

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, April 11, 2005

1:30 p.m.

Date: 05/04/11

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as members of the Legislature. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members, would you now participate in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Please participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. Jeffrey Parker, the Canadian consul general, based in Seattle, Washington, and appointed in September 2004. Mr. Parker and his team are responsible for the four-state region of Alaska, Oregon, Idaho, and Washington.

These four states' economies combined are equal to one-third of Canada's entire domestic economy. They are important partners for Alberta trade, investment, technology, and tourism. Along with my fellow cabinet ministers and provincial government colleagues I had the pleasure of meeting with Mr. Parker today. We had a good, wide-ranging discussion. I would ask that our honoured guest, seated in your gallery, rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the pleasure of having lunch with two generous Calgarians today, and it's now my honour to introduce them to you and through you to all members of the Legislature. Every year the Calgary Homeless Foundation raises money by making fun of me. This year its annual Premier's roast was called Rootin Tootin Ralph, and part of the evening was a live auction. The gentlemen here today were the successful bidders on lunch with the Premier.

My guests are two members of the Calgary Homeless Foundation's board of directors: Sam Kolias, president and CEO of Boardwalk rental properties, and David McIlveen, Boardwalk's

director of community development and social services. As an aside, Mr. Speaker, Boardwalk is one of few if any private-sector companies that offers rental subsidies to low-income people. I see that our special guests are already standing. I'd ask that they receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has just designated two new occupations in apprenticeship and industry training: oil and gas transportation services and well testing services supervisors. These new designations mean that there will now be provincially recognized industry standards in these careers, giving people in these occupations a clear picture of the skills they need to succeed in these fields.

Today I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a number of people who have made this possible, beginning with my congratulations to the first five recipients of certificates under the new well testing supervisor designation, and who are in the members' gallery today. From Pure Energy we have Jason Tremblay and Mark Wohlgemuth, and from Lonkar Well Testing we have Kevin Peterson, Ryan White, and Allen Townsend.

Also with us today to celebrate this success are a number of other guests who work hard to ensure that Alberta has the skilled workers it needs for the future. Roger Soucy of the Petroleum Services Association of Canada is also in the members' gallery today. Seated in the public gallery we have Brian Bickley, chair of the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board; Cheryl Knight, from the Petroleum Human Resources Council of Canada; Elizabeth Aquin, from the Petroleum Services Association of Canada; and Kim Dingwall, from the Petroleum Industry Training Service.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we have representatives from the two companies who are currently employing our first five certificate recipients: Ed Klein and Glenn Berry, from Lonkar Well Testing, and Scott Dancey, from Pure Energy. I would like them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome and in the case of our certificate recipients the congratulations of all members of this Assembly.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, today it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly some very special students who come from a community called Wabasca-Desmarais. They've travelled many, many miles. They're from the Mistassiny school, 26 visitors, and are seated in both the public and the members' galleries. They're led by teacher Edgar Bailey as well as parent helpers Don Tessier, Jennifer MacDonald, and Alvina Cardinal. I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you 23 visitors to the Legislature from the Rockyview Christian school in Pincher Creek. I understand that maybe some of them are in the members' gallery, and some of them are in the public gallery. These 23 folks are accompanied today by teachers Jeff Blosser and Lance Giesbrecht and parent helpers Galen and Gwen Toews, Jerry and Wendy Toews, Merle Unruh, Lavonne Blosser, and Karen Regehr, all from the beautiful, breathtaking constituency of Livingstone-Macleod. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce 10 energetic and young-at-heart seniors from my church, Christ community church. We call them the Diamond Club because they sparkle with energy and enthusiasm. They are led today by Mrs. Shirley Wedman, who is the group leader. They are in the public gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 13 grade 6 students from Killam public school, who are the future of rural Alberta and this province. They are accompanied by their group leader, Ginette Dammann, and one of Alberta's many fine, outstanding, and quality teachers, Karin Brussé, who wrote a proposal for an Access Network contest, which means that these students are all going to be in our fine capital city for a week. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I'd like to introduce to this Legislative Assembly a fine group of students from Dunluce elementary school. They're accompanied today by three teachers, Irene Huk, Lori Whalen, and Krista Penno, and also a student teacher who is about to begin teaching, hopefully, next year, Mr. Cunningham. Along with them are two parents, Mrs. Morris and Miss Turpin. Today their tour has been led by one of our employees from visitor services, who actually was my junior high school teacher perhaps some five, 10 years ago, Mr. Chuck Grelli. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two individuals who are not only visiting the Assembly but are also visiting our country. Nina Limacher and Baptiste PouBlang are two Rotary exchange students who have been going to school in High River since September 2004. Nina hails from Lucerne, Switzerland, and will be graduating from grade 12 this year. Baptiste is from Dunkirk, France, and is in grade 11. These two young people are accompanied by their Rotarian counsellor, Irv Cherneski, and his wife, Kaye. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three individuals. In the members' gallery today we have Dorothy Pacquette. Dorothy is the first female pipefitter accepted to the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters in northern Alberta. Randy Beaudry is her beau and accompanied her on her recent trek from Fort McMurray, the long walk to protest the use of temporary foreign workers. Jack

Hubler is a long-time leader in Alberta's construction and pipeline industry and is with the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters.

In the building here today Dorothy was awarded a centennial medal for her efforts to act as a role model for young women in our province seeking apprenticeship, for young aboriginals, and for all her efforts over the many years she's been working in the industry. I ask that they rise and that you all give the warm welcome of this Assembly to them.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to everyone in this Assembly a constituent of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, seated in the members' gallery, Mr. Glenn Hennig, who is also the manager of the Lakeland REA and who will be watching the proceedings of the House. I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

My other introduction, Mr. Speaker, is a very distinguished Albertan, seated in your gallery, and through you I wish to introduce him to all members of this Assembly. This guest played football for the Huskies for three years, became the general manager and recruited players from Rocky Mountain House, Ponoka, Camrose, Wetaskiwin. It was the team that was the Canadian champion for 1962, '63, and '64. No other junior team won three consecutive titles. On May 27 the whole team and this gentleman, Mr. Don Hamilton, will be inducted into the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame. I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a young man from my constituency, Troy McDonald. Troy is seated in the members' gallery. Troy is a smart young man. He's a Tory. He said that he wants my job about 10 years from now. I'd like you to rise, Troy, and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Kelley Charlebois Consulting Ltd.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not just in Quebec where governing parties channel money to their friends. The list of government contracts in Alberta going to friends of the PC Party with taxpayers getting nothing to show for it is long indeed. The former minister of health handed \$400,000 of Albertans' money to his friend Kelley Charlebois, yet not one page of work exists, not a memo, not a letter, apparently not even an e-mail. The Auditor General of Alberta, lacking the teeth of his federal counterpart, refuses to launch a special investigation. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: can she tell us what Kelley Charlebois did for \$400,000 of taxpayers' money?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the amount referenced was over a three-year period. There was advice provided to the minister. I know that there were appropriate receipts for the travel expenditures. This was

discussed at Public Accounts, and at that time I made a commitment that the procedures were being followed. We are working very hard to make sure that staff are trained in appropriate ways so that this won't happen again.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Will this minister request that the Auditor General launch a full special investigation into what the \$400,000 was used for?

Ms Evans: No, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General has conducted his audit, and we have had a discussion about that in the context of a meeting with the executive committee, and I don't know that any more needs to be said. He has in fact examined those books. He has spoken out at the time of Public Accounts, and I'm not sure what more we would uncover.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: don't the taxpayers of Alberta deserve to know what that \$400,000 was spent on?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that that advice was provided to the minister. There were several issues that the minister was facing. I am told that the advice related to things such as the changes in the regional health boundaries, among others. I don't think more needs to be added.

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

Rod Love Consulting Inc.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, the list of government contracts going to friends of the government, of the PC Party is long indeed. This government sank over a million dollars into a study quarterbacked by a group led by the Premier's friend and now chief of staff, Rod Love, only to learn, as many people predicted, that government money for a railroad to Fort McMurray is not justified. To the Premier: how many tax dollars of the 1 and a quarter million this government sank into this study went personally to the Premier's chief of staff?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't know, and I say that quite frankly. I really don't know. I do know that Rod Love was hired as a consultant, when he was in the consulting business, to advise the consortium on communications. As to the amount he was paid, I don't know, but I'd be happy to find out.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Exactly when and where – exactly – will the Premier make this information public?

Mr. Klein: I don't know where, and I don't know when, but I can make this commitment. I will do it as soon as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking of making things public, will the Premier instruct his chief of staff to make public the

directives given to him by the Ethics Commissioner regarding his private lobbying business, as Mr. Love promised to do?

Mr. Klein: I don't have any problems, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

1:50 Oil Well Drilling on Crown Land

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week during question period, when pressed about the development of well sites on disputed Lubicon land, the Energy minister candidly stated that oil companies who had already commenced construction "have not yet gone forward to the Energy and Utilities Board, which is a requirement, but they will." This is "standard procedure." To the Energy minister: is it standard procedure for well site development and surface disturbance to proceed without the prior approval of the EUB?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, it is standard in the sense that they can move pipe and equipment onto a site prior to the application being granted. No work can then be undertaken. No application, no drilling can occur. That has to go before the EUB.

Dr. Swann: Again to the same minister: how many leases are under construction across Alberta without the approval of the EUB?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, no licences go forth and there's no drilling activity that occurs without the complete and thorough review by the Energy and Utilities Board. They do an excellent job in respect to approving the 20 some odd thousand wells that are drilled annually in this province.

Dr. Swann: Again to the same minister: will this government order Deep Well Oil & Gas and Welwyn Resources to halt any and all construction in the disputed areas until the appropriate consultations can occur and environmental permits and approvals considered?

Mr. Melchin: That is part of the very normal procedure that the companies in that area are required to do. They have not commenced any operations. They have not gone forward at this stage to ask for a licence. That licence, when coming forward, is subject to public consultation.

In this case I would like to point out, though, that even the site where the pipes were put on, that the Lubicon had mentioned, is actually miles away from the territory that is expected to be included in the Lubicon reserve. It's even outside of that area. But that said, even with this public consultation is a requirement in granting a licence.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Health Resource Centre Joint Replacements

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday, nine months after it was first announced, the Ministry of Health and Wellness reannounced a centralized intake registry for Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary and an additional \$20 million to fund 1,200 more hip and knee replacements in the coming year. Long delayed but still welcome. But this Tory government couldn't resist using this otherwise fine initiative to further its agenda of expanding private, for-profit health care delivery in this province. My question

is to the Premier. Why has the government opted to pad the bottom line of its friends at the private, for-profit Health Resource Centre by paying them a premium of at least 10 per cent over and above the cost of doing the same surgeries at a public hospital?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the issue here is not so much how much; the issue is alleviating pain and suffering. The people who suffer from joint problems, whether they're hips or knees or elbows or shoulders, suffer severe, crucial, excruciating pain. We want to find ways to alleviate that pain and suffering, that the NDs would have go on and on and on for years simply because of ideology.

Mr. Mason: It's the pain and suffering of the taxpayers we're worried about, Mr. Premier.

How can the government cling to the claim that improved access justifies the higher cost of doing joint replacements at a private facility when the government's own wait list registry shows that HRC has longer wait times than any of Calgary's public hospitals? Talk about pain and suffering, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't know, and I don't believe that to be true. I know that many more operations relative to joint problems are being performed because of HRC and its ability to contract with the Calgary regional health authority. Again, it comes down to alleviating pain and suffering.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that the public system can deliver the services more cheaply and sooner, why is the Premier going on about pain and suffering when it's the pain and suffering of the taxpayers he should be worried about?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness supplement. But the simple fact is – and the hon. member knows it – you can't build operating rooms just like that. You can't build them overnight. Space is limited in the public system. That's why . . . [interjections] Am I going to be allowed to answer, or are we going to have to put up with this nonsense from the other side?

Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister supplement that question.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, this is very good news, done in concert with 13 orthopedic surgeons, three health regions, very good news because this year we'll accommodate 1,200 more hip and joint replacements than last year. Last year we had 5,300.

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

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The forest industry has been paying duty and dumping for years now on softwood lumber exports to the United States, even though they have won negotiations with the World Trade Organization on the North American free trade agreement. Can the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations tell the House when Alberta's forest industry will have a resolution on this trade dispute?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, according to the Alberta Forest Products Association, the figures they've given us indicate that the industry that we're talking about is really Alberta's third largest manufacturing exporter. We are working hand in hand with the industry and the federal government. We met a few months ago in

Ottawa, we had meetings in Washington, and a group just recently met in Chicago. We share a common goal on both sides of the border and both governments, and that is trying to get free access and a durable solution to the lumber industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the Minister of Economic Development. With your value-added strategy do you also have a marketing strategy for other markets for softwood lumber to the world?

Mr. Dunford: We have, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, we are continually looking for new places to utilize the softwood products that we have. This past February we attended an aspen exhibition in Japan. The purpose of that exposition, of course, was to promote aspen for cabinetry and millwork applications such as doors, windows, panelling, that sort of thing. Right now, we have a study under way, again, looking at opportunities closer to home. We expect the results sometime in June, and the task of that study, of course, is to identify product opportunities for secondary manufacturing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the Minister of Finance. Since this is a disaster in the forest industry, would this qualify for funding under the sustainability fund?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, the sustainability fund is there for unexpected situations that might occur throughout the year or could be natural disasters or if resource revenue dropped considerably. In order to trigger that, you'd have a disaster or an emergency declared. Cabinet would evaluate the information to see whether it applied or if, indeed, other options were available. One concern, of course, would be whether it would be considered by another country to be a subsidy and thus cause a problem with countervailing.

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

Hospital Space in Calgary

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Calgary is woefully short of acute-care hospital beds, and even under the best case scenario the bed shortage will continue until 2010. Last week the minister of health talked about what the department is doing about the shortage, but I note that the work so far is best described as preliminary. My questions are to the minister of health. When will the government approve and fund the plans it is now reviewing so that the Calgary health region can get on with the job of expanding the Rocky View, the Peter Lougheed, and the Foothills?

2:00

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, the budget comes out on the 13th. We'll be discussing the capital planning at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: can the minister assure the people of Calgary that the department has a contingency plan for coping with any disaster or epidemic that might hit Calgary during the next five years? Specifically, where will the sick and injured go?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, throughout Alberta our regional health authorities work very hard to provide the due diligence. If there was any pandemic or disaster of a regional nature, I'm sure that they would look at all of their contingency plans for just those circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, what I'm finding somewhat amusing is that on the heels of the question across the aisle about the hip and joint work that we're doing to try and accommodate other options with public dollars, there is concern now that we won't have space in public hospitals that we have, and we're trying every innovative approach to look at ways to facilitate the people that are sick and injured to get the best possible treatment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: could the minister please explain how her department allowed this chronic shortage of hospital space in Calgary to develop under its watch? Did you blow up all the hospitals?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, today in Alberta we hold no apology for being the best-funded health care system in Canada, the very best. We are doing everything possible to be responsible in cost-effective patient delivery. Where we've had rapid growth of Alberta, where the Alberta advantage has attracted many people, whom the Premier often reminds us don't bring their hospitals and schools, we are coping as well as we can. Should there be an emergency, we would do our best to look after them in that contingency.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Centennial Hockey Challenge

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 17 it was announced by the commissioner of the Western Hockey League that a challenge hockey game will be played as part of a joint centennial celebration with the province of Saskatchewan. I'm sure that our solid team of right wingers will prevail over those Saskatchewan lefties, but my question is to the Minister of Community Development. Could he tell us how this unusual competition came about?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, the Western Hockey League is planning and organizing this game, which will take place on the 14th of April, and it will feature the Western Hockey League's very best players playing on Team Alberta and Team Saskatchewan. It'll be played in the border town of Lloydminster. The idea was conceived by the CBC in collaboration with the centennial offices of Alberta and Saskatchewan and the Western Hockey League. Fellow Albertan and well-known hockey authority Ron MacLean will be the emcee of the broadcast, that'll take place in both Alberta and Saskatchewan. This event is going to be a day-long celebration of the hockey history of this province and the history of our provinces, and it'll also be a prelude to the Allan Cup, which, of course, is emblematic of supremacy in senior hockey.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, just to simply say this: hockey has helped shape our communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan. It's a Canadian passion. It's a way of life.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental is

also to the same minister. Although a trip to Lloydminster is normally priceless, how much money did the Alberta government put toward this event?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, both centennial offices of the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta have each contributed \$35,000 in support of this game. The game is sold out, and proceeds from the game will be distributed to the Western Hockey League's education fund as well as Hockey Alberta, Saskatchewan Hockey Association, and the city of Lloydminster.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Private/Public Partnerships

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government is slow to learn from other governments' mistakes. Although Sir Roger Douglas's draconian New Zealand budget slashing was discredited, the Alberta government applied his philosophy with devastating effects to Alberta's public institutions. The Alberta government also thought it could escape the costly California deregulation fiasco. It didn't. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Given that P3s represent strike three in a list of previously imported failures, will the minister abandon this private, for-profit, at public taxpayers' expense scheme?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, the first answer to that is obviously no. When it comes to P3s, they're an important adjunct to what we do in Alberta. Certainly, each and every one of the P3 projects are looked at extensively. There has to be an advantage to Alberta. Quite simply, that's why we don't necessarily approve every one.

It's quite interesting. The hon. member put out a press release last week and the interesting line that he put it out with is: Friends of Medicare is a "non-partisan [provincial] organization." So I found that quite interesting in the press release.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the same minister. With a projected royalty surplus revenue approaching \$10 billion, would the minister explain the need to borrow money privately?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, we have not to this date borrowed money privately per se. We do have a P3 project going on the Anthony Henday in Edmonton, and certainly the members of this Assembly have heard me talk numerous times about the advantages of what that P3 has done and more importantly what that P3 has done for Edmonton. The whole idea of actually getting a road two years early is certainly extremely important. The idea of the 30-year guarantee, so to speak, is also incredibly important for the citizens of Edmonton. Quite frankly, I find it quite shocking that the Liberal Party would talk against something that provides service to the city of Edmonton.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that Calgarians will have waited for over 12 years for the southeast replacement hospital to be built, will this government commit to public funding, transparent bids, and public administration of this much-needed resource?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe that that question is about the how to, which, in fact, would be the Minister of Infrastructure, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Alberta/U.S. Border Crossings

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has three times the population of our neighbouring province Saskatchewan and does billions of dollars of export trade with the United States with twice the amount of truck traffic. However, Alberta has five border crossings, with only one that is open for 24 hours, while Saskatchewan has 13 crossings, with two being open for 24 hours. My question is to the Minister of Economic Development. Does the minister recognize how this arrangement is restricting the flow of goods and people into and out of Alberta?

Mr. Dunford: Yes, I do, Mr. Speaker. If we look at it on the tourism side, for an example, when we use that wonderful interstate highway system in the United States, it's pretty clear traffic from Detroit, Chicago through Minneapolis. As they move west on the interstate 94, when they enter the Montana border, if they want to stay on the interstate system, then they have to dip quite a ways south through Billings and then back up out through the western part of the state. If they were heading our way, they would have to perhaps come through Coultts, and it has added a tremendous amount to that particular journey.

Just think: if on the highway maps we could put and show a 24-hour border system at Wild Horse, all they have to do as they enter the Montana border is just make their way up to the number 2 in the United States and then, of course, onto 41, and I believe the rubber-tired traffic for tourism would increase exponentially.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplement is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. What is he prepared to do to ensure that southeast Alberta will benefit from better border service by helping establish another 24-hour crossing at Wild Horse down in the southeast corner of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier on this year when I met with the Medicine Hat city council, it became very apparent that this was one of their top priorities. Having a 24-hour border crossing at Wild Horse I think is absolutely essential. I heard a lot of anecdotes about issues that they had getting to the border quite simply two or three minutes too late and being shut down and having to go back.

So, Mr. Speaker, I entirely agree with the hon. member that this is incredibly important and, subsequently, have written letters to the immigration minister, the CIC minister, as well as my counterpart, the transportation minister. I think from a transportation and an economic route, Wild Horse is absolutely essential to southeast Alberta, and we all know the good things that happen in southeast Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

2:10

Group Homes

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on a constituency question. An unlicensed group home funded by the government recently opened for business in my constituency. It rented a house directly across from the entrance to an elementary school. A short time later a 46-year-old developmentally disabled man from the home exposed himself as the kids came to school. The company shut the home in a week after some pressure, but at a public meeting last Thursday it was further reported that a child sex offender was also resident in the home. His chair in the picture window facing the entrance to the school is now empty, thank God. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Are there provincial contract guidelines to ensure that all group home businesses have the sense to not rent homes for child sex offenders next to elementary schools?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with the circumstances surrounding this case, but, hon. member, I'd more than welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with you as it is in your constituency.

Mr. Speaker, you know that we have a Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board, and there are six regional boards. The funding is that there is a flow through of funding through budgets, through our provincial budget, through the provincial board, to the regional boards. The regional boards – I can tell you this, hon. member, whether this group home was licensed or not licensed – do have a policy called Creating Excellence Together, which sets standards for their service providers, and they work very hard to ensure that those policies are in place. But, as I said, I'm not familiar with this incident.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: where does this government draw the line between community safety and security for seniors and children and funding placement of dangerous and sexually deviant individuals in our communities?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very difficult question to answer, hon. member. As you know, we guarantee individuals who are persons with developmental disabilities that they are safe, that they are secure, that they're treated with dignity and respect, and that we, through our provincial boards, our regional boards, have the funding that's allocated. As I indicated to you, those service providers that have facilities within the community are governed through standards, through the creating of excellent standards.

Also, we have through Children's Services, Mr. Speaker, an act, the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, that would license group homes. I'm not familiar with this home, as this hon. member is indicating, so I'd be pleased to look into it.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: can the minister ensure that this government will make every effort to inform neighbouring parents and at least school principals and day home operators that homes for deviants are being placed nearby them?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, I would like to discuss this further with this hon. member. Hon. member, I can tell you this, too, that neighbours will certainly voice their concerns to the appropriate ministry. I'm not sure in this case if it's the Solicitor General or if it's the Minister of Children's Services or a combination of all three ministries, but I would look into this further for you.

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

Horizon Oil Sands Project

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shortly before Christmas the provincial cabinet unilaterally invoked a rarely used provision of the Labour Relations Code called division 8. This was done for Horizon oil so that they could move ahead in the tar sands. Now, this provision opens the door to dismantling collective agreements by using the nonunion Merit Contractors Association and the company-friendly Christian Labour Association [some applause] – well, we'll see if they want to clap – to drive down wages and benefits in the oil sands. To the Premier: is it acceptable in a modern industrial society that purports to be democratic to cancel on a whim the collective bargaining rights of hard-working Alberta tradespeople, as has been done through the division 8 designation?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it was not done specifically for that reason. It was done because CNRL Horizon desperately needed workers. We are very much aware of the situation relative to labour. We somewhat disagree that there are adequate tradespeople, skilled tradespeople, trained tradespeople in the province to fulfill the requirements of the companies. That is why that company asked that division 8 be proceeded with, so that they could get on with the job of hiring needed personnel to get their project on stream.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that the unemployment rate across Canada is high in these areas, why is the government risking decades of labour peace by bringing in or invoking such an odious and undemocratic part of this labour code?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, relative to the unemployment rate – and I would like to address this – we have an unemployment rate in this province of 3.5 per cent. It's the lowest it has been in 25 years. This is fact.

In the oil and mining industry – and we'll refer to mining as the operation used, ostensibly, in the oil sands – the unemployment rate is 2.6 per cent. Mr. Speaker, this clearly indicates that there are more jobs being created than there are people to fill those jobs in that particular sector. Two point six in anyone's language, even the NDs' language, is virtually no unemployment because you take into account seniors and those who are unemployable, and they represent probably the 2.6. So virtually there is no unemployment in that sector, and we need to recruit skilled people from wherever we can.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the seniors will be interested to know that they're in the unemployment rates.

My question is simply this: given that this could lead to a major confrontation with the building trades after years and years of labour peace, does the Premier not see that this heavy-handed approach by his government could actually hinder development in the tar sands?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, to qualify, I meant retired seniors, seniors who no longer wish to work and have fulfilled their duty to society.

Mr. Speaker, again, I would remind the hon. member that Alberta has the hottest economy in the country and an extremely heightened demand for thousands, literally thousands, of workers. Speak to any employer – any employer – in the oil sands, and they will tell you

there are labour shortages. There are extreme shortages of skilled people, and at peak times there are simply not enough Albertans and Canadians to fill the jobs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Regulated Rate Option for Electricity

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Small residential electrical customers, farmers, and small businesses are currently not required to go shopping for a power provider. In July of 2006, however, that may have to change. The regulated rate option, considering the lack of competition, is definitely the preferred method of choosing a power provider. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Will your department consider extending the July 6 expiry date for the regulated rate option?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The regulated rate option, as anticipated, was planned to go till June of 2006, and as such we have been reviewing the options of going forward past June 2006. It's important that those things are set in place well in advance. Our department has been reviewing both the wholesale and retail markets to ensure that we have the best options for all residential and small commercial, and in that light those options will be reviewed over the next few months.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: given that contracts offered to these consumers to date are not as attractive as the regulated rate option, can you tell us how many Albertans have signed an electrical contract in the past year?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, one of the main reasons why the long-term contracts aren't yet as attractive as the regulated rate option is not unlike your mortgage, where your long-term interest rate is higher. There's a premium for a long-term, stable, predictable, guaranteed rate versus the short-term rate. But in that light there's been very good progress being made by the retailers to all residential and small commercial. Many are starting to sign on, though it's early on. Only about 7 per cent of residential consumers have signed long-term contracts at this stage, about 37 per cent of the small commercial market.

Mr. Lindsay: Again to the same minister: if the regulated rate option is not extended and considering the lack of competition among retailers, how can these consumers be assured that they will be able to negotiate a fair contract for their electrical service?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, under all models, even if the regulated rate option continued or did not, if there was a flow-through rate as one of the options, customers are not required to actually negotiate or sign a contract with a retailer. There is and will continue to be a default provision so that they won't be compelled to sign a contract if that's not their wish.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Highwood.

Provincial Achievement Tests

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Standardized testing for every student in grades 3, 6, and 9 and now imposed on supposedly underachieving grade 4 students is costly and bureaucratic. It is also unnecessarily stressful on students, encourages invalid conclusions on the effectiveness of teachers and schools, and reinforces an outmoded, narrow view of teaching and learning. My question to the Minister of Education: when will the minister begin consulting with teachers to reform these exams so that the full range of student aptitudes and creative abilities is properly encouraged and recognized by this government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, in fact, began talking with teachers about this last year. Those discussions have continued, albeit on an informal sort of basis. Nonetheless, the member does raise an interesting question about students who did not fare too well in the grade 3 provincial achievement test and will therefore not be retested until the grade 6 provincial achievement test comes around. So in the interim it was thought advisable to perhaps introduce a provincial achievement test at the grade 4 level. We're just evaluating the implications and results of that particular program of testing to see if it's one that should be continued or if perhaps more diagnostic testing should come in in its place. I'll have some answers very shortly on that.

Mr. Flaherty: Will the minister commit today to abandon his plan to retest underperforming grade 3 students, students that began grade 4, particularly given that the government has no serious plan to provide these students with remedial help?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are all kinds of help available. The question really is identifying what the particular students' needs are in terms of literacy, numeracy, and basic problem-solving skills. Obviously, some students do better at those particular skills than others. Those who have demonstrated the need for more help are getting some of that, and through the diagnostic testing approach that I just indicated, perhaps we could take a look at it over a longer period of time to help students really achieve to the maximum of their abilities. That's what we're committed to doing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the students' aptitudes and abilities need to be assessed much earlier in the educational years, will the minister examine the possibility of introducing a screening process in the first year of a child's education with a commitment to fund the focused remedial programs, formally developed, that the child needs to succeed in school?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that we're studying very closely and have been for some time is the whole issue of children at risk. Now, we have significant programs with tens of millions of dollars going to help address students who have learning difficulties. That is not to say that we should be replacing the home environment. Those students coming from home environments where perhaps they have the benefit of more nurturing, caring, loving environments seem to do fairly well, but those who are so-called at risk – and there are a variety of circumstances we could describe here as to what we mean by at risk – are the ones that we

are trying to zoom in on and help the most. In fact, that's part of our class size reduction initiative and one of the reasons why we just rolled out 89 million new dollars in class size reduction funding this past year. I'm optimistic that on Wednesday perhaps we'll see some of that good news continued.

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

Integrated Land Management

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Alberta's growth has led to a steady increase in public land use by the oil and gas and forest industries, tourism, and people enjoying the great outdoors. What is the government doing to respond to these increasing land-use pressures on our landscape so that there's not a free-for-all?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. This is a very good question in view of the fact that in Alberta approximately 60 per cent of the land is public land, and of course wise use of that land continues to be a priority for the government, particularly because of our growing population and the demands on the land. That's why the government has committed itself to a provincial land-use framework that is consistent with the throne speech and our 20-year plan.

I'm currently working, Mr. Speaker, with other colleagues and other ministries to determine what that framework will look like, and the goal is to create a sustainable land legacy where Albertans can continue to live on the land, labour on the land, and leisure on the land.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you. Again to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: is the Alberta government talking to Albertans about its approach to access management on public land?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's an important component. Not only do we have to talk to our colleagues, but we also have to talk to our stakeholders, including industry, on our approach to access to the land. We must involve the public in informing them of our shared values and our stewardship of the land as well.

One of the ways that we can do this is to encourage education and outreach and, particularly, to let people know about something that comes through SRD, our respect the land program. We want to build on the previous successes with land access and land management that we've had in the past, and we'd like to make sure that we have achieved local participation, like we did in the Bighorn backcountry area, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Groeneveld: To the Minister of Energy. Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that the energy sector is booming in Alberta. Can the Minister of Energy please tell the House what his department is doing to supplement integrated land management?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that the

activity is very substantial in this province, not just what we've heard about the oil sands but throughout the province: natural gas and coal, coal development itself, conventional oil and gas. All of the industry supports very much a very sustainable life cycle, environmental stewardship of the land. It is very important when we develop that we can return the lands to their original state. It is important also to see that we can disturb the land for temporary times but also return it to a very original state of environment.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

Affordability of Postsecondary Education

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each time this Conservative government conducts an affordability study or reviews its tuition policy, it ends up further entrenching its ideology of user-pay. Those determined to watch the forthcoming international infomercial on the third way would do well to take note. Equitable access to public services, as it turns out, is a slippery concept. To the Minister of Advanced Education: will the minister assure Alberta students and their parents that the forthcoming affordability review will result in every qualified student, regardless of their background, being able to afford to go to the program of their choice?

2:30

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have made it perfectly clear that as Minister of Advanced Education and with the support of this government we believe that finances should not be a barrier to any student getting an education. I think that answers the hon. member's question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: if this government is truly committed to equal access to educational opportunities, why has the money available to students from the Alberta student loan program not kept pace with the dramatic tuition increases we've seen over the last dozen years?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we provide student loans on a demand basis. In calculating the amount that's given out on a student's loan, it takes into account the tuition fee for the programs that the student is accessing. It puts forward a budget with respect to the cost of living. Those are adjusted on an annual basis. So to the best of my knowledge the student loan program does take into account the tuition fees that students have to pay.

Mr. Taylor: Interesting, Mr. Speaker.

To the same minister: if the loan program, then, really does provide students with the dollars they need, why did students at the U of A through their students' union this year alone need to provide over \$1.1 million in financial aid to their fellow students precisely because they had needs not being met by the Alberta student loans program?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is misdirecting rather badly by suggesting that because there are other forms of student finance such as bursaries or loans or scholarships or any other form, including loans or grants that may be available from a students' union, that means that the Students Finance Board is not doing its job. We have the best student finance program in the country in this province. I served on that Students Finance Board, as did a member

of the opposition caucus, and we served well together in making sure that the Students Finance Board served Alberta students well.

The Students Finance Board has reviewed programs on an ongoing basis and continues to do that. The affordability review will make sure that as we go into the future, finance is not a barrier to a student getting an education in this province.

There will always be a role for supplementary finance and supplementary assistance to students on an emergency basis. Most of the funds, as I understand it, that the students' union provides to students are funds that are needed by students on an emergency basis. That will happen from time to time, and there will always be other opportunities for students to help each other support their programs and support them financially. But the student finance system that we have in this province is a great system, and it will become greater.

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

Electricity Transmission Line Capacity

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Throughout the province a construction boom in electrical generation is occurring. In the past four years close to 3,000 megawatts have been added to the grid, and many great projects, including wind generation and other green power projects, are about to be announced. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that these projects are boosting our province's power supply, can the minister tell us if our present transmission system can handle all of the power being generated?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to assure all Albertans that our transmission lines and system can handle the power and the growth. That is also why we are looking long term into making sure that it can continue to sustain that growth. We are fortunate to have that challenge in Alberta with all of the growth in load and consumers in this economy providing that challenge, but we are also looking further into the future to ensure that it will be reliable for decades and centuries to come.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. To the same minister: does his department intend to create a formal long-range plan to address potential transmission shortfalls?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, in respect to the long-term plan, the independent system operator has already developed a 10-year plan for transmission. There are some applications before the Energy and Utilities Board at this stage in light of that 10-year plan. Those are very instrumental to ensuring that that reliability is there. The independent system operator is also currently working on developing a 20-year plan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can the minister tell us if an upgrade to the transmission system between British Columbia and Alberta or even in Montana and British Columbia could benefit Alberta's small consumers?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, adding transmission capacity and tie-

lines – we already have one with British Columbia, a very small one with Saskatchewan, and there are other projects being announced or contemplated at this stage with tie-lines through to Montana – adds, really, another generator at another end. That's really all that it's doing: adding another source of reliable power that can be brought into our system in times of need. If there are any capacity constraints of a generator going down, it would just provide us greater reliability for our own consumers here in Alberta.

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

Electricity Exports

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week Calpine Energy applied for authorization to export up to 250 megawatts of electricity generated in Alberta to the United States. Increasing electricity exports from Alberta means that others will benefit while the only things Albertans will get are higher power prices and even more and more air pollution. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why does this Progressive Conservative government continue to encourage electricity exports from Alberta to the United States when it will only lead to higher and more volatile power prices here in Alberta?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I think there are some assumptions in there that are entirely false. It would only increase the reliability of our system to have more opportunity to bring power into this province when it's needed for what we need. Furthermore, we've never taken the view that we should be an island unto ourselves. There are opportunities to supply good, reliable source power to our neighbours and friends in the neighbouring provinces or even to the United States.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that Powerex and Enron made a good job of importing electricity into this province, how and why can we allow electricity exports when Alberta's own electricity regulator has stated that electricity demand will exceed supply by 2006? Again, why is this government adding to the problem by encouraging electricity exports to the United States?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we won't be lacking supply by 2006. Those aren't the forecasts. Furthermore, increasing transmission tie-lines, be it through British Columbia, be it through Saskatchewan, be it through the United States, will only increase the reliability and supply of power and reduce the volatility in price spikes that come by having a shortage of supply in any one market.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how can the hon. minister assure Alberta consumers that the \$1.5 billion that they'll pay to enhance the backbone transmission system is not simply prebuilding for electricity exports, where they will receive no economic benefit?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the \$1.5 billion referenced in transmission is part of the independent system operator's 10-year review of transmission needs in this province. They do form part of the backbone. It is very important that we do have reliable transmission lines to get the power to the customers when it's needed at the

appropriate time, and customers have always borne and paid for that cost to ensure that they have reliable power. It's the best thing that we could do.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of six members to participate under Members' Statements today, but in the interim might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very distinguished individual who is the chair of the region 7 health authority's board. Region 7 is a model for the rest of the province and very much leads by example. If I could please ask the Assembly to acknowledge Mr. Don Schultz.

head: **Members' Statements**
Team Ferbey

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to recognize a very fabulous Alberta team. Yesterday Team Ferbey did Canada, Alberta, and Edmonton proud by winning their third world championship as a team. The win gave Randy his fourth world championship.

2:40

This year's Ford world championship of curling is being heralded as the greatest curling competition ever held, this win providing a fitting conclusion to what has been an outstanding season for curling's greatest team. Yesterday's win was even sweeter given that the past week had not been easy for Randy and the boys. At times they struggled, leaving themselves facing possible elimination in each of their last six games. Undaunted by adversity, Team Ferbey saved their best for last, curling 90 per cent as a team, easily defeating a stunned Scottish squad. When the going gets tough, the tough get going.

This year the Ferbey foursome played 148 games, winning nearly 80 per cent of the time. During the provincial, national, and world championships Team Ferbey amassed a record of 30 wins and five losses. This team has all the talent in the world. Randy Ferbey calls an outstanding game, Scott Pfeifer and Marcel Rocque are the best sweepers ever seen, and Dave Nedohin makes shots that other curlers are afraid to play look routine.

However, you cannot be successful on skill alone. Mr. Speaker, every team relies on their sponsors to help support them. Team Ferbey is blessed to have many wonderful sponsors. I am especially proud of Denmar Energy Services Ltd. of Bonnyville and owners Roger Fortier and Garry Lapointe. Roger and Garry have contributed to the success of the Ferbey foursome through sponsoring the team over the past four years. Both Denmar Energy Services Ltd. and Team Ferbey are Alberta success stories, and together they showcase all that is good about Alberta.

After a well-deserved summer break, Randy Ferbey and company will be headed for Halifax in quest of a spot on Canada's Olympic team en route to Torino, Italy, in 2006.

I know that all the members of this Assembly will join me in congratulating Randy Ferbey, Dave Nedohin, Scott Pfeifer, Marcel

Rocque, Dan Holowaychuk, and coach Brian Moore on their win yesterday. Congratulations, and good luck in Halifax.

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

Value of Education

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over 2,500 years ago Confucius taught the rulers of ancient China: "To make a society prosperous, give it education." Society is still going strong today. In our modern times, reflecting on the importance of learning, the naturalist Charles Darwin said, "It's not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."

I read a recent research report on the value of education by Stanford University. With global evidence it shows that education contributes to national productivity as well as to individual earnings and quality of life. Countries with strong institutions and infrastructure and effective governments arrange to provide their citizens with substantial amounts of education. The accumulation of human capital is one of the three important benefits that flow from good education infrastructure. The others are the accumulation of plant and equipment and the development of efficient production.

This research also shows that the countries of the world having achieved high levels of education for the average person have done so in varying combinations of self-reliance, government subsidy, and direct provision of education. One of the few favourable characteristics of the discredited socialist governments of eastern Europe was the provision of high levels of education. As the relative cost of education continues to rise in relation to other goods and services, the pressure of financing high levels of education is increasing.

Education is important. Learning and teaching are integral parts of education. As Alberta has many excellent student learners, we also have excellent teachers. I want to thank and congratulate teachers who are among the nominees and finalists for the Alberta 2005 excellence in teaching awards.

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

Pride Rainbow Project

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Pride Rainbow project was conceived in the fall of 2003 by four youth of the Unitarian Church of Calgary. The aim of the project was and is to show support for same-sex marriage in Canada and elsewhere.

The physical manifestation of this support is found in a perpetually growing fabric banner approximately five feet wide. Frequent sewing bees undertaken by a diverse and expanding number of dedicated volunteers have increased the length of the banner dramatically, from a mere six feet in the summer of 2004 to its most recent official measurement of 468 feet, 11 inches. The goal is to make it eventually 3.2 kilometres, or two miles, long in order to break the current record of one and a quarter miles set by a group in Florida. The banner, as the project name implies, contains the six colours of the Pride flag: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple.

This past Saturday the Pride Rainbow project celebrated the laudable milestone of its banner reaching 500 feet in length at a party in Calgary's Winston Heights, Mountview community hall. In addition to the guest of honour, the 500-foot-long pride banner itself, the event featured a number of speakers, booths, and displays dedicated to promoting tolerance and diversity in the province of Alberta.

The Alberta Liberal opposition applauds the participants in the

Pride Rainbow project on their convictions and their perseverance and stands with them in support. The Alberta Liberal opposition understands that same-sex couples who seek to get married, far from undermining the mainstream of society, are in fact asking us all to let them join the larger community as full participants with all the responsibilities as well as the rights that attach thereto.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Progressive Conservative Convention

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend people interested in participating in and shaping the political future of our province travelled from across Alberta to attend the Progressive Conservative Association annual general meeting. It was one of the largest of such gatherings ever held, with over 1,500 registered delegates representing a diversity of ages, professions, and interests.

It's my distinct honour, Mr. Speaker, to point out that the rural constituency sending the most delegates to the convention was also the constituency farthest away from Edmonton. Yes, my constituency of Peace River registered 54 delegates to the convention. We sent delegates from the town of Peace River in the south, from High Level in the north, Rainbow Lake in the west, and Fort Vermilion and La Crête in the east. Some of the delegates travelled close to a thousand kilometres to be here, and I want to express my intense pride for being able to represent such committed and dedicated constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I particularly want to recognize the extraordinary efforts of Gary Friedel, our former MLA, Sylvia Kennedy, our constituency association president, John Watt, the mayor of Rainbow Lake, Ray and Al Toews from Fort Vermilion, Robin Erickson and Amy Murphy from Peace River, and all the delegates from La Crête that so honourably represented their community. I would also like to extend my personal thanks and my congratulations to all of the delegates.

Maybe we didn't exactly put the Peace River constituency on the map, Mr. Speaker – I think it was already there – but we sure highlighted it and were very proud to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Team Ferbey

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to congratulate the Ferbey foursome on winning their third world championship in the past five years. I'd also like to congratulate them on winning the 22nd world championship for Canada since 1968.

Ferbey's team was the talk of the Sherwood Park trade show this past weekend as three of the four members reside in Sherwood Park. Skip Randy Ferbey and second Scott Pfeifer both live in my constituency of Strathcona, and David Nedohin, the team's third, lives in the neighbouring constituency of Sherwood Park. The lead, Marcel Rocque, currently lives in Edmonton but grew up in Sherwood Park and was a graduate of Archbishop Jordan high school.

Sherwood Park resident Ed Thomlinson, possibly the Ferbey rink's number one fan, was so confident of their victory after the Brier that he suggested there would be plenty of opportunity to recognize the team after they won the world championship. But Ed and many fans around Strathcona county were a little worried about their chances when they lost three of their first seven games. In order for the Ferbey rink to dig themselves out of the hole they were

in, they had to win eight straight games in order to take home the championship.

The Ferbey rink did exactly what all Albertans do and what all people from Strathcona county do: dug deep, worked hard, and never gave up. They won the rest of their round robin games, won the tie-breaking game, won the three-four playoff game, the semifinal, and took it to the rink from Scotland in the final, winning 11 to 4.

Mr. Speaker, the Ferbey rink had two five-enders in the final game. Never in the history of the world championship has a five-ender been scored, let alone two of them. In fact, the Ferbey rink has never before scored two of them in the same game. They certainly knew when to turn it on.

I would like to congratulate the entire Ferbey rink for an outstanding Brier victory and for a memorable world championship win. I'd particularly like to congratulate my constituents, Randy Ferbey and Scott Pfeifer. This weekend's win gives Randy his fourth world championship and his third as skip of this team. Only two other skips have led their teams to three world championships, and I believe Ferbey's rink is the first to do so with the same four members.

Marcel Rocque, Scott Pfeifer, Dave Nedohin, and Randy Ferbey are truly fine Albertans. Join me in congratulating the members of this team, please.

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

2:50

Dorothy Pacquette

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise here today to speak just a few minutes on the importance of Dorothy Pacquette's journey from Fort McMurray. Her trek took almost two weeks. She arrived in Edmonton on Saturday and was greeted by hundreds of people here at the front of the Legislature while many of the people across the way were at their convention.

What she was trying to underline are the issues of aboriginal training, the issues of training the youth in our province, and the accessibility of other Canadians to the important jobs in the tar sands. The oil sands and the issues of labour availability, training, and infrastructure have been important issues in our body politic as we work through the biggest construction boom in Canadian history.

We have had an awful lot of studies on the demand for workers. We've had an awful lot of press and media on these studies, and all the rest of it, but we've had very little and very rarely studies on supply. These studies on demand come from many associations. Some of them have been very good and add to the knowledge in the area very well. But, for example, to go on a survey of all the associations that hire tradesmen for the oil sands is comparable to surveying all the grade 2 students and asking them how much candy they want in three months. Well, you might get the answer that there's never enough.

The supply side, however – and we see some great problems in the supply side in that it doesn't lend itself so much to the same types of studies. There are hiring halls, there's word of mouth, there's the foreman calling the crews that have been out of work. That's the way the industry works. It doesn't work very much through want ads. It doesn't work very much through these types of things that are being measured and sometimes reported, and that is why it's difficult to use these . . . [Mr. Backs' speaking time expired] I'm through already? Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Brevity in Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, might I thank the two hon. members today who understand the value of two minutes, the hon. Member

for Calgary-Currie and the hon. Member for Peace River. We've had a change in the rules today because members in the past have said that they couldn't participate within one minute. Well, four today conveniently found that they couldn't participate in two minutes either. So congratulations to them.

Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: On this day, from a historical point of view, in 1950 His Royal Highness the Duke of Windsor and Wallis the Duchess of Windsor arrived in Calgary, and among the visits they made on this day in Calgary was to Alberta's first Legion branch, the Calgary No. 1 branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. Interestingly enough, His Royal Highness had turned the sod for the Legion building in 1919, 31 years prior to his arrival.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition signed by Albertans who are very concerned about the dangerous driving conditions faced by many workers in northern Alberta. In particular, the 522 people who signed are urging the government to "increase infrastructure development funding for Highway 63." This brings the total for this petition to 1,718 signatures.

The Speaker: We're on petitions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm presenting a petition from 102 residents of Alberta asking the government of Alberta to prohibit the importation of temporary foreign workers to work on the construction and/or maintenance of oil sands facilities and/or pipelines until the following groups have been accessed and/or trained: Unemployed Albertans and Canadians; Aboriginals; unemployed youth under 25; under-employed landed immigrants; and displaced farmers.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition with 100 names that would urge the government of Alberta to prohibit the importation of temporary foreign workers to work on the construction and/or maintenance of oil sands facilities and/or pipelines until the following groups have been accessed and/or trained: Unemployed Albertans and Canadians; Aboriginals; unemployed youth under 25; under-employed landed immigrants; and displaced farmers.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with a petition from 117 Albertans from the fine Alberta communities of Bruderheim, St. Albert, Lamont, Evansburg, Ardrossan, and Edmonton. It reads: We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to prohibit the importation of temporary foreign workers to work on the construction and/or maintenance of oil sands facilities and/or pipelines until the following groups have been accessed and/or trained: Unemployed Albertans and Canadians; Aboriginals; unemployed youth under 25; under-employed landed immigrants; and displaced farmers.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am presenting a petition signed by 405 Albertans from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Bonnyville, Lac La Biche, St. Paul, Ardrossan, Leduc, Calgary, and Canmore urging the government of Alberta to “introduce legislation allowing parents the authority to place their [addicted] children into mandatory drug treatment and to fund urgently required . . . drug treatment centres.”

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to present a petition from Onoway, Calgary, Alberta Beach, Gunn, Edmonton, and Spruce Grove, which reads: the people below signed urge the Government of Alberta to

prohibit the importation of temporary foreign workers to work on the construction and/or maintenance of oil sands facilities and/or pipelines until the following groups have been accessed and/or trained: Unemployed Albertans and Canadians; Aborigines; unemployed youth under 25; under-employed landed immigrants; and displaced farmers.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill Pr. 1

Bow Valley Community Foundation Act

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

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill Pr. 1, Bow Valley Community Foundation Act.
Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I would like to table the executive summary of an interim report by the Wait Time Alliance entitled No More Time to Wait. Alberta's wait times are embarrassingly far behind the benchmarks set out in this report.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to table copies of government news releases from June 30, 2004, and April 8, 2005. The second appears to be an announcement of a previous announcement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate amount of copies of a brochure being distributed by Direct Energy currently. The brochure boasts of Direct Energy's ability to protect consumers from volatile and unstable energy rates. Of course, consumers wouldn't need such protection if our electric system had not been so disastrously deregulated in the first place.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, two of which are from University Heights residents. The first is a copy of an e-mail from Bill and Norma Crooks, and the second is a letter from Mary Abel. These Calgary-Varsity constituents express their grave concerns regarding the impact on their community of the expansion of 16th Avenue to create access

between the Foothills and Children's hospitals. They feel strongly that there has not been adequate opportunity for meaningful community input concerning this project.

The third tabling is a copy of the nonpartisan Friends of Medicare document released last Thursday to all parties entitled Flawed, Failed, Abandoned: 100 P3s, Canadian & International Evidence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table this submission with the required copies from Bev McKay, the founder of FAIRE, Families Allied to Influence Responsible Eldercare. It's regarding incidents of horrific elder abuse in care, with the accompanying photographs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Premier I wish to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter the Premier sent earlier today to skip Randy Ferbey congratulating Team Alberta on winning the 2005 World Men's Curling Championship.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, April 7, I will now move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 1 through 11 inclusive.

[Motion carried]

Student Loan Defaults

Q1. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted.
For each of the fiscal years 2000-2001, 2001-2002, 2002-2003, and 2003-2004 what was the total number of student loan defaults broken down by the last postsecondary institution or private vocational school attended by the student?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move an amendment to Written Question 1. I believe the amendment has been circulated. It would amend Written Question 1 by striking out “fiscal” and substituting “academic” in reference to the years; by adding “and” before “2002-2003”; striking out “and 2003-2004”; adding “Alberta” before “student loan defaults”; adding “for those students who have completed their studies” after “defaults”; and striking out “institution or private vocational school” and substituting “sector.”

With those amendments the written question would read:

For the academic years 2000-2001, 2001-2002, and 2002-2003 what was the total number of Alberta student loan defaults for those students who have completed their studies broken down by the last postsecondary sector attended by the student?

With those amendments, I would be able to accept the question, Mr. Speaker. I could speak to the amendment now, if you prefer, to the reasons why those amendments are considered to be necessary, and there are a number of them.

First of all, while institution-specific data are available, such loan default information is currently not shared publicly. Each Alberta institution is provided with its own specific data. Institutions outside the province attended by Albertans do not get their data unless there is a problem with consistently high default rates. For example, Harvard, just to pick one, has never received a student loan default report from us. Information at the sector level, such as the university sector, is however available for public information.

Legal services has advised me that there are potential issues with providing information about individual institutions pursuant to section 16 and section 25 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. It may be harmful to the business interest of a private institution as per section 16 or to the economic interest or other interest of a public body under section 25.

Legal services has also advised that we would be wise to consult with the institutions before we consider releasing this sort of specific data. Students with Alberta student loans are attending approximately 1,900 institutions world-wide, which would be an onerous task of consultation. It would require approximately three months' worth of work, and it would be also a considerable amount of work to generate sector-level data, such as universities and colleges. If we even received permission from the institutions to release the data, I'm advised that the resulting report would be likely in excess of 5,700 pages in length.

Default information is tracked based on people who have completed their studies in a specific year in question. Information for 2003-2004 is not available because students would have graduated in May 2004. They would have had a six-month grace period and then another six months before we would consider them delinquent, and that's the reason why we've asked to remove that year from the information.

Default information provided should only include Alberta student loans and not federal loans or other loans, obviously, obtained by students. Management reports associated with defaults are based on school leavers from the May 1 to April 30 period, therefore the academic year rather than the fiscal year.

It's for those reasons, Mr. Speaker, that we're proposing the amendments, to put the question into a context where we can provide as much information as we reasonably can provide and hopefully help satisfy some of the interests of the hon. member in asking the question but without putting an undue amount of work on the department to canvass fully the 1,900 institutions that might be involved to seek their permission to release the institution-specific information and, rather, grouping it by sector, which hopefully will provide at least some of the information that the hon. member requires.

The Speaker: We're on the amendment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the amendment.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have carefully looked at the amendments that the minister has proposed to my question, which seeks information, I think, that's in the public interest. It's not just the curiosity of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that has led to the asking of the question in the first place. I think public interest is involved here. Public resources are involved here. Alberta's students need to know how different institutions perform, why students going into particular institutions default. They also need to know what percentage of students graduate and complete programs and what don't and yet get the loans from these institutions.

So while I would agree that part (a) of the amendment, which changes "academic" to "fiscal," may make sense because the minister's records, I suppose, are by fiscal year rather than by

academic year, if I understand the rationale behind part (a) of the amendment – it's striking out "fiscal" and substituting "academic" – Mr. Speaker, I would certainly appreciate the explanation on this, on the minister changing it from "fiscal" to "academic." Is it because he is willing to provide information for the programs that have been completed? Is that the reason for it, for "fiscal" to "academic"?

Part (b) of the amendment seeks to limit the release of the information to the end of the 2002-2003 academic year, I understand. Again, we are now into 2005. We're more than a year away, a year past the completed academic 2002-2003 year. The minister argued that the reason he can't provide that information is because it takes six months for the first report to come, another six months after that, and I'd suggest to the minister that this still allows the minister to have had enough time to have the information for 2003-2004. [interjection] Okay. Then part (c) of the amendment strikes out for that reason "2003-2004." I understand that the minister is giving me the facts as he has been advised from his department on the availability of this information, so I understand that one.

I do have concerns, however, with respect particularly to parts (e) and (f) of the amendment, Mr. Speaker. Under (e) the minister wants to add "for those students who have completed their studies." If the information to be made available as a response to this question goes back two years, then I don't understand why the minister would want to report only on programs that are completed and not on studies not completed. Lots of the defaults are related to students not completing the programs and quitting altogether.

I think it's important for us to have the information for each institution on how many students who do get the loans do in fact not only default but default as well as fail to complete the programs. Some of the institutions, as I understand it, have really quite miserable records on the completion rates. Default rates are not the only issue. The issue is default rates related to the failure rates, students failing to complete those programs by many of the private, for-profit institutions, and we've asked questions in the House before on that.

3:10

The last point here. Part (f) of the amendment is quite troubling. The minister is unwilling to provide this information by institution. We are not asking for information for every student. Information is objectified, impersonalized when you ask for information by institution, and I don't see why the minister should not in fact be ready to provide the information by institution regardless of whether or not the institution is private, for-profit and therefore business interests are involved, whether or not the institution is public and therefore can provide the information without raising any concerns about the protection of privacy of information for individual students or individual faculty or other employees of the institution.

I find it quite puzzling and, in fact, dismaying that the minister has sought to decline my request for information by institution, which in my view would be very, very important information for students to have, for their families to have. Families are supposed to supplement the studies of their children when they go to school. The loan program allows for that, in fact requires that. Families have an interest in knowing the record of completion, the record of default by institution, not just by sector, so that they can make intelligent decisions. If they are going to be treated as consumers in the marketplace of academic institutions, then the government, I think, will serve the public interest better, will serve the interests of parents and families and students better if it, in fact, decided to be transparent and provide information by each institution so that appropriate judgments can be made by families and by students before making

decisions on which institutions they would prefer to enrol in and pursue their studies in.

So I hope that the minister will change his mind on some of the parts of the amendments that he is proposing. I don't see any reason why he should stick to the amendments as proposed because not to have this information available, not to be transparent about the information that I've sought – certainly, amendment (f) will make information less transparent and more opaque, therefore taking away from parents, families, students the ability to make the right decisions given that they don't have the right information. Why would he withhold information that's critical to making intelligent, smart decisions with respect to enrolment and pursuit of studies in particular institutions based on a record of success or failure?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:14 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Cao	Jablonski	Morton
Cardinal	Johnson	Oberle
Cenaiko	Johnston	Ouellette
Coutts	Knight	Pham
Danyluk	Liepert	Prins
Ducharme	Lougheed	Rodney
Evans	Lund	Snelgrove
Forsyth	Magnus	Stevens
Graydon	Mar	Strang
Griffiths	Marz	Tarchuk
Groeneveld	McFarland	Taylor
Hancock	Miller, R.	Webber
Herard	Mitzel	Zwozdesky
Horner		

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Elsalhy	Pannu
Bonko	Martin	Swann
Eggen		

Totals: For – 40 Against – 7

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Now we have before us a written question that has been amended. Does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona want to close the debate?

Dr. Pannu: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to conclude the debate. During the interregnum that we waited for this latest vote to happen, I had some opportunity to talk with the Minister of Advanced Education. I appreciate his expression of some concern that he didn't give me advance notice on it. I appreciate that. If we'd had an opportunity to talk, perhaps I would have been able to convince the minister to take out some of the more dismaying parts of this amendment proposed here, especially replacing "institution or private vocational school" with the term "sector." I think that's the most serious flaw in the amendment, in my view.

I want to make clear that my interest in seeking this information

was specific to those institutions, private and public, that operate in Alberta, not all the 1,000 and some institutions all over the world that are accessed by our students one way or the other when they're pursuing their postsecondary studies. Perhaps that wasn't entirely clear in my question, but had the minister's staff contacted me, I would certainly have readily modified my question and made it more specific by suggesting that we seek information primarily on institutions that are located in Alberta and operate out of Alberta under government authorization in one form or another to which our postsecondary students go and, in order to go there, get student loans, and some of them default on them.

3:30

We do know that the rate at which students default on their loans has a great deal to do with whether or not they complete their programs at many of the institutions, and the rates of completion are highly variable from one institution to the other. Somehow, I sense that there's a correlation between high rates of default and low rates of success in some of these institutions.

That's why having that information is exceedingly important for students and families to be able to make an appropriate decision and for us as legislators to make sure that the monies that we provide in the form of student loans are appropriately invested, get properly used, and students get the needed protection. Then this increasingly market model of postsecondary education that this government has been encouraging to develop in this province they have to work with. As consumers in the so-called marketplace they need this information, and that's why I asked the question.

So having said this, Mr. Speaker, I am not happy with the question as amended, but I would simply hope that the minister can provide as much information as he possibly can in spite of his amendments so that students are served and the interests of students and families are served just as much as the public interest in the province is served by getting this information, making this information public, getting it into the hands of the citizens of this province, particularly the families and the students who go to postsecondary institutions in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 1 as amended carried]

Student Loan Defaults

Q2. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted. For each of the fiscal years 2000-2001, 2001-2002, 2002-2003, and 2003-2004 what was the total dollar value of student loan defaults broken down by the last postsecondary institution or private vocational school attended by the student?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to provide information as much as possible and, therefore, would be willing to accept this question if amended as I proposed by amendment which has been circulated. Essentially, this question is exactly the same as the previous question, except that it asks for the total dollar value rather than the total number, so the same amendments would pertain.

I would move that Written Question 2 be amended by striking out "fiscal" and substituting "academic"; adding "and" before "2002-2003"; striking out "and 2003-2004"; adding "Alberta" before "student loan defaults"; adding "for those students who have completed their studies" after "defaults"; and by striking out "institution or private vocational school" and substituting "sector." The written question as amended would then read:

For each of the academic years 2000-2001, 2001-2002, and 2002-2003 what was the total dollar value of Alberta student loan defaults for those students who have completed their studies broken down by the last postsecondary sector attended by the student?

Mr. Speaker, I won't repeat the rationale that I gave on Written Question 1 for the need for those changes. Suffice to say that the advice that I have from legal services indicates that there are FOIP issues surrounding the release of the information without having a discussion with each of the institutions involved. While it would be our hope and in discussion with the hon. member who raised the question my intention to make sure that there are appropriate levels of information available to students to make appropriate decisions with respect to whether they should attend courses or attend institutions, and we'll certainly work to try and make sure that students and their families have all the necessary information, the rationale used for making the amendment for Written Question 1 still stands with respect to Written Question 2.

Therefore, I'd ask the House to support the amendments so that I can provide as much information as is possible in the current situation to the hon. member and to the House, and we will then take a look further outside the process of Written Questions and Motions for Returns to see how we can enhance the availability of necessary or important information to students and their families.

The Speaker: On the amendments, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister is absolutely right. The amendments proposed to Written Question 2 are almost identical to those that the minister proposed for Written Question 1, and I have the exact same objections to the amendments proposed to Written Question 2 in the same way I had those objections to the amendments proposed to Written Question 1.

Mr. Speaker, I still find it difficult to accept the minister's argument that he is constrained by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act when it comes to making public information on default rates on loans by institutions. The FOIP Act, as I understand it, simply does not protect institutions from providing information that is public, that should be public, that is not about individuals, either individuals who are employees of those institutions or individuals who are students at these institutions. So I cannot accept the argument – it's simply not persuasive – that FOIP legislation constrains the minister from offering that information. There must be other reasons, and I can only wonder what those reasons are. Replacing "institution or private vocational school" with "sector" makes lots of information unavailable. It makes the whole information opaque.

This House is about transparency; it's about making information public. It's making institutions adhere to standards of openness and transparency that the public interest in this province demands and requires. To exempt them from releasing such information is to give them licence to hide the information that, if made public, would certainly serve the interests of families and students, who have lots at stake in going to postsecondary schools or sending their children to postsecondary schools. They spend lots of money and resources in enabling these people to be able to go there, and to deny them this critical piece of information is to really deny them a service that they, I think, merit, have the right to have.

Mr. Speaker, in light of the conversation that the Minister of Advanced Education and I had, I'm not going to spend all of my time and ask the House to again spend time on taking a standing vote on it, but I cannot support these amendments because they defeat the

very intention and the purposes that lie behind the asking of the question in the first place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion on amendment carried]

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, there's very little to be said about the amended question. I know that the minister will proceed to provide some very general information, which I'm convinced will not be of great use to the students and families whose interests are at stake here. But you get what you get, and I'm therefore willing to let the matter proceed to the next stage.

[Written Question 2 as amended carried]

3:40 Student Loan Numbers

Q3. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted. For each of the fiscal years 2001-2002, 2002-2003, and 2003-2004 what was the total number of students who received student loans while attending a postsecondary institution or private vocational school in Alberta broken down by institution?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again with Written Question 3 I would indicate that we're prepared to accept the question if it were amended so that it could be responded to in an appropriate way. In this case the amendments aren't as extensive because we can provide, in fact, information with respect to the 2003-2004 fiscal year in respect of the total number of students who received loans, so that amendment isn't necessary in this one.

I would ask and I would move that Written Question 3 be amended by adding "Alberta" after "received" and by striking out "by institution" and substituting "by the last postsecondary sector attended by the student." Written Question 3 will then read as follows:

For each of the fiscal years 2001-2002, 2002-2003, and 2003-2004 what was the total number of students who received Alberta student loans while attending a postsecondary institution or private vocational school in Alberta broken down by the last postsecondary sector attended by the student.

Again, the reasons for the changes are straightforward. Institution levels of numbers of students receiving loans are not currently shared, but information at a sector level is available to be made public. Legislative services have indicated again, as I indicated with respect to the other question – I won't go through the whole thing – that it could be a violation of sections 16 or 25 if we agreed to release the information without having prior discussions with the institutions, the private institutions under section 16 or the public institutions under section 25.

Approximately 200 to 250 of the 1,900 institutions attended by Albertans are within the province, so that answers the previous question that the hon. member raised. There are 200 to 250 in the province, and we'd need to consult with those institutions prior to releasing these data, which would be an incredibly time-consuming process. Our standard student loan reports by institutions also include other student assistance received, i.e. benefits and grants, and to provide an institution-level breakdown of loans would also require those reports to be manually severed to exclude the other assistance information.

So, again, while I always have the interest in providing as much information as is appropriate and possible without unduly taking away from the time that staff have to devote to the interests of

students in the postsecondary institution system, it is appropriate to make this amendment so that we can provide as much information as may be reasonably available while recognizing the FOIP requirements and making sure that we don't violate that particular act either knowingly or unknowingly and, also, of course, to limit the information we provide with respect to Alberta student loans as opposed to Canada student loans or loans from family, friends, or other financial institutions.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the House agree to the amendment so that we might provide the hon. member with information on an appropriate basis.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amendment proposed by the Minister of Advanced Education is in two parts. Part (a) simply refers to Alberta students, and I have no objection to part (a) of the amendment. I accept that amendment.

My concern remains with part (b), where the word "sector" will replace the words "by institution" in Written Question 3. Mr. Speaker, I regret to say that I find that FOIP, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, is serving here more as a fig leaf to cover information, to refuse to release information which I see as important, which has nothing to do with the privacy of individuals. It has to do with the performance of institutions. Institutions must be judged based on their performance, and there's no reason for this minister or this government or this House to provide protection against the ability of these institutions to deliver the goods which they're there to offer to students if they are willing to undergo huge student debt and take out loans to seek those qualifications, seek those educational experiences that the educational institutions offer.

I think it's always important if you, particularly a government that regrettably seems intent upon the private, for-profit sector to grow within our public postsecondary education system, then turn around and protect those very institutions that in my view have very little useful role to play within the public postsecondary system, to provide them the protection that they neither deserve nor need to have. If they are going to be players within the postsecondary education system, then they ought to be held accountable for the record that they produce in terms of the success and failure of the students that enrol in them.

It's that information that will then be useful for future students to use to make decisions on whether they want to take loans from the government or public resources to go to the institutions which they know will not deliver on the promised goods. So why, for goodness' sake, keep this information from being available to students and families who have to make these critical decisions? We have heard in this Assembly time and again, year after year about the massive debt loads that our postsecondary students have. They have to have these in order to get to these institutions in the first place.

Well, if that is the case, if we are forcing students to take such high risks with respect to their own financial security present and future and encourage them to invest in their own future from their own resources, then I think we as a government, as a Legislature have a responsibility to stand up for them and call on the institutions to make the information public that would be absolutely necessary for these students to be able to say: yes, I want to go to this institution because of their good academic record, performance record, and no to that institution because I know that the government has provided me with the information that tells me that I shouldn't be seeking admission to this institution based on its past record.

It is that information that's being denied by way of this amend-

ment, and that's why, Mr. Speaker, I again find myself opposing very strongly the part (b) of the amendment as proposed by the minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion on amendment carried]

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I would simply say that my question, Question 3 as amended, won't provide the information that's critical for students to have, for families to have. Regardless, whatever information the minister is willing to provide I will receive and then make a judgment, based on that, on whether or not to continue to persist in my attempts to have information made public that I think is in the interest of students and families to have.

[Written Question 3 as amended carried]

Student Loan Dollar Value

- Q4. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted.
For each of the fiscal years 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 what was the total dollar value of student loans received by students in Alberta broken down by postsecondary institution or private vocational school attended by the student?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As with written questions 1, 2, and 3, Written Question 4 could be accepted if it was amended. Again, the amendments would be made in order to align with the type of information which we feel we can legally provide without having to do the thorough review under the FOIP Act.

3:50

So I would move that Written Question 4 be amended by adding "Alberta" before "student loans," adding "while attending a postsecondary institution or private vocational school" before "in," adding "the last" before "postsecondary," and striking out "institution or private vocational school" and substituting "sector." The amended written question will then read as follows:

For each of the fiscal years 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 what was the total dollar value of Alberta student loans received by students while attending a postsecondary institution or private vocational school in Alberta broken down by the last postsecondary sector attended by the student?

Again, Mr. Speaker, I won't go through and repeat the arguments in detail, but essentially these amendments are perceived to be necessary as we could not agree to release information of that nature without doing a thorough FOIP review, particularly under section 16 and section 25 of the FOIP Act.

I have every interest, as the hon. member does, in making sure that the students have appropriate information in making determinations as to what institutions they might attend or what value they can get, but there is no value, Mr. Speaker, in giving people information which is not in a context or at an appropriate level. Certainly, there's no good reason for us to perhaps go to an extent where we might be violating our own laws with respect to protection of privacy.

I must say that the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act extends privacy not just to individuals but also to institutions under section 25 and to private-sector companies, which would include for-profit, private-sector schools, under section 16. We would not be able to release these data without doing a consultation with each of those institutions. While that might be a valuable thing to do, doing it now in the context of the types of information that we have and agreeing to do it now would not in our view be

legal. Therefore, we must decline to do that, and that's why we ask for the amendments.

What we do going forward to ensure that we look at how we collect data and how we work with institutions and what information might be available to be provided to students in making their decisions is something that I think is worthy of discussion, and I would certainly appreciate any input from the hon. member or other members of the House with respect to those questions.

Regretfully, we must ask for these amendments to this question at this time in order that we can abide by the laws of this House's past and ensure that we don't make undue use of the taxpayers' money using civil servants' time to gather information which is not being collected in the way in which it's being asked for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the amendment.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise regretfully to oppose the amendment for the reasons that I would be repeating the fourth time around in the House if I spoke at length about why I am opposed to the amendment. The amendment simply defeats the very purpose of asking the question. Clearly, now, it seems to me that there are two facts here. One, the minister's inability or lack of readiness to supply information by institution calls into question the commitment of this government to hold institutions to account whether they are for profit, whether they have business interest or academic interest.

I think that this House and this government must hold all institutions accountable for the taxpayers' money that they receive. In this case we are asking for information that students receive to go to these institutions. It is not their money directly given to institutions – I would recognize and acknowledge that fact – but the point is that these are public dollars. Many students who take these loans go to some of these institutions of questionable repute and, in fact, never complete the programs. They fail the programs, and then they default on the loans that they have taken.

That default on student loans means that public dollars are being lost. Then the government calls on some collection agencies to get after these students to recover these loans and in the process loses goodness knows how much, 30 per cent to 70 per cent, whatever the take is of collection agencies, of the money that they're able to collect at the end of this arduous process after they have really harassed families and students for years.

So all we are doing here is drawing attention to the serious flaw in the decision of the government to make whatever information it makes public and perhaps some gaps in the information that ought to be collected that it presently does not collect. There's no reason to be complacent in the manner in which we account for public dollars and tax dollars that we spend either by way of loans or by way of some subsidy or grant to institutions. The answer in the question that I have raised here today would have helped us to account for every dollar that we spend on postsecondary education whether by way of student loans or through some other shape or form. Unfortunately, the minister has refused to do this.

The last point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, is the what I consider inappropriate use of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. To use this act to withhold information which has nothing to do with the protection of privacy of individuals – all we are seeking is institutional records and information related to institutions, not to individuals – is to bring the efficacy and usefulness of this piece of legislation into question. When you use a piece of legislation for purposes for which it is not supposed to be used, you risk putting the credit of the piece of legislation into question, into disrepute.

That is my additional concern, Mr. Speaker, that I must make sure gets on the record. We shouldn't be using pieces of legislation which are not designed to deny people the information that's legitimately due to citizens, that's legitimately due to people who use these institutions: families, students, faculty, and taxpayers in general. My fear is that here FOIP is being used to do precisely that, and that's deeply regrettable.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I would respectfully request that we move to private members' business with unanimous consent from the House, please.

The Speaker: We've just approved the amendment to Written Question 4. We still have to deal with Written Question 4 as amended. Now, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, do you want to conclude the debate?

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I just want to say on Written Question 4, eviscerated and emasculated as it is by the amendment proposed by the minister and voted for by this House, I am willing to receive the information that the minister will be providing with reference to Written Question 4.

[Written Question 4 as amended carried]

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I would request that we move to private members' business with unanimous consent of the House.

[Unanimous consent denied]

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

Ground Ambulance Services

Q5. Mr. MacDonald moved on behalf of Dr. Taft that the following question be accepted. Which reports, consultation groups, and stakeholder reviews have indicated to the government that \$55 million is the total amount needed to fully fund the provincial takeover of ground ambulance services on April 1, 2005?

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think this question is self-explanatory, certainly, but there has been a significant increase in the amount of money that is reported to be required to implement this ground ambulance service. There are some municipalities that are still scratching their heads as to how all this came about. Some municipalities feel that they have been left in the dark and possibly could be left holding a significant bill at the end of this. All these reports, consultation groups that have had discussions with the government, and the reviews from stakeholders: it would be very interesting to see what they had to say initially. It is a matter of public interest because of the significant cost overruns from the initial estimate.

Thank you.

4:00

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm so delighted to rise. In a spirit of transparency and co-operation, we are prepared to accept Written Question 5.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I would like to express on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and other members of our caucus the acceptance of Written Question 5 and look forward to receiving all of the information in a timely fashion.

Thank you.

[Written Question 5 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Alberta's Representative in Washington

Q6. Mr. MacDonald moved on behalf of Ms Pastoor that the following question be accepted.

How much money is being spent on leasing accommodation for the Alberta representative in Washington, D.C., for the 2004-05 fiscal year?

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. Now, certainly all members of this Assembly and the taxpayers know how much the Alberta representative – in some circles it is called the Alberta envoy, and in some other circles it's called the Alberta ambassador – is receiving in wages and benefits. I'm sure this accommodation has a thermostat on it, so if the honourable ambassador would like to put on a sweater and turn down the thermostat in that accommodation, he would be able to do so. But, certainly, in light of the costs of this office to date and the set-up for wages and benefits, it's in the taxpayers' interests that we know how much, if any, the leasing accommodation costs would be to the taxpayers for the fiscal year 2004-2005.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations to indicate his desire to accept this particular question as presented.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to close the debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Education. We look forward to receiving that information, again in a timely manner. Thanks.

[Written Question 6 carried]

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

Coal-bed Methane Wells

Q7. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

Of the total number of coal-bed methane wells drilled in Alberta in 2004, how many produced either saline or non-saline water?

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All the information that is circulating around this province at the very moment about coal-bed methane production and the amount of salty water that is or is not coming from those wells is interesting because

of the different views that are being expressed by landowners. Some landowners are all for this coal-bed methane well drilling; others are not. This written question has provoked a significant amount of debate on that side.

Mr. Mar: Just your pronunciation. That's all.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I can assure the hon. Minister of Community Development that where I grew up, there are yet to be any coal-bed methane wells, and this is an interesting problem.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a lot of misinformation out there in regard to . . .

An Hon. Member: Mispronunciation.

Mr. MacDonald: There may be that too.

There's a lot of misinformation out there that needs to be corrected. This could be a very good industry for Alberta, the coal-bed methane industry, for a form of natural gas production. But I'm quite concerned, and the research that I have done indicates that there is significantly less produced water that is salty in the Alberta coal formations than there is, for instance, in the Powder River basin formations. Significantly less. I would like that verified: just exactly how much produced water is coming up with the gas, and what kind of produced water it is.

Written Question 7 is seeking that information, and hopefully this information would be shared with Albertans who are interested in this, and we could find out precisely what we're dealing with here. If we're dealing with a lot of produced water that is salty in some formations, then we can work at ways of disposing this water. Perhaps it could be used for enhanced oil recovery. Who knows? But I certainly hope that I can receive this information from the government.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to indicate at this time our unfortunate position, being one of having to reject this, but I'd like to present an explanation and also give an undertaking. The hon. Minister of Energy has asked me on his behalf to communicate to the hon. questioner and to all members of the House that it's important to note first of all that most oil and gas wells drilled in Alberta, and most anywhere else for that matter, produce water, be it saline or non-saline. Coal-bed methane wells are not unique in this regard.

In specific response to Written Question 7, the hon. Minister of Energy wishes it to be noted that the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board has not yet finished compiling final coal-bed methane well figures and information for 2004. As a result, neither he nor I would be able to commit to providing the hon. member opposite with the requested information within the time period specified by our House process. However, the Minister of Energy did wish the questioner and all members here to know that he would undertake to provide the information as requested as soon as it becomes available.

4:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. In regard to Written Question 7 one will have to wait. I certainly thought that three months into the year that information would be readily

available, but if it is not, I will wait. Hopefully, I will be pleasantly surprised. Someday, Mr. Speaker, I'll come in to my desk before question period, and the information will be presented.

In conclusion, I would like to remind the hon. Minister of Education that I was specifically asking for coal-bed methane wells and their produced water records. It had nothing to do with oil and gas wells. Certainly, that is a separate issue. But I'm confident that if we share this information with the citizens, with the landowners, I think that we will avoid a lot of the misrepresentation that is currently circulating among some landowners. I find it disturbing that the information in regard to the benefits of this potential industry is not being circulated, because I think that we could stop a lot of potential problems.

Thank you.

[Written Question 7 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Automobile Insurance Rebates

Q8. Mr. Taylor moved on behalf of Mr. R. Miller that the following question be accepted.

Of the Albertans who received an automobile insurance rebate between October 1, 2004, and February 28, 2005, what percentage of these received less than \$50?

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that I'd have to put myself into that category, the percentage that received less than \$50. I think I got about \$12 back, in fact. And for those dates mentioned in the Written Question, I've yet to speak to a single individual who got a bigger rebate than that. So we're of course very interested in finding out how we're doing given this government's earlier undertaking that it would deliver a reformed automobile insurance system in this province that would deliver the cheapest automobile insurance in western Canada.

So thank you for that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, again I need to reject this motion as phrased, and I'd like to provide an explanation on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance. Just by way of background, briefly, there are approximately 1.7 million private passenger vehicles registered and insured in the province of Alberta through more than 70 automobile insurers. Insurance companies annually report their business written and claims paid to an appointed statistical agency.

Now, the Department of Finance does not receive the type of information requested in this particular question that has just been read into *Hansard* from the automobile insurers licensed in Alberta. That is to say that the Department of Finance does not get that information from those insurers. Therefore, it's unfortunate, but the Minister of Finance needs to advise through me to all members of the House that neither she nor the government are in a position to accept this particular question as presented, and so we will have to reject it.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to get up on this one because, you know, I'm appalled at the answer

that we just received by the minister. This was a government program. This was a program that the government established in order to try and control automobile insurance rates in this province, which were sky-high. Now they tell us that they don't have the information to determine whether or not this program had any effect at all. They don't collect it.

What was the point of the exercise, then, Mr. Speaker? If the government is introducing a program creating great turmoil in the insurance industry on the one hand, great expectations on the part of people who have to pay through the nose for their car insurance, and they can't even tell us whether or not a majority of people got any meaningful benefit from this program at all. That is a disgrace, and I think that the government should be ashamed.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, just to close with some measure of disgust, I'm afraid. I don't know how a government that makes a promise that it will deliver the cheapest, most affordable automobile insurance system in western Canada can ever hope to keep that promise and be accountable not only to this Legislature but to the people of Alberta, the registered owners of those 1.7 million vehicles, if it doesn't keep these statistics and if it's not even prepared to make any effort to seek these statistics from the insurance industry. Why make a promise in the first place if you're not going to follow through with it?

So I have to close by saying that I think this is a most unacceptable answer from the government, and I'm disappointed. I'm deeply disappointed. I think an awful lot of Albertans will be deeply disappointed as well.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 8 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:17 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Agnihotri	Elsalhy	Miller, R.
Backs	Macdonald	Swann
Bonko	Mason	Taylor
Eggen	Mather	

Against the motion:

Ady	Horner	Morton
Cao	Johnston	Oberle
Cardinal	Knight	Ouellette
Coutts	Liepert	Pham
Evans	Lougheed	Prins
Forsyth	Lund	Snelgrove
Fritz	Magnus	Stevens
Graydon	Mar	Tarchuk
Griffiths	Marz	Webber
Groeneveld	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Hancock	Mitzel	

Totals:	For – 11	Against – 32
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[Written Question 8 lost]

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

AISH Benefits

Q9. Mr. MacDonald moved on behalf of Ms Pastoor that the following question be accepted.

What is the breakdown of the total dollar value of cash, medical, and other benefits provided monthly to AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, recipients in 2004 by the government?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, certainly there have been a lot of questions around the entire monthly AISH benefit package. There were a large number of Albertans urging the government to increase the monthly benefit package. It was an issue during the past provincial election. Many people have felt very, very strongly that AISH benefits should have been increased. The government in the meantime has been arguing that it has been unaffordable, but this information would go a long way toward providing information in detail not only to the AISH community but to taxpayers.

4:30

Certainly, I was surprised and delighted as well to read in one of the papers today of a budget leak and hear that we're going to see a much-needed increase in AISH benefits. We're not going to get into the whole debate on budget leaks in this province. I think it would be an inappropriate place to have that debate, but certainly I would look forward to the information that we are requesting with Written Question 9 on this side of the House on behalf of the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to indicate that I'd be able to accept the written question if it was amended and also to let you know that this amendment was previously shared with my opposition colleague and circulated to members of the House, as the protocol with these written questions.

I'd like to move that Written Question 9 be amended by striking out the word "medical" and the word "other" and substituting for them the words "and health." The amended question would read as follows. "What is the breakdown of the total dollar value of cash and health benefits provided monthly to AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, recipients in 2003-04 by the government?"

Mr. Speaker, if it's all right with you, I'd like to share the rationale for making that change. The rationale for amending Written Question 9 is that the AISH program currently provides two types of benefits. First, it provides a living allowance, which is also referred to as a cash benefit, and that is \$850 per month that we provide to Albertans with severe disabilities to meet their basic needs. Following an MLA review of the AISH program, we committed to increasing the amount of the monthly living allowance, and I am looking forward to announcing details of that increase and other enhancements to the AISH program later this week.

But the AISH benefit also includes a comprehensive health benefit package, which includes free Alberta health care insurance, prescription drugs, eye care, dental care, emergency ambulance services, and essential diabetic supplies. The word "health" is the terminology used by the AISH program instead of the word "medical." These are minor word amendments – I recognize that, Mr. Speaker – which clarify the specific information that we are able to provide.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. minister of seniors has answered one of my questions, and that was in regard to the definition of health benefit. I was pleased to hear that it does include prescription drug costs and that there is no ceiling on the amount of those prescription drug costs. So on behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East I would like to say thank you. We on this side of the Assembly look forward to receiving that information, again, in a timely fashion.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate on the question as amended.

Mr. MacDonald: Just in conclusion, Mr. Speaker – and I'll be very brief – I thank the hon. minister and look forward to receiving the information.

[Written Question 9 as amended carried]

Student Loan Program

Q10. Mr. Taylor moved that the following question be accepted.
What is the dollar value of all Alberta student loan program relief benefits and completion payments provided to students attending public postsecondary educational institutions, broken down by institution, in each of the 2000-01 to 2003-04 fiscal years?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would be very pleased to accept Written Question 10 if it were amended so that we could provide the information in a manner in which it's available to us appropriately. Therefore, I would move that Written Question 10 be amended by striking out "provided" and substituting "awarded" and by striking out "institution" and substituting "sector." So the amended question would read as follows.

What is the dollar value of all Alberta student loan program relief benefits and completion payments awarded to students attending public postsecondary educational institutions, broken down by sector, in each of the 2000-01 to 2003-04 fiscal years?

Mr. Speaker, in changing it to "sector" as opposed to "institution," I would just refer to the comments that were made in debate under written questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 relative to the provisions of sections 16 and 25 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the advice that I've had from legal services with respect to the fact that providing information based on an institution-by-institution basis may, unless we've consulted with those institutions first, be offensive to the act.

I had committed to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that I would pursue that issue further, and I will make the same commitment to this member, that I will pursue that information further, because I am interested in providing students and families and all Albertans with information, if it's appropriate information, to allow them to make good decisions and good judgments about where to attend and if it's information that's relevant to the decision-making process. However, I'm very, very reluctant, as you may well agree, to have this Legislature order the production of information if by virtue of the FOIP Act we've put some process in place to determine what information should be released and how it should be released. So I would just raise that issue.

Then, of course, what appears to be a rather strange change from "provided" to "awarded." We're merely doing that because reports

identify the amounts that are awarded but not necessarily cashed in a fiscal year. The question needs to be rephrased to include amounts awarded to students because our student assistance tracking distinguishes between awarded, issued, cashed. "Provided" is not one of the terms that we use. So in order to be certain as to what type of information we are giving out, we just ask that the word be changed so it's clear that that's what's being asked for and not something that's not within the terms that we use in that area. But I can assure the hon. member that if he intended to get different information, I'll work with him on that and make sure that we provide, where it's possible and appropriate, the information that he needs.

So I would ask the House to amend Written Question 10 as I have moved.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, my grandmother used to say that half a loaf is better than none, especially when there's the tantalizing promise that the other half of the loaf may come in the fullness of time. I'll certainly accept the hon. minister's explanation for the need to strike out "institution" and substitute "sector." It would be nice to know institution by institution the provision or, I should say, awarding, I guess, of relief benefits and completion payments. It may be that I have to come back in subsequent sessions of this Legislature and propose much the same written question, substituting the word "issued" for "awarded" and then, again, substituting the word "cash" for "awarded."

But as it stands, I'm satisfied with the amendments that the minister has proposed, and I'd be pleased to accept them and get that much information at least.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate, or should I just call the question?

Mr. Taylor: Just call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 10 as amended carried]

4:40 Student Loan Program

Q11. Mr. Taylor moved that the following question be accepted. What is the dollar value of all Alberta student loan program relief benefits and completion payments provided to students attending private, for-profit educational or training institutions, broken down by institution, in each of the 2000-01 to 2003-04 fiscal years?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I would be happy to accept Written Question 11 if it were amended in the manner in which I would propose in order that I can give the information that we have in an appropriate way. I therefore would move that Written Question 11 be amended by striking out "provided" and substituting "awarded," by adding "the" after "attending," and by striking out "for-profit educational or training institutions, broken down by institution," and substituting "vocational school sector."

The amended written question will read, then, as follows. "What is the dollar value of all Alberta student loan program relief benefits

and completion payments awarded to students attending the private vocational school sector in each of the 2000-01 to 2003-04 fiscal years?"

Mr. Speaker, again, the explanation is similar to that provided for Written Question 10 with respect to the need to go to a sector-based reporting rather than an institution-based reporting. Also, we do not use the terminology "private, for-profit educational or training institutions," but we do use the terminology "private vocational schools." It essentially means the same thing, but it's more consistent with the terminology we use. Just to make sure that there's no question about what information we're providing and for what schools we're providing it, we would request that the amendment be made so that we can clearly comply with the direction of this House.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Well, I have no problem with the first two points under the amendment that the hon. minister is proposing: striking out "provided" and substituting "awarded" and adding "the" after "attending." I do, however, have a problem this time with substituting "vocational school sector" for "for-profit educational or training institutions, broken down by institution."

Mr. Speaker, we've been down this road now several times today on several different written questions. I understand under current law, current rules the minister's need to substitute "sector" for "institution." I understand that we have to do it on a sectoral basis, that we cannot do it institution by institution at this time. I appreciate the minister's undertaking that he would explore this further and hopefully, if I understood him correctly in earlier exchanges, get us to the point eventually where we can get this information institution by institution.

The reason why I have a problem in this particular instance is that in the private vocational training regulation, under Exemptions section 3(c) says that the act does not apply to "any program leading to the granting of a degree under the Universities Act." There are some other exemptions, too, but that's the one that really stands out for me. I think, Mr. Speaker, that this allows – and again I'm looking at a specific institution or, you know, in the future at perhaps more than one – at least one institution which has degree-granting status, although in many other respects you would think that it would fall into, as we phrased the question originally, the "for-profit educational or training institution" description. It lets that particular institution, I think, fall through the cracks, and for that reason I cannot support this part of the minister's proposed amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: On the main question as amended, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Very quickly. I've made my points during the amendment. The amendment has now passed, so although my objections still stand to it, let's call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 11 as amended carried]

head: Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given back on Thursday, April 7, I would now move that

motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions 2, 3, and 5 through 18 inclusive.

[Motion carried]

University of Phoenix

M2. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Dr. Pannu that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the ministerial order authorizing the University of Phoenix to operate in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be pleased to indicate to the House that we could accept and encourage the House to vote for Motion for a Return 2 provided that it was amended so that we can most appropriately comply with it. Therefore, I would move an amendment to Motion for a Return 2, as has been provided to the hon. member moving it and is now being circulated, by striking out "a copy" and substituting "copies," by striking out "ministerial order" and substituting "letters of approval," and by striking out "operate" and substituting "offer specific degree programs."

The amended motion for a return would then read as follows: "copies of the letters of approval authorizing the University of Phoenix to offer specific degree programs in Alberta."

Mr. Speaker, we're requesting that the amendment be made to indicate that the approvals were provided through letters of approval rather than by ministerial order and pertain to specific degree programs rather than as moved in terms of authorizing it to operate. The amended motion for a return will more accurately reflect what actually was done.

Approval apparently was granted to the University of Phoenix to offer specific degree programs in Alberta in 1999, and an extension of this approval was granted in September, I believe it was, of 2004. The approvals were granted through letters of approval, not ministerial orders. The relevant legislation at these times provided that approval be provided in accordance with regulation. As there were no regulations in place, the departmental approvals were issued using the letters rather than a ministerial order process. Again, the approval is not for them to operate but with respect to the offering of specific programs and therefore the need for the amendment in order to appropriately respond.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on the amendment.

Mr. Martin: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the explanation from the House leader we would accept the amendment.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Motion for a Return 2 as amended carried]

4:50 University of Phoenix

M3. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Dr. Pannu that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents including but not limited to memos, faxes, reports, letters, applications, and responses related to the approval of the University of Phoenix to operate as a postsecondary institution in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I would rise to accept Motion for a Return 3 on behalf of the government if it could be amended in order to allow us to comply appropriately. Therefore, I would move that Motion for a Return 3 be amended by adding "relied upon by the government of Alberta" after "documents," striking out "related to the approval of" and substituting "in approving," and striking out "operate as a postsecondary institution" and substituting "offer specific degree programs."

Again, in making those amendments or proposing those amendments, the amended motion would then read:

A copy of all documents relied upon by the government of Alberta including but not limited to memos, faxes, reports, letters, applications, and responses in approving the University of Phoenix to offer specific degree programs in Alberta.

The material referenced in this motion includes documents that are regarded as proprietary information; for example, the full curriculum for each of the degree programs as well as information submitted by third parties, including correspondence from the accrediting body. Although the release of this type of information is restricted by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, release of the information specifically used by the department to determine that the University of Phoenix meets the criteria for approving nonresident institutions to offer degree programs in the province would not be so restricted. Therefore, by amending it, we can comply, I believe, with the request being made by giving the information that was relied upon for the approval process while still adhering to the requirements of the freedom of information act otherwise.

I would encourage the House to accept the amendments so that we can provide as much information as is reasonably and legally possible to the House in response to the motion for a return.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on the amendment.

Mr. Martin: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems, in a quick perusal here of the amendment we've just received now, that this limits what we can see in terms of the approval process. I'm thinking mainly in (b), where it says striking out "related to the approval of" and substituting "in approving." Well, this is a private institution, and I think the people of the province have a right to know how these private institutions all of a sudden come into the province and are set up and start offering specific degree programs. I think it's important that we actually have some idea how this happens. All of a sudden we hear down the way that, hey, the University of Phoenix is here.

I might relate, Mr. Speaker, that there are some problems – it's been documented on national television in the United States – dealing with this specific institution, some problems that were created by this institution in terms of funding and extra money coming in to them. So they don't have a lily-white record here, and all of a sudden they're here in Alberta, and some of the same problems that the Americans are talking about could be occurring here. It seems to us that we should be up front about this. How is it that after the problems they've had in the United States, we have this particular university coming here all of a sudden accredited?

What the minister is suggesting is just substituting "in approving." Well, that tells us nothing. It tells us absolutely nothing. We know that they're approved, and we're not going to get any more documentation. What we're interested in is finding out how they got

approved, especially in view of – the minister must be well aware – their record in the United States, where there is some controversy with this specific institution. All of a sudden now they're here in Alberta.

It seems to me that due diligence would have suggested that before we allow them to offer specific degree programs in Alberta, with some of the problems they've had in the United States, we'd want to know that. I think that it's only reasonable, in view of their track record, that we know this information, Mr. Speaker, and with all due respect to the minister, we're not getting much here. This is very, very narrow, and as a result I don't think it's what we want in the motion, and for that reason I certainly would oppose it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to conclude debate on the motion as amended.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess it's nice that we'll find a small document that they've approved the University of Phoenix, but it won't lead us any closer to why and how and, as I say, the record of this university. But I guess anything is better than nothing.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 3 as amended carried]

Coal-bed Methane Well Applications

M5. Mr. Eggen moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing for each of the fiscal years 2001-2002, 2002-2003, and 2003-2004 a list of applications to drill coal-bed methane wells that were denied by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 5 I rise on behalf of the hon. Minister of Energy to indicate that, unfortunately, the information in the form requested by the hon. member opposite is not able to be provided as asked for because the information being sought is neither collected nor organized in the fashion represented by fiscal year. However, if it's acceptable to the hon. member and other members of the House, I would indicate on behalf of the hon. Minister of Energy that he would reorganize the question somewhat and make the information available by calendar year as opposed to by fiscal year, which is how it's now worded.

That having been said, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Energy he has indicated through me to you that he would provide as much of the relevant information as possible by calendar year. As such, we will have to reject this motion for a return as currently worded.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to close the debate.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Well, I find it unfortunate that the hon. minister representing the Minister of Energy is unable to offer an amendment to this motion for a return then. I think we've seen a number of times here this afternoon that small amendments have been brought forward and that thus we're able to receive this information in a timely way.

I think it's absolutely essential that we do in fact receive more accurate information in regard to coal-bed methane exploration in this province. I think that everyone is recognizing the potential importance of coal-bed methane in the immediate future for our energy needs and export energy needs in this province, yet we're unable to perhaps evaluate it in a reasonable way without this information. You know, my understanding is that there are 3,000 coal-bed methane drilling wells in place at this time and thousands more being approved. It would be a simple matter of tabulating those things for us and getting a whole range of potential evaluations. It's just a matter of putting it on a spreadsheet.

So, yes, I would be happy, in fact, to amend my Motion for a Return 5, changing from fiscal to calendar, but as I don't see an amendment coming forward. Excuse me if I'm missing something here. Otherwise, it's impossible for us to go forward on it. Is that correct?

The Speaker: Well, actually, what the hon. member was doing was concluding the debate on the motion that he was putting forward too.

[Motion for a Return 5 lost]

5:00 Coal-bed Methane Well Applications

M6. Mr. Eggen moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing for each of the fiscal years 2001-2002, 2002-2003, and 2003-2004 a list of applications to drill coal-bed methane wells that were approved by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Energy I need to indicate to the hon. questioner and to all members of the House that the information being sought is not collected nor organized nor available by fiscal year. Therefore, we will find ourselves in a position of having to reject this motion as worded, but I would give the undertaking, as I did with the previous motion for a return, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Energy that he will provide you with as much relevant information as possible organized by calendar year since that's how that information derives.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to conclude the debate.

Mr. Eggen: It's becoming more clear now. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am certainly looking forward to receiving this information. As I said with my previous motion for a return, you know, if we are able to evaluate in a substantive way the applications that are being both denied and accepted by the Energy and Utilities Board, then we're in a position to make the balanced and weighted decision that is incumbent on this Legislature.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 6 lost]

Sour Gas Blowout Ignition Study

M7. Mr. Eggen moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents including but not limited to contracts, proposals, memos, and reports, including interim reports, relating to the P2406 sour gas blowout

ignition study in the possession of the Ministry of Energy prepared by the Bercha Group of Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the hon. Minister of Energy has asked me to convey some thoughts in respect to this particular motion. I think, as hon. members would know, the motions for returns process is not intended to be used to circumvent any of the processes and/or protections afforded by Alberta's protection of privacy rules. Some of the information requested in this motion for a return does relate to contracts, to proposals, to memos, and to other related documents. I think the hon. member posing the question is likely aware of the requirement to ensure the protection of privacy of any potentially affected individuals or entities such as may be inferred or referred to by this particular motion.

For the wide-ranging information being sought through this motion for a return, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should be using that process that exists under the Alberta Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation. This would allow any potentially affected third party an opportunity to review the request and to respond to that request. That is an undertaking that we should all heed and abide by.

That having been said, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Energy we will have to reject this motion for a return.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to conclude the debate.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am somewhat surprised at this rejection of offering this information. As everyone here in this Legislature knows, the sour gas blowout situation is all on our minds. In fact, we did have an incident here just to the west of this city before Christmas, and then, you know, it's an ongoing problem throughout the province.

As the conventional sources of natural gas are depleted in this province, it's obvious that companies are going after less safe sources of natural gas, where the hydrogen sulphide content is increased and the pressure is increased. Thus, the danger to people both drilling these wells as well as living in the immediate area, be it a rural or an urban area, is also increasing, the danger to those citizens as well.

What we're looking for from this side, and I think most citizens of Alberta are looking for, is a comprehensive way to deal with both the application for drilling sour gas wells in this province as well as more rigorous standards by which to look at the safety of drilling sour gas wells in this province. I don't think, once again, that many members of this Legislature will be unknowledgeable about the gas wells that are being proposed for the southeast of Calgary. You know, this has been an issue that has been brought up to the forefront by many thousands of Albertans. At the end of the day we want to have a prosperous Alberta, but we also want to have a safe province for our citizens.

I know that some information that I have received in regard to this, the sour gas blowout ignition study in the possession of the Ministry of Energy currently, is very illuminating, and there are a number of other models that will describe the potential effects of a gas blowout in close proximity to an urban area. Quite frankly, the ones that I've seen are very much a doomsday scenario for people living in the immediate area, not just living in the safety control area of a potential blowout close to an urban area but many kilometres beyond that. So, you know, I think that in the interests of safety for

citizens living in proximity to sour gas wells, it would be very revealing and very helpful to people to actually have this information. So I am very disappointed with this refusal.

I'd like to move the motion, nonetheless, and take a vote on it. Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 7 lost]

Sour Gas Blowout Ignition Study

M8. Mr. Eggen moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the P2406 sour gas blowout ignition study, or a copy of the most recent draft of the study, prepared by the Bercha Group of Calgary for the Department of Energy.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question, being worded slightly differently and obviously having a very specific focus to it, does not appear to infringe on FOIP concerns, so on behalf of the hon. Minister of Energy I'm pleased to indicate that he is willing to accept this Motion for a Return 8 as presented on the Order Paper.

[Motion for a Return 8 carried]

Gas Well Applications

M9. Mr. Eggen moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing for each of the fiscal years 2001-2002, 2002-2003, and 2003-2004 a list of applications to drill critical gas wells that were denied by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 9, this is a similar situation to the one I enunciated earlier with respect to motions for returns 5, 6, and so on. That is simply to state to the hon. member: thank you for the question. Unfortunately, it'll have to be rejected as worded only because the information is not collected, organized, nor available by fiscal year. However, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Energy I would communicate to this questioner opposite that the minister will provide as much relevant information as he possibly can organized by calendar year, and I hope that's acceptable to the hon. member.

5:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to conclude the debate.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as per, I believe, motions 5 and 6, I'm certainly willing to peruse and look at the information. I'm looking forward to the information in regard to critical gas wells. I think that I'm not the only one who would be interested in seeing this information, and I look forward to it at its earliest possible convenience to be released to the public.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 9 lost]

Gas Well Applications

M10. Mr. Eggen moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing for each of the fiscal years 2001-2002,

2002-2003, and 2003-2004 a list of applications to drill critical gas wells that were approved by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board.

The Speaker: The Hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 10 the answer is the same as for Motion for a Return 9, that is simply to say that the information the hon. member is seeking is not collected nor organized nor available by fiscal year. However, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Energy, he has asked me to communicate to the members opposite that as much of the relevant information as possible and organized by calendar year will be provided to the questioner as soon as possible. As such, we will have to reject Motion 10 as currently worded on that understanding.

[Motion for a Return 10 lost]

Minister of Sustainable Resource Development Business Expenses

M11. Mr. Bonko moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a breakdown of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development's business expenses including but not limited to airfare, food, accommodation, and conference fees from February 18, 2003, to November 22, 2004.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 11 and on behalf of the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development I would indicate that we would be pleased to accept this motion for a return if it were amended. I believe the amendment has been circulated in its totality to all members here in the House, or it currently is being circulated. In any event, the opposition colleagues were provided with the proposed amendment prior to 11 o'clock this morning as per protocol and procedures governing the House.

That having been said, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to just indicate to the hon. questioner and to all members of the House that for ease in reporting matters such as this, the categories that we have listed in the amended motion reflect the government's adopted procedures when reporting these kinds of credit card expenses. I would also point out that the specific reference to conference fees in the original motion is included under incidental and miscellaneous expenses, which I will read out shortly, and will be provided as a separate category under this particular subtitle when the response gets tabled.

So to accommodate accounting practices, we would like to propose an amendment to this motion. That amendment, in fact, would go as follows. We would strike out "but not limited to airfare, food, accommodation, and conference fees" and then substitute "travel, accommodation, meals, receptions and hosting, and incidental and miscellaneous expenses, including conference fees." Then we would propose to strike out "February 18, 2003, to November 22, 2004," and in place of those words, Mr. Speaker, we would substitute "February 1, 2003, to November 30, 2004," which of course would have the net effect of giving the hon. member more information than he's actually asking for. But from our point of view it gets it down to a monthly basis, the first of the month to the end of the month. So it helps us to provide the information in a form that it is already being collected.

So the final amended motion, Mr. Speaker, very briefly, would simply read:

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a breakdown of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development's

expenses including travel, accommodation, meals, receptions and hosting, and incidental and miscellaneous expenses, including conference fees, from February 1, 2003 to November 30, 2004.

I would like to move that motion as amended.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore on the amendment.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can accept the amendment as a friendly amendment, and we'll live with the results and look forward to receiving the information.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Motion for a Return 11 as amended carried]

Minister of Sustainable Resource Development Business Credit Card Statements

M12. Mr. Bonko moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all monthly business credit card statements for the fiscal year 2003-2004 issued to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and the minister's executive assistant.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 12, I would again indicate on behalf of the government and, in particular, on behalf of the hon. Minister for Sustainable Resource Development that this particular motion as worded would be acceptable to the minister and to the government provided there were some amendments made to it, friendly amendments, I hope the hon. questioner would agree.

In any event, the rationale behind that, Mr. Speaker, would simply be to indicate that the issue of reporting is something we take very seriously, obviously. Now, for ease in reporting, the categories that we have listed in the amended motion, which I will read shortly, actually reflect the government's adopted procedures when reporting these kinds of credit card expenses, as I indicated in the response to Motion for a Return 11 as well.

I should point out, Mr. Speaker, that a considerable amount of time and effort would be required to prepare the document under the original motion's intent. I think members here would recognize that our provincial civil service is an extremely dedicated group of individuals who are doing an excellent job, doing excellent work on behalf of all Albertans. [some applause] Yes. Thank you for the applause, hon. members. I guess it becomes a question of understanding how best that time gets spent by our civil service and what the best use of their time, in particular, might be when you look at questions such as this one in its current form. Therefore, some good amendments have been put forward, and as I said, I'll get to them in just a second.

My final comment would simply be this, Mr. Speaker. Each department, as all members here know, is audited annually by the most professional and thorough of processes as conducted and convened by our own Auditor General, and he would have drawn out to our attention any anomalies that he may have found during his reviews in the past years. Of course, that has not been done. So we're offering these amendments in the spirit of at least trying to provide information in a form that it is currently collected. That having been said, we would propose, then, to strike out "a copy of all monthly business credit card statements" and substitute the words "a statement of all credit card expenses categorized by travel,

accommodation, meals, receptions and hosting, and incidental and miscellaneous expenses” and, finally, strike out the words “issued to” and substitute the words “incurred by.”

In the end, Mr. Speaker, the amended Motion for a Return 12 would be worded as follows:

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a statement of all credit card expenses categorized by travel, accommodation, meals, receptions and hosting, and incidental and miscellaneous expenses for the fiscal year 2003-2004 incurred by the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and the minister’s executive assistant.

I would move that Motion for a Return 12 be accepted as amended.

5:20

The Speaker: On the amendments, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I accept the hon. member’s reasons for the revisions there, and I’m pleased to accept the information as it does come forward.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Motion for a Return 12 as amended carried]

Department of Sustainable Resource Development Business Credit Card Statements

M13. Mr. Bonko moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all monthly business credit card statements for the fiscal year 2003-2004 issued to the deputy minister, all assistant deputy ministers, executive directors, directors, branch heads, managers, and unit leaders for the Department of Sustainable Resource Development.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as with the previous two occasions, I’m going to indicate on behalf of the hon. minister and government our desire to accept this particular motion if it were to have some amendments, which I will read very shortly for the benefit of all members present.

Before I do that, though, Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that in the amended motion we have again categorized expenses under those nomenclatures that the information is collected under: travel, accommodation, meals, receptions and hosting, and incidental and miscellaneous expenses. The reason for this is as a result of a decision by the government last fall to use these specific categories and these specific accounting codes within these categories for the purpose of delineating specific expenses, and those particular categories are used throughout government now. So there’s been a tremendous amount of standardization that has gone on here in the interest of openness, accountability, and organization. It’s our belief that by using these categories, we’ll be able to provide the response to the motion for a return and hopefully to the satisfaction of the questioner.

The second area of comment I’d like to make, Mr. Speaker, is just to provide information to the deputy minister level and not to the other positions listed in the original motion for a return; that being, assistant deputy ministers, executive directors, directors, unit leaders, et cetera. I think there are some others rolled in.

So I want to just explain what the rationale for the wording is then. I indicated earlier that the Auditor General does an extremely

good and thorough job in analyzing all provincial department expenses on an annual basis, and he provides that report and any concerns he might have not only to this Assembly but to the general public of the province. To the best of my knowledge, Mr. Speaker, he hasn’t highlighted any senior department official’s expenses as being a concern at this point.

So I just want to indicate again that a considerable amount of time and effort has gone into preparing the response to this motion, and it would take literally dozens and dozens of hours to compile all the information in a form different than what I’m going to propose. So I hope that will be acceptable to the hon. questioner.

Our well-established process is in place through these annual reviews by the Auditor General that I’ve mentioned, and I think the hon. member and others present are well aware of other avenues that can be used to access even more information should they wish to do that.

That being the case, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest, then, that the amendment simply go as follows: that we strike out “a copy of all monthly business credit card statements” and substitute the words “a statement of all credit card expenses categorized by travel, accommodation, meals, receptions and hosting, and incidental and miscellaneous expenses”; further, that we strike out “issued to” and substitute “incurred by”; and, finally, that we strike out “all assistant deputy ministers, executive directors, directors, branch heads, managers, and unit leaders” such that the final amended motion would be worded as follows:

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a statement of all credit card expenses categorized by travel, accommodation, meals, receptions and hosting, and incidental and miscellaneous expenses for the fiscal year 2003-2004 incurred by the Deputy Minister for the Department of Sustainable Resource Development.

I would move the motion as amended.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m just a little disappointed with regard to the striking out of the following: “all assistant deputy ministers, executive directors, directors, branch heads, managers, and unit leaders” for the Department of Sustainable Resource Development. When they are in fact hired by the department and they carry out any duties that incur costs, they are acting on behalf of the minister and/or his executive assistant. So I thought it would be pertinent and relevant to ask for the specifics with regard to the following members. Again, I’m a little disappointed that they are not going to be included, that the motion does, in fact, exclude them, then.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Motion for a Return 13 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I’m thinking that in view of the hour we may wish to call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 instead of getting started on something and getting stopped in the middle of it.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:28 p.m.]

