specifically next month, when the male bears come out of their winter hibernation. So my question is to the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Under the new interim harvesting agreement what restrictions are imposed on the Métis' ability to hunt grizzly bears in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sustainable Resource Development's role in implementing this agreement is again to make sure that the ongoing theme of conservation and monitoring and enforcement, if necessary, prevails. That is something that was discussed with the Métis during the time of the agreement.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most important things to note is that Alberta's careful and cautious approach to the grizzly bear hunt this year already includes a modest aboriginal harvest. Like the aboriginal harvest, SRD will closely monitor any grizzly bear hunt or any grizzly bear hunting that might occur under the Métis agreement, and we will share those results with the public as we always do.

Dr. Morton: To the same minister again: given the absence of any or at least very minimal restrictions on Métis hunting of grizzly, would the minister consider cancelling the spring grizzly hunt for legally registered hunters in order to prevent Métis or anybody else from hunting or killing grizzlies this spring?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, under the federal government's Powley decision, the Supreme Court decision, and with the interim Métis harvesting agreement that's in place, if the hunt were closed to anyone, the Métis would still be permitted to hunt for subsistence reasons. As a result of that and to ensure the conservation measures that we abide by and that were put into the interim agreement, those measures and education, we will continue to work with the Métis associations and under the leadership of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Dr. Morton: Again to the same minister. I don't know how many people hunt grizzly bears for subsistence, but last year there were six grizzly bears killed by licensed hunters in this province. Does the government have a plan to monitor the number of bears killed by unlicensed Métis hunters this spring to ensure that our grizzly population does remain sustainable?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, we do want grizzly bear on the land, and definitely the grizzly bear hunt is closely monitored and checked and researched every single solitary year. That's why we do that: to make sure that the bears are kept on the land.

By regulation, the hon. member is wanting to know that every single hunter, including Métis, must register their grizzly bear harvest with our officials. We have these measures in place so that we can keep those conservation concerns that we talked about earlier in check and we can take action on our licensing and our ultimate rollout of a grizzly bear strategy each year. So we do monitor. We do it on our best research available.

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

Access to Information on Enron

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no doubt that this Progressive Conservative government and Enron talked and talked and talked often. Enron Canada was a generous financial donor to the Progressive Conservative Party, and even one of their Houston officials was quoted in a government of Alberta news release that was bragging about the power purchase arrangement auction in the year 2000. My first question is to the Premier. Given that over 5,600 pages of records of communication between Enron Canada and Alberta Energy were denied the Official Opposition's

access to information request in 2002, will this government now release these documents to the public immediately?

2:00

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, the market surveillance administrator has asked the federal Competition Bureau to investigate this matter. I'm sure any files that they require will be turned over to them, and once they make their findings, perhaps – I don't know for sure – those papers will become public. I don't know. Nor do I know the reason – but I'll attempt to find out – why the Liberals were denied access to the files. I can only surmise that they didn't fit within the context of the FOIP rules and guidelines.

Relative to the hon. member's preamble, I'll address that in the second supplementary.

Mr. MacDonald: I'll be pleased to hear it.

To the Premier: given all the damning information the American authorities have uncovered on Enron's activities in Alberta through Project Stanley, why is this government refusing to release these records now?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, I have no idea, but perhaps what the hon. member is requesting doesn't fit within the guidelines of the FOIP rules and regulations.

Relative to his first preamble, Mr. Speaker, where he alleges that Enron has talked and talked and talked to the government and had these secret, behind-closed-door discussions, I don't recall any discussions whatsoever with Enron. None.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: how many of these records relate to Enron's unethical activities and price manipulation at the Power Pool of Alberta? There are 5,600 records. How many of those relate to these activities?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, if in fact the allegations being made by the hon. member are true, then that information undoubtedly has been obtained by the market surveillance administrator, and he has passed that information on to the federal Competition Bureau in order that they may conduct their investigation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The mountain pine beetle has had a devastating impact on the forest industry in British Columbia, already resulting in the loss of more than \$9 billion in forestry revenues and threatening 80 per cent of their pine forests. Recent reports indicate that the number of mountain pine beetles in Alberta has increased this year over last and that the forest pest has been found in areas where it hasn't been found before. Can the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development tell us what he's doing about this alarming trend in the increase of mountain pine beetles and their locations in Alberta?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important question because as far as our forestry industry and Sustainable Resource Development are concerned, the greatest threat that we have to our pine forests is the pine beetle that is coming in from British Columbia. That's why we've continued over the past three years – it's a three-year project at this point in time – to look at surveys to see if there's

any significant increase. We do know that there are some areas in the province that are starting to experience some pine beetle infestation, but let me be clear: there is no epidemic of mountain pine beetle at this particular point in time.

We do continue to do aerial surveys as well as on the ground surveys. What we do when we find a patch of pine beetle destroying our pine forests is: we go in there, we identify the trees, we take and log the trees, and we burn them to make sure that the pine beetle does not infest other trees. This is a strategy . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Can the same minister tell us, in light of the fact that there are more beetles found in more places than ever before, if his department is co-ordinating with British Columbia to help keep beetles out of Alberta and, if so, how?

Mr. Coutts: We have 2 million acres of pine forest in Alberta, and our priority definitely is to work with the British Columbia government to learn from their dire situation over there. We constantly share information. As a matter of fact, I plan on talking to my British Columbia counterpart within the next two days when we're in Cranbrook, British Columbia, at a joint cabinet meeting between Alberta and B.C. We know that these beetles come in, as I said, from B.C., and we're monitoring those areas on a very, very close basis. We will continue to work together with the British Columbia government to eradicate this pesky little beetle.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister tell us what, if any, role he's taken in consulting and co-ordinating efforts with the forest industry?

Mr. Coutts: The industry is definitely involved because it's their future that's at stake here. As well, we have different government departments and the federal government being involved with this as well. We also involve municipal governments in this because it's part of their communities that are devastated by annual allowable cuts that are affected by pine beetles.

For example, Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation conducts random checks for barked wood coming in from British Columbia at their weigh stations. Community Development doesn't allow B.C. wood to be burned in their parks, and their conservation officers continually check on that. So I'm quite proud of the fact that these and other efforts have earned the Alberta team a Premier's award of excellence in the past year, and we will continue to work on it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Apprenticeship Training

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this Assembly the Minister of Advanced Education said: "There's no shortage of place in our advanced education institutions for apprenticeships. The shortage is in placement." Yet the apprenticeship and training board's own figures show that for 2003 of the nearly 40,000 apprentices registered in Alberta, barely half were attending technical training institutions. Can the minister explain why?

Mr. Hancock: Most of those who weren't attending institutions at the time were probably building their workplace hours. Part and parcel of the apprenticeship training program is that you work and you go to school. When you've built up the work hours, you're eligible to go to school. We don't have a compulsory aspect in the program that says that once you've acquired the work hours that are necessary, you have to go to school. That depends on the students determining when they're available to go to school and their employers determining when they can release them to go to school. It's very much a co-operative effort with students, their employers, and the system. I can assure the hon. member that we have contracts with the postsecondary institutions that are in place, the technical institutes, to provide apprenticeship programs for everybody that registers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If it is as the minister says, then I wonder if there's any protection for the apprentice if an employer continues to say to the apprentice: "I can't release you to go to school. I can't afford to. I need you here now."

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a very strong apprenticeship system in this province, and we have fieldworkers in the department who work with the employers and the apprentices in order to co-ordinate this. I can assure you that that has not been brought to our attention as a problem in any way, shape, or form.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why is the government of Alberta pushing to allow temporary foreign workers in to work in the oil sands when we actually trained 1,700 fewer apprentices in 2003 than we did in 1982?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, whether or not the hon. member is correct in his assertion, the two have no relationship to each other. The reason why we have the opportunity for foreign workers to come into this province is that there is a skill shortage. There are lots of jobs. This province is operating at full steam. Not just in the apprenticeship area but in skills right across the province there is a need for well-qualified people. There is a place for every qualified Albertan, and there's an opportunity for Albertans who want to be qualified, but that's still not going to be enough to fuel the opportunities that are available in this province. So we welcome others to come to this province to help build this province and to create a home here.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:10 Health Regulations for Rural Community Halls

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past week I met with several rural community associations that due to a boundary adjustment find themselves now in the Calgary health region, and they all expressed the same concerns. The way they're being classified by the health inspectors, also known in rural Alberta as the pie and perogy police, they fear that they're going to have to shut down their community halls. The number of specific concerns raised were far too numerous to mention within the guidelines of a

brief preamble, so I'll go directly to my question to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why are small rural community halls that put on one annual turkey supper or serve annual rodeo lunches classified the same as full-service restaurants by health inspectors?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, for public health reasons, obviously, facilities that serve food are classified under very different categories. The category a facility is placed in depends upon the frequency and the kind of food that's served and whether or not the venue is open to the public. Wherever food is served, public health regulations apply equally regardless of any other factors, including size and frequency of use, and this is to ensure that Albertans can be confident that public health is protected.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that these functions are little more than a community picnic held indoors, should there not be a separate designation for these small rural community halls?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, in light of the hon. member's concern I contacted the Calgary health region today, and the Calgary health region is looking into the matter of how frequently regions and municipalities may feel that there are some impediments to how well they can serve. A number of people have suggested that there are clear guidelines in place. If a region is planning an event, if they're planning some kind of community activity, they can contact the health region, and the health region will come and work with them to ensure that public safety is maintained, that the proper rules and regulations are in place, and they work with the groups to ensure that guidelines are followed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that these complaints were not nearly as prevalent in the health authority that they found themselves in before, is there a standard level of inspection between one health region and another?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in most regional health authorities the level of inspection varies with the amount of confidence the health authority has relative to the type of food and the type of facilities, the frequency, and so on. While I recognize that under the new regional authorities there may be variances, I encourage community groups to work with the health authority, to work with the public health inspector to make sure that there is in fact a safe event possible under the guidelines.

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

Health Reform

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has huffed and puffed for months about the so-called third way in health care, yet he refused to talk about it during the election, and four months after the election he's still refusing to level with Albertans. Meanwhile, the NDP opposition has just finished province-wide public hearings on health care reform, and believe me, grassroots Albertans have lots of ideas on how to fix problems that in many cases were created by this government. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the Premier still refusing to consult with the Marthas and Henrys of this

province to get their input on how to strengthen and sustain the public health care system in this province?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that will be done. This is a three-pronged approach to achieving sustainability in health care, which has now reached proportions of – what? – \$9.1 billion a year. If the hon. member feels that is acceptable, then he can stand up and tell Albertans that he thinks that that and an 8 per cent increase each and every year is acceptable. I'll let him do that. I'm not about to do that.

Mr. Speaker, the answer to the question is: the first step was actually to put more money into the health care system to eliminate all the deficits of the regional health authorities and to alleviate waiting lists for certain common procedures, primarily bone and joint procedures, some heart procedures, some cancer procedures, and to accommodate some capital.

The second phase of the program is to hold an international symposium to find out what works in other jurisdictions, including socialist republics where there is a mix of public and private.

The third component, of course, is a public consultation with the people of this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier again: why is the Premier and his government huddling with hand-picked international health care experts at an invitation-only symposium in Calgary in May while freezing out severely normal Albertans who have many worthwhile ideas for improving the health system?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I understand that 500 severely normal Albertans have been invited. We can't invite the world to this symposium. We're inviting representatives from around the world to share their experiences, from jurisdictions around the globe representing countries that espouse to the free-enterprise system and representing countries that espouse to the system that they espouse to.

Dr. Pannu: My second supplementary to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: with his so-called third way why is the government ripping off a slogan from the United Kingdom in order to import a health care system from the United States?

Mr. Klein: Well, first of all, I don't know to what slogan the hon. member alludes, Mr. Speaker. If he's talking about the third way, I didn't know that. I just thought it was a good slogan, and if they're using it in Britain, great. Britain happens to be governed by the Labour Party, which is the equivalent to the NDs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Enron Activities in Alberta

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate received a \$1.7 million increase in funding overtop of its last year's \$2.6 million budget. This expensive office supposedly has the charge of defending Alberta's consumers against price gouging, market manipulation, and price-fixing by utility companies. Unfortunately, it has been silent. To the Minister of Government Services: has the Utilities Consumer Advocate looked into the current case against Enron and its affiliates price gouging in Alberta?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, as has been answered in this House many times, there is an investigation going on by the Competition Bureau of the federal government, and that will get into all of the angles. The Minister of Energy has on many occasions clearly demonstrated what the provincial government's role has been, and certainly the Competition Bureau will be coming out with their report, and we'll have a complete answer when that is done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why is it, then, that the Utilities Consumer Advocate's own website posts consumer updates about Enron's activities in Alberta, Project Stanley? Is it just functioning as a propaganda machine when it's not really investigating anything?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, I haven't seen where Enron is on the website at this time. Enron is now not an identity.

Mr. Elsalhy: To the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency: given that the Utilities Consumer Advocate is refusing to look into something that affects all taxpayers, which is really his main reason for existence, what's your ministry doing to ensure that the Department of Government Services is investigating the consumer rip-off?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that the utilities advocate has been travelling all of Alberta doing investigations, and to my understanding he's saying that he's posting them on the website.

Thank you.

Mr. Melchin: I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, that there is an investigation going on, and I think it's not fair to characterize it that the appropriate authorities aren't doing their work. That's why you do put in bodies like the market surveillance administrator. That's why there is a Competition Bureau. They have been given the jurisdiction, they are taking the authority, and they're doing their work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

2:20 Wabamun Provincial Park Closure

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Wabamun Lake provincial park is closed now for the remainder of 2005 to upgrade the water and sewer systems. My question is to the Minister of Community Development, responsible for parks. Is it necessary to shut the park down for the entire summer? Could the work not have been done incrementally over the winter and spring or later this winter and fall?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is an enormous amount of work that is being done, and to be clear, some work has been conducted over the winter and the spring. That work, which is now completed, has been the installation of new showers and new washroom facilities. The next step is to install and connect the sewer and waterlines. There is a significant amount of work to do

in this, and the reason why the park was closed was for public safety reasons. So the park will be closed and then remain closed for the balance of the year 2005. The total cost of this project is about \$1.5 million.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: knowing how popular this camping and fishing getaway just west of Edmonton is, what are some alternatives for campers this summer?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, only the park itself is closed. People should know that the village of Wabamun and the marina that are there will remain open, so people will still be able to use some of the amenities in the area. I should say also that once these renovations are done, I think people are going to be very, very pleased with the work that's been done.

With respect to other places to go, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of other campgrounds within a 100-kilometre radius of this area. Two of them would be Miquelon Lake and the Pembina River provincial parks, and Albertans can visit the department's website to see other park sites and camping venues that may be available to them, perhaps an opportunity to see a part of the province that they wouldn't ordinarily see. That website can be accessed relatively easily, and you can check for campsites both geographically and alphabetically.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: are there plans to upgrade or develop a more serviced campsite at this park in the near future?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, any further improvements to this park or any others will be considered in the next fiscal year, but again this is a major investment of money into the park at Wabamun Lake. In addition to what I indicated in my previous answer, I have a list of things that are being done. We're refurbishing the water tower, replacing the water main valves, establishing a new potable well, constructing four new septic fields, and relocating the recreational vehicle sewage disposal station. But even if we move forward on other improvements for this park, I don't anticipate it will ever need to be closed again.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Game Farming

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning our Member for Calgary-Mountain View along with the Alberta Wilderness Association were calling upon this government to ban game farming in Alberta. This is because of the ongoing threat and contamination of wildlife from chronic wasting disease. My question to the minister of agriculture. For 12 years this Premier has been promising a public inquiry into this industry. When will this happen?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, there has never been a case of CJD that has been linked back to CWD, or chronic wasting disease, and I think that to suggest that there's a

health risk when there's no science to support such a suggestion is somewhat irresponsible. It's irresponsible to the industry. It's irresponsible to those producers who have taken the entrepreneurial attitude to get into this business. It's irresponsible to suggest that there's a health risk associated with these producers' animals.

We're currently testing about 10,000 a year, and only three cases of CWD have ever been confirmed, and none of that has ever hit the human food chain or, for that matter, the feed chain. As with BSE, Mr. Speaker, effective surveillance is the key. As with BSE, more science is required, which is why this government has already announced \$38 million for a new prion research centre, which will study the folding proteins that cause this disease. I might also add that there is no CWD in our wild herd as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that such a small area on the border is being culled, how will this government prevent cross-migration between Alberta and Saskatchewan?

Mr. Horner: Again, Mr. Speaker, the department of agriculture as well as the Department of SRD are monitoring that situation very, very closely. The cull is a preventative measure to ensure that we don't have a spread of disease in our wild or domestic herd. Again, we are testing the wild animals, and chronic wasting disease has not been found in wild deer or elk in Alberta despite testing over 5,400 animals during the last seven hunting seasons.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that this industry cannot survive without government supports, will this government shut down the industry by providing compensation to all the game farmers?

Mr. Horner: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. Our intent is to encourage this industry and build this industry. Our intent is to continue to support those producers, which we have done through per head payments – we are still waiting for the federal government to come forward with their portion of that per head payment – which we have done through dollars to market enhancement programs, much the same as we have done with the beef industry.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, this industry has been hit hard by the border closure in the United States as well as some border closures in Korea. Our department as well as the Minister of Economic Development and his department are working to reopen those borders and to reopen those markets. This is a very valued industry in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of seven members to participate. In the interim might we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure

to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my first school group to visit here since the House has been sitting. I have 28 enthusiastic students here from Taber and their teachers and a few parents. I'd like to introduce to this gallery their teachers, Mr. Pyne and Mrs. Siemens, and their parent drivers are James Heal, Lori Cudrak, Bonnie Elliott, Miss Jordan, and Tony Machacek. I'd ask that they rise and we give them the regular warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Recognitions

The Speaker: We'll start with the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Red Deer College Kings Volleyball Team

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me stand in the Legislature of Alberta today to recognize the Red Deer College Kings men's volleyball team dynasty.

Mr. Speaker, what do you get when you win 38 straight matches in provincial and national volleyball championships? You get six consecutive national volleyball championships and a claim to a national dynasty.

Thanks to the exceptional direction of head coach Keith Hansen, the College Kings volleyball team has won another national championship. The national tournament was played in Fredericton, New Brunswick, where the College Kings set a national record for the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association men's volleyball with six straight championships, the eighth in 11 years.

Congratulations to all the coaches and players of the Red Deer College Kings and a special congratulation to tournament MVP and the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association player of the year, Joey Martins.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members of the Legislature join me in congratulating the Red Deer College Kings men's volleyball team on their six straight national titles.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Tom Baldwin

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great regret that I rise today to recognize the late Tom Baldwin, the executive director of the Northern Alberta Development Council. Tom suddenly and unexpectedly passed away on Sunday, March 13. He was 48 years old.

Tom was well known throughout the north and respected for working miraculously in his quiet articulate fashion. His knowledge, leadership, and accomplishments can only be marvelled at, and his expertise can only really be appreciated by those who had just a fragment of his understanding.

As a chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council I was fortunate enough to be able to work closely with Tom, and I was always amazed at how hard he worked to improve communities. He was on countless committees and associations and never missed an opportunity to use his great charisma and tireless energy to promote northern Alberta. Tom's commitment to excellence was apparent in all aspects of his life and his work. He will be dearly missed by his family, friends, and colleagues.

Thank you very much.

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

2:30

Jared Potts Jennifer Ross

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year the Great Kids awards honour outstanding youth for their contributions to their schools, communities, and families. This past Sunday two of my constituents received the Great Kids award.

The first constituent is Jared Potts, a 14 year old attending Griffiths-Scott school in Millet. Jared is known for kindness and thoughtfulness. Jared's parents passed away when he was young. Despite that, he has shown perseverance and tenacity through his actions in the community. He's recognized for his kindness and bases his success on what he gives to others as opposed to what he receives.

The other recipient is Jennifer Ross. Jennifer is a 17 year old from Camrose. It's been said that Jennifer has displayed some extraordinary feats throughout her life. When Jen was four, she suffered from a virus which severely damaged her liver, which required a liver transplant. From that point on, Jen became a passionate spokesperson for organ donations and served as the Stollery children's hospital child champion in 2003-2004. Jen displays great strength and generosity and will continue to be a leader in the community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Stony Plain Atom Hockey Double-A Team

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize an outstanding group of young athletes aged nine to 11 from my constituency of Stony Plain. The Stony Plain atom double-A hockey team participated in the provincial championship tournament in Barrhead over the past weekend. By exhibiting a high level of skill, teamwork, and sportsmanship, this team, coached by Mr. Malcolm Berndt, won the gold medal and are the new provincial champions. I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating the players, coaches, and manager on this outstanding accomplishment.

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

School Lunch Program

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege today to talk about the Edmonton school lunch program. This program provides a well-balanced lunch to children so that they can concentrate on their schoolwork and not on their hunger. The program, which feeds nearly 2,300 children in 12 participating schools, provides one-third of a child's daily nutritional requirements. Lunches are prepared by the Misericordia and Edmonton General hospitals.

In addition, the Edmonton school lunch program also offers young chefs groups, collective kitchens, snack in the shack, and the nutritional snack program where funding is given to participating schools to provide a mid-morning nutritious snack to 6,300 children in 33 high-needs schools. And the breakfast club: a junior high school provides a healthy breakfast each morning.

Teachers recognize the benefits of the lunch program, indicating that there is a positive influence on student behaviour, attendance, morale, concentration, and learning ability. The Edmonton school lunch program is a cost-efficient investment in our children and our communities. Its continued growth depends upon generous donations from all sectors of the community.

Thank you.

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

Safeway Support for ArtStart Program

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During February Safeway grocers across Alberta and western Canada kick-started the Show Your Heart campaign, which raises upwards of \$15 million a year for local charities. Here in Edmonton-Centre the Oliver Safeway is supporting ArtStart throughout the year of 2005, thereby making an incredible difference in our community. I'm very pleased to acknowledge the remarkable efforts of the Safeway staff and volunteers in Edmonton and across the province. The particular enthusiasm of those Oliver Safeway staff like Adrienne Brown and store manager Dan Kolba and their work for ArtStart should be applauded.

ArtStart, headed by Jacqueline Biollo, is a program that gives inner-city children the opportunity to produce art portfolios, learn a variety of mediums, participate in choir and musical theatre. They're introduced to creative movement through dance and are invited to learn the violin or viola. The value and importance of this program is priceless. On Saturday, February 12, the Oliver Safeway raised \$2,000 for its cause. Please join me in congratulating the hard-working volunteers of Oliver Safeway and ArtStart and commending them on their efforts for this wonderful charity.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition from approximately 670 constituents of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne urging the Legislative Assembly to increase the funding for long-term care facilities so that our seniors can remain in their communities when they no longer can look after themselves.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to table today. The first is a petition with 324 signatures urging the government to "institute a fair and equitable . . . floor price for cattle."

The second is a petition with 648 signatures calling for increased funding for improvements to Highway 63.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Bill 11

Stettler Regional Water Authorization Act

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 11, the Stettler Regional Water Authorization Act, 2005, which would ensure a safe, secure water supply for approximately 6,000 Albertans living in the communities of Donalda, Big Valley, Rochon Sands, White Sands, Byemoor, Endiang, Erskine, Nevis, and Red Willow.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 11 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Bill 28

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2005

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 28, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2005.

The bill introduces two new tools for municipal revenue generation. The first is a property tax increment financing tool which will help municipalities address infrastructure and other costs associated with redevelopment in designated areas. The second will provide the authority for municipalities to pass a bylaw to collect a levy from sand and gravel operators to address some of the impacts of the extraction activity.

The bill also clarifies taxation status for certain Crown lease properties to ensure consistent taxation rules and equitable property tax treatment. In particular, this affects certain Crown lease assessments associated with parks and recreation areas.

Finally, the bill will allow for clarification of the administration of the linear assessment process.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the requisite number of copies of the Northern Lights health region annual report 2003-04, the Alberta Cancer Board annual report 2003-04, and the Alberta Mental Health Board annual report 2003-04.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I wish to table with the Assembly the appropriate number of copies of three annual reports. The first is the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission 2003-2004 annual report. The second document is the Charitable Gaming in Alberta review 2003-2004. Finally, pursuant to the Horse Racing Alberta Act I would like to table today the Horse Racing Alberta 2003 annual report.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of a document from the Epp family in Red Deer in support of Bill 202, PCAD. This document states that all five members of this family "have suffered unspeakable pain and grief and trauma" as a result of the drug and alcohol addictions of their daughter and sister that began when she was 13 years old, when she was a bright and gifted straight-A student.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. Both of these documents have been uncovered by

American authorities, and they're in regard to Enron's activities in Alberta through Project Stanley. The first is a backgrounder that was prepared on behalf of the company after the Competition Bureau had initiated an investigation of certain transactions involving Enron and Powerex during the period from June to October of 1999.

The second tabling is again from Enron's legal advisors to some of their operators in regard to Project Stanley, and they're asking the question: were the Project Stanley tapes destroyed?

Thank you.

2:40

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table four documents that were e-mailed to my constituency office today. The first is from Frances Plaunt, the second from Bettie Yanota, the third from E. Seidle, and the fourth from Tom Yanota. They're all expressing concerns about the lack of consultation between the province and their community with regard to the 16th Avenue road expansion.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to be tabling the appropriate number of copies of the front and second pages of that website that I referred to in question period. It's utilitiesconsumeradvocate.gov.ab.ca on the index page, and it refers to the consumer advocate's investigation into Project Stanley.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table today. The first is from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association entitled AUMA Frustrated with Provincial Funding Formula for Ambulance Transitioning. The release details AUMA's frustration with the funding formula proposed by the government after the confusion relative to the transfer of responsibilities for ambulance services.

The second I would like to table is the appropriate number of copies of the Far Side cartoon by Gary Larson entitled The Real Reason Dinosaurs Went Extinct. It shows, of course, dinosaurs smoking. Government members may wish to take note.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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. Mr. Stevens, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General pursuant to the Legal Profession Act: the Alberta Law Foundation 31st annual report, 2004, for the fiscal year ended March 31; the Alberta Law Foundation audited financial statements and other financial information for the year ended March 31, 2004.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**
Committees of the Whole House

The Speaker: Hon. members, in just a few seconds I'm going to say, "Orders of the Day," and then something really neat is going to happen for the new members. The Clerk will then say, "Commit-

tee"; the Speaker will depart. A lot of members ask, "Why is it the Speaker has to leave?" other than the Speaker really likes the fact that he has to leave. So I've done some research just to give you some of these historical vignettes.

In 1641 in Great Britain during a Parliament that was called a Long Parliament, a particular individual was appointed Chairman of Committees so as to get him out of the way so that he might not obstruct the ordinary business of the House by too much speaking. So that was a pretty neat thing. In those days the Speaker was too often the spy of the King, so it was considered that if you wanted to get rid of him at certain times, this could be best done by turning the House into a committee and putting some other member into the chair.

From another book, *The House Was My Home*:

Then the committee system came into being and work was sent out to committees of Members to be dealt with and reported back. The Members still felt a sense of restriction imposed by the formal rules of procedure in the House until some parliamentary genius suggested that if the Speaker were to leave the Chair and the Mace be removed from the Table the whole House would then become a committee and could proceed under the more informal rules which the Members found so useful in the committees established to act outside the House . . .

[As a matter of fact] committees of the whole House, to consider important subjects such as money bills [in Great Britain], were first recorded in 1607, when it was affirmed for the first time that if Mr Speaker were absent the whole House might be a committee, to consider the details of a Bill.

But at that time the Speaker did not necessarily have to leave the Chamber. That really didn't evolve until about 200 years ago, but it was a great evolution.

So you've now become a little more informed.

In a minute or two you can get up and walk about, and you can visit somebody on the other side of the House, and you can doff jackets and things like that.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order. As the Speaker indicated to you, this is an informal session. However, for any member who wishes to speak, you have to be at your own chair to be recognized to speak, but you can move around in the Assembly at this stage.

head: **Interim Supply Estimates 2005-06**
Offices of the Legislative Assembly,
Government, and Lottery Fund

The Deputy Chair: Would anyone like to begin debate on the interim supply? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Only insofar, Mr. Chairman, as to put forward that, as is the normal practice of the House, of course, the estimates which were voted last year, supply which was voted last year through the appropriation bill, cease as of the end of March of this year. So interim supply is necessary in order to allow government to pay its staff and to provide the grants funding that we provide to government-supported organizations such as schools and health authorities and others around the province. It's a normal and routine manner with which to ensure that the life of the province goes on insofar as it's supported by the citizens through their government.

Interim supply that's being requested at this point in time is

basically a rough estimate of the first part of the year and in some cases slightly more than that for a department where grant funding is paid out early in the year. Of course, the fullness of the discussion around supply and the fullness of support of supply will come as the budget is tabled and we move into Committee of Supply with respect to the regular estimates.

So I'd encourage the House to support interim supply estimates so that as we get into the fullness of debate at Committee of Supply for each department, as this House well knows we will, the ongoing operations of government through schools, hospitals, the maintenance of roads, and all the other things which are necessary to provide the infrastructure and capital and human support for Albertans continue.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and get the opportunity to participate in the discussion, in the debate in regard to interim supply estimates for 2005-2006. Certainly, everyone recognizes that the government has to receive interim funding. We can describe this as normal and routine, but many citizens in this province do not consider this government's spending normal nor routine, and we cannot be cavalier with government spending.

Since I have become a member of this House, government spending on the total budget has increased from roughly \$14 billion to \$22 billion. As I've said many times before, we still have the same problems in regard to access to health care, closure of public schools, roads, bridges, sewers, the maintenance and the construction of our infrastructure. So we have to be careful whenever we describe things as normal and routine.

2:50

Perhaps this interim supply, the amounts to be voted here, Mr. Chairman, would not nearly be so large if this government would plan their annual budget so that the budget would be tabled or presented to the Legislative Assembly before the end of the fiscal year. Now, I don't know if that is too much to ask, but I know that in some fiscal years that has been accomplished. Now, this year, for reasons that are not known to this member, that's not going to happen. Certainly, this is a rough estimate, and when we use the words "rough estimate" to describe a budget process, it makes one want to have a closer look at this list of interim supply estimates. Mr. Chairman, whenever we use rough estimating for budgets, there can be problems.

I don't want to go back to a time in recent history when this Progressive Conservative government used to use special warrants to fund their habits, but that use of special warrants was, in my view, because maybe our estimates were rough. Maybe our budget estimates need to be refined. But we have to be cognizant of the fact and all hon. members of this Assembly recognize that we do only have one taxpayer, and we have to show a great deal of respect and restraint. As this budget process, which the hon. Minister of Advanced Education earlier explained to the House, is going to unfold, and we're going to get to the main estimates of each department eventually, we have to have a look at what we're doing here with interim supply amounts to be voted.

If we look at the schedule, we're looking at support for the Legislative Assembly of \$12 million; the office of the Auditor General, 4 and a half million dollars. The Ombudsman is to get \$700,000. The Chief Electoral Officer is to get \$700,000. Meanwhile, in supplementary estimates we have an amount that was to be voted because of the Senate elections that was greater than what was

previously estimated. That Senate election must have been one of those rough estimates that we were talking about earlier. We have \$100,000 for the Ethics Commissioner, and we have the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner to receive \$1.1 million. That would be a total in the LAO budget of a little bit over \$19 million.

Now, for the government here it's all neatly listed alphabetically, A through S. The Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development department is to get \$10.6 million. Advanced Education is to get two amounts. The first is for expense and equipment/inventory purchases of \$255 million and nonbudgetary disbursements of \$20 million, so that's a total of \$275 million. Agriculture, Food and Rural Development is to receive \$160 million. Children's Services is to receive close to \$350 million.

Community Development. I'm sure that as time progresses, we're going to see the Community Development budget scrutinized with a great deal of interest by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. The hon. member has been in his office, I noticed, poring diligently over not only the previous annual report from that department, Mr. Chairman, but he's gone back four or possibly five fiscal years by now. It'll be interesting to see what is uncovered in that department. But at the moment that department is to receive through interim supply an amount exceeding \$100 million.

Economic Development. Now, that's not the department that has the aircraft fleet. No; I'm mistaken. That's Infrastructure. Economic Development uses the airplane on occasion. Economic Development is to get \$14 million.

Education, a very important and sometimes unappreciated department, is to receive over \$660 million. Energy is to receive in interim supply \$59 million. Environment is to receive a little bit over \$22 million. I don't know what the total budget will be for the Department of Environment, but I would think, Mr. Chairman, that it would be significant. Executive Council is to receive at this time over \$5 million. Finance in two budgetary items is to receive over \$31 million.

Gaming is a player, certainly, in interim supply. For expenses there is going to be an amount allocated of \$38 million and lottery fund payments of \$316 million. I would love an update on just exactly where these lottery fund payments will be going in the first quarter of the fiscal year. That's a lot of money. I'm sure some of it is going to the department of health, some would be going to Children's Services. When and where in those departments would that money be going?

Government Services is to receive over \$17 million. Now, Government Services is a very interesting department. Certainly, in question period earlier today there was a discussion about the role of Government Services and the role of the consumer advocate. There was also a discussion in question period today about grizzly bears in hibernation, and there would be those that would say that the consumer advocate is in hibernation, and there are those that would say that they hope the consumer advocate comes out of hibernation. The consumer advocate: I don't know whether it's a shared office. I don't know exactly how this works. Some view this as a conflict. "Some" would include this hon. member. The Government Services assistant deputy minister or deputy minister, I forget which, is one and the same as the consumer advocate. I think that if it's an important job, which some people think it is, there should be a dedicated individual hired to do one job.

3:00

Now, I'm certain that the consumer advocate is not going to be paid out of this amount of \$17 million because, of course, the budget for the consumer advocate is coming from the ratepayers, from the

natural gas customers in this province and the customers of electricity. There is a little bit of a levy, a tax, you name it, on consumers. They're paying for this office, and this is getting to be, as was mentioned in question period, a very expensive office.

Now, Health and Wellness is to receive in the next short period of time over \$2 billion. Certainly, we want to ensure that our hospitals and our regional health authorities are receiving adequate funding. At this time perhaps we could get an update from the government members as to exactly how that budget process works. Do the health authorities present their budgets in advance? If so, how far in advance before the provincial budget is set? I think it would be interesting to find out how many of the health authorities are setting their budgets well in advance before the province sets the global budget.

Human Resources and Employment is to receive \$136 million, again for expense and equipment/inventory purchases.

Infrastructure and Transportation is to receive – oh, here we go – expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$485 million. I hope that they're not going to buy a new airplane with that, maybe a jet. I hope not. Why not? Because there's no need of any more aircraft.

If I could make a suggestion to the government, perhaps you should reduce the size of that fleet and maybe hire or buy an air ambulance that could take sick Albertans from rural Alberta into Edmonton and Calgary to receive medical treatment in a timely fashion. We could reduce the size of the government fleet and increase the number of air ambulances, maybe a helicopter, perhaps, or maybe a fixed-wing aircraft that would be suitable for that purpose.

Infrastructure and Transportation is receiving a lot of money, and one of the areas I certainly hope that they don't spend any money is on new airplanes. But I certainly hope that they do maintain the ones we've got, for obvious reasons. I wouldn't want any of them to be crashing or have to stay at an airport in another province or another country and have to charter back because that, as we all know, can get really expensive.

Now, Innovation and Science is to receive \$35 million. I don't believe the SuperNet is involved with Innovation and Science. That has been moved over to the RAGE department.

International and Intergovernmental Relations is below Innovation and Science, and they are to receive \$3 million.

The Justice department is to receive \$67 million. Now, the Justice Department is certainly not involved in the construction of the courthouse in Calgary. That would be Infrastructure and Transportation. Justice is most certainly involved in the planning of it, but they're not paying for it. Okay. There are in supplementary estimates amounts for the courthouse in Calgary, but perhaps we'll get to that later on this afternoon. So Justice is going to get \$67 million.

Municipal Affairs is to receive \$31,600,000.

Restructuring and Government Efficiency is to receive, to my astonishment, \$66 million. I think I need glasses. I saw in the quarterly report that was released where the RAGE department had received I believe it was \$37 million. In a very short period of time that department has been very efficient at spending tax dollars, and now we see that it is to receive an interim supply amount of over \$66 million. What are we going to use that money for? Certainly, in question period this afternoon the only file that seemed to be open on the hon. minister's desk, as I understood it, was the SuperNet. There was no talk of studying any restructuring or government efficiency. It was just, "I'm going to deal with one file," and that was it. So I don't know what all this money would be for, and I would really appreciate an explanation at this time.

After the last election when the government caucus grew, the size

of cabinet grew. This is not a government that is concerned about reducing the size of government, as some would be led to believe, because certainly the number of government members increased in 2001 and the size of the cabinet increased dramatically. Well, the government shrank in the election last fall. Even the odd cabinet minister lost their seat, yet we see that, again, the size of government continues to expand, this time not by seven or eight ministries but by one, this RAGE, Restructuring and Government Efficiency. I think that when taxpayers get a look at this amount, they may be enraged with the RAGE ministry for spending far too much money without any adequate explanation as to why.

Now, Seniors and Community Supports is to receive \$347 million. Certainly, there have been some initiatives recently by this government to finally admit that some of the past government policies have reduced significantly the disposable income of many of Alberta's seniors. If a person or a couple has been retired for 10 years, 15 years their disposable income, unfortunately, has not kept up – the cost of utilities, the cost of insurance – and that has really affected a lot of seniors. We want to encourage seniors to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible.

The government has sort of admitted that, yes, they have been maybe a little bit stingy. I think we can afford to give our seniors an adequate disposable income through the Alberta seniors' benefits without breaking this province. When these individuals retired, they didn't know that this government was going to, for instance, proceed with electricity deregulation, and a power bill now is a big expense at the end of the month for many retired seniors. They come into the constituency office, I see them in the coffee shop, and they tell me that, Mr. Chairman. If we can use some of this money to increase the Alberta seniors' benefits, I think it would be wisely spent and would be respectful of the citizens who helped build this province.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

3:10

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my honour to have the opportunity as well to speak to the interim supply estimates. In my mind, we shouldn't even be here having this discussion today. We should be discussing a budget today, not interim supply.

I understand from previous Legislatures that we normally sit starting somewhere around the second week of February. Nobody has yet made clear to any of those of us on this side of the House why we were not here the second week of February. As you know, there are many, many new MLAs in the Legislature this time around. Elected November 22, we were anxious and ready and willing and able to go to work. We've been chomping at the bit literally for months now.

Obviously, one of the first tasks that we look forward to is debating the budget, planning the fiscal priorities for this province for the coming year. Here we are two weeks away from the end of the fiscal year, and we don't even have a preliminary budget in front of us to begin debating.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud indicated that this is a normal process. My point would be, Mr. Chairman, that this does not have to be a normal process, and in fact it's not necessarily a normal process in other jurisdictions. It certainly has become a normal process here in Alberta.

We've got a one-week break coming up at the end of next week. We're going to take a break for spring break, and I understand that many members are looking forward to that, but I question whether or not that's appropriate given the fact that we don't have a budget.

I think we should be here, debating the budget as opposed to going skiing or whatever it is that some of the other members might be planning on doing. I know that I'll be working on budget preparations.

Mr. Chairman, after three and a half weeks of work we're going to take a one-week holiday. Now, I don't know, but in my mind that seems an awful lot like the severance package that Mr. West received for working only six months as the chief of staff and ended up with a huge severance.

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Mr. R. Miller: It's very relevant, I'm afraid. Three and a half weeks of work, and here we are getting a one-week holiday. I honestly don't believe we should be taking a break at all.

Now, it's amazing to me, Mr. Chairman, that we're asked to look at interim supply estimates with one or two lines only per department. There's absolutely no information there that tells us what this money might be used for, and in fact as we rise to speak in this debate in committee today, we're left to guess at what the various ministries and their ministers might be wanting the money for. I don't know what you would expect us to tell our constituents when we go back to the constituency on Thursday afternoon or Friday and meet them in the office, and they're going to ask us: "Where is the budget? We're almost at the end of the fiscal year, and we're wondering what the government is going to spend the money on this coming year."

An Hon. Member: They're not going to ask you that question. You're not in government.

Mr. R. Miller: They do ask us because it's their money. You know, the hon. members across the way, Mr. Chairman, perhaps should remember that this is not money that belongs to the government. This is money that belongs to the taxpayer, and I can assure the one hon. member that every single time I meet with a constituent, they express concerns to me about their tax dollars and the way that their tax dollars are being used. So for somebody from across the floor to suggest that it's not my money because I'm in opposition, he's missing the boat entirely. This is money that belongs to every single taxpayer, and they have a right to know how the government plans to use it over the coming fiscal year.

As I say, here we are two weeks away from the end of this year, and they're asking us for 5 billion and some dollars without any more than a single line in terms of telling us what they might be using this for.

Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure that I'm going to do what my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar did and go through line by line, although I might. Certainly, as the Finance critic I wonder about finance in particular, and I see in here – I always find it interesting that I get up to mention finance, and the minister gets up to leave – that there's \$32.3 million.

Mr. Dunford: Point of order.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of Members

Mr. Dunford: You know what? I don't know what the item is, but we're not to comment on people's attendance or nonattendance in this House.

Mr. MacDonald: Citation?

Mr. Dunford: You know the answer.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the chair did not hear those comments, but if they were made, they are not appropriate. As a convention we do not comment on a fellow member's presence or absence in the Assembly. Okay?

Mr. R. Miller: My apologies to the hon. member, Mr. Chairman.

Debate Continued

Mr. R. Miller: As I was saying, \$32.3 million estimated for the Finance ministry: a simple two-line explanation. There's nothing to tell us what it's for. Now, I'm wondering, and I had hoped to be able to ask the Finance minister – perhaps I will later – if 1.4 million of those dollars . . .

Mr. Dunford: He just did it again.

Mr. R. Miller: I did not. I said that I may ask the minister. Mr. Chairman, I hope you were listening this time.

Chair's Ruling

Decorum

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, please. Please speak through the chair. You have to have some decorum in this Assembly. Although we are at committee stage, I think there has to be decorum. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has the floor.

Debate Continued

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm sure if yourself or anybody else would like to check *Hansard*, I indicated that I may later ask the minister this question.

I'm hoping that \$1.4 million is included in this \$32.3 million so that we can explain to Albertans through some sort of an advertising program why they should feel good about being asked to roll over and take their medicine by this government and the auto insurance industry as we continue to pay record high auto insurance premiums and the insurance industry continues to collect record high profits. Last year, as you well know – and it's in the supplementary estimates, which we will be debating later today – this same ministry spent \$1.4 million trying to explain to Albertans, with a very slick advertising campaign I might add . . .

Mr. MacDonald: How much did it cost?

Mr. R. Miller: One point four million dollars, Hughie.

. . . to try to convince Albertans that the insurance reforms were a good idea. Maybe it's just me being cynical, but it also happened to be just before a provincial election. So I'm really hoping that there's \$1.4 million included in this \$32.3 million that might go now towards Albertans to help them feel good about the fact that the insurance industry is making record profits at their expense.

Now, someone will have to explain to me – I've said it several times, and I don't mind saying it again. I am relatively new to this process. I do not understand what nonbudgetary disbursements mean in the Ministry of Finance. I know there's a two-line explanation in the estimates that talks about "non-budgetary disbursements consist of the exchange of cash for another form of asset, or for the reduction of a liability." I note here that out of the \$32.3 million about one-third is for nonbudgetary disbursements. I'm sorry. I just don't understand what that means, and I'm hoping that at some point somebody will have the opportunity to explain that to me.

There are a couple of other ministries that I flagged because they create some interest for me. The ministry of health as an example: a little more than \$2 billion for expense and equipment and \$5.6 million on capital investment. Now, I'm curious. We had some discussion earlier today about the health symposium that's going on in May. Certainly, there was discussion of the fact that this is an invitation-only event, and I believe the Premier said that there were some 500 invited guests, hand-picked by the government. I'd like to know just how much of this money is going to put on that event.

Albertans have expressed an incredible amount of interest in health care and are very, very concerned about whatever the plans might be by this government for the future of health care, whether it be a third way or a second way or no way at all. I'd be very curious to know just how much money that particular event is going to cost. Again, Mr. Chairman, we're not going to find out now until probably sometime in the middle of April, which is shortly before that symposium takes place, how much it's going to cost. I think it's unfair to my constituents and to the rest of Albertans to be left in the dark on that particular expense. They'd like to know what it's costing.

3:20

I'm going to echo the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on this one, but I had exactly the same thought: Restructuring and Government Efficiency, \$66.2 million, and this afternoon the minister stood in the House and told us that the only file that he's concentrating on right now at all is the SuperNet. Given that this is an estimate that's supposed to run only to the beginning of June, \$66.2 million seems like an awful lot of money for one file, as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar suggested. I'm wondering if we shouldn't perhaps call it the supersize Internet as opposed to the SuperNet because somebody is certainly supersizing the budget there, Mr. Chairman.

There were a couple of others here that certainly caught my eye. Advanced Education, \$255 million for expense and equipment/inventory purchases. I have no idea what that might be. Certainly advanced education is a concern. I heard it time and time again at the door. People are very concerned about the future of their children, especially if they have school-age children or children that might be approaching university age, as I do myself, Mr. Chairman.

I have two children that are approaching university age, and certainly postsecondary education is something that I'm very, very concerned about, and many of my constituents are as well. You know, actually, Friday afternoon I have a meeting with a constituent who has a concern about a high school student, a child of theirs, and this is going to most likely be a concern of theirs as well. It's just really, really hard for me to sit down and try to explain to somebody why we're being asked to approve \$5 billion, and there's nothing more than a single line to address that.

Now, a couple of other comments. I mentioned earlier that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud talked about this being a normal practice and a usual practice of this Assembly to approve interim estimates, and I couldn't help but notice a report from *Canadian Business and Current Affairs*, the *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, that last year in Saskatchewan, which is the lovely province next door to ours, a sister province of ours, in their spring session for the very, very first time in that province's history they approved some interim funding because they had yet to pass the budget. Interestingly enough, in that particular case they actually had a budget before them which they were deliberating. They had the information in front of them but did not have time to pass the budget before the end of the fiscal year, so they had to move to interim funding. But this was the first time in that province's history.

We've talked about the centennial a lot, Mr. Chairman. You will

know, as will other members, that Saskatchewan is as old as Alberta. Now, I wish I had had time this afternoon to check and see how many times in Alberta's history we've had interim supplies, but obviously it's certainly more than once. I was able to look back through several of the most recent years, and it seems year after year after year, as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud suggested, interim supply is a normal practice for this government. It certainly is not and has not been a normal practice in Saskatchewan, so that would cause me a great deal of concern as well. Now, I would like to submit that maybe Saskatchewan has some practices that this Finance minister and this province should be looking at very carefully.

Well, I'm at about the stage, Mr. Chairman, where I'm going to start doing as my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar did and go through line by line. The first thing that appears on here is \$12 million for support to the Legislative Assembly. Like most working stiffs in this province I need a paycheque, so I'm not going to question too seriously the \$12 million that's being asked for there, because my wife would probably give me a hard time when I came home tonight if I didn't have a paycheque coming.

Office of the Auditor General, \$4.5 million. Office of the Ombudsman: it looks like this gentleman is actually quite frugal. It's only \$700,000 between now and the 1st of June. Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, \$700,000. I'm not sure what they're doing right now over at that office, Mr. Chairman. Perhaps they're still counting ballots or something. I'm really not sure what that might be. Office of the Ethics Commissioner: I'm surprised, quite frankly, that that budget isn't a little bigger than \$100,000.

Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner: well, \$1.1 million to operate that office for the next two months. I can understand that because it certainly appears that they have a very big job on their plate in terms of FOIP legislation and the work that they do limiting access to information by Albertans, it seems, at every turn. That's been quite evident, most recently especially with attempts to get information on the flight logs with the government aircraft.

Now, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, \$10.6 million. I would like to think that some of that money might be contemplated to go towards holding some public hearings on the Métis harvesting rights, although it doesn't appear as if that's the case. I do understand that there is a meeting coming up in Bonnyville soon, and I applaud the minister for holding that meeting. I wish there had been many more across the province. Perhaps, contemplated in this \$10.6 million, Mr. Chairman, that's what the minister is planning.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, \$160.6 million. It's an awful big number. I'm not sure what's in there. I'm hoping that there may be some BSE relief in there for our farmers. Certainly, the federal government came through this week with some more relief for farmers, and I'm hoping that the Alberta government might do so as well.

Community Development, \$90 million between now and the 1st of June. Again, a pretty big number, although I understand that we have some celebrations coming up somewhere around the May long weekend, Mr. Chairman, and perhaps some of that \$90 million is earmarked for the royal visit that is contemplated.

Economic Development, \$14 million between now and the 1st of June. I'm not sure, again, what that might be for. We had a motion that moved through the House yesterday, through second reading and into committee. I think it passed committee, actually, and is now at third reading. It's the motion on the hotel tax. That money is being raised through the private sector, so I'm not sure what the \$14 million might be for there. It would be good to know.

Just going through here. Five point three million dollars for Executive Council. Again, being new to the game, I'm not sure. I expect that means those in the front row across from us, and again it's a pretty big number. Gaming, \$316 million for lottery fund payments. I'm not sure what that is for, if that's winnings that are being paid back to people after the money has been collected or what. Again, an awful big number.

Health and Wellness. Well, Mr. Chairman, \$2.044 billion for Health and Wellness. I have to be honest with you. I'm a small businessman, and I've told people that when I look at numbers as Finance critic, I often have to add three or four or even five zeros to the numbers that I'm used to dealing with, and \$2.044 billion is a very, very big number. It's bigger than anything I've ever dealt with before.

I think it is a recognition by this government of the concerns that the citizens have for health care, but then we heard some very good questions this afternoon on health care and the private delivery of some services. In fact, the minister indicated that she was quite comfortable with farming out surgeries to private companies that charge more to the government than we're able to deliver those same services for through a public system. As much as I'm in favour of giving Albertans the very best health care possible, I'm wondering if that number has to be as big as it is there. Maybe if we were delivering services through the publicly funded system, which many studies have shown to be more efficient, perhaps that number could be a little smaller than it is in this case.

3:30

Infrastructure and Transportation. Well, I have a particular concern with that, Mr. Chairman, because my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford happens to encompass the interchange at 23rd Avenue and Calgary Trail. As you well know, that particular interchange is in the news a lot, especially as it regards the \$1 billion that was supposed to flow through to Edmonton in infrastructure payments. Now that \$1 billion appears to have morphed into \$750 million, and there is some concern that perhaps the construction of that interchange may be delayed as a result of that lesser amount of funding that's coming through to the city of Edmonton.

Innovation and Science: \$35.4 million.

Mr. Chairman, I believe my time is up, and I'll be happy to complete running through the book at a later point. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was listening intently to the hon. member's dissertation there, and I wanted to correct him on a couple of things as it related to the agriculture portfolio.

He mentioned that the federal government has come through recently with more aid for our producers, and if that is indeed true, I would love to see the announcement that was made for that because the only announcement that I am aware of that was made was a repeat announcement of the \$50 million that the federal government had committed to the beef marketing initiative. The only reason, I would like to point out to the hon. member, they did that was on the heels of our \$30 million contribution to that same fund in order to diversify our markets. I would like to point that out to the hon. member because he may be able to help me with lobbying his federal cousins for some additional funding that was promised to us in some way, shape, or form on the other ruminants in our province.

We had a question this afternoon in the House on the other cervid

industry in this province. It should be noted that this government has stepped up to the plate and offered a per head payment as well as marketing dollars for the other ruminant industry based on some indications from the federal government that they were going to actually step up to the plate and help that industry out as well. To date – to date – Mr. Chairman, we've not seen any dollars in that respect.

Another item that I would like to point out, Mr. Chairman, is the \$38 million announcement which we have made to tackle the research component of this crisis that we are involved in, in better understanding BSE. My understanding is that to date the federal government has not come forward with any matching funding in that, and I would love to have them come to the table with us on that one.

In addition, Mr. Chairman – and these are only a few of the things that come to mind as I sit listening in the House – we've already announced \$7 million in research and development funding for the SRMs that are going to cause a serious problem for us in the province and are currently an issue. We would appreciate very much if the federal government would see fit to use some of their surplus to help out the producers in this province who are struggling. Quite frankly, Alberta is probably the best place to be in the cattle industry today given the crisis that's going on across the country and the supports that this government has provided to our industry.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak to the motion to approve the interim supply estimates for 2005-2006. I look at the document before us and am impressed with the numbers, first of all, the overall aggregate numbers just for the government departments. For one-sixth of the year, because these estimates are for two months, the months of April and May, into the next fiscal year, the total amount for 24 government departments that's being asked for approval for here is close to \$5.52 billion. Multiply it by six because this is only for two months and if you were to use this as the average bimonthly expenditures, the total budget for these 24 departments would likely come close to \$33 billion.

Now, it would seem to me, although I don't have the numbers before me – and that's why it would have been helpful if the Minister of Finance had provided last year's interim supply estimate numbers so that we could have a general idea about the relative increase or decrease of the money being asked for by each of the 24 departments and get some idea about, then, why that is the case. But that information is not there. Notwithstanding, it is the case that this budget if calculated on the basis of the average expenditure of \$5.52 billion for every two months will come to about \$33 billion or more.

I understand that for last year, the fiscal year that's just ending, 2004-05, the total amount would be close to perhaps \$28 billion. So that's a huge increase if I'm correct in that. Then the increase is close to \$5 billion or \$5.5 billion over the previous year of \$28 billion, and that amounts to about a 16 to 18 per cent increase. I'm just making these calculations in my head as I go along. It doesn't seem to make much sense when you have huge increases proposed by way of this interim supply. I'd like to ask the Minister of Finance if she would like to comment on this increase, and maybe she will have some justification for the very, very radically different numbers for this year than last year.

As I said, I can't help but simply make some estimates here. It would have been nice if we had last year's numbers mentioned there as part of the interim supply so that I wouldn't be accused later on of making wild guesses. That's all I'm left to do at this moment.

That is certainly something that's I think a concern since it's a huge amount of money as part of the next year's budget, which is not before us yet and won't be for, perhaps, another three to four weeks. Who knows? Maybe the Minister of Finance will tell us the exact date on which that budget will be coming down so that finally Albertans and we here in this Assembly will have an opportunity to take a close look at next year's budget and the government's plans to spend taxpayers' dollars in different ways.

Regardless of when we get the budget and when we finally have a vote on it so that the government has the legitimate right to then go ahead and start spending that money, close to 5 and a half billion dollars are being asked for our approval right now without any details available to us with respect to how this money is going to be spent as part of the next fiscal year. I don't think that's an appropriate way to seek this Assembly's approval to spend such huge sums of money without accounting in any detail as to where this money is going.

When you look at the different departments, the one that strikes me as the one that deserves, you know, the closest of scrutinies is the new Department of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. Other members have spoken on the supply estimates requested by different departments, so I won't go into details on any of those, but this one is a department that seemed to be from the very, very beginning, from the get-go, terribly redundant.

This government has been busy restructuring this government since 1993, yet come 2005-06 it is asking for \$66.2 million just for the first two months of the next fiscal year for this department's expenditures. Multiply that by six and the restructuring ministry, which I said is to me redundant, useless, not needed, will be spending between \$375 million and \$400 million on something that this government has been busy doing for the last 13 years without the help of such a ministry. It looks like a make-work arrangement, one that will cost Albertans dearly, to the tune of \$400 million. It could be that much, although it's difficult to be exact on this.

3:40

So I think there's a need for this Legislature and certainly for us to raise questions on this. I'm sure the minister responsible or the Minister of Finance will have some comments to make in response to the questions that are being raised here, some of these by me as I look through the different estimates.

I have questions about the Seniors and Community Supports, which I suppose is responsible now for AISH recipients. I stand to be corrected if that's not the case. In the throne speech the government made some promises with respect to making adjustments to the AISH payments and to restoring seniors' benefits related to dental care and eye care. I'm wondering: if those benefits are the responsibility of the Department of Seniors and Community Supports, then what amount of this \$347 million that are being requested for approval for the first two months of the fiscal would go towards increasing the AISH payments and the payments for restoration of seniors' benefits with respect to dental care and eye care?

Similarly, let me take one more case here, Advanced Education. Since the Minister of Advanced Education will be happy to answer some questions on this, let me pose some. There are \$20.3 million under the nonbudgetary disbursements being asked for for the first two months of the next fiscal year, fiscal 2005-2006. Pro-rated annually that comes to about \$121 million or more under nonbudgetary disbursements. Nonbudgetary disbursements are defined in this document, and the definition is very sparse, I must say: "consist of the exchange of cash for another form of asset" – that's one category – "or for the reduction of a liability."

Now, talking specifically about the interim supply, I wonder:

under these two categories of the nonbudgetary disbursements what's the proportion of the \$20.3 million that's going to each? It's these kinds of questions that need to be addressed.

Also to the Minister of Advanced Education, as part of his Bill 1, I have a fear that the bureaucracy will grow in order to implement some of the proposals related to centralization of province-wide admission arrangements and for setting some common standards, the minister calls them, which is part of the language of the bill. What kind of new expenditures are being planned to pay for that necessary bureaucracy that will inevitably be spawning thanks to the proposal that he's making as part of his Bill 1?

So those are some specific questions here related to Advanced Education. I don't think there is room here to ask the minister because the departmental requisition here, this supply request, relates only to April and May while the academic year at the universities and colleges this year will not start until – the classes won't start until September 1. The academic year started, I suppose, on January 1. Are there any hints in this request that some of the money is being now asked for continuing, with the tuition freeze, into the 2005-2006 academic year? If so, it would be nice to know what's roughly the amount that's being requested in order to continue to implement the tuition freeze, or is it not on the table at all?

I think the minister should be contrite on this. Over 80,000 Albertans will be enrolling next year, again, into our postsecondary technical institutes, colleges, and universities, and they're expecting and they're hoping that this government will continue with a tuition freeze, but they want to be assured about this. I would like the minister, perhaps, to give some signals here in response to the monies that he's asking for as part of his department's expenditures, whether that includes that consideration of continuing the freeze for those students.

I'd much rather be asking these questions in relation to the debate on the budget, but the budget has been delayed so far into the future that these questions must be asked even though the budget is not before us. The fact that the budget is not before us is not the fault of the members of the Assembly. It falls squarely on the shoulders of this government, which is finding it very hard this year to come up with a budget, which normally is one of the major tasks of the Assembly before the spring session. We're dealing with tens of billions of dollars of taxpayers' money, and we still don't know when the government plans to spend that money are going to be available to the public and to this Assembly.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would take my seat, and I will give other hon. members the opportunity.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister for Health and Wellness, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a privilege to get up today and defend the supplementary estimates of the Department of Health and Wellness. At the outset I want to remind the hon. member opposite from Edmonton-Rutherford, who spoke about the expenses, that in the introduction of the bill yesterday, the Minister of Finance clearly illuminated why the interim supply estimates were as high as they were. Although the hon. member opposite made much comment about the \$2,044,200,000 for expense and equipment and inventory purchases, by definition this expense includes "salaries, supplies, grants, amortization of capital assets and debt servicing costs." In short, Health employs just less than a hundred thousand employees, and for two months this amount helps run the health system, for April and May. So an extraordinary wild cost? No, of course not. It is the responsible governance and payment

through the regional health authorities for the salaries of people that serve the patients of this province.

3:50

Now, Mr. Chairman, in terms of the supplementary estimates that are being debated, I will comment later, but that I think was a reference point and a suggestion as well that we should be discussing how much would be spent on this year's international symposium. I'd like to remind the hon. member opposite that although it was not a budgeted amount for this year's budget, we are doing our best within the resources available in the administration of the Department of Health and Wellness to provide supports for the symposium, to make sure that we have provided monies for those 500-some-odd people that will attend. They will represent every stakeholder group in the health-related field, from opticians to ophthalmologists, physicians, nurses, licensed practical nurses, regional health authorities. The members of the opposition have been invited to attend as well.

Mr. Chairman, although I'm aware that this attendance might run into conflict with activities in this House, clearly it is being arranged to be primarily convenient for those members of the public, including physicians, who will evaluate the effectiveness of those treatments. So, quite honestly, the best practices that will be displayed have been very carefully selected, and we are managing that symposium as parsimoniously as possible. It will be located in Calgary at the Westin. The costs that I've seen that have been advanced thus far are frugal indeed. I'm not able now to report what the totals will be, but I will report at some time later.

Mr. Chairman, another reference point from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was that the minister, if I refer to the Blues, was quite comfortable with expenditures that were made by a private provider for health care service. Those were not words that I stated. I said that evaluation of that had not come forward.

What I am comfortable about and what I can assure this Assembly my comfort relative to is that 500 people who had pain and suffering, who had endured long waiting lists – we were able to alleviate their discomfort by giving them an opportunity to advance their surgery in a fashion that made sure that they were attended to. From many of those people I have had either verbal comment or comments from people within the city of Calgary who are family members associated with those particular patients who have said that that was the best thing that happened because it gave them an opportunity to go back to work.

Mr. Chairman, I don't think there's more to be said on this interim supply amount to be voted, but this particular reference point is for management of the health care system. At some point later when you want to speak about additional operating and capital funding for the years 2004-05, I will identify how we expended the additional funding of \$350 million provided to the health authorities to defer or defray their accumulated deficits and provide additional operating funding to enable them to advance the cause on waiting lists.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise in the Legislature today to speak to interim supply. The focus of interim supply is to make sure the government has operating grants when they have not yet completed the budgeting process. Even when this government has a budget, they end up overspending. How foolish can that be for a government that cannot organize its time? Once again they want us to write a blank cheque without any detail. It tells us that there is progress in place to start planning, and that's what's critical if we are

going to be fiscally responsible and fiscally prudent in this province. We have got to signal them so that the proper budget planning can be undertaken so that we can have a reflection of the needs of the agencies that are going to be doing the expenditure planning on our behalf.

Mr. Chairman, last year Dr. Nicol said this.

I guess one of the things that's really difficult as we go about talking with Albertans about interim supply is focusing on the kind of debate around: what expenditures are there? I know that the normal answer to that is: well, wait till the budget.

And it's still the same thing today.

But if we are supposed to work on this judiciously and in the spirit of appropriate government recognition of expenditures, we need to have the detail that's associated with being able to say that these are the types of expenditures.

Mr. Chairman, a little further he said:

The question that comes up in my community most of all, you know, is: what is going to happen to the expenditures for seniors? The seniors lost both their dental and optical benefits . . .

And it's still the same.

. . . or some of them, in recent budgets. Will they be restored through this program?

This is the question.

Is that going to be part of the focus that will be there for seniors?

The focus also that comes up in a number of other discussions would be: will there be dollars in the budget and are they included in this interim supply to initiate and expand the investigation of complaints of all Albertans about abuse of elders? You know, the elder abuse situation is really getting to be critical when we look at it from the point of view of the number of concerns that come to our offices and get raised about: are seniors getting proper care? Are seniors being looked after appropriately in their homes and in care facilities?

These are the questions.

These are the kinds of things that individuals want to know and want answers to.

When we see just major lines with departmental expenditures, we don't know where these are going, so how can we comment on them appropriately when individuals ask us?

If my constituents ask me about this interim supply, I think they will laugh at the government. Here I have the list of interim supply for the fiscal year ending this year, March 31, 2006. It's a huge, huge amount. My friend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar explained all the departments right from the beginning. It's really a huge amount and without any details.

I want to ask the Minister of Community Development, because I'm the critic for Community Development, to see the breakdown of the \$90 million which the government mentioned in this supply list, \$90 million they are spending on expenses and equipment/inventory purchases, whatever they call it. How much money will be spent on the programs or the services? Is it possible to receive a detailed breakdown of how the money found under each line item is going to be spent?

These are just a few questions I raise, but there are definitely many, many more questions to ask. Maybe I will ask in detail when the question period comes. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

4:00

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, well, well, where to start. I remember one time coming home from a first day at a new job where there was a lot of work ahead, and I said to my wife: I don't know where to start. And she said: Start anywhere. So I shall.

I'll start, Mr. Chairman, with paper. I'll start with the incredible amount of duplicate paper that we get in this job. I'll start with the

fact that every morning we start our caucus meeting with *Hansard* from last night and the Order Paper and the Votes and Proceedings and a full copy of the bills, and then we get it all again later on the same day. Actually, I guess, we get the bills for the first time here in the House, and then we get those again the next day. You know, we must in this Legislature, in this House, be responsible for the clear-cutting of a significant part of the British Columbia forest with all the paper we go through, and I was wondering how to bring this up.

Then, I noticed that with all this paper that we duplicate, all this paper that we produce, for this we get a seven-page document proposing to have us approve the spending of \$5.5 billion with no supporting evidence whatsoever. Line items, that's all.

I know I'm starting to go over some of the same areas that some of my colleagues have already touched on here today, but I just don't understand a process that would ask the members of this House to approve an interim budget for a government that has yet to produce a budget for this fiscal year when they've had so much time. There's no justification in here whatsoever, some half-baked explanation of what expense and equipment/inventory purchases are and what nonbudgetary disbursements are and what capital investment is.

Then we get a line like in Advanced Education: \$255 million for two months' worth of expense and equipment/inventory purchases and \$20,300,000 for nonbudgetary disbursements for two months. I have no idea what those are. I mean, I know this. I know that our universities collectively have about a billion dollar infrastructure deficit, but I have no idea whether any of this money is going to solve that problem.

I know that one of the reasons why our universities and most of our colleges are forecasting running deficits or are having problems meeting their budgets is because they're paying astronomically high utility bills compared to what they used to have to pay. But I don't know whether any of the money in here for Advanced Education is going to help that. I know that the minister has talked about wanting to improve accessibility and wanting to improve affordability and wanting to improve the quality of postsecondary education. I cannot read from this whether any of this goes to support any of that.

Although this adds up to \$275 million of, I guess, routine expenses in the Department of Advanced Education for two months' worth of work, multiply that by six, I can see that it does not total up to \$3 billion for the postsecondary education endowment fund or a billion dollars for an increase in the Alberta heritage scholarship fund or half a billion dollars for the ingenuity fund. I mean, there has been much talk by this government over the last several weeks about how much they're reinvesting in postsecondary education, but I can't see if any of the reinvestment is in here. In fact, it would seem to suggest that it's not.

The reason why I bring this up, Mr. Chairman, is because when we ask for details, when we press for details, whether it's in question period, whether it's in news conferences outside this House, wherever it is, the answer that comes back from the government benches is: stay tuned; wait for the budget. Well, okay. When are we going to see the budget?

We started this session of the Legislature, depending, I guess, on who's doing the calculating – my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford said that the Legislature usually starts to sit the second week of February. My understanding is that it's usually right after the long weekend in February, the Family Day long weekend in February. Whichever it is, they've had at least an extra week if not an extra two weeks before the House went into session this time to do the grunt work on the budget.

Thank goodness we have spring break. Thank goodness we have

Easter break. It gives them another week to do the grunt work on the budget so that maybe in my lifetime we'll see the budget. I'm getting tired of waiting. Five billion dollars in here. They're asking us on trust, on faith, on blind faith, to approve their spending of \$5.5 billion, which, times six, is \$33 billion.

I know that the Minister of Finance scoffed at my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona, I believe it was, when he did that math in his head.

Mrs. McClellan: I did not. I never scoffed at him.

Mr. Taylor: I know that the Minister of Finance says that she would never scoff. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has the floor. The chair will be happy to recognize anybody else who wishes to participate in this debate. Please identify yourself to me. I will recognize you at the appropriate time.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I hope we can continue a lively and spirited debate about this.

I would love to find out more about what this \$5.5 billion is supposed to be spent on over the next two months. On behalf of the 33,000 constituents of Calgary-Currie I don't feel good approving on faith a government document that asks me to commit to spending 5.5 billion tax dollars over a two-month period. Projected across the entire year, that's \$33 billion. That's a huge number. Now, maybe it's the right number. I'm not even going to suggest right now that it's out of line, provided the government will furnish for us some fundamental details as to how they intend to spend the money. They're not doing that.

It doesn't matter what department I speak of. I used Advanced Education as an example because I am the critic for that portfolio for the Official Opposition, and I think I'm a little better briefed in the activities of that department and that area, that issue, than I am on the other areas. That's why we have other members who are critics for other areas. But I submit to you that I could have picked any ministry here: RAGE, Sustainable Resource Development, Infrastructure and Transportation.

Infrastructure and Transportation: their budget for two months is well over \$600 million, and only a fraction of that is for capital investment. Capital investment is described as "regardless of value: assets such as land; buildings; highways; roads; bridges; transportation and storage facilities; permanent accommodation," et cetera, et cetera, things that the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation ought to be concerned about, roads and schools and hospitals and public works and public buildings. That's one of the definitions of capital investment.

There's so much capital investment lacking in this province. An \$8 billion infrastructure deficit, yet they're only putting \$116,800,000 towards that in the next two months. You know, maybe that's the right number. Maybe that's a great start on a whole bunch of environmental impact assessments and other engineering studies that will lead us, you know, to a grand and golden future of infrastructure deficit making up. But I can't tell. I don't know. I just don't know.

I don't know if they're going to spend the money on the roads and the schools and the hospitals that this province and cities like Calgary and Edmonton and rural areas so desperately need or what they're going to do. I'd love to know why they spend so much more on expense and equipment/inventory purchases than they do on building roads and schools and hospitals and doing what that

department is supposed to do. Again, no information, Mr. Chairman. No details. No explanation.

4:10

You know, during the election campaign the voters of Alberta were told in so many words by the Premier that election campaigns are really no place to talk about health care reform. Now my assessment is that with a seven-page document that purports to have us approve 5 and a half billion dollars in spending for two short months, we are being told by this government that the Assembly is no place to go into detail about how our tax dollars are spent.

This was a government, Mr. Chairman, that prided itself, that got elected in the first place, this particular incarnation of the government, on getting us out of debt, eliminating the deficit, balancing the budget, and responsible, frugal spending. Well, that was then; this is now. I would suggest that the next time they say anything about our federal Liberal cousins in Ottawa, they take a good, hard look in the mirror because the members opposite are the ones who like to spend like they do in Ottawa. They may not be tax-and-spend Conservatives, but that's only because they've got oil in the ground to make up for the fact that they don't have to take it out of your pocket in order to waste it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Hinman: I can barely hear you, Mr. Chairman. I wasn't sure whether it was me or someone else that had the floor.

I appreciate the opportunity to stand and to participate in I guess it's called a debate on interim funding. The first thing that I'd like to address is the support to the Legislative Assembly. I received a lesson this morning on what they call good politics. I'd prefer to receive lessons on good government though. I have no desire to learn the shenanigans that can go on.

I'd like to see the details, and every member, I'm sure, is going to ask for this. Why do we vote on something that we receive no details on? Are we just fish? Are we just sheep that are supposed to walk over? Or maybe we're down at the buffalo jump, and we're supposed to land and have our heads smashed in. I'm not sure. Because that's what it would take to vote on a paper like this and say: oh yes, I'm in favour of it. I requested \$93,000 this morning from Members' Services, and I guess I'd like to see where the \$12 million – I was told that we have a very tight budget, and they couldn't afford to allow the Alliance caucus to have \$93,000 for research and secretarial services.

I've been told many times by different members across the floor that they have no business being in business. This looks like pretty big business to me: \$160 million going to agriculture. There's no question that we've had a major disaster in the province. It's gone on for two years, and we haven't taken a stance yet to realize that value-added is not only necessary if we desire to go on. We need to have our own packing plants.

I'm afraid that if we continue to follow and wait for our neighbours to the south to tell us that we are now okay and that they'll accept our beef – they're in a state of denial there in the south. They've had chronic wasting syndrome in their wildlife and in their game farms, and because they've shot, shoveled, and shut up with their beef, it doesn't mean that they don't have BSE in their cattle. If we wait to be connected to them rather than developing our own markets to raise our standards to the high quality that we have instead of staying at the low quality that goes on in their country, we're going to be devastated again when finally the world wakes up

and says, "We know that you have BSE in the U.S.," and once again we're linked to them.

If we were to put just a small percentage of this budget to be loaned out and have a mortgage on that, that Albertans would be able to call back if in fact those facilities were to go under and to resell them – we need the facilities here. They've played a great deal of games with the different ones, and they say: oh, if they have a good business plan, we'll accept it. That's hogwash. The fact is that business plans have gone forward. Because they're different, because they're not in the box, they say they're not credible. I have three that I'd love to sit down with the minister of agriculture and discuss with him, but I haven't had an invitation. If he'd send one, I'd make the time. He's had the time to fly down to my riding and talk there. I'd appreciate being able to speak to him because we have some ideas. There are some very good, innovative ideas that have come forward. There have been packing plants that have brought people from . . .

Mr. Horner: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development has a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Horner: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Standing Order 23(h) and (I), imputing motives to another member. This hon. member has not requested a meeting with this minister. This hon. member has not presented three business plans to me. This hon. member has not requested my itinerary as to where I was going and what I was doing, not that I would give it to him in the first place. I believe he has imputed to me the motive that I am not taking care of the producers in his area, and that is simply not true. I would like him to retract those statements and to apologize.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, do you understand this?

Mr. Hinman: I guess I'll retract. I'm not sure where I breached, but I'll apologize to the hon. member. I've been to his office several times, and I guess I'd need a paper trail. I'm a farmer, rancher, handshake type of guy, and I realize that in this world it's paper trails, and I will abide by that. I apologize for the misunderstanding. May I continue then?

The Deputy Chair: We will recognize that as a retraction and apology. Thank you. You may proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hinman: There are some very innovative ideas. They've brought people and talked to people in the Mideast, Japan, Korea, and Europe and packing plants that have the ability to bring the sales from those other countries, but when they have made application to I believe it's CVAT, they've been turned down. They don't have the innovation to see that this is a new business plan; therefore, they've ruled and said: well, it can't be successful because it's new.

This government has continued to aid the big slaughterhouses and those with connections in order to expand but still keep a monopoly here on the industry in the province. So I would plead on behalf of . . .

Mr. Horner: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development is rising again on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Horner: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member is again under Standing Order 23(h) and (I) imputing motives to this government by saying that we are not helping individual entrepreneurs or packing plants and only helping the big business ones.

Mr. Chairman, there have been 29 proposals come to my office that I have personally reviewed. Probably three of them are the three that this hon. member is referring to, although they may not have told him that. I don't know whether he's been that intimate with their plan development.

Secondly, we are indeed helping a number of packing plants that are not owned by multinational corporations. In due course the hon. member will understand what it takes to get a value-added business going in this province, as I do and as many of the entrepreneurs do.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that he should retract that last statement as well.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, before you speak I just want to draw to your attention the standing order under which the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development rose. It states:

23. A member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that member . . .

(h) makes allegations against another member.

You may respond to this point of order that is being raised.

Mr. Hinman: First of all, I can't hear the best, and there's been so much chatter going on, I don't know if I heard everything. But I'll apologize, and I'll continue on with a few ideas and some things that some of the constituents have asked me to address concerning this supplemental supply.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Peace River on the point of order.

Mr. Oberle: Point of order, Mr. Chairman, also on 23(h). I apologize for the delay. I had to look up the citation. I'm new.

In his initial retraction the member said that he had been to the minister's office several times, and he said, "I guess I need a paper trail," insinuating that the hon. minister was not telling the truth when he suggested that the member had not asked for an invitation.

4:20

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Anybody else wishing to participate on the point of order? Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, did you want to rise on the point of order?

Mr. Chase: Yes. Again, I'm new, and I apologize for requiring explanations, but I interpreted what the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner was trying to point out was that he had physically gone to the office of the minister of agriculture, who is an extremely busy man. What he meant, I'm assuming, by the paper trail was that he's used to doing things first-hand – knock on the door, "Is it convenient?" kind of thing – rather than simply writing notes. I think you probably realize now that given this dependency upon paper, that's probably another approach: when at first you don't succeed, try the note. I don't think there's a deliberate attempt here. We're learning, and hopefully that will be accepted.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, you've already spoken. Do you want to add on?

Mr. Horner: I just wanted to make a point of clarification, Mr. Chairman. As many members in this House well know, my door is always open if I'm there. Any MLA that comes to my door is more than welcome without an appointment if I'm there and able to spend the time. In fact, this hon. member has been in my office, and we have had a chat on a couple of occasions, I believe. The offer is always there to all members of this House to come into my office, and if I am there and I have the time to chat for whatever brief moment or issue it is, they're more than welcome to do that.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I hope that for the new members this is a learning experience. What we say here has a reaction or there can be a reaction to what we say, and a point of order can be raised if somebody is making allegations against another member. The chair will consider this as a learning experience. I once again caution the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner that the choice of words can lead to such points of order and disruption in the debate, so guide yourself accordingly.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: I appreciate that, Mr. Chair, and I make a full retraction. I was not insinuating at any time denial or anything like that, just frustration on the three packing plants that I'm working with that haven't received the answers that they're looking for. We definitely need to open up and have a better line of communication, and that's the avenue that I'm trying to pursue. I appreciate the offer from the hon. minister of agriculture, and we'll try and schedule something together because I do understand and know that it's a huge task and a very busy schedule that he has.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hinman: To go on, in agriculture, though, there are many people and ranchers in my area that are still struggling with the CAIS program. They haven't received them yet. Earlier in this House they talked about 70 per cent of 2003 payments being out. I guess, in view of that, those payments haven't all gone out, yet we're willing to spend and look forward to the future. I just want to bring it to attention that if necessary we need to put more facilities and people there so that this can get out quicker because there are a lot of people in dire straits waiting for that money, and a year behind does seem quite a tragedy for those people.

I'd like to discuss a little bit more, also, about education. The shutting down of the rural schools and the rightsizing is a huge concern. It's very difficult for some of the specific schools. For example, I'll use the one in Milk River. It's an old school, but it's still fairly sound. The minister has told them: we won't look at readdressing this because there is less than 80 per cent being used. They don't understand. They'd like to be able to increase their curriculum and offer more things for those students, yet they're told that they're going to have to tear down their gym and tear down the library to bring other things in.

The point that I'm trying to bring up is that it would be very nice to have the priorities and where this money is being spent so we really could have a decent discussion on where we think it should go. But what are we to discuss with just a one-line entry? I mean, if we were to take this to the bank and say that we wanted to borrow money – and that's what we're doing: we're asking taxpayers to collect money so that we can spend this \$5 billion but no details. I find that very difficult to address. How are you supposed to proceed and say that I'm representing those people from Cardston-Taber-Warner, yet I'm not privy to know where the \$5 billion is going to be spent other than just in lump sums? Of course, this government has done its due diligence.

I mean, I think that maybe just 24 people and we could've saved

a lot of money there and let this cabinet minister continue to run the executive of the province and not worry about the rest of us to spend the time to look at these things. We're struggling here on the other side of the House wanting to make Alberta better, wanting to work with them, yet we're given no information. My biggest request at this time would be to please give a detailed breakdown of where this money is wanted and will be spent so that we could look at it and prioritize it to the best advantage to Albertans.

With the huge surplus that we continue to come in with, I also struggle with the fact that why do we not see tax cuts coming in a massive amount when we have an \$8 billion surplus? That money should be going back to the Alberta taxpayers who have put that in there. The purpose of government isn't to collect extra taxes so we have a lot and can make all of a sudden these contingency plans. It's to collect the taxes. The municipal level is not allowed to do this. Why are we allowed to do it on the provincial level?

With that, I'll sit down and appreciate being able to address this. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Deputy Premier, rising on a point of order or wanting to respond?

Mrs. McClellan: No, no. Just thought I'd wait till three or four had made comments and then offer some clarification.

I think that when this bill was introduced, the explanation was given, perhaps not well enough, and I think it was given today again by our Government House Leader, perhaps again didn't expound long enough or well enough. I certainly appreciate that there are a number of new members in this House that are not entirely familiar at this point with the process that we go through with the budget.

I do want to make it clear that I don't scoff at anybody. Sometimes I like to engage in repartee as much as anyone else. I was a new member in this House 18 years ago, and I appreciated the courtesy and respect that others gave me that had been here longer, and I hope that I accord the same to the new members here as well as the ones that have been here for some time.

I want to just point out again that this is for two months' operation of government. It is to carry us to June 1 of '05. For new members' information in particular, each year when the budget is presented, there is a three-year business plan of government and by department. That three-year plan lays out the expenditures that are anticipated in the current year of budget time frame and the next budget time frame, so the three years. In 2004-05 there was an overall three-year business plan for government and by department. If you wanted to look at that, you would get an indication of what the anticipation was for the second year, which is the year we're in now – I'm trying to be clear, not confusing – which would give you some indication as to what those dollars might have been anticipated for.

However, the more important part that I hear from members is the question on the amounts. I don't think anybody is doubting that it will take that much money to operate the government for the period of time. One of the reasons that you have it larger than you would if you simply multiplied by the remaining months is that, as I think I indicated when I introduced the bill, in many cases grants are given at the beginning of the fiscal year. In some cases payments are made monthly. In some cases payments are made maybe quarterly or in a half year. But in many instances we pay grants to entities on the 1st of the year, so there will be a higher amount paid in the first month that may not carry on throughout.

So I wanted to make sure that members understood that. It was an interesting calculation, hon. member, a bit scary but an interesting calculation that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona made in his addition and subtraction, but I hope that knowing that you have

grants paid up front at the first of the year, that can be substantial, gives you some comfort level in your multiplication.

4:30

So, Mr. Chairman, I simply wanted to offer those clarifications. As the practice has been, and for new members, whenever we deal with matters in the House, if there are questions that I don't deal with at the time – we want to allow as much time here for members to raise their questions – I will respond to each individual member in writing. Now, the normal practice in the budget process is that I would respond to those questions before the end of budget. Will I have the opportunity to get written response to you before we deal with this bill? Maybe not, but you will get the response.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With the exception of what adjusters refer to as acts of God, which in this province include floods, blizzards, prairie and lightning-strike forest fires, hail, drought, tornados, pine beetles, and grasshoppers, to name a few, minus of course Moses' amphibious plague, the government should be able to plan an accurate budget projection. This government has had 34 years and counting of budget planning experience, but for the past decade it has alternated between flying by the seat of its pants and flying on autopilot. It appears more and more that this government, while very good at subtracting, as evidenced by ongoing cuts or freezes to health care, public education, social programs, AISH, minimum wage, infrastructure, roads, parks, and protected areas, seems to have trouble adding and balancing budgets or publicly accounting for expenditures within a fixed budgeting process.

I would be interested in hearing from government ministers how they arrived at their budgets for the first quarter and what types of projects they are planning to kick off the centennial year. As a new member myself and for the new members who represent almost a third of this House, this type of overview would provide a form of whirlwind busman's in-service initiation tour. I would like to at this moment thank the Minister of Finance. I do appreciate her explanation, and as a teacher every bit of learning I can receive is appreciated.

I would especially be interested in how the departments for which I share the critic portfolio operate. These departments include Infrastructure and Transportation as well as parks and protected areas. These are two departments that I would not begrudge major budget increases if I could be assured that the money went to targeted areas. For example, I would like to see upgrades begun on highway 2, especially between Carstairs and Crossfield, which seem to have two levels of roads on the south side. It really appears to be a matter of you take the high road, and I'll take the low road, and I'll be in Calgary afore ye. The trouble occurs, however, when you try to change lanes, dropping suddenly off the upper lip into the lower trough.

Another local highway that I would like to see repaired is highway 8, that unfortunately has killed a number of Calgary commuters and injured many more. Other dangerous highways include 43 and 63, which lead to Fort McMurray. Both these highways have become killer strips, which should have been fixed long ago. There is a secondary road problem where rural residents have to do the daily joust with logging trucks and heavy well-servicing equipment. The municipality roads are equally atrocious. Each year radio stations and local papers run contests to name and provide locations of their most infamous pothole. The contests receive hundreds of different entries.

Besides the road problems the biggest deficit Albertans have faced for the past 12 years has been in the area of infrastructure. The Calgary Conservative caucus seems to think that the best way to cut costs is to close schools and hospitals rather than open them. The problem with this short-sighted logic is that premature closing costs more money in the long term for the replacement. While we wait and wait for these replacements to finally occur, such as at the southeast hospital, which has been set back now to 2010, service deteriorates.

When the government formulates or calculates its interim budgets, I would be interested to hear at some point whether the Finance minister could explain to what extent inflation and population growth are taken into account. I would also like to hear from either the minister of learning or perhaps the minister of infrastructure whether the cost of busing thousands of children out of the suburbs of cities like Edmonton and Calgary is actually cheaper than building community schools in their areas.

I also wonder whether the time spent on school buses would not be much better spent at home or at school, for example in libraries either reading for pleasure, doing homework, or working on research projects. As a teacher of 34 years, I realize the need to provide for a variety of activities to keep students actively involved both mentally and physically. Long bus rides rather than short walks or jogs fail to provide this necessary stimulation.

I would also like to ask the ministers of learning and advanced learning whether they consider education to be an investment in the future or a financial liability. Given the resource bounty in this province, which is the envy of all the other provinces and states, I can't help but wonder why a larger portion of our annual GPP isn't allotted to a pursuit of education.

The majority of school boards in this province, which are running provincially-forced deficits, are searching for alternate ways to generate revenue. One of these ways is to actively recruit students from foreign countries, in particular Korea, China, and Japan. However, when these students pay the equivalent of an education head tax for the privilege of studying in Alberta's schools, the reality, due to lack of funding for English as a Second Language, is that they find themselves frequently isolated, immersed in English-speaking classes. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that there is a dropout rate of close to 75 per cent of high school ESL students. Again, I would be very much in favour of addressing this problem either through hiring more ESL teachers to reduce class sizes or extending the number of years for which an ESL student is funded.

Another factor that could decrease the dropout rate would be to exempt students whose language skills aren't sufficiently advanced from being forced to take departmental or provincial exams, which create a great deal of stress for Alberta-born students, never mind immigrant children.

One of the ways the department of learning could have a greater bang for their buck would be to recognize the value of the variety of daily in-class evaluations and school-based testing and put the money spent on creating and marking end-of-the-year, out-the-door, one-shot, nonremedial government exams into curriculum development where it would do some good. Torturing grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 students with these one-shot, one-to-two-hour tests, which especially at the grade 12 level account for half of the student's mark, seems sufficiently unusual and cruel punishment. But like putting salt into a festering wound, the government follows its Fraser Institute advisors' advice and publishes the school results.

How many times will these tests be administered and published before the government realizes that there is a direct relationship between marks and socioeconomic status? If you want to improve grades, address the underlying issues of poverty, health, and housing, rather than beating up kids . . .

Dr. Brown: Point of order.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill is rising on a point of order. Are you rising on a point of order?

Point of Order
Reading from Documents

Dr. Brown: Mr. Chairman, I rise under Standing Order 23(d). The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity appears to be reading extensively from a document, contrary to 23(d) and also *Beauchesne* 473, that members are not to be reading extensively. They can consult extensive notes, but he appears to be reading from a document which is not before the House.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Once the students have navigated their way through the grade 12 process – they've gone through 12 years of crowded classrooms, of underbudgeted programming – they finally arrive at the gates of postsecondary institutions. One that the hon. member is very familiar with as he was formerly involved at the University of Calgary. He and I have had numerous discussions about the importance of postsecondary funding. The problem is that when they arrived at these school doors, 25 per cent of them were turned away this fall because there were no seats available.

4:40

The Deputy Chair: Are you speaking on the point of order? I just recognized you if you wanted to respond to it.

Mr. Chase: Oh, sorry. Was I reading from a document? The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill caught me. I admit that I had been reading from my personal notes that I had written. Could I have a qualification from a more learned member as to whether I'm allowed to read my notes or not.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill rose on a point of order citing Standing Order 23(d), which says:

A member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that member . . .

(d) refers at length to debates of the current session or reads unnecessarily from *Hansard* or from any other document, but a member may quote relevant passages for the purposes of a complaint about something said or of a reply to an alleged misrepresentation.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity was reading from his personal notes, and there is nothing wrong with that. So there is no point of order.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, you may proceed.

Mr. Chase: Well, thank you for that clarification.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: I have been an English teacher, and I've written a lot of essays, letters to the editor. That's part of the reason I'm here today. Anyway, I realize that I'm not giving you the full benefit of my rhetoric, so I'll put my notes away.

What I was getting to is that in the postsecondary area, as I pointed out, 25 per cent of students were not admitted into Alberta institutes of postsecondary learning. They had the marks, the marks which have increased tremendously over the years. They met the 80

per cent plus averages. They qualified. Somehow, whether it was their own personal debt or their family's debt, they were able to raise the money for the inflated tuition costs in Alberta. They came up to the university institutions, they applied, and they were turned away.

So Alberta lost twice. They lost because these kids were held back in their academic process. They lost a second time because they had to find other alternates. They had to go outside of the province to get their education. That is very unfortunate in this province. We have the wealth, but how we invest it – and that's what we're talking about today in terms of interim budgets – seems to be questionable.

The other area that the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner – and I keep thinking: boy, what a title having all those three; mine's simple, Calgary-Varsity – mentioned was the need to invest in not only our own marketing, our infrastructure for slaughterhouse capacity, but also I would add to his concerns the need for 100 per cent testing.

If we want to develop new markets to counteract the border closures and our dependency on our American neighbours, we cannot be always at their mercy. What we do by 100 per cent testing is we open up the markets in countries like Japan, who have already instituted 100 per cent testing. We cannot afford the opportunity to miss markets like the growing market in China, which is rapidly outstripping all other economies. The only way we can get into those countries and their economies and derive the benefits is through 100 per cent testing. My understanding is that that testing is available. The best time to test before it hits the food chain is obviously prior to the slaughter. We need to invest money into preventative feeding practices that allow ruminant waste to turn up again in terms of food. We've got to close that door as well.

I do very much appreciate your patience. When I talked about long bus rides, I'm sure you were thinking: I feel I'm on a long bus ride now. With that, I will sit down.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for clarification, and thank you, hon. member for Calgary, for qualifying that creative writing is acceptable, but *Hansard* dependability isn't. Thanks very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Assembly. I will speak to the interim supply budget regarding, first, education. At least I've got the minister of postsecondary listening to me, hopefully, for a minute. Anyway, I do appreciate the Deputy Premier spending some time with us to educate us. That was very much appreciated.

I'm not able to tell exactly where the Education budget is going, but I do hope that one of the key items in the interim budget is the matter of diagnostic testing. Again, I would like to address this in terms of the House. I do believe that the whole matter of diagnostic testing at the elementary level, K to 3, is very, very important for helping children adjust to elementary education.

I also hope that there's some vision in the interim supply budget of Education for a look at the whole business of dropouts. I think it's time that we looked at that to see if we can get a handle on the 20 to 30 per cent, if there's some indication or some good information that we can draw on to help make us do some extra work in curriculum development.

I hope that there's some new direction in terms of curriculum development for teachers, where teachers are asked to introduce a new curriculum into the schools of Alberta, that there are some dollars there for teacher in-service. I think it's also a real key, it seems to me, to look at the whole matter of achievement testing – this would be very interesting – and ascertain if it's doing the job.

As an old evaluator of schools throughout Alberta we used to look at the whole instructional process, how instruction was going, and the administrative process and had a fairly good handle on what was taking place in schools. I wonder if achievement testing does that. Sometimes I think the whole business of achievement testing is a bit of a trophy hanger.

New dollars I think should be indicated in the Education budget for gifted children, and I hope that's something that the new minister will look at as well.

I hope there are some new ideas in terms of curriculum development on drug education.

I think there's some need to look at the whole matter of community schools not only in the rural areas of the province and revisit it from an urban sense and broaden out the whole business of adult education and utilizing schools for helping seniors in the evening and that kind of thing.

The whole matter of school fees hopefully will be looked at by the new minister through this interim budget that we're looking at. OPM – operations, plants, and maintenance – is another matter.

These are the items that I hope the Minister of Education will look at in terms of his new budget or in the interim budget that we're looking at.

Mr. Chairman, there's another matter that I would like to speak to today, and that's the matter of health. It's not clear to me in looking at the interim statement if there is some money there for the whole question of crystal meth and what's happening there. Last night at our caucus we met a parent group and an RCMP officer who were telling us the very, very tragic cases that are facing children and adults with drug problems.

There are two or three things that I hope are identified in the health budget. One is the matter of facilities. I'm not talking necessarily here of new facilities. I think there are facilities in the province already up, some of them that I'm aware of that are empty that could be utilized for this. I think it's very important to look at facilities for the treatment of these types of people. Also, the matter of treatment. I think that treatment has to be looked at in terms of introducing the medical people more in the treatment. AADAC, as I understand it – and I stand to be corrected – does not have any services for children under 18 in terms of the crystal meth problem.

The other interesting issue that's very, very important in this whole issue is the matter of co-ordination or interministry co-operation, and we're talking there of the matters of Justice, Children's Services, Solicitor General, those types of things. So I'm hoping that in the health budget there is some money for crystal meth, and I hope that we can do something about it.

4:50

One of the other areas that I'd like to comment on for more of a landowner outside the province – and I was very encouraged to hear the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development talking about the pine beetle problem. I'm sorry to say that in British Columbia, where I'm aware of this, I think the government of the day did not do a good job of handling this issue. I'm pleased to hear that the minister is going to take a positive attack and move on this very quickly. It's a very serious problem, and unless it's cut in the bud, I think we could find ourselves with a very serious problem in our forests.

I see the Minister of Gaming is sitting over there wide awake this afternoon listening to me, and I'm so pleased about that. Sir, besides talking about your budget, I would like to ask you if you could help us new people in St. Albert and give us a new handle on your services. My good constituency office manager was told, when we had a group of about 10 citizens that wanted to hear about the

gaming matter, that I was making a political matter out of this. You look like a very wise and prudent man. I wonder if you could help us. I'm seeing you there, so I'm making a plea. I'd like to just get information for some people who want to start some things out there in a nonprofit way, and we'd really appreciate it.

Now, I see that the minister of health has come back. I'd just like to make a pitch one more time if I can. [interjections]

Chair's Ruling

Referring to the Absence of Members

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we had this discussion earlier on today, that by convention we do not make reference to a member's presence or absence in the Assembly. So I'd caution you because a number of people were wanting to rise on a point of order on this matter.

Mr. Flaherty: So should I sit down, sir?

The Deputy Chair: No, no, no. All I'm saying is I'm cautioning you. We do not make reference to a member's presence or absence in this Assembly.

Mr. Flaherty: Pardon me, sir. Thank you for that.

Debate Continued

Mr. Flaherty: I'd like to just comment on the remark that someone made over here to me as well that bothered me, but I'll just leave that for your good judgment, sir. It did bother me a lot. I'll leave it.

I was just going to suggest my train of thought. Oh, I was going back to the question of treatment and residential care for crystal meth people. In St. Albert we did a survey under a former area manager of mine and we found out that of the 12 agencies present there now, we do not have any agency that does intervention and treatment for crystal meth. I can't say that it's scientifically done, but it did concern me. I did speak to a lady in your constituency last night who spoke very highly of you, and she said that it was something that you would probably be interested in.

So I'll just raise that through you, Mr. Chairman. I do apologize again for making that statement, and I hope that anyone else that wants to see me about some issues will do it face to face.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chair's Ruling

Insulting Language

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the Minister of Health and Wellness, I just want to raise a very important point in this Assembly. Each and every member here in this Assembly is an honourable member, and when we make catcalls that are insulting, it is an insult to the entire Assembly.

Now, I as the chair did not hear the catcall that ended up frustrating the hon. Member for St. Albert, but whoever it is, please, we have to be respectful of our colleagues in this Assembly. So whoever it is, I caution you: do not do it again.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Debate Continued

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak just to the last point that the hon. Member for St. Albert addressed, which was the capacity of either AADAC or Alberta Health and Wellness to provide intervention and treatment for persons affected by crystal meth. It is a grave concern. It is one of the reasons why I have been in support of the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, who

has been campaigning on initiatives to assure Albertans of better treatment and intervention for youth that are so afflicted.

I'm going to take under advisement the concerns that the hon. member has mentioned about his own local community. I know that if there's a perception that there isn't anybody to provide either intervention or treatment, I'm sure we can try to rectify that. I think the one area that the hon. member and I would probably both find a common ground of understanding on is that today in Alberta, other than the AARC facility in Calgary, there are not places to secure treatment for people that ultimately protect the child on a 24-hour basis. For the families who have been facing the attempted suicides, the often very traumatic side effects of the indulgence and addiction to crystal meth, this poses a real problem. What AADAC has been looking at is a program to intervene and treat but not necessarily secure or protect, so we will have a great deal to do before we are fully able to work with the youth the way that we wish.

If I may, Mr. Chairman, I would like to take the initiative to follow up on what treatments are available in St. Albert so that we can make sure that as much as possible information is provided to the hon. member and, most importantly, that if there is some gap in service there that is provided elsewhere in the region currently, we can try to fulfill that. It's our youth that are imperiled.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've been watching the proceedings this afternoon and the points of order and some catcalls, and it reminds me of my first year in the Assembly in '97. I have a great deal of sympathy for new members of the House. There is a sharp learning curve, and we all survive it. We learn. I ask for patience and courtesy on the part of all members of the House towards each other. I was quite shocked to hear an utterance a while ago that was, I guess, directed at one of the new members of this House when he had the floor and was speaking. I am saddened by such actions and this kind of behaviour in the Legislature.

Without naming names and without rising on a point of order, I just want to request and hope that all members in the Assembly will show the courtesy and respect due to all of us. We are here because we have been elected to be here, and our rights and privileges and our dignity must not come under attack from any of us. There's a need for self-discipline here, and I hope that we'll all exercise that.

5:00

Having said that, I want to return to the debate on the interim supply estimates for the budget. I heard the minister of health address a question raised by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I think, with respect to this consultation that the Premier and the minister of health are planning to have in early May. The numbers are mentioned here; 500 people will be invited to this assembly. Participants will be picked, of course, by the minister or by the Premier's office or perhaps in consultation with each other. We certainly won't be privy to who gets invited or who doesn't.

I just want to mention that I have attended over the last eight years as a member of the Assembly two forums of this kind. The first one followed public hearings held by an all-party committee on justice, which went around the province and provided a forum for Albertans to come to this committee to speak their mind with respect to the concern that they had. That exercise in public consultation – it was free and open and transparent – which was held by this committee, which every party represented in the House was on, was the prelude to the second-stage consultation. It was held in Calgary, and 400 or 500 people were invited to this forum on justice. So I can see that there was some effort made to get ready for the two-, three-day event in Calgary by an all-party committee of this Legislature going out to Albertans to listen to them, to take them seriously, and then bring in

a set of recommendations which we made. That report became in a sense the basis on which the next stage of the consultation was undertaken.

Now, the second forum that I attended had to do with the environment, and again as a critic for environment for the NDP opposition I attended that forum. The flavour was very different. The whole thing seemed to be orchestrated in a way that there was no possibility for people who were attending it to raise questions which didn't fit the format. The format in a sense fettered us in a way that there was really no debate that took place there. There was very sophisticated electronic gadgetry that was used to sort of consult people: press this button if you're for this or for that one. I felt rather manipulated, you know, attending that one.

My fear is that the health forum that is being planned here follows the consultation model of the environmental sort of exercise that was done. It's going to be an expensive one. It's going to be one that I'm afraid is going to be more of an exercise in shaping the outcomes of the forum even before it takes place. It will be based on money. It will be dealing with an issue of such central importance to Albertans, has been over the last eight years since I've been in this Assembly, and to now have the Premier and our Minister of Health and Wellness organize this opportunity to consult Albertans by hand-picking those who can come to this forum I think would be a waste of effort. I'm afraid to say that it sounds more like a cynical exercise in manipulating public opinion than in really engaging people in asking: what exactly is it that you propose needs to be done to fix the system and to prepare it for becoming stronger and more responsive to the needs of the next year and ten years hence?

The budget associated with this exercise. As the minister has said, she doesn't quite have a handle on it yet, but she will bring the information back to us. If the budget for this May exercise is going to come from this department, then I think that the minister at least should have been prepared well enough to tell the House what the budget is for this exercise. Dollars for it will be drawn from the interim supply estimate that the department is presenting here.

Unfortunately, alas, that information is not there. Is it going to be \$500 per head, \$600, \$700? I don't think it should be difficult to at least bring in some sort of estimate as to the costs of that exercise. What is it going to cost the so-called experts that are going to fly in from all over the world, I presume? How many of them are going to be there? We are only two months away from this event, yet the minister doesn't know who's coming, what they're going to be paid for coming, what the costs are going to be.

I don't think it's that. I think it's another indication to me of a government that runs on autopilot. It's a government that likes to run on remote control rather than using the resources that it has in terms of technical resources, professional resources, human skills and abilities that it has in its own civil service to be able to do its homework and come to this Legislature prepared, and say: "Here are the costs. Here is what we are hoping it'll be like. It may be 5 per cent this way or that way, but we're asking you as part of these interim supply estimates to approve this particular budget item or this particular estimate as part of this because it's a special event. We've been working on it for many years. We attach to it a great deal of importance. This is the Premier's pet project, and here are the estimates."

The fact that the government has not done its homework on it, the fact that the Minister of Health and Wellness is unable to give us any estimated dollar figures on it I think speaks volumes of the way this government has been running the affairs of this province.

Another reminder, going back in time. Eight years ago when I first got elected and came to the House, we were dealing with 18 ministries, 18 departments. Looking at the budgets or at the interim supply estimates, the emphasis was on a small government: we can

do it with less; 18 ministers are more than enough. Immediately after the 2001 election, that number was increased by six. The size of the cabinet grew by 33 per cent in one fell swoop.

So it's a big government. It's a massively large cabinet, yet its ministers are unable to bring any information before the House that we can at least use to base our determination of whether we're going to vote for it or against it. It's a highly undesirable situation in which the members of the Assembly are put by the failure of the ministers and their departments to give us at least bare minimum information that would be considered necessary in order for us to vote in \$5.5 billion over the next two months, come the end of this month. So it's not what we expected.

I have some questions, for example, about the Executive Council; \$5.3 million is being asked for that. It would be important for the House to know how much of this money is going to be needed for the operations for the two-month period from the 1st of April to the end of May on the Public Affairs Bureau. Is that bureau being expanded? How much money is needed for the operations of that propaganda machine that's controlled from the Premier's office? No information on it, yet we are asked to vote for \$5.3 million just for the Executive Council.

It's not good enough, Mr. Chairman, for the government to come before this House without some information that's necessary for the members of this House to make up their mind whether to vote for the request that's before us in the form of interim supply estimates for 2005-2006.

I could go on, but I will stop here and let some other hon. members take a turn. Thank you.

5:10

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. [some applause]

Ms Pastoor: Don't be doing that. I haven't read this yet.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Being new and being exposed to what is called interim supply made me have to go back and think about budgeting. My only experience with large budgeting is with the city of Lethbridge. But more importantly, a lot of my budgeting experience is with my own budget. If I was overdrawn \$5 billion – however, let's back it up into my reality. If I was overdrawn by \$500, at 6 per cent I'm now \$530 in the hole, and if I kept going on and on and on like that, I would soon be homeless. So where would I get that money? That's why I envy this government and their ability to have these interim supply estimates. I don't have the ability to go to someone else, but they can go to the taxpayers and bail themselves out. Because I was unable to live within the budget that I had or perhaps properly project my costs, better yet, I would have had special dollars in an envelope labelled "contingencies," and these would be taken from that present year's budget.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the Gaming department. Because these are just one-line items, some of my questions would be: I would like to know if these dollars are being used for the horse-racing track at Balzac. In my mind that track should be able to stand on its own and be a separate project. They should not have to have interim money to carry them over. That is a separate project, and truly they should have been able to project the funding for that project.

For Health and Wellness I'm hoping that these dollars go toward – the definition is "salaries and supplies." I would really like to hope that these were for the extra salaries of extra personal care aides that would be hired in our long-term care facilities. And supplies: one of the words is "consumable inventories" for the Department of Health and Wellness. To me a consumable inventory would be disposable pads that we use on our seniors when they live in nursing homes or long-term care or, in fact, in assisted or

designated living situations. I'm not sure – and I don't care how absorbent it is – that one a night is sufficient. So I would love to think that that consumable inventory would be proper numbers of disposables and that this isn't considered part of a bottom line and that this is why they only get one a night.

I'd like to think, too, that some of these wellness dollars would go toward the U of L project. They have a huge wellness centre coming onside, and they're valiantly going ahead with it. It isn't just for Lethbridge; it's for the surrounding area as well, and it's certainly necessary, by the government's own desires, to move more toward prevention than treatment.

The International and Intergovernmental Relations line asks for \$3 million. My question would be: what is that \$3 million for at this point? I know that we have just opened up a new office in Washington. I also understand that Washington is very expensive, and that we also have the U.S. exchange rate that we have to factor into that. But even considering those, I really believe that \$3 million is a pile of a chunk of change for someone that didn't project the project properly.

head: **Vote on Interim Supply Estimates 2005-06
Offices of the Legislative Assembly,
Government, and Lottery Fund**

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, but pursuant to Standing Order 59(2) and Government Motion 14, agreed to March 15, 2005, I must now put the following question. Those members in favour of each of the resolutions not yet voted upon relating to the 2005-2006 interim estimates for the offices of the Legislative Assembly, government and lottery fund, please say aye.

Some Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed, please say no.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Deputy Chair: The motion is carried.
Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report the interim supply estimates.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports as follows.

All resolutions relating to the 2005-2006 interim estimates for the offices of the Legislative Assembly, government and lottery fund have been approved.

For support to the Legislative Assembly, expense of \$12,000,000; the office of the Auditor General for expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$4,500,000; office of the Ombudsman, expense of \$700,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, expense of \$700,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, expense of \$100,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, expense of \$1,100,000.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$10,600,000.

Advanced Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$255,000,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$20,300,000.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$160,600,000.

Children's Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$348,100,000.

Community Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$90,000,000; capital investment, \$11,000,000.

Economic Development: expense, \$14,000,000.

Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$665,600,000.

Energy: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$59,000,000.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$22,700,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$5,300,000.

Finance: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$20,600,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$11,700,000.

Gaming: expense, \$38,200,000; lottery fund payments, \$316,000,000.

Government Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$17,600,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,044,200,000; capital investment, \$5,600,000.

Human Resources and Employment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$136,500,000.

5:20

Infrastructure and Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$485,300,000; capital investment, \$116,800,000.

Innovation and Science: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$35,400,000.

International and Intergovernmental Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$3,000,000.

Justice: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$67,300,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$31,600,000.

Restructuring and Government Efficiency: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$66,200,000.

Seniors and Community Supports: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$347,100,000.

Solicitor General: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$74,100,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$41,900,000; capital investment, \$3,500,000.

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

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that we adjourn until 8 this evening, at which time we return in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:24 p.m.]

