

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 18, 2005**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 05/04/18

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

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 and to our guests here as well, today we'll be led in the singing of our national anthem by one of our tour guides, Inge vanDelft. I would ask all to participate in the language of their 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.

Thank you, Inge.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Loughheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members assembled students from Strathcona Christian Academy, accompanied by their principal, Mr. Jim Seutter, and their teacher, Mr. Doug Zook. I'd ask that the students from SCA please stand and be acknowledged in the Assembly.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you 26 students and four adults from your constituency, sir. They're led by their teacher, Anita Flese, and Mr. Michael Wiese, Mrs. Sharon Gilchrist, and Mrs. Marion Charchun. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, and may I also take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. member on his new wedded bliss status as of last Saturday.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a distinct pleasure I have today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the most beautiful woman in the world. She's kind, sensitive, intelligent, funny, warm, endearing, and I could go on forever, but either way she is the light of my life, and any person would be so lucky to know her. I'm the luckiest man in the world because this weekend she married me. I'd like to introduce to you and to members of this Assembly my wife, Mrs. Sue Griffiths.

Mr. Rogers: I don't know how to follow that, Mr. Speaker. But it is my privilege to introduce to you and through you some of the most exceptional students in this province. I have two groups of students here today. The first group I will introduce is from Covenant Christian school, and they are seated in the public gallery. They are accompanied by their teacher, Ms Colette Hayes, and parent helpers Wim Ruysch, Melanie Samuelson, Linda Van Doesburg, Joanne Gulley, Marianne De Boer, and Michelle Koopmans. I would ask that the students from Covenant Christian school rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the second group is a grade 10 social studies class from Leduc composite high school in the city of Leduc. They are led by their teachers, Mrs. Vanessa Andres and Mr. Stanley Staniszewski. They are also seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Lynda and Ron Jonson. The Jonsons are vocal advocates for improvement in long-term care facilities. Lynda has herself visited over 100 long-term care facilities in Alberta and describes them as plagued by an epidemic of neglect and abuse. I would ask that Lynda and Ron rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a group of 23 very bright and energetic young students from Princeton elementary school in my riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. They are seated in the public gallery and are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Unger, and their student teacher, who has been with them for the past nine weeks, Miss Joumaa. Also, parent Manfred Grunling has joined them for this visit. Princeton was one of several Edmonton schools considered for closure. However, thankfully they received word that they will get to keep their wonderful school for a while yet. I ask that these students and the staff accompanying them rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, have your guests arrived yet?

Dr. Pannu: One guest, Mr. Speaker, so I'll take the liberty of introducing her and wait for the others.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this House Pamela Miller. Pamela Miller's brother, Aaron Webster, was brutally murdered three years ago in Vancouver's Stanley park apparently for no other reason than the fact that he was gay. His death serves as a reminder that we live in a society in which individuals can still be hostile and violent towards gays and lesbians and other minority groups. At this time I'd ask that Pamela please rise 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.

Electricity Marketing

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hundreds of hours of transcripts involving Enron and the manipulation of electricity markets are being made public through a trial in the U.S. The *Calgary Herald* reprinted some of those this weekend, but one they did not print is the transcript tabled earlier in this Assembly of a conversation between an Enron employee and an employee at TransAlta concerning ideas for manipulating markets. To the Minister of Energy: has this government or its agencies ever investigated the possible role of TransAlta in manipulating Alberta's electricity prices?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, those transcripts in particular that refer to TransAlta have been looked at. Those actually refer to transactions that occurred in the state of Washington, not in Alberta in particular. Also, actually, when they use words like "marriage of convenience," it refers to control areas. It actually talks about that any jurisdiction, companies included, can create control areas, and those have a very stringent regulatory requirement around them and a very high standard. So they talk about should they set up a control area, which is a very valid part of any discussion.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the transcript and other evidence, will the minister categorically deny that TransAlta conspired with Enron to price gouge Alberta consumers?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, what I will say is that those transcripts have been looked at. They didn't apply to Alberta in particular, and in that respect the market surveillance administrator continues to be a watchdog and does an excellent job in protecting Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister tell this House if the Alberta electric system operator investigation into potential market manipulation, reported in September 2003, was referring to TransAlta?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the specifics in front of me with respect to 2003. I'd be happy to advise in due course.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, for years companies like Enron took advantage of electricity deregulation to manipulate power prices. An Enron senior executive declared in 1999 about Alberta that, quote, it's become clear how easy this is to do, end quote, referring to price manipulation. Despite the claims of this government, deep concern remains that Alberta's electricity market is still being manipulated. Again to the Minister of Energy: will the minister tell us clearly what monetary or legal penalties exist, if any, for companies that unethically exploit market loopholes to their advantage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, I've got to say that all of the things talked about are just allegations or statements. The facts have not proven out. There have been investigations in the past, but even with that, the market surveillance administrator has

referred some material to the federal Competition Bureau. They take these things very seriously, and they will ensure and act very judiciously on behalf of Albertans to protect them.

I would like to expand though. In 2003 there was legislation passed that gives substantial improvements, and it was done to ensure that there was a broad standard of conduct that all would have to abide by and that there would be very severe penalties for those that would breach those.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that current investigations, including the one by the federal Competition Bureau, won't tell Albertans how much money they are owed by Enron, why won't this government pursue Enron to recover undue profits, that should be returned to Alberta consumers?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the legislative hedges in place back at that time, 1999 in particular, that are referred to did just that. They protected Albertans, that they would not have been harmed by any profiteering or manipulation of the marketplace. Because the power at that stage was regulated – before the transition in selling the power purchase arrangements – there was a cap on the amount that any company could get on an upside, and any additional monies would go back into the power pool. Therefore, the consumers were protected at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, then, again to the same minister: is it, in fact, this government's and this minister's position that there was no price manipulation for Alberta's electricity?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I will state that Albertans at the time of 1999, in particular, were not harmed in any material aspect at all with respect to the case that he cites.

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

Budget Expenditures

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government appears to be playing a shell game. It has traded its fiscal debt for a down-loaded infrastructure deficit. While \$9.2 billion is a large sum of money, it will not restore the province in 2005 to its precut 1994 state. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Will the minister please explain why Calgary's postsecondary infrastructure repair and expansion needs, including the University of Calgary in Calgary-Varsity, Mount Royal in Calgary-Currie, and SAIT and the Alberta College of Art in Calgary-Mountain View were basically ignored in this year's budget announcement?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member, having lived in the community and representing a community that has an institution in it, will know well that, for example, Mount Royal has engaged in a considerable amount of building over the last number of years and continues to do so, that SAIT has just finished an aerospace centre at the airport in Calgary, that the Alberta College of Art and Design has plans with respect to how they might proceed with the downtown urban campus site in conjunction with

the other postsecondaries in Calgary – and that’s in the early planning phases – that the University of Calgary is looking toward building a digital library in the context of e-Calgary and the Calgary campus and is working with us in development of the Lois Hole digital library for across Alberta. There are many, many good things that have happened in, are happening in, and will happen in Calgary, and we’ll continue to work with them on the planning process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: while Calgarians were pleased to finally hear the promised government commitment to publicly fund the southeast replacement hospital, when will this government provide the entire expansion funding for the needed beds that were lost due to the closure of half of Calgary’s hospitals in the 1990s?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the hon. member totally ignores the fact that there has been a considerable amount of good work happening in Calgary and across this province in terms of building the health system, and the announcement with respect to the south Calgary hospital ought to be the most exciting thing that he’s heard in a long time. The commitment to building the south Calgary hospital is not only about putting beds in place, but it’s about new ways of delivering health and finding ways to make sure that Albertans stay healthy. So the hon. member ought to stay tuned and stay on tune with respect to the good things that are happening in the health system, including the international symposium that’s going to happen in Calgary at the beginning of May.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Community Development: given the centennial spotlight on arts and culture, the heart and soul of Alberta, why were these two key societal pillars ignored in this year’s budget?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, I’ll just take that question under advisement for the hon. Minister of Community Development. Thank you.

Long-term Care Facilities

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the appalling conditions in long-term care facilities are Alberta’s dirty little secret. Accommodation and related charges to long-term care residents keep going up, but living conditions remain deplorable. Staffing levels are woefully inadequate, facilities are overcrowded, and inspections are few and far between. My questions are for the Premier. Why, after this government has been in power for 34 years and posted billions of dollars in surpluses over the past 10 years, are the province’s most vulnerable seniors forced to live in such appalling conditions?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the preamble is to say the least rude, insensitive, offensive, and totally false. The hon. member should apologize to all the good people who work in long-term care centres.

Mr. Speaker, certainly, it is a fact that the Friends of Medicare, the friends of the NDs and the Liberals, held a news conference this morning, sponsored by the New Democrats, as I understand it, to talk about problems with Alberta’s long-term care system. Totally unbiased, of course. We recognized some time ago that the demands

on Alberta’s long-term care system are going to grow. The reality is that we have an aging population. Improving long-term care is a priority for this government, and I will have the hon. minister of . . .

Some Hon. Members: Time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, why does the government keep ignoring the petitions and pleas of family members when they tell this government that there are simply too few qualified caregivers to look after their loved ones in these facilities?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it was in the budget, but as I said previously, I’ll have the hon. minister respond.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we said in the Assembly last week, the responsibility for long-term care is a shared responsibility. It’s a joint responsibility between the Minister of Health and Wellness and my ministry. The area that I look after in long-term care is the accommodation area, which, of course, is meals, laundry, and that type of service, housekeeping services, utilities.

The question was in regard to caregivers and staffing ratios, and what I would say to the hon. member is that I will take that under advisement for the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: notwithstanding the commitment we just heard from the minister, which is far too late, why has the government not already established minimum staffing and quality care standards for the vulnerable elderly and disabled citizens who live in long-term care facilities?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we have. We have. We have been making tremendous progress. For example, we directed regional health authorities to raise the average hours of care each resident receives from three hours to 3.4 hours over the next three years. This means more hands-on care every day for residents. If the hon. member was listening to the budget debate, he would have heard that targeted funds will be provided to increase nursing care in long-term care facilities.

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

Unbudgeted Surplus

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation made reference to another possible 35 new or upgraded school projects if there was a surplus revenue. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. How does the idea of further capital projects relate to potential surpluses?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in the budget speech of Wednesday last, we do have options for unbudgeted surplus, options that would be for balance sheet improvements. Of course, some of those could be for capital, for the overall capital plan. It could be to improve the heritage fund. It could be to endowments such as the advanced education fund, the scholarship fund, or the science and engineering fund. So those unbudgeted surpluses will be dealt with in that way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Yes. My first supplemental is also to the Minister of Finance. When will you know if there is additional money that could be allocated to these projects?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, it will continue to be our practice to do a first-quarter review, a second-quarter review, and a third-quarter review. If during that process there are pressures that need to be addressed in any of the areas I mentioned and if it seems prudent to expend any dollars in those areas, those decisions will be made through that process.

Mrs. Ady: My final supplemental is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Since 35 projects have been discussed, have you already decided what projects would take the highest priority? Which communities would get what if money was available?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister of Finance said the key word, which was “if” there is a surplus available. We’ve had each and every school board in the province give us their capital requests, give us their capital desires, and certainly we will look at that. But there have been no decisions made. Again – again – the key word is “if” there is a surplus and “if” we decide to put it toward capital infrastructure.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Student Finance System

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Students, parents, and indeed all Albertans are waiting anxiously for the forthcoming postsecondary affordability review, yet the minister’s recent defence in question period of the student finance system in Alberta, one that he described at the time as the “finest . . . in this country” and even “great,” leaves me wondering whether this affordability review is more about PR than seizing the opportunity for an honest look at the problems and the full range of possibilities. My question to the Minister of Advanced Education: given the vigorous defence of the current system how can Alberta students and parents be confident that the minister is willing to look at real reform rather than simply tinkering at the margins of the system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s because I’ve had the opportunity to talk with students and with members of the institutions and the stakeholders in the community. We’ve had open, frank, collaborative discussions about what’s needed and about how we go forward.

It’s not difficult to admit that we have the best system available in the country today, but also admit, Mr. Speaker, that there are students who feel that finances are a barrier to their education, and so there may be better ways to deal with it. We can look at other ways to ensure that rural students have access to education even if the costs of education are more than just the tuition fees: the cost of moving to school as well as the cost of going to school. There are many things that we can look at. What we’ve promised, and I think what the student leaders and others in the system are very excited about, is the fact of an open, honest affordability review, looking at all aspects of it and making the changes that are necessary after that review. That’s what we’ve promised to do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the government expects to disperse \$105 million in loans this year but only allocates \$35.5 million to the loan remission program, can the minister clarify his recent claim that virtually all the money that’s provided by the provincial student finance from Alberta coffers gets remitted?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, in terms of details and questions on the budget I’d remind the hon. member that tomorrow in Committee of Supply he’ll have all the opportunity in the world to explore and ask extensive and detailed questions about the budget for Advanced Education, including a lesson, if he wishes, in how the student loan system works and how remission works.

Mr. Taylor: And I will, Mr. Speaker.

To the same minister: will the minister end the confusion among some student finance experts across the country, who tell me they can’t find the evidence, and table the documentation to support his claim that Alberta students end up with the lowest debt of any students across this land?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the information that I have is that Alberta students benefit and end up with the lowest overall debt, at least government-supported debt, across the country. I will find the information to back that up and have a discussion with the hon. member.

The clear facts are that we have a great student finance system, that students who want to go to school can apply. Yes, we expect them to earn resources themselves. Yes, we expect parental contribution and family contribution. Yes, we expect them to maximize their own investment in their own education. But we’ve also said that finances are not a barrier to a student getting an education, and it is clear that students in this province are in the best position of any students across the country when it comes to student debt.

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

Education Property Tax

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wednesday’s budget once again increased the education property tax, placing additional pressure on municipalities that are facing significant challenges providing service to their communities. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The budget shows that taxes are going down, but the education property tax requisition is actually increasing. Can the minister shed some light on this anomaly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question is an excellent question because it does tend to get a little bit confusing. The mill rate, in fact, went down but the requisition, the amount that will flow through to the government, went up. It’s not unlike reducing the income tax rate, but you have more taxpayers paying more taxes, and so the total revenue goes up. In this budget the intention was to capture the real growth, the actual new assessment, new buildings that weren’t there the year before, but not to capture the inflation. That’s why the rate went down, but the actual dollars that were collected will go up.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is to the same minister. What will the impact of this requisition increase be on municipalities and homeowners?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there really isn't one simple answer to the question because every municipality has a different rate of growth. I can tell the hon. member that in 40 per cent of the municipalities where there has been relatively slow growth, their taxes will in fact go down. The requisition will go down by 5 per cent where they haven't had the growth. The individual taxes will go down.

In the other 60 per cent approximately 43 of the municipalities, because of high growth, will be protected by the maximum 10 per cent cap that's in place. The balance of the municipalities will have an increase of somewhere between zero and 10 per cent on the requisition, which means that there may be some slight increases to the individual homeowners' taxes.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: how much education funding is coming from the property tax bill?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question, and in fact it shows that the trend is moving in the right direction. When we amalgamated and took over the collection of property taxes in 1994, approximately 57 per cent of the total cost of education was being borne by municipal taxation. Through the years, by having a close hold on the increase in assessment to property taxes, that percentage has shrunk down to 34 per cent. So today only 34 per cent of education taxes are borne by property tax payers.

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

Youth Residential Drug Treatment

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because of the growing demand for specialized treatment for adolescents, Alberta needs more youth treatment facilities. The good news is that this government has provided 12 spaces for each region. This means 12 new spaces for the entire city of Calgary and 12 new spaces for the entire capital region. To the Minister of Children's Services: given the magnitude of the problem identified through the Alberta drug strategy, why only 12 beds?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to try and answer that question as it comes under the minister of health. I can tell her that this government is concerned about our adolescents in this province. The private member's bill that the member is discussing was brought up last week and passed unanimously in the House. The minister of health has addressed that issue by providing 12 beds in Edmonton and 12 beds in Calgary. I think what's important is that we've got those beds now. We can assess the children that are going in there, try and figure out the needs, and if we need more beds, I'm sure the minister will address that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. To the same minister: given that

AADAC doesn't have the infrastructure or staff to run residential treatment, will AADAC receive the only new funding as compared to NGOs in the province?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, it's a difficult question for me to answer because it comes under the purview of the minister of health, but I will say that she is dedicated to the matter of dealing with children who are drug addicted, and I'm quite positive that AADAC, with all of the staff that they have and all the knowledge that they have contained within the department, will do whatever they can to address the needs of the children.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. To the same minister: given that the existing not-for-profit facilities that provide drug treatment in Alberta have empty spaces, is the minister going to commit the funding to make these spaces available to our youth?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I really am having trouble following that particular question, whether she's talking about the treatment facilities under the minister of health under AADAC dealing with drug addictions or if she's talking about other facilities that are outside of that purview. I'd be more than pleased to sit down with her, like I have in the past, and discuss her concerns.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Bow and Elbow River Watersheds

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Environment. After the Walkerton inquiry, Ontario is moving forward with legislation and regulations to implement some of the recommendations of that inquiry, and those recommendations identify the protection of source waters as the first step in a multibarrier approach to protecting water quality. Ontario is now implementing source water protection plans on a watershed-by-watershed basis. Can the minister advise, given the fact that the Bow and Elbow rivers in the Calgary area are important sources of drinking water, what sources of potential contamination or risks have been identified in those watersheds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say, as we've referred to in this House before, that this invaluable resource, which we refer to as blue gold – we will treat it and continue to treat it like the precious resource that it is.

I would like to say, though, that from the Bow River Water Quality Task Force, that studied the point that the hon. member has made, there are recommendations, and in terms of dealing with that, we are looking at contamination and what impact it will have on our quality of water. I want to say that the council that he makes reference to is working very closely as a stakeholder with the Ministry of Environment.

Dr. Brown: Will the minister advise whether his department has identified any specific risks in the Bow and Elbow watersheds with respect particularly to herbicides, pesticides, and any agricultural or industrial chemicals?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member again asks a very important point, and we're examining that. We're doing a data collection relative to the exact point that the member is talking about

because we want to ensure that at the end of the day the conservation of our water resources, one that we all as Albertans use preciously, something that I think we can all do a better job at. But even more so, we want to ensure that it continues to be considered the number one quality that we enjoy in this province, unlike, as you know, some other provinces that are experiencing extreme difficulty. I'm very proud, I want to say, of the resource that we have in this province based on the good people that are making that kind of positive effort.

Dr. Brown: Will the minister advise if there are any proactive steps being contemplated with respect to ensuring that there is an assessment on a continuing basis of possible risks from such things as herbicides, pesticides, and other risks to the aquifers in the Bow River basin?

Mr. Boutillier: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, without any fear of contradiction, we are proceeding exactly on that line. We will continue to do an analysis relative to what is today and what is in the future. As I said in this House before, we inherit the land and the water not from our ancestors but literally borrow it from our children. We want to ensure that that water, quality water, is left for our children in the future.

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

Youth Residential Drug Treatment (continued)

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the government's response to the MLA corrections review, the province decided to close correctional operations. Young offender units in Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Red Deer are now sitting empty and collecting dust. It seems obvious that these spaces could be used for treatment centres for youths addicted to alcohol and drugs. My question is to the Solicitor General. Given that the treatment centres appear to be in Calgary and Edmonton, why has this government not considered using these existing rural facilities as treatment centres?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, with Bill 202 moving through the Assembly on Thursday last, that is one of the options that we are going to be looking at, to look at detoxification facilities for that five-day period, and we're going to be examining all types of alternatives throughout government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. You saved approximately \$3 million annually by closing them, and I'm thinking that it isn't a small price to pay for utilizing these facilities to help our children fight addictions. Is that right?

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, the new Youth Criminal Justice Act, which came in, emphasizes noncustodial sentences to our youth, and this is why the review that was done two years ago was very important. It provided as well the ability to look at the young offender centres and the fact that about only a 50 per cent population is required in them right now as per the new justice act. So that is one of the reasons why we're going to be looking at the availability as well as the opportunity to assist with Bill 202.

Ms Pastoor: Given the importance of fighting the growing problem of crystal meth in Alberta, will you not commit to using these empty facilities to increase the number of beds available for detoxification and treatment?

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, we recognize that crystal meth is a very, very serious problem in Alberta and a very serious and addictive drug that our youth are being involved in right now. There are a number of strategies regarding our ability to combat organized crime as well as the ability to have centres that will be able to assist those kids in detoxification as well as, in fact, the mental health wellness aspect of it.

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

Policing Resources

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last week a 13-year-old girl was brutally murdered, a hard-working Yellow Cab driver, a father of seven, lost his life while at work, and last Saturday another woman's body was discovered near Edmonton. All of these are big-city crimes, yet last week's budget failed to deliver any increase in the per capita policing grants for the major cities of Edmonton and Calgary. My question is to the Solicitor General. Given the long overdue and welcome police funding increases for Alberta's medium-sized communities, how can the government justify failing to provide comparable additional police funding increases for our two major cities?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the hon. member mentioned the fact of the female that was found north of Camrose this past weekend, and I can tell you this, that \$3 million is provided to Project Kare, which is a joint force and integrated model between the RCMP and Edmonton Police Service providing the homicide investigation with regard to the missing women. That is in place right now, and we are continuing to move that way.

There was obviously, Mr. Speaker, a definite need for additional funds to rural Alberta, to those smaller communities between 5,000 and 20,000, and those needs have to be addressed first. We've met with the mayors of the other cities and let them know what the schedule is for us to look at down the road. As well, we are providing Edmonton and Calgary and our other larger municipal services additional resources that'll be utilized with regard to Alberta's response to organized crime.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since these murders don't appear to be related to organized crime, how does the freeze in the per capita police grant help address the need of Alberta's major cities for more front-line police officers?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, the investigation that's taking place outside the city of Edmonton by the Project Kare team is utilizing analysts, is utilizing skills and experts from across Canada. They're doing psychological profiling on who the suspect or suspects may be. So there's a lot of work taking place at this very moment. When we talk about policing and policing resources within our major centres, there is a commitment by this government. Calgary received almost \$15 million this year and Edmonton about

\$10 million to provide initiatives toward assisting them regarding their policing costs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that both Edmonton and Calgary are improving community safety by hiring more police officers, why does the Conservative government refuse to at least share the financial burden, their refusal made evident by its failure to increase per capita policing grants for these two cities?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to providing assistance to those municipalities regarding their policing costs. As I mentioned, we are providing Edmonton with approximately \$10 million and Calgary with approximately \$15 million, but in addition we're also going to be providing 20 additional officers for Calgary that the province will be paying for, which will be working with the integrated response to organized crime. As well, Edmonton will receive roughly in the same neighbourhood and the RCMP roughly 20 as well. So we are going to be working in an integrated fashion between these police services, exchanging information, working together to better serve Albertans.

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

Foreign Investments in the Energy Industry

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January the federal government signed an agreement with China to encourage mutually beneficial commercial partnerships between our two nations, and last week saw two announcements of significant Chinese investment in the further development of Alberta's oil sands. My question is to the Minister of Energy. What can he tell this House about this source of investment and the possible implications it might have on Alberta's energy industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member does rightly confirm that there were two announcements last week. One was about a 16 per cent interest in MEG Energy, which is a Calgary-based company that holds some leases in the oil sands, and the other was with respect to Enbridge and PetroChina signing a memorandum of understanding at the exploratory stage of shipping oil from the oil sands through a pipeline to the west. In that respect, we have always made sure that our markets are open to outside investment. I want to reinforce, though, that Albertans do own this resource. It is in our interest to see that they are explored under the policies that we would put in place in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that Enbridge intends to include a Chinese partner in the Gateway pipeline project which would move Alberta oil sands production to the west coast, where it can be shipped to China, is this pipeline in the best interests of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a lot of advan-

tages for us to source additional areas for supply of the oil that will come from Alberta, not just the oil sands but truly from the natural gas and oil that's in abundance in this area. That would source not just the Chinese market but also the southern California market by opening up further markets. That said, though, we will work hard with those companies to ensure that we get all the upgrading opportunities to happen right here in Alberta so that we're not just shipping raw bitumen out through those pipelines. We can look at upgrading, refining, and all the petrochemical-related activities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: what specifically is the province doing to ensure that foreign involvement in Alberta's oil sands is not just about mining and removing our own nonrenewable energy resources?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is our policy that we look to all the valued-added opportunities for Albertans to maximize that hydrocarbon chain for Albertans. There are excellent jobs – highly skilled, professional jobs – that are available in the upgrading and the refining and petrochemical industries. In that light we will continue to work very closely with industry to ensure that an integrated approach to developing our resources occurs.

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

Mountain Pine Beetle

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development stated, "There is no epidemic of mountain pine beetle at this particular point in time." It appears that burning trees and clear-cutting is a strategy that has been adopted to protect our multibillion dollar industry. My question to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: why is it that we identify the problem, we cut and burn, and we wait for it to surface again? How is this strategy proactive?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, in this year's budget we do have some extra dollars that will go to ongoing programs. The first line, of course, is exactly as I stated in this House last week, that first of all you have to identify where the pine beetle are. Aerial surveys do that, as well as on-the-ground surveys, as well as taking into account the people that are actually in the forest. That's the people in the forest industry that help us identify where the pine beetle are. You take that first line of action, you clear-cut that, and you burn it to make the preventative measure. But in the long term we have committed and will be committing extra dollars to make sure that that pine beetle does not come into our healthy pine forest in this province. So it's an ongoing concern of ours, and it's an ongoing prevention that we go through.

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, given that the B.C. government has committed \$150 million on top of the \$1.5 billion on long-term plans, can the minister inform us what financial commitments this government has taken besides the token amount mentioned last week?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, a million dollars is not a token amount. It's a considerable amount. The million dollars is also matched by

the province of British Columbia, and it's part of the ongoing agreement that we have with them. In addition, the federal government has come along to help the people in British Columbia to eradicate the pine beetle because basically there is no way of getting rid of the pine beetle except by identifying pockets of it, other than having the cold weather, minus 30 or 40, which is the only natural way of getting rid of the pine beetle.

So it's an expensive undertaking, and we will continue to make sure that we protect our healthy pine forests by investing the dollars, and this year's budget has a significant amount in it for that prevention.

Mr. Bonko: I used to fight my own fights as a kid. It sounds like this government's allowing someone else to fight their own fight.

The Speaker: That's a question, hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, it is a co-operative effort, and we are participating with both the B.C. government and the federal government to make sure that we protect Alberta's – Alberta's – pine forests. We don't want the same thing to happen in our healthy pine forests that has happened in British Columbia because of the pine beetle, which is an epidemic over there.

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

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone knows that our fast population growth and our continuously booming economy are due to the right government policies. The megaprojects in the north and their supporting services across Alberta require thousands of skilled workers. This has generated a concern over hiring of temporary foreign workers. So my question today is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Minister, do we have shortage of a skilled workforce in Alberta?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a good question. Last month's Alberta unemployment rate was 3.5 per cent, and it is the lowest it's been in 24 years. In fact, this means that we are creating more jobs than we have people to fill those jobs. The hon. member is right. It's the right government policy that's doing it, in fact. So, yes, skill shortages are indeed a reality. But employers, of course, have to go through a rigid policy, an exhaustive policy, to ensure that Albertans are given the first opportunity and Canadians are given the opportunity to access these jobs, and that policy will remain.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. What is your proof against the claim that we don't have skill shortages where temporary foreign workers are being hired and that there are plenty of Canadian-/Albertan tradespeople who are available to do the work?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, that's another good question. An unemployment rate of 3 per cent or less indicates that there is a skill shortage. The unemployment rate in the mining, oil, and gas industry and the extraction industry is 2.6 per cent. Like I said

before, you know, the employers have to go through an exhaustive policy and actually make the application to the federal government to approve the process. It's costly and it's exhaustive. Employers do not prefer that. They would rather hire people here in Alberta and in Canada. In fact, I've said earlier in this House that anyone that can come up with a person that's a tradesperson that's applied for a job and has not been hired and is replaced by a foreign skilled worker: show me. Show me the person.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental question is to the same minister. What is the government policy to deal with the concern that temporary workers displace Albertan and Canadian work with cheap labour?

Mr. Cardinal: No. Mr. Speaker, any person that is approved to come and work in Alberta has to follow all our labour standards, including the wages paid to the employees. Again, it is not cheap labour because it is an exhaustive and a costly process to get foreign workers here. It's only common sense that employers will hire local people if they're available because they're not as expensive as bringing in foreign workers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Oil Well Drilling on Crown Land

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are under the illusion that their government is in control of resource extraction and honours principles of environmental protection. In recent months, however, extensive land clearing for oil and gas activity on contested Crown lands has been allowed to take place without the companies seeking prior approval from government or consultation with the affected Lubicon communities. I have pictures here that I'll table later. To the Minister of Energy: given that the minister stated that companies are merely following standard procedure, how are issues of public trust addressed when a company is essentially allowed to bulldoze public land without approval from the EUB?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, it's not without the awareness of the EUB. What has to yet happen is the EUB has to – when they come forward for an application of drilling for that well, that has to yet go forward at that stage. That's the next part of the process.

Dr. Swann: To the Minister of Environment: how can the minister assure Albertans that proper environmental protection exists when oil and gas companies are allowed to destroy natural areas without licence or approval?

Mr. Boutillier: Mr. Speaker, I want to first and foremost say, as I have said in this House many times in the past, that ensuring environment protection principles are always in place to protect the environment no matter what stakeholder is using the rich and valuable resource that Albertans own – and Albertans own the resource, no one else. Pertaining to the specific issue that the hon. member mentions, I can assure this House and the hon. member that all environmental principles will continue to be met based on the framework we have established. Pertaining to any that are licensed or unlicensed, I will also suggest that the EUB and the Minister of Energy will ensure that due diligence is taking place to ensure that they are licensed relative to the work that they do.

Dr. Swann: Again to the Minister of Environment: will the minister stop the unlicensed destruction taking place on this Crown land, publicly owned land, until a proper assessment is completed?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I can assure this hon. member and every member of this Assembly and all Albertans that are listening and watching at home that the environment protection framework and principles that we have to ensure sound environmental principles, also pertaining to stakeholder work that is done in this province, the principles set forth by this government, will be followed to the letter and to the law.

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

Bridge Repair and Construction

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many bridges and large culverts on rural roads are in serious need of repair or replacement because they're either nearing the end of their useful lives or were not designed to take the larger vehicles and heavier loads of today. My questions today are for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. What is his department planning to do to address this important issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two years ago we doubled the amount of dollars that were available for the bridge program from \$9 million to \$18 million. This, theoretically, will help the local authorities to put in more of these necessary structures. What we all realize and know is that if a road goes and comes to a bridge and if you can't cross the bridge, you're not going to go anywhere. So it's quite common sense that we have to do this, and we will be doing it in conjunction with the municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: what assistance is his department providing to rural municipalities to help them access these available grants?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. From a purely monetary point of view we also have the municipal infrastructure program as well as the bridge program. One of the big issues is that actually even last year not all of this money was used up. It was not all given out to the municipalities because there is a significant amount of planning. You have DFO issues, for example, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, especially when it's over an active waterway.

So, Mr. Speaker, we continue to help them. We continue to help the municipalities with their planning, and we certainly hope that the municipalities will avail themselves of these dollars because obviously these bridges are extremely important.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Given that we're on the subject of bridges, could the minister update this Assembly and my constituents watching at home on the status of the twinning of the bridge over the North Saskatchewan River near Drayton Valley?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, it's very doubtful that the hon. member's constituents are watching at home because all of his constituents are too busy working. However, I have met with the mayor of Drayton Valley as well as the county of Drayton Valley and went over the bridge that the hon. member is referencing. It certainly is a very tough hill going down to the bridge, and indeed there have been a lot of accidents.

We had a functional study done in 1999, which did bring back some figures, but we're currently in the process of updating that 1999 study to 2005 standards, Mr. Speaker. This is something that is of tremendous concern to the hon. member as well as to his constituents, and we're going to do our utmost to ensure the safety of the people driving over this bridge because there's a lot of heavy traffic, a lot of logging trucks that are now going over this bridge.

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

Mortgage Fraud

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When an Alberta family achieves the goal of home ownership, which allows them to raise a family and provide some financial security, there is an expectation that government registry services will protect their largest investment from fraud. Alberta has unfortunately gained the distinction of being the mortgage fraud capital of Canada, with some 2,700 cases of mortgage fraud in one year alone. My question is to the Minister of Government Services. Will the minister acknowledge that this government, having failed to protect the information and privacy of Alberta homeowners, will now commit to implementing increased security measures within the provincial land titles office?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, while there is a lot of fraud going on within the province, it's not unique to Alberta. As a matter of fact, this is one of the problems that's surfacing across the country, and we have put in place a cross-ministry initiative to deal with the issue. We will be coming forward with some different ideas on how we can deal with it, but we certainly would urge people to watch for certain indications where there may be transactions relative to property that are happening on a regular basis that indicates that there's an inflation. There are a number of other areas that, in fact, we will be trying to make the public aware of that would assist a great deal in preventing these mortgage frauds from occurring.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the land titles office, which his department refers to as merely a registry, is responsible under Alberta law for losses suffered by homeowners, including those resulting from fraud, what decisive action will the hon. minister take to prevent future fraudulent activities?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, there's more than just the land titles that is involved in many of these transactions, and as you probably have recognized, under Bill 31 we are trying to plug certain cases there where, in fact, the assurance fund under the Real Estate Council of Alberta would be held responsible for these frauds. Through the various means that we're going to be implementing, we hope to be able to curtail if not stop a lot of this fraud.

I've got to indicate that this is not just in Alberta. This is happening across the country. As a matter of fact, it is an issue that we will be discussing at our federal/provincial ministers' meeting coming up in June.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So given this cross-ministry initiative my final question will be to the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. How will the hon. minister work with Government Services to help them overcome this baffling inefficiency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the competent Minister of Government Services is taking the lead role on this, and I will gladly give him whatever help he needs to help him.
Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of six hon. members to participate in statements, 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 West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you and through you to the Assembly 25 bright students from Mountain View school in Hinton along with their teacher, Linda Muhly, aides Bonnie Gillespie and Mrs. Terri Bancroft, and parent helpers Mrs. Sarah Burns and Mrs. Debbie Corless. At this time I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm absolutely thrilled to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of very special guests: close to two dozen residents from Pleasantview Place seniors' lodge, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona. These seniors are actively engaged in many healthy living and community projects. They have established a walking club at the lodge and have been exploring Alberta's many towns and villages. They recently visited the waste management plant in Edmonton. They've also raised funds for the tsunami victims. They are accompanied by Diane Loyer, a co-ordinator at the lodge. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and I will now ask them, please, to rise so that they can receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, by way of historic comment for today on this day in 1966 an act respecting the establishment and operation of Mount Royal junior college received royal assent. Thousands of graduates, including our Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Norman L. Kwong.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

AADAC Youth Drug Treatment Programs

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The problem of addiction has been the cause of impassioned debate in this House

recently. As chair of AADAC I hear first-hand about the lives impacted and the corrosive effects on society that result from addiction. Substance abuse is a serious matter, and it's especially tragic when it involves children. However, the government has it within its means to intervene in a positive way, as was demonstrated recently in this House.

Thankfully the new provincial budget, announced last week, includes an increase to AADAC's funding, which will allow the commission to begin operating almost immediately youth detoxification and residential treatment in this province. I'm pleased to say that there will be two programs, located in the Edmonton region and the Calgary region, with 24 new beds, eight for detoxification and 16 for residential treatment.

The programs are designed to help youths who are in serious difficulty with substance abuse and who require intensive intervention. Both the detoxification and residential programs will treat crystal meth users as well as users of other addictive drugs. Regarding crystal meth AADAC will provide a treatment protocol designed specifically for youth who are abusing this dangerous substance. The residential program will be 12 weeks in duration. However, in cases of long-term or severe substance abuse AADAC has the capacity to provide youths with up to a year of treatment through its spectrum of programs. AADAC has also as of April 1, 2005, increased its accreditation standards for all youth treatment programs we fund so that we can doubly ensure that young Albertans in our care are receiving the highest standard of help possible.

The new standards along with the detoxification and residential treatment programs are excellent enhancements to AADAC's range of services for youths and adults. AADAC already provides comprehensive outpatient programs for youths and their families at 26 area offices.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Economic Development in Northern Alberta

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise today to draw attention to the importance of northern Alberta. As we move forward with the aggressive infrastructure agenda put forward through the 2005 budget, presented last Wednesday, it is of great importance that we don't forget about our northern communities.

Northern Alberta already makes a significant contribution to Alberta's economy and the quality of life that all Albertans enjoy, but it is only beginning to capture its full potential. There are tremendous untapped opportunities in the north. Government needs to work with northern Albertans to help enhance their current industries and make value-added concepts become value-added manufacturing realities.

In order to create more manufacturing and the processing of raw materials that the north exports, it will take more than local businesses to be erected and start adding value-added materials. As a government we must make a commitment to provide an opportunity for these Albertans to change how their economies operate. An investment in infrastructure will assist in the economic transformation the north is seeking to make. This includes ensuring having the necessary roads and railways to handle the economic growth taking place.

Tourism will also be playing a large role in the growth of the north. As almost all of the members of this Assembly can attest, northern Alberta has some of the most beautiful country in Canada and the entire world. Those who have not had the opportunity to

experience this vast, bountiful, breathtaking country must do so. It is a great place to visit, live, and invest.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Gifting of Promotional Attire

The Speaker: Before introducing the hon. member, might I remind all members that from time to time an hon. member will arrive in the Assembly with a certain different form of attire. But there was a rule established several years ago that if that member wanted to wear such distinctive attire, it would only be appropriate and in good manners to provide all members of the Assembly with a copy of such attire. Now, the chair is still waiting for the hon. Member for Red Deer-North to deliver the 82 jerseys that she promised to deliver to all other members of the Assembly. I suspect that the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster will be a little more prompt with respect to this request.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it would be rude for me to be quicker than the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, so I'll wait until she does.

2:40 Centennial Hockey Challenge

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan celebrated their joint centennials by staging a very special hockey game last Thursday in the border city of Lloydminster. This historic battle at the border featured some of Alberta's finest junior A hockey players face to face with their counterparts from Saskatchewan.

It was a game that truly defined the friendship and friendly, competitive spirit between our two provinces. More importantly, it showed that our young athletes are indeed true champions that personify Alberta's and Saskatchewan's reputations for sportsmanship and excellence in athletics. Mr. Speaker, through snowstorms and power failures the Centennial Hockey Challenge was a huge success that saw Team Alberta emerge victorious by a score of 7 to 5.

To the organizers, participants, volunteers, and especially the fans: your involvement in this biprovincial celebration of our centennial have set a standard that will be truly hard to match. For Lloydminster, Mr. Speaker, it is just the start of a week of great hockey as the Allan Cup starts there tomorrow.

A special thanks to Premier Calvert and all the Saskatchewan MLAs who attended this nonpartisan event. However, thanks to the time-tested theory that a good team of solid right wingers leads to success, Premier Calvert will be wearing Alberta's colours in the Saskatchewan Legislature today in honour of Team Alberta's win.

I know that all members in this Assembly will join me in extending congratulations to head coach Dean Clark and all members of Team Alberta for writing the perfect ending to the 2005 Centennial Hockey Challenge cup.

The Speaker: It's XL.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge that April 17 to 23 is National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week and to share with you a new initiative by the Kidney Foundation of Canada and Scotiabank that was launched in my constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat this past Friday.

The green wristband I'm wearing is part of the Live2Share campaign, which is designed to raise awareness of the importance of organ and tissue donation. Right now in Alberta 512 people are waiting for an organ transplant. Seventy-five per cent of them are waiting for a kidney. In 2004 41 Albertans died while waiting for an organ transplant.

For people whose kidneys have failed, the cost to the health care system is enormous. The cost of dialysis is approximately \$50,000 per person per year. A kidney transplant has a one-time cost of \$20,000, with \$6,000 per year for medications. More importantly, transplants offer individuals a new lease on life.

For some people talking about organ and tissue donation can be difficult, but for the more than 4,000 Canadians who are waiting for a life-saving organ transplant, it's a subject we can't afford to avoid. A very small percentage of people die in circumstances that make them ineligible to be an organ donor. We owe it to Albertans to make sure that every possible opportunity for organ donation is pursued. One organ donor has the power to save eight lives and to help 50 to 100 other people through the donation of tissues, corneas, bones, and veins.

Many people don't realize that while you can sign your Alberta health care card to show your support of organ donation, the decision is ultimately made by your family. Studies have shown that 92 per cent of families will donate their loved one's organs if they have discussed organ donation while only 53 per cent of families will give the gift of life if they have not previously discussed organ donation.

Mr. Speaker, until you've talked to a gentleman who's had a double lung transplant or a person who's had two heart transplants or a lady who's waiting for a kidney or a child waiting for a liver, it's perhaps difficult to understand how important it is to consider organ donations. I congratulate the Kidney Foundation of Canada on the Live2Share campaign and their commitment to improving the lives of the people in my community and of this province.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to advise the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster that my jersey size is XL as well.

Caroline Mouris

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased to rise today to recognize the accomplishments of Caroline Mouris, a grade 12 student at Harry Ainlay high school in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. Caroline at the tender age of 17 is already an artist of some renown and just recently has been awarded a full-time, full tuition, four-year scholarship at Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. Cooper Union is located in New York City's East Village and prepares students for the professions of architecture, art, and engineering. The scholarship itself is worth about \$110,000 U.S. and will allow Caroline to pursue an undergraduate degree in the fine arts.

Mr. Speaker, although Caroline started drawing as a toddler, she credits her high school art teacher, Mr. Theron Lund, with teaching her how to take her abilities to the next level and encouraging her to apply at Cooper Union. Caroline has indicated that she has no particular preference as to what reaction her art invokes as long as it provokes thought amongst the viewers.

Mr. Speaker, it seems that we are bombarded daily with news stories about crystal meth, gang shootings, and troubled youth. It is the brilliance of young people like Caroline that reminds us of the

incredible potential of today's youth and gives us all plenty of reason to believe that our future is in good hands indeed.

I would ask all members of the Alberta Legislature to join me in congratulating Caroline Mouris on her wonderful achievement and in wishing her all the very best as she begins her studies in New York this fall. Thank you.

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

School Closures

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last few weeks ministers of this government have stood in the Assembly and denied any responsibility for the devastating school closures that are threatening several of Edmonton's core neighbourhoods as well as hurting many rural communities. Using their tired and unfeeling arguments about utilization formulas, rhetoric that is, of course, familiar to those of us who have attended school closure meetings, this government chooses to blame closures on the school boards. The reality is, however, that school boards are bound by the utilization formula set by the government, and the current formula is nothing more than a how-to guide in closing schools.

The impact felt by a community that has lost its school can be terrible indeed. It doesn't have to be this way. For example, Ontario has recently changed their policy to separate school closures and grants for new schools. In Alberta, by contrast, the policy rewards boards for closing schools because that's the only way they can get a new school built in new neighbourhoods. We can also look to B.C. for a different approach to school utilization. In B.C. they include after-hour activities from Boy Scouts and badminton to adult education classes in the overall determination of how much a school is being used. In fact, some areas have hired evening co-ordinators to ensure that schools are being used as much as possible by the community.

These approaches are wildly different from the irrational approach used by this government. In its obsession with the short term and the bottom line this government is promoting a vision of schools in communities as temporary and disposable. Instead, we should be building a sense of tradition in our core communities. We should be instilling our students with practical knowledge to prepare them for the world, but we should be doing so in buildings and schools that will give kids a true sensitivity to local history and a strong connection to their community.

Emphasizing community use of the school and detaching school closures from grants for new schools are two initial steps to recognizing the importance of schools in our communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition from 105 good Albertans from the great Alberta communities of Anzac, Tofield, Coalhurst, Lethbridge, Fort McMurray, 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.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am presenting petitions signed by 102 Albertans from across this province who also are dismayed at the fact that temporary foreign workers are being brought into this province.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the honour of presenting a petition to the Assembly. It's a petition signed by 3,400 Albertans who happen to come from all across this beautiful province of ours, from Taber, Coronation, Red Deer, Barrhead, Ponoka, Nanton, Wabamun, Slave Lake, St. Paul, Fort McMurray, Stony Plain, Camrose, Wellington, Drayton Valley, Bashaw, Forestburg, Daysland, Wetaskiwin, Thorsby, Eckville, Stettler, Edmonton, Calgary, and I could go on. The petition urges the government to

introduce legislation that will enhance the quality of care for residents in long term care and continuing care facilities by requiring health regions to increase the number of caregivers to at least one caregiver per five residents from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and one caregiver per eight residents from 8:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: 2:50

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 29

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Amendment Act, 2005

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 29, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Amendment Act, 2005.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 29 amends the AISH Act by expanding the definition of the benefit to include supplementary payments for emergent or personal costs outside the current financial and health benefit package.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was Equality Day in Canada, which is the anniversary of section 15 of the Charter coming into effect. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a document called The Top 15 on 15. It summarizes 15 of the most important Supreme Court decisions made under section 15. I would encourage all members to review this document so that we can all renew our commitment to the importance of equal treatment for all Canadians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am tabling with permission the appropriate number of copies of a letter I received from a constituent of Edmonton-McClung by the name of Cheryl Applewhaite expressing support for a total smoking ban in all public

places and also expressing her dissatisfaction with what she refers to as “disease driven health services” and “inadequate support for health promotion and disease prevention.”

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have seven letters to table today regarding the interim Métis harvesting agreement from the following concerned Albertans: Duane Radford, Richard Duquette, Fredrich Kegel, Ian Kopp, Jolin Fisher, Bryan Martin, and Aden Stewart. These individuals are frustrated that the interim Métis harvesting agreement proceeded without adequate stakeholder input and is not in keeping with sound conservation practices.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter to table from a constituent who questioned the value of his hard work in his apprenticeship training and becoming qualified in light of all of the temporary foreign workers that are being proposed to be brought into the province.

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 14, it is my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today’s Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 12 through 23 inclusive.

[Motion carried]

Trade Show Expenditures

Q12. Mr. Elsalhy moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko moved that the following question be accepted.

How much money has the Ministry and Department of Economic Development spent on trade shows in the fiscal years 1992-93 through 2003-04 inclusive?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Economic Development I would like to advise the House that the minister recommends that we reject this written question as the time period is sufficiently long that much of the requested information is now publicly available, archived material, or will have been destroyed. Consideration was given to amending the written question to cover only those years for the which the ministry is in possession of the relevant records. However, the process of collecting the necessary records required to answer these written questions would involve significant cost to the ministries.

The member’s inquiry can be made through the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which sets forth a process for completing such requests, including a fee schedule to ensure that applicants cover a fair portion of the cost of collecting and disclosing relevant records.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. I’m happy to participate in the discussion on Written Question 12, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I must express my disappointment to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. I have in the past used the access to information laws to try to gain access to some of this information. Some of it I have been successful with; some I have not. There is one file that certainly comes to mind, and that’s a trade mission that went to Tokyo and then went on to Korea; Seoul, as a matter of fact, not North Korea but South Korea. It took a great deal of time and effort to get this information.

We are spending significant amounts of money on these trade shows. There was even the design in this case of a booth that was done. Fortunately, it was done in Alberta. There were also two arts groups that went on this trade show, one from Calgary and I think a country band from out around Hinton. So there are significant amounts of money being spent here, and to say that one should have to go through access to information to get it I think is an error. To say that it is cumbersome for the department to have these records going back to the fiscal year 1992-93 is also an error. I think that is not respectful of the taxpayers. I would have to say in this case, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, that it’s neglectful of the taxpayers.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. My question and comment as well are addressed to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I’m not sure that the minister is aware that every time a flight request is put out there, it’s the taxpayer who is basically paying twice for information to be provided. At some point I’m hoping that the government will realize that the opposition is equally important to the development and promotion of democracy in this province, and without the necessary information being provided upon request, we are simply putting the taxpayer further in the hole by asking for legitimate requests.

A question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs is: are you willing at this time to provide more recent information that is more easily convenient for you to come up with? For example, let’s go back to 2003-04, 2004-05. Would you at least consider tabling that information?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity should be aware that this is not a question-and-answer period. One has one chance to participate.

Mr. Chase: Can I ask him to take it under consideration, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: No.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar pretty much summed up my sentiment on this question. We will be maybe submitting another question in the near future that meets with the hon. minister’s criteria.

I move to close debate.

[Written Question 12 lost]

Trade Mission Expenditures

Q13. Mr. Elsalhy moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that the following question be accepted.

How much money has the Ministry and Department of Economic Development spent on trade missions in the fiscal years 1992-93 through 2003-04 inclusive, broken down by mission and year?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government will be recommending that the House reject this question also. The question is similar in nature, and the rationale is the same.

3:00

Mr. Chase: Again, when travelling is undertaken for the express purpose of increasing the Alberta advantage – a number of, for example, what I would call trade junkets to the Orient have taken place – if there was value in these junkets, if we achieved more foreign investment, then I would suggest that it would be advantageous of the government to basically blow their horn with regard to all the investments they achieve through these junkets. If there's no proportionate return for value for Alberta taxpayers based on these trips, then I suggest that we stop them.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I will be brief. I'm disappointed in the rejection of Written Question 13 by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. We look at the Department of Economic Development, and we look at the fiscal years where we are trying to get this information, from 1992-93. I think that if we were to get this information – and perhaps this is why the government is so afraid to provide it, so reluctant to provide this information – there would be a chart starting in 1992-93, and it would sort of flatten out, I think. Then as we got the information and we tracked the number of trade missions and the amount of money spent through to 2003-2004, we would certainly see a chart that would be reflective of this government's spending habits, which in my view in a lot of cases are excessive.

I don't believe some of this money is being wisely spent. We've seen dramatic budget increases. I would think that this chart, if we were to build one, would be very much like the Project Stanley hockey stick that's referred to in Enron in the electricity price manipulation. It would go along like this and then go straight up, Mr. Speaker, on a 45- or 50-degree angle, very similar to a hockey stick.

I hope I'm wrong, but those are my suspicions as to why we can't have that information. It would just show the excessive spending by this government in these sorts of matters.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, although disappointed, in the interest of saving time and moving along, I move Written Question 13.

Thank you.

[Written Question 13 lost]

School Fee Revenues

Q14. Mr. R. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Flaherty that the following question be accepted.

What is the total revenue received by Alberta school boards from school fees, broken down by school board and by fee type for the fiscal years 2000-01 through 2003-04 inclusive?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to indicate to the House that we are prepared to accept Written Question 14 with some amendments should the mover or someone on behalf of the mover be so disposed to agree. In fact, this information was shared with the opposition colleagues prior to 11 this morning as required, and I think it's now been circulated throughout the House.

Nonetheless, the reason that we need to look at amending this particular question is simply because all school boards report their financial information based on their particular school year, which typically runs September 1 through to August 31 of each year, as most members here would know. So the amendment is simply to change the motion from "fiscal years" to read "school years." I think the same information would still be arrived at. The amended question would simply read, "What is the total revenue received by Alberta school boards from school fees, broken down by school board and by fee type for the school years 2000-01 through 2003-04 inclusive?"

So I would move acceptance of Written Question 14 as amended on the basis that I've just explained.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Just to clarify, Mr. Speaker, we're speaking only on the amendment right now. Is that correct?

The Speaker: Only on the amendment.

Mr. R. Miller: Yes. Thank you very much. On behalf of my colleague for St. Albert I would like to thank the minister for his explanation as to the amendment and suggest that it is something that we are agreeable to. So I would speak in favour of the amendment.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on the question as amended.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to see that the government is willing to provide this information, and as I suggested, we're understanding of the parameters under which they're doing so. I would move that we close debate.

Thank you.

[Written Question 14 as amended carried]

School-based Fundraising Revenues

Q15. Mr. R. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Flaherty that the following question be accepted.

What is the total revenue received by Alberta school boards

from school-based fundraising initiatives, broken down by school for the fiscal years 2000-01 through 2003-04 inclusive?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I'm going to suggest that we accept Written Question 15, albeit with some amendments, and I would also indicate that this particular set of amendments has been shared with the opposition prior to 11 a.m. today as required, and it's now been circulated throughout the House.

Very briefly, the same rationale applies here, for the first part, as with Written Question 14, and that is that all school boards report their financial information based on a school year. Similarly, school boards' audited financial statements do not report at the school level. They report at the school board level. I should also add that in Alberta Education we refer to school-generated funds as funds raised at the school level to support programs that enhance educational services for students. For example, there might be some items that might be included that are actually optional school fees, such as the case might be for field trips or activities pertaining to graduation exercises, a yearbook, student pictures, locks, locker rentals, and so on.

As a result, I would again like to propose a suggested amended wording for this question so that it would read as follows. "What is the total revenue received by Alberta school boards from school-generated funds, broken down by school authority for the school years 2000-01 through 2003-04 inclusive?"

Should the mover or the person speaking on behalf of the mover be amenable to those changes, then we would be happy to accept and move the acceptance of Written Question 15 as amended.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm afraid that on behalf of my colleague for St. Albert I can't support the amendment. By striking out "fundraising initiatives" and substituting "school-generated funds," we lose the intention of the question, and that is, obviously, to identify how much fundraising is being done in initiatives outside of school fees. By lumping them together, as I understand this amendment would do, we lose the clarity we're looking for and the detail that we would be looking for.

Again, I guess I would make the same argument. If we have to deal with school authorities – i.e., school boards as opposed to individual schools – then we're once again going to lose the sort of detail and clarity that the writer of the question had hoped to receive from the government.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure about the legalities involved, but it would appear to me that although they have changed the wording of the question in the rewritten question to show that they're dealing with school years as opposed to fiscal years, that's not actually outlined in the three amendments, (a), (b), and (c), that are shown here. Oh, maybe I'm wrong about that. I think I'm wrong about that.

On those first two anyway, (a) and (b), certainly I couldn't on behalf of my colleague from St. Albert speak in favour of this amendment given that it takes away from the intention of the question in the first place.

3:10

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to bring to the attention of the entire House in regard to this amendment to Written Question 15 that schedule E of the standard format for auditing each and every respective school board in this province outlines the source and application of school-generated funds for the respective year. This information would already be listed in a document that was tabled by the hon. Minister of Education during this session. So to substitute "school-generated funds" and to strike out "school-based fundraising initiatives" completely changes this written question. If one looks at the revenue, the statement of revenues and expenses for the school year ended the 31st of August for whatever year you want to look at, there certainly is a line item for net school-generated funds that is totally different than the use of school-generated funds. I think this changes the written question.

The information that we were seeking in the original, unamended version would be of a great deal of interest to many parents who work very hard to raise money for their respective schools. The parents, some of them, feel very frustrated that public education is not being publicly funded adequately.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. What this amendment doesn't get at is how schools are funded. Basically, my experience of 34 years was that in the last number of years, when I taught at, I would say, an upper middle-class school with reasonably affluent parents who were able to participate in casinos and other fundraising activities such as selling coupon books, one-third of our total school budget was provided by the province in the form of grants. The other two-thirds came out of parents' fundraising through casinos, through cafeteria profits, through Coke machines, and school fees.

So basically, the point this question was asking was very specific to fundraising as opposed to school fees, cafeteria profits, and all the other areas, and I would very much hope that these concerns would be addressed.

[Motion on amendment lost]

The Speaker: Now on the debate on Written Question 15. Additional speakers? Shall I call the question then?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has already spoken on this matter. You'd be closing the debate here now.

Mr. R. Miller: I won't be closing the debate.

The Speaker: Any other speakers? Well, then, proceed, hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Just very briefly, Mr. Speaker. [some applause] Well, thank you. I always appreciate the encouragement from the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

This is becoming a serious issue in terms of accessibility. I know that in the previous question, Question 14, by fees and now through school fundraising initiatives we're starting develop a bit of a tiered system here. I think one of the members alluded to it, the Member for Calgary-Varsity. If you happen to have the wherewithal and you're in a school where the parents have the wherewithal and ability to fund raise, that school is going to get more than some of the, for lack of a better term, high-needs schools because the parents don't have the wherewithal to do that.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that we should begin to take a look at how

education is being funded. How much of it is through school fees? How much of it in high school? If you've got three or four kids and you come from modest means, it becomes very difficult for those parents to just do the regular things. They have to do that, but if there are other things in high school that add to the student's education, add to the quality of the education, trips and that sort of thing, they're not going to be able to do it.

I'd like to see this information. I'm realist enough to know that that's not going to happen in this House today, Mr. Speaker, but I really say to the Minister of Education that we should begin to take a look at this whole area of fundraising and how that leads to, I think, an inequality from school to school within the same district. Of course, I'm speaking now of being on the Edmonton public school board, but it'd be true in Calgary in the bigger schools. Also the fees: more and more fees tacked on for what I'd call regular programming. Again, it leads to a two-tiered system because people from modest means certainly aren't going to be able to involve themselves in some of the trips and that sort of thing.

I think this is a reasonable question that people ask. I don't know why it is that we can't get this sort of information. I think it's sort of important. More importantly, if we had the information, Mr. Speaker, then we could begin to look in terms of the overall funding for education. Is there a necessity to increase the funding because more of it's through school fees? We could talk about the taxpayers, but those parents are the same taxpayers. I really worry about where we're going. It could lead, I think, to a two-tiered type of educational system.

So I would hope that the minister, even if they're not going to give us this information now, would look at it in the future and also take this as a very serious matter in the direction that education is going. I can assure you, having been a former trustee, that this was an issue raised to us by parents time after time after time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly unfortunate that members chose to defeat the amendment that was proposed, which would have allowed the Minister of Education to have this question phrased in language to which he could respond. Having not accepted the amendment, it's now in unclear language and puts him in a position where he can't adequately respond to the question, so we would have to ask members of the House to now turn down the question.

In saying that, it's interesting that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar made reference to the audited statements, which clearly refer to school-generated funds, which is something that school boards do report on as I understand it. That's the language that the minister was trying to inject into the question so that the information could be provided on an appropriate basis. I don't understand why the hon. members would turn down an amendment which allows the question to be answered, but having turned down the amendment, we now have to suggest that the question be turned down because it's not in language which can be answered on the basis of which the information is reported. [interjection]

The Speaker: Well, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has moved. If I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, that closes the debate.

The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm having difficulty with the notion that the question is unclear. It clearly states "school-based

fundraising initiatives." We've accepted the former amendment of changing "fiscal" to "school" years, so I don't see where the confusion exists.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the amendment has been defeated on this question.

Mr. Chase: But the turning down of the question . . .

The Speaker: Sorry. There's no debate. It's just a fact.

Additional comments? Hon. Member for Edmonton Gold-Bar, you can participate if you wish.

3:20

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I listened with a great deal of interest to the brief explanation by the hon. Minister of Advanced Education in regard to this written question and how difficult it would be to provide that information. The information for school-generated funds is in each audited statement.

Mr. Hancock: My point exactly.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. But the information – and this is my point exactly – that we're after is not, and there is quite a difference here. There is quite a difference in the information that was asked for and the information that's been offered.

I would remind the hon. minister that in this House last week the Department of Education didn't even have the proper regulation for school closures on its website. You had an outdated one on there. [interjections] Yeah, you fixed it up. You bet. You fixed it up on Thursday of last week. But that information wasn't adequate.

How are parents to know what is accurate and what is outdated information in this department when we look at the school closure regulation that had been passed by this government in August of last year and the Minister of Education and the Department of Education still had one on there, Mr. Speaker, from before that? So whenever parents look at this department and they're looking for information, on occasion the most up-to-date, accurate information is not available. I don't understand why there is a reluctance to provide this information in the manner that was asked for by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview perhaps expressed my sentiments and those of my colleagues best when he indicated that if it's not possible to get this information, perhaps the minister will recognize from today's debate how much interest there is in having this information and, certainly, how very much the parents of the students in this province would like to have this information. Perhaps, if nothing else, the government can take under consideration changing the way that they report the statistics so that in the future when this question is asked, they would be able to provide it.

Just as an anecdote, Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie and myself visited Ellerslie north campus on Friday and were appalled to see that on their wish list that they're presenting to their parent council looking for items to be purchased by the proceeds of an upcoming casino was new carpet for the library. This is exactly why these sorts of things are so important for not just

members of this House but also for parents across the province to know because, certainly, the consideration is that perhaps schools are raising money outside of the fees, as my colleague from Calgary-Varsity suggested, outside of pop machines and cafeteria and so forth, for things other than field trips and, rather, for essentials for learning.

Really that is the crux of the matter, and that is why the question was worded the way it was, referring specifically to fundraising initiatives, and why the Member for St. Albert feels that it is so important to have this particular information. So I would certainly hope that the Assembly would vote in favour of this question, and I will close debate.

Thank you.

[Written Question 15 lost]

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

**Department of Energy
Communications Contracts Expenditures**

Q16. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

How much money in total did the Ministry and Department of Energy spend on communications contracts in the 2003-04 fiscal year broken down by organization?

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, fiscal year 2003-2004 was a busy one for the department. The department on behalf of this government was trying to defend publicly electricity deregulation, natural gas deregulation. [interjection] I hear one clap over there, but there are a lot of government members in the Assembly this afternoon, and they obviously don't support that. It's sort of quiet.

Support for electricity deregulation and natural gas deregulation, or energy deregulation: certainly, consumers have had a number of campaigns directed their way. There are many people who think that all of these campaigns originate in the Public Affairs Bureau, but there are some that are contracted out to various communications agencies. It would be very interesting and very informative to know exactly how much money is being spent by this government to convince consumers of both electricity and natural gas that energy deregulation has worked, that choice has reduced costs and improved efficiency. It certainly hasn't happened. [interjection] Now, the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky says: give it up. No, I won't give it up. Consumers are phoning, and they're saying: don't give it up. They feel that this whole process has let them down from day one.

The propaganda campaigns: they start, but they never finish explaining to consumers the benefits of energy deregulation. This is, again, information that we should have. We should know how many of these communications campaigns have started. How many have, for instance, tried to convince us, whenever a third-party marketer or a middle person or a middle marketer knocks on your door, of the merits of having a long-term contract whether it be one or three or five years? The Department of Energy's website: who designed that? The one that's updated as frequently as my own website, which is not too often. Certainly, there has been a lot of money spent telling people how wonderful electricity deregulation is. It's money that's been spent, and what we really should be doing is taking our low-cost plan for electricity deregulation and adopting that in this province.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to say that citizens of this province would probably be as startled as I if they knew the total

costs of trying to sell in the fiscal year 2003-04 the merits of energy deregulation to consumers by this government. The bill would be in the millions of dollars, and I would hope that I can receive this information and share it with all the consumers of this province, consumers who have not only in this fiscal year that we're talking about but in previous fiscal years had to bear the unfortunate burden of sky-high energy bills.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of the Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time on behalf of the Minister of Energy and the government I am recommending that Written Question 16 be rejected. I would like to assist the hon. member, though. If he has a question, perhaps he can make it just a bit more clear. Since there appears to be a question related to how the ministry spends its money in the budget, he may want to specifically as chair consider asking a question in Public Accounts Committee as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. This question again has to do with transparency and accountability versus hiding information within the FOIP requirement and then requiring, as we formerly mentioned, taxpayers to fund the bill and wait months to finally have the information.

One of the first moves the Premier made upon assuming the leadership of the Conservative Party was to bring the public relations department under his specific wing. Right now that public relations department costs taxpayers annually \$14 million, and there are approximately 266 employees employed to basically tell the people what a good job this government is doing. We don't need extra tellers unaccounted for. In other words, if we have extra individuals being contracted out by the Department of Energy on top of the \$14 million that taxpayers are already paying out, then at some point this self-promotion becomes rather prohibitive.

I would suggest that in the nature of accountability and transparency this question be accepted. If the expenses are legitimate, back them up by revealing them. Thank you.

The Speaker: Others?

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the comment just made about the taxpayers' money, I'm not sure who the hon. member thinks has to ferret out all this information when a written question is asked, but I can assure him that many times when written questions come forward, when they're phrased in a global way that you can't narrow it down to the type of information that's being looked at, it takes civil servants hundreds of hours to get the information together, and it's not a very appropriate use of the taxpayers' money if it's a fishing trip. Often these written questions could be much more effective if the type of information that was really being ascertained could be appropriately described.

Many times in this House we have to move to amend a question to get it into the right language so that we can be sure that we respond accurately. When the Legislature orders a return or an answer to a written question or orders information be provided, you must be certain that the language is precise so that you provide the information that's being ordered. You would not want to be offside

an order from the Legislature. That is why often you try and get precise language in the questions. When a global question is asked which doesn't have the precise language, it ends up ordering civil servants – wasting taxpayers' money looking for a broad scope of information, and it's not a good use.

Now, the other comment that I wanted to respond to was when our current Premier became Premier of this province – if the hon. member wants to go back to that point in time and talk about Public Affairs and bringing the communications department under the government, it was this Premier who, as one of the first acts, brought forward a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which made a process for the public to access information that was in the hands of government in an appropriate way and to make those determinations as to how to appropriately acquire and how to pay the cost of acquiring information when people sought to do so.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The latest comments from the hon. Minister of Advanced Education – I would have to say that was an unbelievable speech. We're talking about government waste here. We have to go no further than contracts to friends of the government that we don't know whether any work was ever done. Waste. Over \$40 million spent on the thoroughbred horse-racing renewal while we're closing schools: that's a waste.

The Speaker: Okay. The chair appreciates all of this, but relevance is important. Right now we have Written Question 16 before us.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. In regard to Written Question 16, I would not need to ask this question if public accounts were organized in such a fashion that each department was listed alphabetically. Then I could go through the document myself and see which communications outfits were hired by this government, for how much, and then I could pursue the questioning. Right now, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker – now I'm going to get in trouble with my colleagues on this side of the House – the public accounts documents are organized A through Z, not zee but zed, and they're not organized by department.

It would be totally unnecessary to ask this question if this government could provide to all Albertans on a department-wide basis exactly how much money they're spending and where, and with Energy people would be very interested to know how much money is being spent to convince them that they should like electricity and natural gas deregulation.

In conclusion, we were quite specific to the hon. Minister of Energy. We want the amount that was spent on communications contracts in the fiscal year 2003-2004, broken down by the respective outfits that were awarded these spin-doctoring contracts.

Thank you.

[Written Question 16 lost]

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

Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations Hosting Expenses

Q17. Ms Pastoor moved that the following question be accepted. How much money has been spent by the Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations on hosting expenses in the fiscal years 1996-97 through 2003-04 inclusive broken down by function and year?

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly the first to recognize the enjoyment of hosting and the value of networking, but there is a difference between the value that you get for your dollars networking and just plain partying. Further questions, I think, that could be answered are: how many people are actually meeting? How many are hangers-on? How many of these people actually have the information or, in fact, have the authority to move any of the issues along that might come out of this networking? I believe that the taxpayers should have that information.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations I'm pleased to advise that Written Question 17 will be accepted.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to conclude the debate.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I'll call the question.

[Written Question 17 carried]

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

Information Technology Security Awareness

Q18. Mr. Elsalhy moved that the following question be accepted. What measures has the Ministry of Innovation and Science taken to improve the information technology security awareness of government employees as recommended in the Auditor General's 2003-04 annual report?

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My motive for submitting this question is in reaction to the cases where information was either lost or misplaced, and the Auditor General reacted by trying to encourage the Ministry of Innovation and Science to beef up security and try to prevent such losses or information being misplaced from happening again.

So I would really urge the House to support this written question. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to this question because it's a question that should properly be directed to Restructuring and Government Efficiency as my ministry now has the office of the corporate chief information officer under its authority. Therefore, I must formally reject the question, but I would ask the Member for Edmonton-McClung to resubmit the question so that I may answer it. In fact, I encourage the member to resubmit the question because there are a number of security awareness measures under way that I would be pleased to share with him if he resubmits at a later date.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

3:40

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would definitely go ahead and take this advice, and I will resubmit the question, although it appears that it could have been just answered by the hon. minister,

you know, in the interests of sharing the information. Again, like my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford indicated before, if they have something positive to show, and they would like to parade and show the efficiencies that they have now, certainly if I'm in the minister's shoes, I would be the first person to share this information even if the question was submitted to a colleague and not to myself.

However, I thank the hon. minister, and I will definitely resubmit this. Thank you.

[Written Question 18 lost]

Reforestation Timelines

Q19. Mr. Elsalhy moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that the following question be accepted.

What measures has the government taken to ensure that reforestation timelines are being met by timber harvesting companies?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, we would be pleased to indicate to this House that we are prepared to accept Written Question 19.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, this certainly is a positive move, and I appreciate the co-operation from the hon. minister. I move the question.

[Written Question 19 carried]

Student Loan Program

Q20. Mr. R. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Taylor that the following question be accepted.

What is the dollar amount of student loans provided to students attending public postsecondary educational institutions in Alberta under the Alberta student loan program in each of the fiscal years 2000-01 to 2003-04 inclusive?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would be pleased to accept this question on behalf of the government provided that we can amend it for clarification purposes. I would therefore move that Written Question 20 be amended by striking out "provided" and substituting "issued." It may sound like a very small or picky change, but there are a number of different ways in which student loans are recorded.

We issue a certificate. The certificate is then taken to an institution for certification that the individual it's issued to is a student. Then that certificate is provided to the student loan provider, and funds are then deposited; in other words, the certificate is cashed. There are sometimes differences in the amounts between what's issued and what's cashed, depending on whether it goes over a fiscal year-end, although they're modest differences. The language that we've utilized consistently is the question of how many loans have been issued or the amount of loans issued, so that's the reason for the change. Otherwise, the information will be similar in nature, but it'll be more accurately reported.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to the amend-

ment, then, I understand and appreciate the minister's explanation, and I would support the amendment and would hope that the remainder of the members would do so as well.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, in the interests of time and given that it would appear as if the government is going to provide the information that my colleague from Calgary-Currie is looking for, I would move that we close debate on Written Question 20.

[Written Question 20 as amended carried]

Student Loan Program

Q21. Mr. R. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Taylor that the following question be accepted.

What is the dollar amount of student loans provided to students attending private, for-profit educational or training institutions in Alberta under the Alberta student loan program in each of the fiscal years 2000-01 to 2003-04 inclusive?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I would be pleased to accept Written Question 21 on behalf of government if we could ask the House for a small amendment, in this case two points. I would move that Written Question 21 be amended by striking out "provided" and substituting "issued" and by striking out "for-profit educational or training institutions" and substituting "vocational schools."

Again, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the information that would be provided would be similar, but the language is the language in which the information is collected. We don't collect information on for-profit educational or training institutions, but we do collect information on private vocational schools. I think the information that would be provided is what the member would want, but it's again the precise language under which we collect the information. So I would ask for those amendments in order that we'd be able to accept the question and provide the information.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, no problem with the change in clause (a) as it's similar to what we did on a previous written question. On clause (b) my only comment would be that I find it interesting that this government continually admonishes the opposition, saying that profit is not a dirty word, and here they are taking it out of this particular question. So I find that a little bit ironic, I suppose, but I understand, again, what the minister is trying to achieve. In the interests of receiving the information that my colleague for Calgary-Currie is looking for, I would expect that we will probably be supporting the amendment, but I'll certainly give other members a chance to speak to it.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Speaker: We're on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Very definitely on the amendment. I'm discussing for-profit educational or training institutions and substituting vocational schools. Just for my own clarification an example: would the DeVry Institute of Technology be considered a vocational school?

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: On the question as amended, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to close debate.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Currie that we close the debate, and we'll gratefully accept the information from the government.

[Written Question 21 as amended carried]

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

Former Chief of Staff Remuneration

Q22. Mr. R. Miller moved that the following question be accepted.

What was the total amount paid to the Premier's former chief of staff, Mr. Peter Elzinga, in each of the 2002-03 and 2003-04 fiscal years broken down according to salary, allowances, bonuses, and severance pay?

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an issue that has been not only in the news a lot over the last couple of years but certainly on the minds of many Albertans. It was an issue that arose several times for myself at the doorstep during the campaign. I think that there are many, many Albertans that would be most pleased to have the opportunity to review this information, so we're hopeful that the government will comply by providing it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Premier's office to indicate that unfortunately this question will have to be rejected, and the reason for that is because information pertaining to salaries and benefits for the former chief of staff for the office of the Premier is already publicly available in the 2002-03 and the 2003-04 annual reports for Executive Council. Severance payments are also included within the overall expenditure reporting on the financial statements in Executive Council's annual report. So that information is there should they wish to dig it up.

Thank you.

3:50

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Just, again, clarification. When the Premier's most recent adviser, Dr. West, was I guess terminated, the information was very clear. It came in the area of about \$186,000, and the time period was obvious. Is that type of clarification and detail available for Mr. Elzinga?

The Speaker: The minister can only debate once. This is not a question-and-answer period. You had your input.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional comments?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to close the debate.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Education has indicated that that information is available to us if we dig deep enough, and I can assure him that we will begin digging.

[Written Question 22 lost]

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

Current Chief of Staff Remuneration

Q23. Mr. R. Miller moved that the following question be accepted.

What is the total maximum amount scheduled to be paid to the Premier's current chief of staff, Mr. Rod Love, for each year of the current contract broken down according to salary, allowances, bonuses, and severance pay?

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the Assembly that most of the people that I have spoken to are particularly interested in the question of severance pay, and I will look forward to the government's response.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question will need to be rejected as well, and I want to briefly explain why. First of all, Executive Council publishes the salaries and benefits of the chief of staff in its annual reports. The 2004-05 annual report will be published – and I say that in the future tense – in September of '05. The salary range of senior officials, including the chief of staff for the office of the Premier, is publicly available on the public administration office website. Finally, if severance were to be paid, it would be included within the overall expenditure reporting on the financial statements in Executive Council's annual report.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Hopefully, I'm doing it right this time. The point of the question with regard to severance pay again goes back to Dr. West. The feeling not only by the opposition but by many members of the public was that it was exorbitant. Therefore, we have the latest adviser coming back on. It's sort of in a revolving-door format. Obviously, he's undertaken a contract, and part of that contract would include severance. We would like on behalf of the taxpayers to know what the payout will be that has previously been agreed to so that taxpayers can judge the ongoing worth of this individual and potentially how quickly he should be severed.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think my closing comments really reflect the comments of my colleague from Calgary-Varsity in that the intent of the question here is to gain some understanding as to how much Alberta taxpayers might be on the

hook for if, in fact, this current chief of staff is let go as quickly as the previous chief of staff was let go and whether or not, then, Alberta taxpayers are getting good value for their money. So that was really the reason for the question and, as I said, the particular emphasis on the severance pay.

Unfortunately, it would appear from the minister's response that we're likely to have to wait until after the fact to learn how much money we're on the hook for as opposed to knowing now. I really believe that Alberta taxpayers have every right to know up front what would be in that contract.

Given that, we'll move Written Question 23.

[Written Question 23 lost]

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been served on Thursday, April 14, it's my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 14 through 26 inclusive.

[Motion carried]

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

Minister of Municipal Affairs Business Expenses

M14. Mr. MacDonald moved on behalf of Dr. Taft that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a breakdown of the Minister of Municipal Affairs' expenses including but not limited to airfare, food, accommodation, and conference fees from February 18, 2003, to November 22, 2004.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I would be anxious, as would the taxpayers, to see a full accounting of this minister's expenses as noted. Thank you.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to indicate on behalf of the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs that we are prepared to accept Motion for a Return 14 albeit with some amendments. These amendments were circulated prior to 11 a.m. to the opposition as requested and required, and I believe it's now been circulated to all members.

That having been said, you may recall that we had debated a similar motion to this one in this Assembly last Monday. In that context, Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to indicate to the hon. questioner and to all members of the House that for ease of 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. They were successfully embraced a week ago, and I'm hopeful that they will be again this week.

I would also like to 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 as part of the amended motion. That information will be provided as a separate category under this particular subtitle when the response gets tabled in the House.

So to accommodate accounting practices, I would like to propose

an amendment to this motion. That amendment, in fact, would be worded as follows. First of all, we would strike out "but not limited to airfare, food, accommodation, and conference fees" and substitute the following words: "travel, accommodation, meals, receptions and hosting, and incidental and miscellaneous expenses, including conference fees."

Following that, Mr. Speaker, we would propose to strike out "February 18, 2003, to November 22, 2004," and in place of those words we would substitute the following words: "February 1, 2003, to November 30, 2004," which, of course, would have the net effect of giving the hon. members even more information than is being asked for, which is a good thing. From our point of view it gets down to this being necessary to report on a monthly basis, that being from the first of the particular month to the end of the particular month. So it helps us to provide the information in a form that is already being collected.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, the final amended motion would be phrased as follows.

That an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a breakdown of the Minister of Municipal Affairs' 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 the acceptance of this motion as amended on the basis of the rationale provided.

The Acting Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

4:00

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In regard to the amendment that was read into the record by the hon. Minister of Education, certainly, with this Motion for a Return 14 that is acceptable, and I and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview will look forward to receiving the information through this Motion for a Return 14 as amended. Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Motion for a Return 14 as amended carried]

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

Department of Municipal Affairs Business Credit Card Statements

M15. Mr. MacDonald moved on behalf of Dr. Taft 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 2003-04 issued to the deputy ministers, all assistant deputy ministers, executive directors, directors, branch heads, managers, and unit leaders for the Department of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, that is, I think, self-explanatory. We have a duty and an obligation to ensure that this government remains accountable and each respective department remains accountable. We cannot forget the taxpayer in all of this.

The budget of this government is going up, up, and up. The government is growing larger. It's a big government, and these sorts of motions for returns ensure that there is transparency and accountability. I look forward, hopefully, to receiving this information from the Department of Municipal Affairs in light of what has happened in the past with some of the credit card expenses. Executive Council

comes to mind, certainly. This information would be of a great deal of interest to the taxpayers, as I said before.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 15 I would again like to indicate on behalf of the government and specifically on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs that this particular motion as worded would be acceptable to the minister and to the government provided there were some amendments made to it.

You may recall, Mr. Speaker, as would other members in the House, that a similar motion to this was in fact debated and advanced in this Legislature last Monday, April 11. I understand that the amendment that I am now proposing on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs has been circulated in its totality to all the members in the House and that opposition colleagues affected were notified prior to 11 this morning as per protocol and other procedures.

I should indicate, Mr. Speaker, that in the amended motion we have again categorized expenses under the same categories referenced in Motion for a Return 14, that being 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 of Alberta 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 the government of Alberta now. So there's a big effort for consistency of purpose there. Of course, there's been a tremendous amount of standardization that has gone here in the interest of openness, accountability, and organization.

It's our belief, Mr. Speaker, that by using these categories, we'll be able to provide responses to the motion for a return and hopefully to the satisfaction of the questioner.

The second area that I'd like to comment on, Mr. Speaker, is just with respect to being able to provide information at the deputy minister level and not at the other positions' level listed in the original motion for return, specifically, assistant deputy ministers, executive directors, directors, branch heads, managers, unit leaders, et cetera.

So I just want to explain what the rationale for the wording is then, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated to the House last Monday, I think, during debate on a similar motion for a return, the Auditor General does an extremely good and a very thorough analytical job when reviewing all provincial departmental expenses on an annual basis. He provides that report and any concerns that he might have not only to this Assembly but also to the general public of the province and, for that matter, to anyone else who might be interested. To the best of my knowledge our Auditor General has not highlighted any senior department officials' expenses as being a concern at this time.

So I just want to again indicate that a considerable amount of time and effort has already gone into preparing the response to this motion, and it would take literally dozens and dozens and dozens of more hours to compile even more information in a form other than what I am proposing on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I hope that will be acceptable to the hon. questioner, Mr. Speaker, because our well-established process is now in place through these annual reviews by the Auditor General, that I've already referenced. 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 so.

That being the case, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest 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, accommodations, 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 2003-04 incurred by the Deputy Minister the Department of Municipal Affairs.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. On the amendment to Motion for a Return 15, I'm astonished that this amendment would reduce the number of people who are actually going to be responsible and accountable in regard to the expenditure of tax dollars on who knows what. Certainly, this amendment where we're striking out assistant deputy ministers, executive directors, directors, branch heads, managers, and unit leaders, whoever they are, from any form of public scrutiny I think is totally wrong by the minister.

What happens if and when these employees, these senior civil servants, pick up the tab for others? Perhaps it's going to be the minister that they're picking up the tab for. There will be no accountability if we are to accept this amended motion as described by the hon. minister. I'm not satisfied with that. I don't think taxpayers would be satisfied with that.

For instance, let's say that a delegation from this department goes to Mexico. Mexico comes to mind, Mr. Speaker, because there was a delegation that went there before, and it was quite a long trip to Mexico and various individuals went at various times during that interval, and they went off on little side trips as well. The information provided to me indicated that these side trips were there. So what would happen with this department if there were side trips, and the side trips were picked up on the credit cards of the assistant deputy ministers or the executive directors? No, I can't accept that amendment.

4:10

The hon. minister talks about the Auditor General, and he's correct. The Auditor General, what he does investigate, is thorough. But the Auditor General doesn't investigate each line item in the budget. There are things called test audits, and that's what is going on here. That's not satisfactory. In light of the past behaviour of this government I think it's shameful that we would even attempt to amend this motion as described by the hon. minister.

Now, certainly, Mr. Speaker, if one was to go to the *Alberta Gazette*, you could see hosting expenses over a certain amount, \$600. Perhaps we could have access to some of this information, but not all of it. If the tab was over six hundred bucks, well, then it has to be listed, and I think it's a good idea that it's listed in the *Gazette*. But what would happen if, for instance, let's say we went to a restaurant in Calgary, a steak house in Calgary, and the executive director picked up a portion of the tab, the unit leader picked up a portion of the tab on the government credit card, and the assistant deputy minister picked up the rest of the tab. So the tab was divided into three, and it would less be than \$600. Taxpayers would have no idea what the money was being used for and with whom it was being spent.

Mr. Mason: You'd even know the price of the orange juice.

Mr. MacDonald: No, the price of orange juice can get pretty high, as everyone knows. It doesn't matter whether it's freshly squeezed or frozen. In some jurisdictions it can be quite high, Mr. Speaker.

I, for one, am surprised at this amendment. I'm disappointed in this amendment as well, and for the sake of openness and transparency I would just have to say that, no, this is not satisfactory. There are a lot of people working, in this case the Department of Municipal Affairs, and I think that all senior managers should be accountable. Thank you.

Mr. Chase: I'm not going to go on, but I've got to give an analogy. We've got Snow White and the seven dwarfs in the ministry of diamond extraction. Snow runs up a large tab, but Dopey says, "No, I've got it, Snow." Then Snow goes off on a tour of other castles, the wicked queen, and the hunter, et cetera, and the bus tab comes up, and basically Happy stands up and says, "No, Snow, I've got it." So the point of what I am saying is that without the specific information we're getting snowed.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Another Liberal fairy tale, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to briefly get on the record and again say that I'm disappointed in this.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Ah, really?

Mr. MacDonald: Yeah. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs is chatting over there. But I'm sorry; we have to have a government that is accountable and transparent. This motion for a return, the changes that have been initiated here, are not satisfactory. It's only a year since there was a great deal of debate in this Legislative Assembly about some of the habits, some of the excessive spending habits, of this government. It doesn't matter whether we're talking about orange juice by the glass or by the pitcher, the taxpayers have some concern whenever they feel that their dollars are not being used wisely. This motion for a return will help taxpayers have a lot more confidence in their government and how they spend their dollars.

Now, to water this down is discouraging. I'm not going to get into detail on this, but some senior civil servants have had their expenses questioned. Some of them, in fact, have wound up going through the court system.

We on this side of the House have a duty and an obligation. The government in this case, whenever it is so insistent on changing through amendment this motion for a return, I just have to say that I'm disappointed. You don't seem to have learned lessons from last year that taxpayers demand answers, and they demand answers through us as the Official Opposition.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 15 as amended carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Minister of Municipal Affairs Business Credit Card Statements

M16. Mr. MacDonald moved on behalf of Dr. Taft 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 Municipal Affairs and the minister's executive assistant.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is, again, self-explanatory. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is keen and serious about holding this government accountable, and it's reflected in this Motion for a Return 16. I would hope that we will receive this information in a timely fashion from the department.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 16 I would like to indicate on behalf of the government and particularly on behalf of the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs that this particular motion if it were to be amended minorly would be acceptable to the minister and to the government. The amendment has been circulated, I believe, to all members of the House, and I believe it was also provided as a courtesy and as required to opposition prior to 11 o'clock this morning.

That having been said, Mr. Speaker, the rationale behind the amendment is simply this, and that is to indicate that the issue of reporting is obviously something we do take very seriously on this side of the House, and for ease of that reporting, the categories that we have listed in the amended motion, which I will read to you very soon, actually reflect the government's adopted procedures when we are looking at these kinds of credit card expenses and the best way to reflect them and report on them. I believe I've indicated that in previous comments here in the House.

In any case, Mr. Speaker, each department, as all members here would know, is, of course, annually audited by the most professional and thorough of all processes, 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 previous years. Of course, there haven't been any, so that has not been done.

However, we're offering these amendments in the spirit of at least trying to provide information in the form that is currently collected. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I propose 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" and, finally, strike out the words "issued to" and substitute the words "incurred by."

4:20

In the end, Mr. Speaker, the amended motion 16 would be worded in its totality 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 Municipal Affairs and the minister's executive assistant.

I hope that's acceptable to the questioner and would move the acceptance of this motion as amended.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened to that

with interest. Certainly, at this time one might have to see with this Motion for a Return 16 just exactly what will be provided with this amendment. There was a great deal of fanfare when the government decided that they would put on each respective ministry website all reports and amounts spent on international travel. And, you know, there are certainly some departments in this government that travel more frequently to international destinations than others. Municipal Affairs is a department where there's very little globe-trotting that I'm aware of. Now, Economic Development, that would be another matter.

But when you look at the websites and you see what information is on there and you have a look at this amended motion for a return, I would be of the understanding that all travel, whether it be international travel, within Canada, or within Alberta, would be included in this motion for a return. It is for that reason that I'm going to on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview wait and see precisely what sort of detail we get from this Motion for a Return 16.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview we will look forward to getting that information and having an analysis done of it.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 16 as amended carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on behalf of the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Department of Learning Business Credit Card Statements

M17. Mr. MacDonald moved on behalf of Mr. Flaherty 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 2003-04 issued to the deputy minister, assistant deputy minister, directors, branch heads, managers, and unit leaders for the department of learning.

Mr. MacDonald: Certainly, I think many people, including parents of public school students in this province, would be very anxious to see how much money is being spent and where by senior government departmental officials. Whenever we're having this debate across the city here, some of the central city neighbourhoods are being asked to just step aside and allow their community-based schools to be closed so we can save in some cases \$90,000 in operational costs, in some cases \$140,000 in operational costs. So if it's an issue of having very little money, well, let's find out exactly how much and where senior people from the department are spending tax dollars.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister for Education and Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to this particular motion, 17, I guess that it needs to be indicated once again that the motion can be accepted if it were to be amended. I'll get into that in just a moment.

I have explained this before, but for purposes of those people who only read selective motions or selective written questions, I will go through the procedure again and also remind all colleagues that this particular issue and a similar motion with a similar context and a similar amendment were debated in this Assembly last Monday. That having been said, I know that the amendment has been circulated to all members now, and it was also provided to our opposition colleagues prior to 11 this morning as required by protocol and procedures that govern this House.

I'll begin by indicating that in the amended motion, once again, we have categorized the expenses, standardized them, so to speak, under the same categories that were referenced in response to Motion for a Return 14 just earlier, those being travel, accommodation, meals, receptions and hosting, and incidental and miscellaneous expenses. The reason for this, of course, is as a result of a decision that was made by our government roughly a year ago or half a year ago or thereabouts, last fall in any event, to use these specific categories and these specific accounting codes within the categories for the purpose of explaining those specific expenses, and those particular categories are now employed throughout the government process.

So that's one of several efforts in government to standardize procedures that we have undertaken in the interest of being accountable and open and honest and so on. By using these categories, Mr. Speaker, we'll be able to provide the response to this motion as amended, and hopefully that would be to the satisfaction of the questioner.

I've already explained the comments pertaining to the deputy minister level versus the other positions listed in the original motion, and I would just explain what the rationale for the wording is, then, in this respect. As I've indicated previously in the House and earlier even today in the House and during last Monday's debate on similar motions for returns, our Auditor General for the province of Alberta does an exceptionally fine job and a very, very thorough and meticulous job in analyzing all expenses of all provincial departments on an annual basis.

Then that particular report with his comments, be they favourable or be they negative but nonetheless his comments, regardless of what they might be, is provided back to and through this Assembly to all members as well as to the general public of our province. To the best of my knowledge, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has not highlighted any senior department officials' expenses as being a major concern to him at this point.

So I'll just indicate again that we have spent considerable amounts of time and considerable amounts of effort looking into the preparation for the response to this particular motion, as with previous ones of a similar nature, and it would just take so, so long to try and compile every little tidbit of information in a form different than what I'm proposing in the amendment. So I hope that will be acceptable to the questioner or to the person speaking on behalf of the questioner.

That having been said, the amended motion, which we could see ourselves supporting, 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 2003-04 incurred by the deputy minister for the department of learning.

That having been said, I would hope that everyone would accept that as a suitable amendment to the motion proposed.

4:30

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Again for the record, just in case someone is reading *Hansard* and they haven't had a chance to look at the debate for previous motions for returns where the government has been very reluctant to provide all the information in regard to credit card expenses categorized by travel, accommodation, meals, reception, hosting, and incidental and miscellaneous expenses, we would have to say this. Again, if we are to strike out, as has been requested here, the tabs that are to be picked up by the assistant deputy ministers, the directors, the branch heads, the managers, and unit leaders from the department of learning, we really are doing the taxpayers of this province a disservice, and we are being disrespectful of the taxpayers.

We are, as I said earlier, requesting schools to be closed so that we can reduce operational expenses by as little as \$100,000 or \$140,000, yet we can't make public the amount of money that assistant deputy ministers, directors, branch heads, managers, and unit leaders may be spending by picking up the tab again. Who are they picking up the tab for? And why? And where? They're not doing it, in my estimation, for public schools. That doesn't seem to be a priority. In fact, this is the government that'll turn around and, just like that, order an audit of a public school. You know, they'll just turn around and, zap, you're audited.

In that case, why then can parents through the Official Opposition not have a look at how the monthly business credit card statements run and at what exactly is on them? I would remind the hon. Minister of Education that it's not too long ago, in the last two or three fiscal years – it may have been Municipal Affairs; it may have been Infrastructure – that there was some significant public discourse surrounding the behaviour of an assistant deputy minister or, I will stand corrected, Mr. Speaker, a senior member of the department. I'm on recall here, and if I were to make a mistake, I would apologize to the House. But there was definitely some wrongdoing, and I believe this matter wound up in the courts.

To say now that there's nothing wrong, I think that is an error because there have been some indiscretions in the past. This original motion for a return as proposed by the Member for St. Albert certainly, in my view, is in order. You can't exclude all these senior officials in the department. Why would you? Again, we go back to the same information that is published in the *Alberta Gazette*: hosting expenses over a certain amount, in this case 600 bucks.

So the parents in North Edmonton school don't find out that the assistant deputy minister, a director, and a branch head used a credit card to pay off a dinner with we don't know whom. Maybe it's an organization promoting charter schools. Maybe it's a group of private schools, and they're picking up this tab, but if the three of them are separating the bill, the taxpayers will never find out because the *Alberta Gazette* will not record that.

Again, I think this is disrespectful to taxpayers, to the public school system, to parents and pupils. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. We have the same argument again. We're asking on behalf of the taxpayers and the constituents, who sent us here, for transparency and accountability, and unfortunately we're not receiving it. The easiest way to deal with this would be simply to post the information on the website on a regular basis and make it publicly available to all interested parties. I can't see this as being particularly top-secret, FOIPed information which involves us going through a long, unnecessary process to get the information that should be there.

I'd like to remind the members opposite in the House that while there are only 21 of us here, the majority of Albertans voted against

the government and for parties representing the opposition, and that's because we were knocking on doors saying that we would try and improve accountability and transparency in this House. Yet every time we stand up and offer a legitimate suggestion for a small time period for travel expenses, and so on, incurred by a whole department as opposed to one individual, we get turned down.

Also, with regard to the Auditor General I think that under most circumstances the Auditor General is doing a wonderful job. However, he has not been given the powers by this government to investigate nearly as thoroughly as, say, the federal Auditor General, Sheila Fraser. So if you want true accountability and you want it to be handled through the Auditor General rather than through your own departments, I suggest that you give the man the sufficient power to make the changes.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar sort of moved me to make a couple of comments here. This particular department I've had some knowledge of in the past, and I go back. Certainly, when they didn't like things, they were prepared to audit the Edmonton public school board. The idea was that it's all right to waste the time and energy of the school board, but when they're asked for the same sort of audit on the assistant deputy minister, directors, and branch managers, they're not nearly as forthcoming.

I would remind people that the Edmonton public school board – and I was there at the time – was audited because we had the temerity to say that if the arbitration wasn't covered, we were going to lose a lot of teachers, which is precisely what happened. Immediately the Department of Education's response through the minister, taking the advice he was getting from these very same people, was: "Well, they must be wasting their money. We have to audit them."

But it seems that now, when the members are asking for a similar approach to these same bureaucrats – assistant deputy ministers, directors, branch heads, managers, and unit leaders – well, then, it's too much work. It's too much work, Mr. Speaker, to ferret this out. I say that what's good for the goose is good for the gander, especially with this particular department in view of the record.

What was interesting about the audit – and I sat there with the former minister – were the things that they said about how we were inefficient. One of the major things was that we weren't closing down enough schools. We weren't closing down enough schools. That was one of their brilliant analyses. The other was that we should add teacher minutes onto people. That was how we were being inefficient. We should add more teaching time, and we should close down more schools. That's what they paid for in an audit, this brilliant bunch here, Mr. Speaker.

I think it should be appropriate – I know it wasn't this minister that was there at the time – that this type of great information that they got back, wasting all that time and energy auditing the Edmonton public school board, which this minister says is doing a great job – it should be fair that we check and see what's happening with them. I say, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, that if they want to talk about wasting money, that was the biggest waste of money I've ever seen, a department doing that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

4:40

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. On behalf of the hon. Member for St. Albert I would have to express at this time my disappointment. This government claims to be open and transparent, but after this amended Motion for a Return 17 I have to say again that I'm sorry. I'm deeply disappointed in this government for refusing the original motion for a return as requested by the hon. Member for St. Albert. I'm very, very disappointed in this government in light of what's going on across this city and across this province with public education, that we can't have full accountability. Accountability with the Progressive Conservative government is not a two-way street.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 17 as amended carried]

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

Department of Innovation and Science Business Credit Card Statements

M18. Mr. Elsalhy 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 2003-04 issued to the deputy minister, assistant deputy minister, directors, branch heads, managers, and unit leaders for the Department of Innovation and Science.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Something tells me that I am going to listen to the same debate from the opposite side, but I'm hopeful that maybe this time it might be different.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 18 the explanation is identical to Motion 17 and to previous motions that have already been discussed and debated in this House, so I'll save the House the time by not re-repeating all of that at this time. Suffice it to say that if it's acceptable, then we would propose an amendment to this motion on the basis of the same rationale that had been explained earlier.

In a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, that simply is that we categorize our expenses by a different nomenclature, and secondly, we do have an Auditor General, who examines all of the expenditures within government. I've explained all of that earlier, so I'll sum up simply by saying that we would support this motion if it were amended to read 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 2003-04 incurred by the Deputy Minister for the Department of Innovation and Science.

I would hope that that motion as amended would succeed.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the explanation from the hon. minister, but again I would have to reject the offer to amend this motion for a return. I understand and maybe agree with the nomenclature and changing the wording in section (a) and section (b). It still captures the essence of the question, so I am not in disagreement with point (a) and point (b). But, really, limiting the

information given to just the deputy minister and not disclosing the information as it pertains to the assistant deputy minister and the directors and the branch heads and the managers and unit leaders is really disappointing. The Auditor General might do a fine job reading the ministry records in general, but I think that really what we are looking for is detailed information that would allow us to answer questions that are fair and that are reasonable.

I think that failing that, we would probably have to resort to maybe hiring a forensic accountant or somebody who has experience combing through hidden information because now what the government is doing is not disclosing that information, so it is, in fact, hidden. I am really most disappointed. This is not an unfair question, and I bet you the information is easily compilable in the format that we requested. Like some of the previous hon. colleagues indicated, perhaps they could have simply posted it on the website and saved themselves and ourselves the trouble of going through a motion for a return to ask for it or, failing that, maybe even going to the FOIP co-ordinator and having to wait for several months and then having to pay through our noses to get this information.

So I would urge the House to not accept the amendment. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. As MLAs we're required to go through our expenses and be accountable for them. When I travel from Calgary to Edmonton or back, I claim expenses, indicating the kilometrage I travel. If I take a taxi and use the Diners card, then that bill comes back. All this information, I'm assuming, is available because it's being collected. I post it for myself for the benefit of the LAO every single week. The idea is that the information is there. It's available on a weekly basis. Possibly, it's just a matter of posting it so that it would be more transparent and accountable.

If it is such a difficult task to collect and post all this information, then I might suggest to the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency to bring Steve West back in, that this time, instead of getting rid of 10,000 members of the public service, he start by removing deputies, assistant deputies, branch heads, managers, and unit leaders who are not willing to have their expenses publicly put forth.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to conclude debate.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As was previously expressed, I'm really most disappointed. However, I think we have to take what's offered and study it. Although it is really inadequate and it doesn't really answer the question, we'll just take it the way it comes.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 18 as amended carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition.

Ground Ambulance Services

M19. Mr. MacDonald moved on behalf of Dr. Taft that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any

documents from the Department of Municipal Affairs for the fiscal years 2003-2004 and 2002-2003 referring to the provincial takeover of ground ambulance services from municipalities on April 1, 2005.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, this has created a great deal of debate in the province, this whole issue of the ground ambulance services and who is to fund them and how. We saw a significant cost overrun here. It was initially decided that between \$52 million and, I believe, \$55 million would be an adequate expenditure to provide for this takeover, but to everyone's surprise it was more than double that. It was more than double that. Some municipal districts were very concerned about their ambulance service and what would happen to it. There has been much talk about this.

There was also a lot of talk in the last election about the lack of vision of this government, and this was an example of that lack of vision. We see this dramatic increase in costs and one spokesperson for the government saying one thing and another saying another thing. It was a program or a takeover that certainly did not at this time work out. So the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is doing a great service to the citizens of the entire province by requesting this information through this forum at this time. I'm sure the government is going to provide this information, and I'm eager to receive it on his behalf.

Thank you.

4:50

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is prepared to accept this motion.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, did you want to speak?

Mr. Chase: If the hon. members opposite are prepared to accept this motion, I strongly support their acceptance. Thank you for speeding up the process and adding clarity to our procedures.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to thank the hon. minister on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview for agreeing to this motion for a return. We look forward to having a look at the information and analyzing it.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 19 carried]

Alberta Office In Washington

M20. Mr. Elsalhy moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents including but not limited to budget, business, and operational plans related to the establishment of an Alberta office in Washington, DC.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations I wish to accept Motion for a Return 20 with amendments. The amendments have been distributed to all members and shared with the opposition.

I'd like to move that the motion for a return be amended by striking out "all documents including but not limited to" and substituting "the." Mr. Speaker, the amended motion for a return would then read as follows: "That an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the budget, business, and operational plans related to the establishment of an Alberta office in Washington, DC." The hon. minister would be pleased to provide that information.

The motion as drafted refers to "all documents . . . related to the establishment of an Alberta office in Washington, DC." I'm advised that some of the documents requested may contain information potentially harmful to our intergovernmental relations and third parties and contain information that is considered privileged, such as advice to the minister and cabinet. For the wide-ranging information requested in this return, it is suggested that the hon. member use the process that currently exists under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This would give all impacted third parties an opportunity to review the request and provide their comment before any information is released.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move that Motion for a Return 20 be accepted as amended.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the rationale given by the hon. minister. When we drafted this question, we didn't think that the words "all documents" were this big, really. We didn't expect it to be potentially troubling for the government. Although I don't agree that, basically, some of those documents might have been privileged or may be damaging to our relations with the U.S., I appreciate the approach offered by the hon. minister. I know that the hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore would still like to see some of that information.

However, I just have this question. Basically, the amended version of this motion would offer stuff that I would have assumed to be readily available, perhaps on the website or perhaps in government printed publications. So my question is: isn't this information readily available? It was the other information that we were really after, but I would welcome more comments from colleagues.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just make a few comments on that because the three motions following are sort of all around the same issue. I'm prepared as the critic for International and Intergovernmental Relations to accept this amendment because although it's not great, at least we have access to the documents. I understand what a problem it can be waiting for third-party permission. Rather than wait, I would like to get something going. Because this is a new department, I'd like a good, strong baseline of information, and then I can worry about the other stuff. This is a department and an office that we will be keeping a very close eye on. So I would accept this amendment.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. If I could offer a suggestion. We have through the LAO the availability of legal counsel. I would suggest that through that legal counsel, if there was any potential privacy, third-party circumstance that the legal counsel considered to be of

such a nature that potentially would affect intercountry relations, then that lawyer or member of the counsel could provide that information to all members.

At some point we need to be working together and sharing a common information base, and there has to be, obviously, an improved trust circumstance. With the availability of our legal representations to keep us straight on what is and what isn't acceptable information, we would all be playing on the same team instead of the LAO serving in the role of a referee. I appreciate what my colleague has said, and in the interests of getting the information flowing, I will sit.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to close debate.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Official Opposition and the sponsor of this motion for a return, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, will be awaiting the information as amended.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 20 as amended carried]

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

Alberta Office in Washington

M21. Ms Pastoor moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all cost-benefit analyses for the newly established Alberta office in Washington, DC.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll repeat some of the remarks that I made to the previous motion. Because this is newly established, I think that now is the time to create a baseline so that we can get a true evaluation of what exactly is going on and what we're getting for our taxpayers' dollars.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again, on behalf of the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations I'm pleased to accept Motion for a Return 21.

5:00

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to conclude debate.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. It's concluded. I'd call the question.

[Motion for a Return 21 carried]

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

Alberta Office in Washington

M22. Ms Pastoor moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the detailed budget breakdown for the Alberta office in Washington, DC, for the 2004-05 fiscal year.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My reasoning is basically the same. It is more detailed in the previous two motions, and again it's giving us a good baseline to see if, in fact, we are getting benefit for our tax dollars.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations I would note that this hon. member clearly crafts very good questions and is most persuasive in her arguments because, once again, I am pleased to accept Motion for a Return 22.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to conclude debate.

Ms Pastoor: Well, thank you to the hon. member from across. Yes. I have been known to be succinct in my remarks.

The debate is concluded, and I would call the question.

[Motion for a Return 22 carried]

AISH Review Committee Submissions

M23. Ms Pastoor moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all submissions to the renewing AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, committee between August 1, 2004, and December 31, 2004.

The Acting 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 motion for a return 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 per the protocol with motions for returns.

I'd like to move that Motion for a Return 23 be amended by striking out "copies" and substituting "a summary"; striking out "renewing AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, committee" and substituting "MLA committee reviewing the AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, program"; and striking out "August 1, 2004, and December 31, 2004" and substituting "September 28, 2004, and January 31, 2005." So the amended motion, Mr. Speaker, would now read as follows: "A summary of [the responses provided] to the MLA committee reviewing the AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, program between September 28, 2004, and January 31, 2005."

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share with you the rationale for making some of these changes. We did receive, as the hon. member knows, an overwhelming amount of feedback from AISH clients, their families, and Albertans during the MLA AISH review process. In fact, we received approximately 18,000 individual responses as part of the review. Copying all the submissions would result in significant costs and use of supplies, staff time, et cetera, and I don't think that was the hon. member's intent.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the time frame indicated in the motion for a return is different from the time period during which we received input from Albertans, as the AISH review was announced on September 28 of last year and input was accepted up to January 31, 2005.

Last Friday I released the MLA AISH review committee's report and was pleased to do so, Mr. Speaker. This report is a summary of the input provided by Albertans. It is responses which established the framework for the committee's recommendations and set the stage for the significant investment and enhancement to the programs which were announced last week.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member is very interested in

this area, just from conversation that we have had about this, and I'd like to invite the Member for Lethbridge-East to meet with the assistant deputy minister for the AISH program so that the member can review any submissions, hon. member, that you are interested in out of these 18,000 submissions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the amendment.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. I would accept this amendment, and as has already been described by the hon. member from across the House, we have sat and discussed this, and I believe that with these amendments I will still be receiving the information that I need. I particularly wanted to know how the budget had been based on some of the suggestions that had come out of those reports.

So I thank the hon. member for actually cutting down, probably, my workload and still getting me the information that I need.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Motion for a Return 23 as amended carried]

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

Temporary Foreign Workers

M24. Mr. Backs moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any and all documents pertaining to the June 2004 memorandum of understanding between the government and the federal government regarding foreign temporary workers.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just note that there's been a great deal of interest in this particular agreement, a lot of controversy surrounding this particular agreement as to what, indeed, were the real statistics used, any studies that were used regarding the actual unemployment rate.

I know, for example, that some of the trades, say last spring, for example, were experiencing quite high unemployment. There were a lot of complaints from a lot of construction apprentices about the lack of continued, steady employment so that they could stay in their trade and, certainly, in a number of other occupations and areas. There was not a lot of consultation on this with a lot of labour providers. It seemed like the Alberta government went after this agreement quite aggressively. You know, many people call this the Oberg agreement now, as he was the minister responsible at the time. Many people say that the whole agreement in itself is an attempt to distort the labour market.

I would appreciate that this information be forthcoming. Thank you.

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

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to Motion for a Return 24. I am rejecting the motion for a return requesting copies of any and all documentation pertaining to the June 2004 MOU between the provincial and federal governments regarding foreign temporary workers. The MR could be interpreted very broadly, including correspondence from members of the public, which is submitted in confidence and contains personal information.

However, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's interest in this matter. As such, I am willing to table documents that indicate

the government's intent in negotiating this MOU with the federal government. I will table these documents to the Clerk's office tomorrow.

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

5:10

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. It'll certainly be interesting to have an opportunity to read those tabled documents tomorrow. When we look at Motion for a Return 24 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, I think it goes into a lot more detail than that. You know, I realize that the hon. minister is monitoring the situation, but in this case he's being very selective with the documents that he could release tomorrow.

I think the motion for a return as proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Manning is much more appropriate. This is an issue that has created a lot of interest in Alberta and, certainly, in the rest of the country. I was as surprised as anyone to learn on the 2nd or the 3rd of June last year that this memorandum had been signed and that we were going to implement this drive to recruit foreign workers on a temporary basis.

Now, certainly, in the last day or two in the media there has been a great deal of speculation on the new policy from the federal government, the family reunification policy, and that is a good policy. We certainly need to increase the number of Canadians that are coming here from other parts of the world, but . . .

An Hon. Member: P.E.I.?

Mr. MacDonald: Now, there was an hon. member who said that P.E.I. was on the other side of the world, but it's not that far away, and it's certainly been a part of Canada for a very long time and has been making a positive contribution to this country for a very long time.

But when you look at this policy, where we're going to have these temporary foreign workers allowed into the country, we're not going to be training the new immigrants like we should be. They are in some cases having to wait for long periods of time to enter this country. It's not fair to them. It's not fair to them to suddenly recruit – whether it's through NAIT or SAIT or some other community college or some other organization – temporary foreign workers. It's not fair to them.

It's not fair to the farmers, who have faced very difficult economic times and have a very high interest in getting a trade certificate in this province so that they can participate in the construction of the new tar sands facilities. How do the farmers feel when they see this massive tax holiday that they're paying for? We have reduced royalties from 25 to 1 per cent, and they're not getting fair access to this employment because they've not been trained. It's not fair to the farmers.

It's not fair to the First Nations people, who have a very, very high rate of unemployment. Now, I was surprised that last week, I think it was, there was a member from the workforce in Fort McMurray – Dorothy was her name – who had walked all the way from Fort McMurray to Edmonton to protest this notion, this notion that we're going to recruit all these temporary foreign workers into this country.

Her original residence was over in Saskatchewan, east of the tar sands, and she told me that there were chronic rates of unemployment in the First Nations people in Saskatchewan. Why in the world would we talk about going to Venezuela and to other places to recruit construction workers on a temporary basis while this pool of labour is probably 300 or 400 kilometres away in northern Saskatch-

ewan? This is just poor public policy, and Motion for a Return 24 would satisfy a lot of the requests for all the information about this government's ill-conceived policy.

We have youth unemployment rates in this province. There are lots of young people in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar who are looking for apprenticeships, and they can't get them. They cannot get them, yet this government is trying to diminish the trade programs in this province and undermine living wages by recruiting these foreign workers on a temporary basis.

That's why I would ask the minister to reconsider in regard to Motion for a Return 24 and provide the information as requested by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. There are still groups in this province and in this country that have high levels of unemployment. This whole idea of having temporary foreign workers should be an action of very last resort, after all pools of labour have been trained in this province. We just can't be operating at the whim of the big oil companies here. We're giving them lots of tax breaks. They're willing to invest their money here. That's evident. They're not stopping investing their money, and that's a good thing.

But it has to be fair. It has to be fair to both the trained and untrained workers. It has to be fair to the farmers, the young people, Canadians from all across the country, and it also has to be fair to the immigrants who are already here. They shouldn't have to wait for training and access to jobs in the north because someone is more interested in recruiting temporary foreign workers from Venezuela.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to this motion, and I want to begin by expressing my concern that this particular motion has been rejected by the minister. Now, I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has been repeatedly disappointed today by the response of the government ministers because each time he's been disappointed, he's said so. So I know he's a very disappointed man, and I would like him to go away from our session this afternoon in a little bit more of an upbeat mood.

In a little more serious vein, this is a very important motion. I'm pleased that it's been made, but I am concerned that it has been rejected. Now, the minister, in rejecting this, said that there would be too many things that would have to be provided, and it could be interpreted very, very broadly, and all kinds of things like personal correspondence or issues related to personal matters could be revealed.

But if you go up a little bit higher to some of the motions that have been accepted by other ministers, they are drafted in a very similar form. So, for example, the provincial takeover of ground ambulance services: copies of any documents; all documents related to the Alberta office in Washington. These have been accepted by the respective ministers, but this minister has rejected this one. Why is that, Mr. Speaker? Why is he rejecting it?

Well, you know, there was a document that we tabled in the House a week or two ago from Suncor that basically detailed some of the labour shortages that they're dealing with. It was clear from a careful look at that document that the labour shortages were not general. They were a shortage within CLAC. In other words, CLAC, the Christian Labour Association of Canada, which is the company's favourite union, has difficulty attracting certain trades. Probably, at least in my view, this is due to the fact that that union does not fight as vigorously for its members as legitimate trade unions in the building trades and elsewhere. So CLAC has a

problem fulfilling the needs of potential employers for the construction of new projects, most notably the Horizon project, and can't fill its roster and supply the necessary workers in order to allow the government's section 8 to take effect and allow them to step in ahead of other trade unions.

So the government's plan has got to be seen in that light, Mr. Speaker. The rejection of this motion has to be seen in that light, as well, because I believe that these documents would demonstrate that, in fact, the government is conspiring with investors in the oil sands in order to replace legitimate trade unions with a company union, CLAC, or potentially even the Merit shop contractors, which is a non-union shop. In order to provide a low-cost wage environment for these employers, the government is willing to sacrifice not just reasonable wages, working conditions, and benefits for legitimate trades workers but also the employment of Albertans, including First Nations people, and other Canadians in order to fast-track the project on behalf of the Horizon project and further developments of the oil sands as well.

5:20

So, Mr. Speaker, I suspect that this motion that has been proposed, if passed, would provide ammunition for those of us on this side of the House who have argued that the importation of temporary foreign workers is unnecessary at this time and is in fact intended to undermine legitimate trade unions and the benefits that they bring to their members. They wanted to bring over a bunch of Venezuelan oil workers who at the instigation of the American government helped participate in a strike in a vain attempt to bring down the Chavez government in Venezuela and now find themselves without work. Now they want to bring them here to undermine the working people of this province as well. You know, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that kind of thing is not acceptable. I don't think we need to bring in the foreign workers.

But it would be very curious to be a fly on the wall if you were at the discussions between the federal government, which is, frankly, no better than this one when it comes to these matters, and this government as they put together their plan to bring in foreign workers to build the oil sands non-union. That's what this is about, Mr. Speaker, and that's why, in my view, the hon. minister has rejected this question.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Very frequently in this House what is thrown at us is, "Your federal cousins did this," or "Your federal cousins did that," associating us with those so-called federal cousins. Yet here we are in the House asking for information that supposedly our federal cousins passed along to the government, and the government is not willing to share that information, which, if nothing else, points out that we have no idea what our federal cousins are doing with regard to temporary foreign workers, and we would like a little bit of elucidation from this hon. member's department.

Also, it's been pointed out by my hon. NDP colleague that this is a very specific motion, requesting information for the month of June in 2004. It's not global, and it's not asking for details on the expenses of a variety of individuals, which have been the reasons for rejecting similar motions and similar questions. It's extremely specific. What we don't need from this government are translators, summarizers, or information sanitizers. We need specific detailed information.

As has been pointed out in question period and then through to . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the noise level is beginning to rise. Please, if you have any discussions, there is room at the back in the Confederation Room or in the coffee area. You may proceed and have your conversation take place there.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has the floor.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I know the hon. members would rather hear this information first-hand than spend long nights reading it in *Hansard*, although it might assist them with their sleeping patterns.

In this House we have brought forward a whole series of unemployment figures. Obviously, the Maritimes are suffering to a much greater extent than we in Alberta are suffering, but even as close, as has been pointed out, as Saskatchewan and within our own aboriginal community we have a number of workers who are practically begging for employment. Some of that employment would involve skill training, and we have the institutions within this province. We also have union organizations that have the skills to train the members to bring them up to the level of employment that the oil sands are requiring.

We are not opposed to legitimate refugees. We're not opposed to immigrants. We're not opposed to the work that is done that helps out local farmers and orchard people in terms of seasonal and migrational employment. Every year we welcome thousands of workers on a very temporary harvesting basis from Mexico, and it's thanks to their efforts and the Canadian working conditions and the co-operation that we produce a number of products that serve our domestic needs as well as exportables. So the idea of seasonal and migrational isn't a problem. But when we go to temporary foreign workers, one of the problems is the definition of temporary. If temporary means that they're over here for two or three years on the equivalent of an extended green card, then they don't fit the definition of temporary.

We have workers throughout our country who need employment. Each time we read one of these series of petitions, it starts out that first we should employ a variety of people, and it basically ends up:

and unemployed farm workers. We have the people here that need the employment. We would not want our federal government to be shoehorning individuals from other countries into this process to lower the standards of work and pay for Albertans and unemployed Canadians. You've heard the petitions enough that you should have it memorized by now without my having to repeat it. Let's look after Canadians first. Let's look after our immigrants. Let's look after our refugees. Let's keep Albertans number one, Canadians number two. We don't need temporary foreign workers whose temporary contracts extend.

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

Mr. Backs: To conclude debate on that, Mr. Speaker. The use of temporary foreign workers is really very much an issue at the forefront of concern for many, many Albertans for many reasons. The papers – the *Edmonton Sun*, the *Edmonton Journal*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *National Post* – have had many, many different articles on this issue which have tried to analyze it. We've seen numerous studies. *Fort McMurray Today*, of course, has had many, many things, the *Lethbridge Herald* – I even had an interview with the *Olds Albertan* in the fine community of Olds regarding the issue.

Certainly, there's a great interest in having the information brought forward, the full information. I'm surprised that the minister would say that there would be issues of a private and personal concern in a memorandum of agreement between governments on this issue, which will deal specifically with the oil sands and all of the important employment issues that we will have in seeking the construction of those huge facilities.

There was, again, an odd agreement on the division 8 application from CNRL. A lot of good people work for CNRL. A lot of them have done a lot of work on that, but it's again raised great consternation.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, it's 5:30 p.m. The House stands adjourned until 8 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

