

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

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

8:00 p.m.

Date: 05/04/18

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Hon. members, before we proceed with the matters before us, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a whole bunch of people here tonight that I'm going to introduce in groups because there are so many of them. I'm going to ask the members of all of the groups that I introduce to stand up, and then we'll give them the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

From your constituency, Mr. Speaker, the Bishop McNally high school concert band from Calgary, with teacher Mr. John Ramsay; the Hunting Hills high school drama cast of *Peter Pan* from Red Deer, with Mr. Bill Jacobsen; the Eastglen high school dance group from Edmonton, with Ms Allison White; the Victoria school concert choir from Edmonton, with Mr. Gerhard Kruschke and Mr. Craig Daniel, vice-principal; art students from Louis St. Laurent from Edmonton, with Mrs. Claire Theberge, vice-principal. Please stand and receive the warm greeting of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the second group are all of the discipline reps from the Fine Arts Council of the ATA as well as the Alberta Teachers' Association district reps: Mr. Glen Christensen, art rep from St. Paul; Ms Andrea Coull, dance rep from Spruce Grove; Ms Kerry McPhail-Hayden, drama rep from St. Albert; Ms Sherri Larsen Ashworth, music rep from Sherwood Park; Ms Mary Dunnigan, Kim Fraser, and Mr. Harold Neth. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

We also have Ms Claire MacDonald, editor of the *Fine Facta* journal, from Calgary.

Finally, and by no means least, the person who made all of this happen, Mr. Speaker, a man by the name of Mr. Peter McWhir, past president of the Fine Arts Council, from Calgary. Please stand, Peter. This fellow took it upon himself to organize all of this today. I just don't know how to thank you except to say that I'm sure that all of the students really touched all of our souls.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the hon. members of this Assembly a couple of people who are interested in government and certainly are interested in hearing the riveting speech from the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont. I'm talking about two people, Kristen McLeod and Vincent Tetreault, from Edmonton. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two guests with me

this evening. First of all, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Mr. Graham Lettner. Graham is in his third year of a degree in electrical engineering. He has recently been elected president of the University of Alberta Students' Union. Since arriving at campus in 2002, Graham has been very active and has sat as an elected member of student council, representing the Faculty of Engineering, and was previously the president of St. Joseph's College. Graham, I would ask you to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

As well, with Graham tonight is Mrs. Samantha Power. Sam is in her fourth year of political science, where she studies the effect that the media has on the treatment of marginalized groups. She has been recently elected to the University of Alberta in the position of associate VP academic in the student elections that occurred in early March. I would ask her, as well, to rise and have her receive the warm welcome of the Assembly too.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the chair would not want to miss this opportunity to recognize the work of Mr. Ramsay and his staff at Bishop McNally, which is a school in my riding, and I'm very proud of each and every one of you.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

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

High School Credits

505. Mr. Herard moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider the benefits of requiring five credits in fine arts as a condition for high school graduation in the province.

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion urges government to review the role that fine arts plays in our provincial education system at the high school level. Our province already enjoys one of the best education systems in the world. This is the product of good curriculum, good teachers, and great students, like the ones we have in the galleries tonight.

So why am I requesting this review of fine arts in high schools? There are a number of compelling reasons, Mr. Speaker, that I hope will convince members on both sides of this Assembly to vote for this motion. These include improved human development and learning outcomes, as supported by an abundance of research; historical and economic reasons resulting from technology and new globalization trends; and our ability to achieve our 20-year strategy to become the best place to live, work, visit, and raise a family.

Mr. Speaker, this motion calls for the government to consider the benefits of requiring five credits in fine arts for high school graduation in light of the significant changes in our world and the abundance of the new research supporting the benefits of including fine arts in high school for improved student learning.

There are those who feel that studying the arts has no practical benefit except for those who pursue a career in the arts. Mr. Speaker, the last 20 years has produced volumes of research that provides convincing evidence that learning music, dance, drama, or art helps kids learn better, live better, enjoy a better quality of life, and become better citizens. To summarize the research, generally speaking, creativity, innovation, and lateral thought are developed and enhanced through the studying of the arts. The ability to assimilate information, attention to detail, working in teams, worth ethic, discipline, and self-esteem are all other benefits that are recognized.

A few examples follow, Mr. Speaker. A study by physician and

biologist Lewis Thomas found that the top 66 per cent of students admitted to medical schools were music majors. In another example researchers from the Yale University School of Medicine have found that medical students are better at diagnosing if they are taught to analyze fine details in paintings. By studying art, medical students' ability to learn in other areas was also shown to be demonstrably improved. To paraphrase, an issue of *Neurological Research* published in March 1999 demonstrates that music rhythm involves ratios and fractions, proportions, and thinking in time and space. When compared to learning math on computers, students who took piano keyboard training performed 34 per cent better on tests measuring spatial/temporal ability or proportional reasoning, including ratios and fractions.

Dr. James Catterall of UCLA in 1997 tracked more than 25,000 students, which is a huge sample, Mr. Speaker, and found that regardless of socioeconomic background – and that's important – those with music training consistently got better marks in standardized tests in reading proficiency exams than those who had no music.

8:10

The important part of this is that an arts education helps level the, quote, unquote, learning playing field across cultural and socioeconomic boundaries. Other studies showed measurable impact on youth at risk: deterring delinquent behaviour and improving dropout rates. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I'm told that one of our own northern school jurisdictions reduced their dropout rate by over 30 per cent by introducing an arts program at the high school level. The program also helped develop a positive work ethic, pride in a job well done, self-esteem, and reduced substance abuse in the face of other socioeconomic issues.

Studies have shown that where schools increase opportunities for the arts to all students, test scores rise proportionately with no detrimental effect on test scores even in subject areas, Mr. Speaker, where time was borrowed in the school day to make time for band and choir.

Mr. Speaker, for those who need a more academic discussion, I would urge them to look at a study entitled *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts*, written by Kevin McCarthy, Elizabeth Ondaatje, Laura Zakaras, and Arthur Brooks, commissioned by the Wallace Foundation in New York in 2004. Time does not permit me to discuss this research in detail, but this study explores both the intrinsic and instrumental benefits of both public and private value of the arts in education and society. It deals in detail with instrumental benefits such as cognitive, attitudinal, behavioural, health, social, economic outcomes; intrinsic benefits including captivation, pleasure, capacity for empathy, cognitive growth, social bonds, and expression of communal meaning are also discussed in detail.

Mr. Speaker, there's no end to the literature that has emerged over the last 20 years that demonstrates the benefits of the arts in all school levels. I believe it's time to take this research seriously and get on with the opportunity for improved student learning throughout Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I know that some of my colleagues are worried about how rural schools will be able to integrate fine arts into the classroom and that the same options or opportunities may not always be available in the rural areas as are available in urban areas. If it turns out that the research shows significant benefits in human potential and improved student learning by studying the arts, why would we want to continue to disadvantage rural children in that way? As a province we invested in SuperNet in part to level the learning playing field between urban and rural students. Why would we not

want to level the learning playing field for the arts? Rural children deserve the best that we can provide.

This is why this motion is asking the government to at least consider the benefits of requiring students to have five credits in fine arts for graduation. Concerns such as rural issues can be discussed. Perhaps funding formulas need to be changed or more fine arts teachers hired, but again that is something that we as a province have the capacity to do to improve student learning in rural Alberta.

There may even be an opportunity for Alberta to move outside the box in terms of implementing fine arts with the help of SuperNet. Our best arts clinicians will be made available anywhere, any time via SuperNet video conferencing. I've visited schools who learn with the help of artists, and they all rank near the top in student achievement.

Mr. Speaker, historically, the last time that fine arts was extensively reviewed at the high school level was back in the information age, in the 20th century. The 21st century is the knowledge age, where the use of technology permeates most of what we do in life. Who could have predicted that the world would be so different when the last review of fine arts in high school was done, some 20 years ago? Who could have thought that the whole multimedia foundation of the 21st century knowledge age would rely on creative minds trained in the arts? We need to become a province that understands the relationship between multimedia technology and the importance of the arts and the humanities in defining who we are as people and how best to prepare our children for success in the 21st century.

Mr. Speaker, increasingly when one examines the new economy of the 21st century, one finds creative artistic expression in most of the products of the multimedia age. Artists are used to build the billions of creative websites world-wide, websites of every description that are becoming the repository of the world's knowledge. The content industry has huge potential, and we're only beginning to see the implications.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, the most commercially successful computer games for children are not built by technocrats, but they're built by teams of artists working in concert with computer software experts. Some of the world's best animators, musicians, singers, Juno and Academy award recipients are Canadians, all with a solid background in the arts.

Mr. Speaker, the future importance of five credits in fine arts is what this motion seeks to examine because the demand for creative interfaces to the knowledge age is growing rapidly. I'll be listening with interest to others' comments.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to speak to Motion 505. Before starting, I would just like to compliment the government on the big band assembly yesterday at the music hall. I think it was a wonderful thing for the government to be sponsoring. Again, St. Albert was just at the bottom of hosting it, so it was very successful. I happened to have the opportunity to sit next to some of the trustees at the event and got my fill-in on 505.

First of all, it's my understanding that currently high school students require 10 credits from a select group of courses. Looking at these, they range from career technology, fine arts, second languages, physical education, locally developed and acquired authorized courses, one 36-level course from the IOP occupational cluster, one 35-level locally developed IOP course, or two 35-level courses from any trade in the registered apprenticeship program. The point I'm trying to make in this one, Mr. Speaker, is that it is a crowded curriculum, and I guess one has to look at where priorities

are when you come into school administration and the cost of these things.

I have to also say that in the Learning Commission, number 6, regarding curriculum enhancement and fine arts, suggests that “all students should have opportunities to learn and experience the fine arts at all levels in the education system.” So fine arts should be mandatory, it suggests in the commission report, and then optional in grades 10, 11, and 12.

Another consideration, I think, Mr. Speaker, in terms of this new program is school fees. Any time we introduce something, sometimes we have in fine arts especially the thing of school fees coming into play. I think this is something we have to consider and make a concern for parents that may not be able to afford the extra school fees to have such a fine program that’s been outlined for us this evening.

Also, much like other curriculum proposals for mandatory daily physical activity and second-language acquisition, this proposal will likely place additional pressure on schools’ infrastructure, equipment, teacher numbers, and training. Resources would have to be provided for implementation and would have to involve, hopefully, consultation across the province at the rural school level and also at the urban centres across the province.

One other aspect I’d like to emphasize: I think it would be important in such a fine program as this if we were to go outside the schools and talk to the many fine artists across the province and get some of their feelings and the information that they would have to offer.

8:20

Now, Mr. Peter McWhir – I haven’t had the pleasure of meeting him – I understand is hosting an arts education conference this fall, the 27th and 30th, and I guess that is tied into, as I understand it, the ATA Fine Arts Council. So I imagine he would be able to get feedback from school districts, teachers right across the province and get lots of input.

I think, in terms of thinking back to the crystal meth bill, it seems to me that one of the key things we require here is leadership. I was interested to see that the Minister of Education’s background is mentioned here in the statement: a former arts teacher and supporter of the arts coupled with his experience in the fine arts field. I think this would be of great benefit, and hopefully he can show us the way to get this new course implemented. I would suggest, too, that it would be nice to start it at the other end, from 1 to 9, so again I’m probably causing the problem of a crowded curriculum.

Let me, then, just say that some of the things like timetable, teacher availability, curriculum development, leadership at the ministerial level and also at the school system level is very crucial for this program. I would also like to say that in the discussions yesterday St. Albert schools would be most happy to pilot some of this activity. I hope that doesn’t mean that I have to be a Tory MLA. Anyway, I’ll let you look at that and be objective. I think that that would be a good way of introducing this program into the schools if we need a year to find out what some of the things are that we require and to look at some of the things that I have already mentioned.

One of the other things I noticed in a memo that I just got this afternoon from the ATA – it talked about teachers being needed. I think we talked about that. Something that I didn’t realize: it said that it would also be necessary to update the curriculum for all arts courses as most material is currently 20 years out of date. Now, I don’t know if that’s true, if that’s just ATA jargon or politics, but that surprised me. So with a program of this nature I’d have to get information, and probably I can get it from the minister someday,

regarding what is the need for upgrading curriculum in the school system.

Another interesting thing that the member across the way mentioned seems to be an increasing popularity of the arts. In the last decade high school enrolment was 23.4 per cent whereas enrolment in drama and visual arts has increased over 50 per cent. I found that very interesting. Enrolment in dance is up 700 per cent. I’m happy to say that my granddaughter in Calgary will be dancing in front of the Queen. She’s 10 years old, and she’s a wonderful lady, and I think that she’ll do a tremendous job.

It says here also, however, that despite the popularity of grade 10 arts courses, there’s a sharp decline in enrolment by the time students reach grade 12. I think it’s unfortunate that that happens, but evidently he’s indicating in this memo that that’s the case.

Before sitting down, Mr. Speaker, I would like to also say that the St. Albert constituency is very, very high on the arts. It’s very important to our community. Some of these things can be looked at. I emphasize the leadership of the Minister of Education to get this thing in order and shape it up. I think we would probably be very supportive of this proposal.

Thank you very much.

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

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to add a few comments to the debate on Motion 505 tonight. I take great interest in any idea that may have a positive impact on our education system, and I would like to commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont for putting forth such an interesting one.

Motion 505 is urging government to “consider the benefits of requiring five credits in fine arts as a condition for high school graduation in the province.” Given the important role art plays in our lives, I think government should at least weigh the merits of this motion.

As the hon. member next to me stated, there is a steadily increasing body of knowledge that shows that exposure to the arts and training in the arts have a positive impact that extends far into other areas of a person’s life. It is also widely acknowledged that the skills developed through the process of creation and experimentation – that is, creativity, innovation, and lateral thinking – are extremely marketable in the current world labour force. Moreover, the benefits of arts training have been touted as improving students’ ability to not only perform in areas other than the arts, but arts training also prepares a student for the new demands of the information age. Alberta’s Learning Commission noted these benefits and recommended that all students should have the opportunities to learn and experience the fine arts. With this in mind, Mr. Speaker, I think it would be shortsighted to not at the very least consider that Alberta students receive a minimum level of exposure to the arts given the many benefits.

Perhaps we could find out about and learn from the experiences in British Columbia and Nova Scotia. In recent years changes have been made to the curricular requirements in both provinces to make arts education mandatory for graduation from high school. A report of the Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Arts Education Curriculum in 2001 stated that learning in the arts over time results in increasing control over creative and technical abilities. As students progress along the learning continuum, they increase their ability to create and generate their own ideas for work and make decisions about its development. Critical and contextual understandings are deepened so that students are able to form their own judgments and support them using correct terminology and a range of evaluative criteria.

That, Mr. Speaker, is quite the endorsement of arts education in our high schools. I am encouraged to hear that over the last 10 years in Alberta the number of credits that students have earned in the fine arts has increased significantly and that the government continues to look at ways to further develop a fine arts K to 12 program.

Given the modest nature of Motion 505, I support its intent. Let's investigate whether we can or should mandate fine arts within a learning system that still values the preservation of flexibility and choice for our students.

Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I had the opportunity to attend the inaugural Lieutenant Governor of Alberta's arts awards at the Banff Centre. Established under the patronage of the late Lois Hole, these awards were created to celebrate excellence in and underline the importance of the arts in Alberta, and they succeeded in doing just that. The evening was artistically very impressive, very motivating, and an incredible tribute to Lois, who was a dynamic force in the development of our appreciation of the arts.

In closing, I'd like to share some words spoken in Lois' public speech when she launched the Alberta awards last October:

The arts bring meaning to our lives. They prick our consciences, excite our senses, and inspire our own creativity. They make us think and feel and [strive] to do better. The arts bring comfort when we need it, and they make us uncomfortable when we need it too.

They are a reflection of all we are, an image of what we were and a call to what we could be.

These are wise words from a very wise woman.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would encourage all members to support this motion and urge the government to review the role that fine arts plays in our provincial education system. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Minister for Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have the pleasure to rise and speak in favour of Motion 505 this evening. I would like to congratulate the Member for Calgary-Egmont for bringing up a very innovative and important, I think, innovation and perspective on our public education system.

I think, as several speakers have already brought forward, that it's becoming more evident that an applied and systematic study of the arts is beneficial in the broadest possible way for education of both young people and adults. You know, it also has the benefit of enriching people's lives, which otherwise, I think, is an important part of public education that we sometimes forget about, that we're not just producing working units to fit into various parts of our economy; rather, we are here to produce, Mr. Speaker, in our public system citizens of our province and of our country. Citizens that are well educated in the arts, I believe, have a more balanced view of life and are more capable of enjoying the world that we have around, physical and spiritual and intellectual. So by pursuing the arts, it means a great deal to me as an educator myself and with my own personal history of education. I taught for several years in a most wonderful school that we have here in Edmonton, the Victoria school for the performing arts, where, you know, we have seen sort of the tip of the spear of the potential, I believe, of the arts and education and how we can apply it to public schools.

8:30

I think, as well, Mr. Speaker, that we don't have to look any further than all of the wonderful guests that we have here this evening, the vivacity and the camaraderie and the wonderful opportunities that I think the arts provide for young students at various stages in their education. You know, I think that if each of us as members reaches back into their own public education

experience, some of their most fond memories might come from their participation in music programs or drama programs or the spoken arts and such things as that.

I do, too, have some reservations as an educator, specifically in applying more obligatory things onto the public education system. I think that we have to be careful with those applications because we know from practical experience of our own children going to high school or some of us teaching in high school that already the curriculum is very full. Students who are applying themselves and trying to get the most out of high school will often find themselves with 140 or 150 credits or more during the course of their three years of education.

You know, quite frankly, I believe that in the 20 or so years since I was in high school, the high school education really has improved. There's no doubt about it. The vigour has definitely increased and the level of expectation has increased, but, you know, along with that is a level of stress and time constraint that we have placed upon our young people. I think that we have to be judicious in how we apply new programming to our high school curriculum in particular and, I think, public education in general.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we might consider this motion in a broader sense and have it perhaps spread to the junior high curriculum or even the higher grades of the elementary curriculum because, in fact, this is a place where students have perhaps a more acute receptiveness to the arts, and we can start habits and appreciation of various types of visual and musical and performing arts that they can carry through with them regardless of what they pursue in high school.

Just to go back specifically to the high school curriculum, I think that one of the places where the arts and arts appreciation has made some inroads, Mr. Speaker, is in some of the accelerated, or advanced, programs that we have available to us now in the Alberta high schools. I know, again from personal teaching experience, that the IB, international baccalaureate, and advanced placement programs both have artistic appreciation elements built into the curriculums: in the English curriculum, in the history curriculum, literature, and language arts. You know, this is a place where we might be able to pursue these same things in our Alberta curriculum and recognize them as such.

I think that one of the walls that an arts focus runs into in our public education system at this point, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that we have built, I think over the last 10 years or so especially, a public education system that is very much focused on a very reductive and test-oriented view of what an education is. The best and the most that we can gain from a good arts education and appreciation does not fit into that reductive and test-oriented view of public education.

So I think that perhaps the hon. member's motion actually is an opportunity for us to look beyond just how we are formulating our education system and perhaps look to not just trying to categorize our students so much and put them into boxes and to give them a mark and a stamp and off they go but, rather, to educate them in a more holistic way. I think it's a window of opportunity for us. It's a door, as I said at the beginning of my comments, to create better citizens who enjoy their lives more. As I say, focusing on arts is a wonderful idea, but let's make room for it by perhaps adjusting other elements of our education system in English and in social studies or even in math and in science for certainly these studies have applications in the arts as well.

So just by way of concluding, then, Mr. Speaker, I do fully support the spirit of this motion. I think it's wonderful and refreshing to discuss such things here in this Legislature. I think it's important as well. I leave you with the last observation that I have. It's that, you know, the arts are for everyone. I think that we perhaps

create a bit of elitism in the way that we approach fine arts, focusing on the very best of the best, you know, the great actors and musicians that we hope might become world renowned. But the true heart of the arts is where our own heart of humanity lies, and every single one of us with a beating heart and a mind has that within us. To stir that appreciation in every citizen I think will derive benefit for all of us in turn.

So I thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, wish to get a few supportive comments on the record for Motion 505 as presented by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont. Before I do, I just wanted to say hello and thank you for their attendance to all of our special guests, particularly our young guests who are here from Bishop McNally school, from Hunting Hills, from Eastglen, from Vic school of the arts, from Louis St. Laurent, from St. Albert, from Spruce Grove, and so on and so on. In that context, special thanks to Peter McWhir for having helped orchestrate the evening, so to speak.

I also would like to just quickly reference two special individuals who are here in the members' gallery, Mr. Speaker. My deputy minister, Mr. Keray Henke, is here – if he could just give us a wave – and Mr. Rick Morrow, who is our assistant deputy minister in basic learning. Thank you, gentlemen, for being here on behalf of the department to listen to this important discussion. Finally, to the ATA Fine Arts Council reps, thank you, as well, those of you who are here, to the teachers.

This is a tremendously important motion, obviously, and I want to make a few comments, first of all, as a former fine arts teacher at the high school and junior high level because it was at that level, Mr. Speaker, that I really came to appreciate how beneficial fine arts programs, fine arts classes can be to our young students. Later, of course, I had a very interesting career as a professional musician, as a performer, a composer, a conductor, and so on, but it was the teaching part that really zoomed in on me because of the tremendous impact it had on future generations.

Obviously, my own experience with the arts deeply enriched my life. I got to travel the world. I got to meet kings and queens and Rolling Stones and all kinds of wonderful people along the way. But those are just some of the opportunities that await these young folks who are here tonight and others who might be reading this later.

So today in my new role as Alberta's Minister of Education I want to express some support for this motion. In fact, Mr. Speaker, earlier this evening, I'll just point out to members here, the arts were used in a very special way by the young students from Lago Lindo school here in Edmonton with their principal, Mr. John Eshenko, who celebrated the Cycle of Life/Recycle program, a special concert program at the Winspear Centre. They provided songs that focused on the importance of caring for our planet with hit songs like Landfill Blues and the Life Cycle Dance and Grasslands and Bear in Buckingham Palace and the Voices of Nature. Well, you can appreciate where these young K to grade 6ers went with this special program that was presented by the Beverage Container Management Board. It gives you one way in which the arts can be used to promote other important life goals, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, it's not surprising, therefore, that Alberta's Commission on Learning supported fine arts education in recommendation 6, wherein it stated, "All students should have opportunities to learn and experience the fine arts." Also, the Commission's report recognized the demands of the high school curriculum and stated, "Fine arts should be mandatory [for students] up to [and including] grade 9."

8:40

Now, many students already choose to take fine arts courses in high school as well, which is what Motion 505 is really all about. In fact, it might interest members of the Assembly and our guests to know that last year 45 per cent of high school graduates had in fact completed at least five credits in a fine arts program. There are 18 such formal course programs offered in music, drama, and art and almost 200 locally developed courses created by schools to meet the unique interests and talents of their students.

I'm always reminded of the outstanding programs that are put on by our schools here, for example at J. Percy Page, where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods sits and once taught. They use the arts to portray their love for our country during Remembrance Day ceremonies. Some fantastic arts programs have been provided by numerous other schools throughout our constituencies as well. I should also point out, Mr. Speaker, that students can earn credit for private music study from the Conservatory Canada program, from the Royal Conservatory of Music program, and from Mount Royal College.

Now, putting this particular motion into effect would mean overcoming some challenges, which have been alluded to. For example, we would need to ensure that we have enough qualified fine arts teachers, that there are prerequisites for these high school level courses, that the student course load for completion of diploma requirements would be workable, that there was enough classroom space, materials, and equipment, and so on. So there are some challenges. But you know, Mr. Speaker, there is that expression: obstacles are what we see when we lose sight of our vision. I wouldn't want us to lose sight of this particular vision, but I would like to put some of those cautionary points on record as we consider and, I hope, support this particular motion.

So Alberta Education is currently reviewing the fine arts kindergarten to grade 12 program of studies, and this might be a very appropriate time for us to do some additional consultation with our stakeholder groups: the school boards, the teachers, the parents, and so on. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this motion's suggestion of having a requirement of five basic fine arts credits for high school graduation would certainly be considered in that particular review.

As I wrap up, I just want to reference very quickly some comments by John Ruskin, a Victorian artist, author, and teacher, who once said, "Fine art is that in which the hand, the head, and the heart of man go together." It's truly an area that involves the physical being, the mind, and the spirit, and of course the fine arts are an important element of every student's education.

I'm going to support this motion, Mr. Speaker, as a teacher, as a musician, as a parent, and as Minister of Education. I also want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont for having brought it forward in such an eloquent fashion. I am obliged to say that we at Alberta Education need to be very careful how we proceed, should this particular motion be adopted here tonight, because we want to make it very clear that there will be some challenges in working through how this particular motion might be brought to bear for our schools, our teachers, and our students.

In any case, Mr. Speaker, the research, the facts, and the evidence in support of the overwhelming impact that the arts can have on student learning are irrefutable. The arts breathe an incredible amount of oxygen into our daily living. They impact the cultural, the social, and the economic life of our province, and they yield enormous benefits for our young students as they go about acquiring the knowledge, the skills, and the abilities to take their place as contributing citizens.

In that regard, Mr. Speaker, and with those comments, I'm going to go on record as supporting this motion. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member bringing forward Motion 505. I certainly listened with interest with regard to the previous speakers and especially the Minister of Education as he raised some caution. I think everything's good, but there's caution to be taken when you're approaching some new territory. He did raise specifics with regard to funding, and that would be included with instrument purchases or supplies and equipment as well as making sure that the necessary teachers are there to ensure that this motion and that the all-over intent is secured by the schools.

I think we can go back to say that some of the aspects of this motion include some of the earliest forms of our communication. Whether it be music or the visual or the performing, I think we can all attest that it's a no-brainer that we all, in one form or another, do appreciate it in its most simplistic form.

Coming from the school board, as I was sitting on the board of trustees, we made sure that that was part of our priorities embedded within our education system, that we did have music, art, performing arts as part of our priorities so that all students can have a basic form of appreciation for this. Coming from there, you would hope that it would take on a lifelong journey, so then it would go into the general public, so they'd have a general appreciation for it and carry it on to lifelong.

I think, again, this has excellent merits to be able to continue on, but I would just raise some cautions, as the minister has raised. I do support it with just some reservations with regard to making sure that this isn't just lip service that we're paying, that we are in fact ensuring that the basic things that we need to carry through with this are going to be supplied in the form of hard-core funding, that it will be able to be fully implemented throughout the districts as well as into the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise this evening to participate in the discussion and debate of Motion 505, a motion that raises the issue of a fine arts requirement for high school graduation. I would first like to congratulate my hon. colleague from Calgary-Egmont for understanding the benefits and the importance of the fine arts, not only in education but in real life. The education of Albertans has always been a priority of this government, and this motion raises another initiative that would enhance and contribute to the learning environments of young Albertans.

Motion 505 requests that the government examine the benefits of taking five credits, the equivalent of one course, at some point during the three years of high school to complement students' education. There are many different courses which fall under the category of fine arts. There would be more than a few choices to choose from. Fine arts encompass music, drama, graphic art, pottery, art history, dance, painting, and many others. The arts offer a vast variety of options and choices.

Mr. Speaker, what I find to be the crucial advantage of Motion 505 is the potential benefits it may bring to the students. Fine arts offer a unique learning experience, one that is not the same as writing an essay or solving a math problem. Music, drama, or visual arts provide tools that cannot be duplicated by any other form of learning. Fine arts inspire and motivate creativity while developing

intellect. After all, without Peter Pan how would we know the directions to never-never land?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw wanted to be here to speak tonight about her experience with her son about the importance of fine arts. He applied to medical school, and during the interview at Albert Einstein university in New York they didn't ask him about his neuroscience degree. They asked him about his fine arts courses. The question they asked was: what did music teach you? He answered: music was the first place where I learned to accept criticism and to manage it. He was accepted into the medical school and is now a successful student there.

Mr. Speaker, not only does education in the arts enhance one's creativity, but research findings indicate that arts education greatly improves a student's ability to perform in other areas. Fine art courses draw on a range of intelligence skills and learning techniques. These techniques may not be addressed in most educational classrooms, as learning settings have traditionally focused on verbal, written, and mathematical skills.

Mr. Speaker, over the last decade jobs in the workforce as a whole have changed dramatically. We have seen this change occur mostly due to the information age and information-based technologies and systems. Nonetheless, the skill requirements for workers are expanding. It is becoming increasingly important for workers to develop their ability to communicate, think creatively, and find several solutions or find alternative methods to deal with a problem.

Mr. Speaker, there are many life skills that are inherent through learning in the arts. The arts help students to acknowledge that components within a group interact and influence one another. The arts teach attention to slight variances and bring to light that small differences can have a large impact.

8:50

As much as I support this motion and find it valuable, I do have a concern that I'd like to express. Smaller communities have difficulties accommodating fine arts classes. Rural constituencies or ones surrounding smaller centres may not have the same choices and options available as schools in Alberta's larger urban centres. However, Mr. Speaker, why couldn't we have a teacher with a mobile classroom in the arts to visit classes in the rural areas once or twice a week? Have classroom, will travel.

Having said that, I do believe the potential benefits of an education in the arts, regardless that it is just introductory, will outweigh not requiring the arts course in the first place. Mr. Speaker, I feel that it is vitally important to give students a broad range of learning experiences. It is difficult for students to know the direction or path to take if they've never been exposed to alternatives. Some may argue that a mandatory fine arts requirement takes away from flexibility or control that the students have over their career path. Quite frankly, I do not believe that students will lose their ability to determine an education that suits their interest if one course in the fine arts is implemented as compulsory. A balanced education is important to student learning.

The findings of the Learning Commission support the idea of a well-rounded educational experience. The sixth recommendation in the report says that Alberta Learning should "maintain and continuously improve Alberta's comprehensive and balanced curriculum." There was also a further recommendation that "all students should have opportunities to learn and experience the fine arts at all levels in the education system." Training in the arts can assist in the building of general behaviours, skills, and attitudes. Moreover, these positive attributes can be broadly applied to extend beyond the realm of the arts program.

Mr. Speaker, this motion could possibly contribute to an enhanced

learning experience for Alberta students. It would also facilitate in providing choices and exposing new opportunities to our youth. I had the great opportunity of being the wife of Julius Caesar in our high school production of William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. The camaraderie and the bond that you share with your fellow thespians is unforgettable, and it stays with you for the rest of your life.

Mr. Speaker, if I could take artistic licence and paraphrase the great Julius Caesar, I would say this about the students that were here tonight to entertain us with their artistic skills: they came; they saw; they conquered. I strongly support this initiative and urge all my hon. colleagues to vote in favour of Motion 505.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do applaud the Member for Calgary-Egmont for the worthy objectives of this motion, which urges the government to consider five credits in fine arts as a condition for high school graduation in the province. This motion would ensure that fine arts programs exist in every school in Alberta.

There is a misconception that art and music are isolated subjects. Nothing could be further from the truth. The arts help children understand other subjects much more clearly. From math and science to language arts to geography art nurtures inventiveness as it engages children in a process that aids in the development of self-esteem, self-discipline, co-operation, and self-motivation. Participating in artistic activities helps children gain tools necessary for understanding human experiences, adapting to and respecting other ways of working and thinking, developing creative problem-solving skills, and communicating thoughts and ideas in a variety of ways. Mr. Speaker, Grant Wood, the author of *Art in the Daily Life of the Child*, states: "The aim of art education in the public schools is not to make more professional artists but to teach people to live happier, fuller lives; to extract more out of their experience, whatever that experience may be."

But those concerned with the flourishing of the arts in our province should remember that this government helped force the arts out of schools with their funding cuts.

Mandatory fine arts programming requires that schools have adequate facilities, equipment, and trained teachers. This motion extends the Alberta Learning Commission's recommendation 6 regarding curriculum enhancements in fine arts. According to the recommendations of the Learning Commission, "all students should have opportunities to learn and experience the fine arts at all levels in the education system." Fine arts should be mandatory up to grade 9 then optional for students in grade 10 to grade 12.

The Alberta Liberals oppose charging extra for materials, art classes, instrument fees for music classes, et cetera. This may also impinge on this motion if the fine arts required charging fees for the courses. The content selected for the courses should be developed primarily by educational professionals and remain free from political interference or censorship. This motion calls only for the government to consider the advisability of implementing the proposal. No final decision or policy direction is implied by supporting this motion.

Quality arts programs provide opportunities to address two things: number one, cultural perspective within multiculturalism and aboriginal cultures; number two, diversity, which includes socioeconomic status, ability, gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity. In doing so, quality arts education programs ensure that students are able to see their own cultural and life experiences within the curriculum.

Mr. Speaker, I will support this motion with some reservation because I think that learning about the visual arts gives students a window onto the rich and interesting world around them, teaching them about their own history and culture as well as that of other people. Art is a subject that encourages children to think critically, solve problems creatively, make evaluations, work within groups, and appreciate different points of view. These skills are particularly suited to the complex challenges of the contemporary workplace. Students with exposure to the arts are not only happier but more successful.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, in looking at the time, I just wanted to advise the Assembly that given the extended time we used for introduction of guests, we will proceed with the debate until 9:07, at which time I will call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont to close debate.

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

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to rise today and join the debate on Motion 505, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont. The motion urges the government to "consider the benefits of requiring five credits in fine arts as a condition for high school graduation." I don't think many Albertans would dispute the merits of fine arts education in the development of students' talent, character, intellectual skills, self-confidence, and many other important attributes required for successful and healthy lives.

One area I would like to discuss as we debate the benefit of making five credits in fine arts mandatory is the availability of resources. These resources include materials as well as teachers. While it could be possible to implement this initiative in high schools located in the main urban areas like Calgary and Edmonton, I do not think that it would be easy for some rural areas. It may be difficult for a small town or community to provide the necessary resources that would allow them to offer students the required options to fulfill the fine arts credit requirements.

9:00

Studies upon studies have demonstrated that children tend to perform better in school and other environments if they have been exposed to the art curriculum. Fine arts, be it music, drama, visual arts, dancing, or other forms, spur confidence, curiosity, emotional intelligence, and self-control. Exposure to instruction in the arts not only promotes talent but also teaches the young how to relate, communicate, co-operate, and, most importantly, tolerate one another on various levels. It is important that we put more emphasis in our schools on arts because there are undoubtedly hundreds of students in our province that may have talents that they or their parents are not aware of.

Currently the province is putting emphasis on physical activity in school. It, too, is important to the health of Albertan children, but as much as a healthy body promotes well-being, so does a healthy mind. If we are going to make physical activity mandatory, is it such a stretch to make five credits in fine arts mandatory? If I can remember correctly, the idea of school when I was there was to educate and open up the unknown so that the students can experience as much as possible. In doing so, school promotes strong and healthy minds as well as active, healthy lifestyles.

Mr. Speaker, to limit students to a certain set of predetermined classes because it is felt that any other type of educational experience would be a waste of time is very, very inappropriate. For all

we know, in each one of those children there could be a potential Michelangelo or da Vinci just waiting to be discovered and inspired. For example, in ancient Greece, Rome, China, Persia, India, and elsewhere people were renowned for combining art and science in order to understand the world around them and solve problems of the day.

Mr. Speaker, I support Motion 505 because it asks the government to consider the benefit of requiring five credits in fine arts upon graduation. I think one of the solutions to the problem of rural students accessing adequate fine arts options is giving them the ability to seek fine arts education outside the school.

Mr. Speaker, I see myself as a student of history. History teaches that what's left of the mighty societies of ancient civilization is not the wealth nor the power but the legacy in the arts such as the beautiful architecture of the pyramids, of the Great Wall. Through thousands of years what's left are the beautiful artifacts, the graphic depictions of their lives, the sound of their music in song, and the movement of their dances.

So with that, I urge all the members here to support Motion 505. Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an important issue for our society, and I, too, want to thank the Member for Calgary-Egmont for bringing this motion forward. Thank you to all the guests who are here tonight in support.

The fine arts do two important things, both of which are hard to measure: they feed the soul, which we desperately need in an increasingly secular world, and they make us more creative. Both of these statements are hard to prove. Both statements defy measurement. It's like the wind. We know it's there, but it's hard to measure.

We need to support this motion because the arts have been sacrificed for everything else on the timetable for a long time. When a school has to cut the budget, the money is usually taken from the fine arts. It happens over time as well. The sciences have dominated the Alberta high school curriculum for many years, with the result that there are many trained scientists who cannot get a job, and the people who want to do arts are afraid that there won't be any work for them, so they take something else. We have lost a generation of creative people because of our focus on science and technology. That technology is useless if we can't find more creative ways of using it, and we lack the creative people in every walk of life.

The arts humanize. Social skills learned in orchestra and concert band and choir are directly transferable to the workplace. When we have a crisis, we look for comfort in music, art, literature, poetry, sculpture. The arts teach us how to live. In any civilization that we dig up, it is the arts which give us the clue to the psychology of the people. When people are prosperous, they have time to express themselves. Even the cave paintings tell us that that society must have had abundant food. You cannot create or express when you are hungry. The wealth of the arts defines the personality of a society.

The arts foster creativity. IBM and other corporations are desperate for creative minds. They have many brilliant technicians but not enough brilliant technicians who can see other possibilities. One of my favourite quotes about creativity and what it does for the people is by Brenda Ueland. "Why should we all use our creative power . . .? Because there is nothing that makes people so generous, joyful, lively, bold and compassionate, so indifferent to fighting and the accumulation of objects and money."

Five credits are the absolute minimum. We should maybe be

looking at 15. More importantly, every time you mandate something into the curriculum, like phys ed, something else has to be mandated off. The timetable is finite. You can't keep adding without subtracting. So we play around with it in a random fashion, but I think that it is time for a complete overhaul of the timetable.

What kind of people do we want running this province in 20 years? What kinds of things do they need to know? Our curriculum was formulated in the 19th century for the 20th, and now we're in the 21st century. Do we need our students to know the same things now that they did then? If we feel the need to mandate courses like science or phys ed or fine arts, then is that telling us that our present setup is inadequate? Maybe it's time to get a group of futurists together and decide what our students need to know when the oil sands are dried up.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, but under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont to close debate on Motion 505.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank all hon. members for their well-thought-out comments. I was going to get into a number of issues that, possibly, conservative thinkers would have an interest in, reports such as, for example, from the Canada West Foundation entitled Culture and Economic Competitiveness, discussing how CEOs of corporations look for human capital centres. They look for highly educated managers and skilled workers, and these people look to places where they have an opportunity for an active cultural lifestyle and where quality cultural infrastructure exists.

I was going to quote a fellow by the name of Jason Azmier in an article in *Western Landscapes*, who clearly demonstrates that the west loses out big time in terms of federal funding for the culture. In fact, federal funding is \$45 per capita in the west and \$110 per capita in the rest of Canada. The reason for that is because there really isn't a cultural infrastructure here in Alberta to attract any more than what we're already getting.

So then the question becomes: can we really live up to the 20-year strategic plan when we talk about, you know, having the best place to live and raise a family? Those were the things that I still needed to cover.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hundreds of Albertans who sent me encouragement and expressed personal experiences as to the benefit of fine arts in their lives and those of their children. I want to say a special thanks to the many teachers, students, and the performers who travelled here to their legislative home and to make us feel first-hand the values of fine arts and to help make a difference in this decision, and I wish them a safe trip home. I want to thank my son Christopher, who's also a music teacher, who helped spread word of this motion to the arts community and garner a lot of support.

I want to close, Mr. Speaker, by quoting a notable Canadian artist and producer, Bob Ezrin, who produced albums for Pink Floyd, Kiss, Roberta Flack, and Rod Stewart amongst others. You may remember that he was inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame in the 2004 Juno awards right here in Edmonton. He used his time in his acceptance speech to express his concern about reductions in nonacademic arts programs. He said in part, and I quote: even though I'm the guy who brought you *School's Out* and "We don't need no education," I'm very passionate about music education; while the three Rs provide kids with the basic tools they need, the arts give them the imagination and inspiration to do something important with these tools.

9:10

Another notable that I wish to quote, a man by the name of Plato, said centuries ago, "Musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul."

Hon. members, I urge everyone to vote in favour of this motion. Thank you so much.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 carried unanimously]

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

head: **Main Estimates 2005-06**

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

The Deputy Chair: As per our Standing Orders the first hour is limited between the minister and members of the opposition, following which it'll be available to any other member of the Assembly. Should the chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council wish to participate, he may be able to do so within the first 20 minutes allocated to the minister.

The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, colleagues. Today, actually, I want to present the 2005-2006 estimates for the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and the 2005-2008 business plan. This is the ministry's fifth business plan, and it supports our vision of an Alberta that includes the full participation of self-reliant aboriginal and northern Albertans into the province's second century.

I'd like to thank my terrific staff, Mr. Chairman, for the hard work they do on behalf of all Albertans. With me today is my deputy minister – I don't know if she's seated over there; it looks like she's not – and the assistant deputy minister, Ken Boutillier. I don't know if he's over there. No? They're not here either. They're probably out smoking. Senior financial officer Lorne Harvey is seated over there. Do you want to stand and take a bow? Executive directors John McDonough and Neil Reddekopp. I don't know if they're both over there. It looks like I've lost them while we were waiting. [interjection] Oh, are they over there? Okay. Also my directors: Thomas Droege, Jason Gariepy, Gerry Kushlyk, and Allan Pard. Would you please stand so that everybody knows who you are? As well, NADC's acting executive director, Allen Geary. These are the individuals who keep me in line.

One person that I want to talk about today – and I know he's not sitting there, but he will eventually get here – is Ken Boutillier, who is the assistant deputy minister. This is Ken's last budget. He'll be retiring, actually, after 25 years. He'll be retiring in September. I want to say a thank you to him for all the hard work that he's done and thank him also for making sure that we had cutting edge programs and cutting edge policies that he's led. So I want to say a special thanks to him.

Achieving our mission involves developing partnerships with aboriginal people and collaborations with other ministries and the private sector. Together we will enhance the well-being and self-reliance of aboriginal and northern communities. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is a small ministry with several responsi-

bilities. We are not in the business of program delivery; however, the ministry does advance the social and economic needs of the largest northern geographical area in the province.

In addition, we strengthen relationships with approximately 200,000 aboriginal people in Alberta. We provide advice and support to other government ministries to address policy and service needs of aboriginal people. This includes guidance on how to work effectively with aboriginal governments and communities.

We facilitate, co-ordinate, and advise on the development of cross-ministry policies, strategies, and initiatives. This helps to ensure that all Albertans benefit from our province's opportunities and prosperity. Our mandate is to be responsive to the needs of aboriginal and northern Albertans, other government ministries, and the private sector. Our 2005-2006 estimates reflect this mandate and other key legislative requirements.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has a budget of \$39.4 million, which is up \$3.7 million from 2004-2005. A significant portion of the budget is for legislative funding requirements, or, as we call them, statutory funds, provided to the Métis Settlements General Council as per the Metis Settlements Accord Implementation Act. The act requires payment of \$10 million per year until April 1, 2006. As well, under the legislation our department provides funding to Métis settlements through the matching grants replacement agreement. The grant amount for 2005-2006 is \$4.1 million. This brings the total for Métis settlements legislative requirements and governance efforts to approximately \$14.1 million.

This leaves \$25.1 million for key departmental initiatives such as aboriginal affairs specific, \$22.4 million. The Northern Alberta Development Council receives \$2 million, and I know that I'm asking the chair, the MLA from Lac La Biche, to speak on NADC's efforts shortly. The Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal receives \$942,000.

In 2004-05 we had 79 full-time employees, of which 57 worked in the department, 15 with NADC, and another seven assigned to the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal. This year we're adding 11 full-time employees, bringing our total to 90.

Our 2005-2008 business plan identifies five strategic priorities that the ministry intends to focus on. These are the aboriginal policy framework. We will continue to lead implementation of the commitments made in the aboriginal policy framework. This involves working with all Alberta ministries, the aboriginal community, and other stakeholders to address socioeconomic barriers facing aboriginal people.

On consultation we'll continue to lead development and implementation of provincial processes for consulting with aboriginal communities in relation to land and resource issues. We haven't completed that yet, but we'll get there.

Métis settlements. We will work with Métis settlements through the transition assessment and planning project to enhance self-reliance and to prepare for 2007, when statutory payments end.

Urban aboriginal initiatives. We will continue to work with federal, provincial, and municipal departments and agencies and local aboriginal organizations in urban centres to focus on aboriginal needs and priorities.

Northern development. We will continue to co-ordinate policies and strategies to address northern matters and to enhance economic and social development.

The department's business plan goals are linked to the four pillars of the government of Alberta strategic business plan, and our collective goal is to make Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit. Our ministry has two core businesses for '05-08. These goals are consistent with government-wide business planning standards, and funding is aligned with core businesses, goals, strategies, and

performance measures. Our ministry's first core business relates to aboriginal people and issues. It is aimed at increasing aboriginal participation in Alberta's social and economic life of the province and to facilitate resolution of significant matters.

Our first goal is to "provide leadership in assisting government to manage significant Aboriginal priorities requiring a co-ordinated policy or strategic response." We will achieve this goal by, one, leading the implementation of the aboriginal policy framework through the cross-ministry aboriginal policy initiative; two, identifying and addressing barriers to socioeconomic opportunities facing aboriginal people; and three, continuing to collaborate in the development of cross-ministry consultation strategy. Together our department's participation in cross-ministry policy initiatives provides opportunities to co-ordinate responses to the priorities of aboriginal people and northern Albertans.

9:20

The strategies under this goal include leading in the cross-ministry API, which is the commitment under the government's aboriginal policy framework; working with Alberta ministries on economic development strategies that address barriers to self-reliance on First Nations reserves; developing and implementing appropriate arrangements with Métis governments in Alberta on harvesting rights, which includes striking a balance between respecting rights and addressing safety and conservation concerns; facilitating participation of Alberta ministries with Canada and First Nations on self-government; and co-ordinating the implementation of a proposed consultation strategy to address land and resource challenges.

There are two specific initiatives under this goal: first, developing First Nations economic capacity will play a more meaningful role in Alberta's economy – the cross-ministry initiative, Alberta Economic Development and Alberta Human Resources and Employment, includes building the skills, business planning, financial management, and knowledge and resources of First Nations to take advantage of existing and emerging opportunities – second, utilizing the proposed consultation strategy to gain access to land for resource development while protecting sites of vital importance to First Nations. Traditional use studies are one example of how we are addressing land and resource matters in the province.

Our performance measures for goal one include the percentage of targets achieved in a cross-ministry aboriginal policy initiative. This is an indicator of cross-ministry progress on addressing aboriginal needs. We will also report on the percentage of Alberta ministries addressing aboriginal priorities in their business and operational plans.

Our second goal is to provide advice and specialized knowledge to ministries, aboriginal governments, and other stakeholders to identify and resolve emerging issues. Achieving this goal depends on our ongoing efforts to enhance provincial relations with aboriginal people, facilitate inclusion of aboriginal priorities in the development of government initiatives, and work with aboriginal communities, Alberta ministries, and other stakeholders to identify and resolve concerns.

Strategies also include working towards a timely resolution of land-related negotiations, which Alberta has an obligation to under the natural resources transfer agreement. It also includes partnering with Métis settlements to prepare for greater self-reliance in working with other levels of government and aboriginal organizations to address urban aboriginal needs.

Other strategies under goal two include advising and assisting ministries to develop policies to enhance the well-being and self-reliance of northern and aboriginal peoples. This includes address-

ing funding and capacity building strategies. We will continue to engage the ministries' aboriginal industry advisory committees to help us set our department's future direction, and we will continue to be active participants in federal/provincial/territorial processes involving aboriginal people.

Performance measures, of course, include Métis settlements' self-generated revenue. Another key measure is progress achieved in negotiation and implementation of land-related agreements. We will also report on a number of capacity building initiatives within aboriginal communities and organizations, which assist in resource development and creation of a stable environment for consultation and partnership.

Our second core goal is to advance the development of northern Alberta. This means that we'll continue to listen to northern Albertans to work with other ministries and stakeholders to advance economic and sustainable development. This includes advancing strategic priorities and identifying opportunities and challenges that will lead to the creation of a northern development strategy. We will also continue to support initiatives to improve skill levels in the north.

Other strategies include raising awareness of the importance of northern development, which means that we are active participants in the federal/provincial Northern Development Ministers Forum, the Northwest Territories/Alberta memorandum of understanding, and the Alberta/British Columbia accord, as well as on northern issues we belong to the Alberta-Alaska Bilateral Council. Alberta is North American vice-president to the Northern Forum, which advances the concerns of northern residents in a global context.

So we are looking at long-standing indicators such as partnership satisfaction survey results, return rates on bursary recipients, and a number of stakeholder partnerships to develop.

I'd like to ask the MLA for Lac La Biche-St. Paul and chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council now to please update what they've been doing.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you so much, Madam Minister. As you noted, the government is focusing on strategic priorities. The north has abundant natural resources and is one of the driving forces behind Alberta's thriving economy. It has 100 per cent of the oil sands, 40 per cent of the conventional oil and gas, 90 per cent of the potential productive forests, and 21 per cent of the provincial crop production.

Achieving our full potential requires better co-ordination on northern development. While oil sands' development is always at the forefront, it is important to add value to northern resources, especially in agriculture and forestry. There are tremendous untapped opportunities in the north. Much of the northern economy, however, is based on resource extraction. Northern Albertans want to enhance their current industries, capture the full value of raw products, and make value-added concepts become value-added manufacturing realities.

Developing northern transportation corridors, including air, road, and rail, particularly railroads to the western ports, is essential to provide access to markets, resources, and services. This infrastructure is key to development processing and the sale of products to allow the north to compete in global markets. We need to connect communities, enhance internal movement of labour and materials to meet high investment requirements, and develop tourism opportunities.

Northern Alberta growth is advancing quicker than the infrastructure and support services and trades. Northern Alberta Development

Council continues to promote the northern Alberta highway strategy and to work on the advancement on the northwest corridor and its connections to the port of Prince Rupert, reopening key rail links and establishing a container site.

Skill development is another high priority for council. We need to ensure that northern colleges and industry help provide a trained workforce, that northern residents benefit from development, and that there is greater aboriginal participation in the northern workforce. NADC initiatives that will advance skill development in the north include assisting northern students to make the transition from high school to postsecondary education, implementing a youth apprenticeship program, and encouraging graduates to return to northern Alberta to work and to live.

While there are barriers and challenges facing northern Albertans, Alberta's north holds the promise for incredible economic opportunities and sustainable development. I've enjoyed promoting northern development, and I look forward to working with the minister on these opportunities.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, you will be able to respond once. Did you have concluding remarks?

Ms Calahasen: Just a conclusion, yeah.

I would like to actually conclude by highlighting the ministry's focus on developing the next Alberta. Our vision is one of full participation by self-reliant aboriginal people and northern Albertans. This vision is achievable. It includes removing barriers to increase participation in Alberta's economy. It involves trusting and working with our partners and using the necessary resources to achieve our vision. We want to ensure that we continually set a vision for the next 20 years for the north. Strategically, we'll continue to develop and implement provincial processes that benefit our province. We will work with aboriginal people and northern Albertans to make our province the best place to live, work, and visit in our second century.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to lead off the debate on the aboriginal affairs budget. First of all, I'd like to start with a compliment, believe it or not. I know, I saw your head spin around there for a moment. I noticed that the Auditor General's report found nothing of any significance in the aboriginal affairs department, and aboriginal affairs was also one of the few government departments that maintained its budget for the last year. I think the other departments just – I think it was 22 of 24 – spent a little bit more money than they should have, and aboriginal affairs believed it had a budget and stuck with it. So congratulations to you for maintaining it.

Enough of the congratulations. Let's get on to the rest of it. You didn't think I was going to end there, did you? No.

I do have a few questions about the budget. As you mentioned in your opening address, it's another \$3.7 million that has been added to the aboriginal affairs budget this. Last year I believe there was another \$4 million or so added to the aboriginal affairs budget.

9:30

Now, the obvious question is: where is this money going? That's \$8 million over two years. That's a pretty substantial increase, and I don't find anything in these documents that tells me where this extra money is going. It's not a very big department, as you said

yourself. I believe it's \$29 million or something like that, and an \$8 million increase over the last two years is pretty substantial. I think it would be of interest to everyone in the House if we had a breakdown as to why you're getting another \$4 million.

I'm also curious about aboriginal affairs itself. Now, there's a line in these budgets that says aboriginal affairs budget. At one point it says \$17.4 million, and elsewhere it says \$22.9 million. This is the bulk of your department, and it comes up under a one-line mention that says aboriginal affairs.

An Hon. Member: Page number.

Mr. Tougas: It's on page 120, and it's on a number of other pages: page 20 of the budget document.

Why is there so little information about where the bulk of your department funding goes to? Now, we have all the other departments – you know, Energy doesn't have a listing that says, "Energy, \$5 million," and Learning doesn't say, "Learning, \$1 billion" or something. There's a detailed breakdown about where the money goes. What we have here is: aboriginal affairs, \$22.292 million. Where is it going?

Now, I suspect that if we wanted to spend the time, you could probably give me a detailed listing right here and now. Knowing you, you probably know it off the top of your head, but I don't think anybody wants to sit here and listen to it. So if you could supply it in writing, I'd appreciate that because it is of interest, and it's also very hard for me to do my job as the aboriginal affairs critic with so little information. So a little bit more would certainly be appreciated in this regard.

The same applies, too, for the Northern Alberta Development Council, the funding for that. I believe it stays roughly the same at about \$2 million every year. A little bit further information on where that money goes would also be appreciated.

Now, over in the five-year plan I've noticed that there's a substantial increase in the budget again under aboriginal affairs without any particular justification or any listing for what it's all about. For 2003-04 under aboriginal affairs the budget was \$14.7 million. The target for 2007-08 is \$24 million, so you're looking at almost a \$10 million increase in the aboriginal affairs budget, again under that one single line: aboriginal affairs. Now, the rest of the budget is actually going down, I assume, because of the end of the Métis settlements legislation. By 2007 that disappears, the way I read this, and your budget will actually decrease by 2007-08, except under the listing of aboriginal affairs. So, again, if we could have more information on that, that would certainly be appreciated.

I'd also like to ask you a few questions about the business plan. On page 116, there's a mention of the consultation process, which, as I understand it, has been going on for quite some time. I believe it's been going on since about 2000. I may be wrong; if I am, please correct me. Under Consultation the document states that the ministry will "lead the development and implementation of provincial consultation processes to ensure that Aboriginal interests are recognized in the management of Crown lands and resources." Now, as I understand it, the budget for this was about \$6 million going back to 2000, and we're now in '05-06. First of all, what is the status of that document? How far along are we with it, and how much is it costing us? I mean, are we out of the \$6 million now? Is it still going on? Is there more to come? What is the status of this document at this time?

I've also been told that some chiefs in the north have only received a draft document from last May, and they haven't heard anything since. If this is correct, why so? Are they being adequately informed about what is actually going on with the consultation document?

If the minister would like to interrupt and answer any of these questions, feel free to just carry on. I don't care to stand and talk for 20 minutes. If she'd like to make a few comments, feel free.

Now, concerning the recent developments with the Métis, there have been a couple of Supreme Court decisions, as you know, the Powley decision in particular, which seem to give the Métis increased hunting and fishing rights. The question that arises then is: will this lead to further rights for the Métis and perhaps on a par with the aboriginal people? Does that mean that this will put extra stress on the department? Will it mean that more funds will be needed? Does the minister see this as something that is going to be happening in the future? Will there be virtual parity between aboriginal and Métis, and will that mean more work for her department or more funding required?

Now, of course, we've been talking in the Legislature recently about the Lubicon, who found that industry was accessing Crown land near their reserve without any consultation originally. Now, the Minister of Energy has said in the House that the companies are allowed to bring in their equipment and develop areas on Crown land without permits in anticipation of winning EUB approval to begin drilling. My question is: is the consultation process working, when Lubicon members wake up to find that heavy equipment is moving onto land very near their territory? I don't know if this is the appropriate forum for this, but it is an interesting question, and perhaps you can address that at some point.

I'd also like to ask about the Métis harvesting accord. In the business plan on page 117 strategy 1.4 says that there will be cross-ministry work to develop the MHA. Again, I suspect the cost of this is probably hidden somewhere in these documents; we just can't find it. I would like to know exactly how much this is going to be costing the aboriginal affairs department. Is it going to be spread out with Sustainable Resource Development, or is it entirely an aboriginal affairs initiative? In the original MHA I believe the signature of the Community Development minister at the time was affixed to that document. Is Community Development still involved in this process, or have they been sent to the sidelines, so to speak?

Regarding the north, we have a serious situation developing in Fort McMurray right now with housing and infrastructure. Now, it seems to me that the area is moving along quite nicely on the economic side, and I'm wondering if there is a role for the council to play in addressing the increasingly serious housing problem in the north. Is this something that there may be more funds required for, or is this something that's sort of outside of the purview of the aboriginal affairs department?

This also brings up the question again of temporary foreign workers being brought into Alberta to alleviate this alleged shortage of trade workers for oil sands projects. Now, from an aboriginal affairs point of view is the ministry doing everything possible to ensure that aboriginals are getting every opportunity to participate in this booming economy? These northern developments are not going away any time soon. This is a long-term thing. This isn't a boom. We're going to be seeing this for years and years. It seems to me that we have a golden opportunity right now to make sure that every aboriginal who wants to participate in the oil sands development gets a chance to, and I don't know if that's happening.

It's a little hard to tell from these documents if enough resources are being brought to bear in this matter. We can't let this opportunity go by. I hate to think that there are aboriginals who may want to be working in the oil sands but that we're bringing workers from elsewhere who may be taking their place. That may not be happening, but this is a serious matter, and it's a great opportunity. I mean, we just cannot pass by this chance to make sure that aboriginals are doing everything they can to participate in the Alberta economy.

An Hon. Member: And the advantage.

Mr. Tougas: Yes, the Alberta advantage. Thank you very much.

Finally, I know I've touched on a lot of things here, and I see you're taking a few notes, and maybe you'd like to address some of these things afterwards. The question of urban aboriginals has come up. I believe you have a strategy for that. Again, I think that by 2007 . . .

Some Hon. Members: 2011.

Mr. Tougas: By 2011. Thank you.

By 2011 Edmonton will have Canada's largest aboriginal population. What is the aboriginal affairs department doing about this situation? It's not a crisis, but it is something that is developing. It's an emerging issue. I know you do have the urban aboriginal program, but I would like a little more information about what it's all about.

I also have here that the city of Edmonton has formed the Edmonton urban aboriginal accord initiative between itself and the Edmonton Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee. Is this part of the aboriginal affairs department, or is this something quite apart from it altogether? Or is it something that you're even at all familiar with? Is this the type of thing that the city is involved in? I don't see any mention of the province of Alberta in this document here. So perhaps you could fill us in a little bit on that.

If you'd like to address any of these questions, I'd be happy to sit down, and you can fill me in on a few of these things. I think some of our colleagues here have some questions as well. So if you would like to have the floor for a little bit, feel free.

9:40

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I would like to talk about the urban aboriginal societies or groups that we are working with. It's true that we're going to have a large aboriginal population that's going to occur all across Canada, and you probably have that information from the Canada perspective because it's a huge issue.

One of the areas that we've been trying to deal with is: how do we work with the urban aboriginal communities and, more particularly, the urban centres like Edmonton and Calgary? We were in partnership with the federal government in Calgary and in Edmonton, and now we have also encouraged the federal government to include Lethbridge as one of the urban aboriginal strategies so that we could begin to deal with some of the concerns that have been brought forward. So with that we've actually committed a number of dollars to co-ordinate an overall strategy for accessing and improving the delivery of programs and services.

I'll just give you an example. In Calgary we committed to provide \$100,000 to the Calgary Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee for community-approved projects, and of course an official from our department sits on that steering committee. We're also working with the city of Edmonton, as I indicated, with the Edmonton Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee and the Western Economic Diversification Office developing an aboriginal accord between the urban aboriginal people and the city.

What we wanted to do was to make sure that we continue to work with these various groups and the various cities because, as you know, the urban migration from the aboriginal community into the cities has just been quite an interesting situation with the urban

people. So we've been wanting to ensure that we continue to do that. So we are working in partnerships with not only the cities but also with western diversification so that we can begin to look at priority setting and decision-making processes that would enable the aboriginal community to become more involved in the city to be able to determine what needs to be done.

We also, as I indicated, successfully partnered with the city of Lethbridge, and that would be to help with community-based strategies to address aboriginal employment issues in Lethbridge. What we want to do there is to make sure that we continually work together jointly on addressing the community's needs. We have to be able to work with other communities as well in those cities as well as across Alberta with groups such as the friendship centres. As you know, there's a friendship centre in Lethbridge, there's a friendship centre in Calgary, and there's a friendship centre in Edmonton. We've got friendship centres all across the province: in Pincher Creek as a matter of fact. We have them in small urban areas.

Of course, the Métis Nation of Alberta has also been a really good group to work with, and we're dealing with the urban aboriginal issues because they do live in the urban areas. Of course, what we've been trying to make sure we do is to include health, education, and employment of urban aboriginal people. Those are the areas that the communities that are located in these centres have been talking about and bringing to our attention, and we certainly have been working with them.

That was an important question. That's an area that I have a special concern about because when you see the concerns that the people are bringing to the table and you begin to see the cities dealing with that urban migration, we have to sit with them to determine what it is that we have to do to address those. So thank you very much for that question because that's, in my view, one of the bigger questions.

When we're talking about the north, I know that probably my colleague from the north will address some of the northern issues, but I want to talk about the temporary workers. We have been working with Human Resources and Employment, and that's basically to be able to start to figure out how the First Nations can get, first of all, an education so that they can begin to look at trades training.

Then from there, what we want to do is to make sure that they also have the ability – in fact, we've been working with Education as well as with Advanced Education not only to deal with the issue of education so that they can begin to look at trades but also to look at those projects that my colleague will talk about. We have to be able to see how we can encourage the aboriginal community to get that training so that they can access the next level, which is the trades training and more education so that they can begin to see the opportunities that are available.

We've been working not only on the educational side; we've got the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit policy that's in place. We also have the Learning Commission, of which 15 of the strategies were recognized as aboriginal-specific, and those 15 strategies are the ones that we also have adopted. They're the recommendations that we've said we would deal with, and those ones we're trying to put in place, working with our partners, which are First Nations as well as the Métis community, to see how we can begin to address the educational needs of the aboriginal community so that they can take advantage of what's happening with the Alberta advantage, as you've identified. Those are the areas, I think, that are very important for aboriginal communities to be able to see what opportunities are available to them.

We are also making sure that when we're dealing with the

economic possibilities in the province, when something happens in a community – I'll give you an example. We have Loon Lake. I don't know if you know where Loon Lake is, a community called Loon Lake. It's a reserve, actually. We have a community called Loon Lake, and within Loon Lake – Loon River, actually, is the reserve – we have all sorts of activity happening around the reserve. What we try to do is to make sure that we help them make the connections with industry to see what possibilities exist not only for employment but also training possibilities and to make sure that there are other opportunities for them in the contract areas so that there are full possibilities of their involvement in the economic participation.

So those are the areas that we get involved in and work with the communities as well as with industry and other departments to see how we can ensure that that could happen. It's a continuation of everything that we're doing and making sure that we do the cross-ministry initiative, which is called the aboriginal policy initiative. On that note, I think it's important that my colleague will address that as well, and maybe he can get up in a few minutes and talk about that.

The Auditor General. I want to say thanks for the compliments. As they say, anything before the but is, you know . . . But I want to say a special thanks for that. I appreciate that. We've worked very hard. My staff have worked very hard to make sure that we continually deal with the issues that the Auditor General brings to our table and try to address them. I know that he's continually making sure that we get better and better, and my staff has certainly been involved in that.

I'll have the chair of the NADC now address some of the northern issues, if he may, Mr. Chair.

Chair's Ruling

Questions to Members Other than Ministers

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, as per the Standing Orders there's no provision for chairmen of committees to answer questions or participate. We had the special provision that in the first 20 minutes that were allocated to you, you could cede some time to the hon. chairman.

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

Debate Continued

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you as well . . . [The sound system malfunctioned] I've got a little feedback action going on. It's kind of like an electric guitar effect, you know, in keeping with the arts theme that we were doing earlier this evening, I guess.

Thank you so much for giving me an opportunity to make comments on the budget. I, too, would like to make a general comment, that amongst the different critic portfolio areas that I am responsible for, I see Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development as being a very straightforward and well-organized budget document. I think that it's in keeping with the mandate of the ministry as well as looking at a number of important needs that need to be addressed in this area, so it is quite a good one to work with.

9:50

I have a number of questions. I'm just going to take the lead from how you were working with the other critic member and just give you a number of them, and then you can work with it as you see fit.

My first question is in regard to the overall spending in aboriginal affairs. Of the spending from last year my reading of it is that it's up by 31 per cent. I would be curious to know what specifically these extra monies were allotted to. I would be interested in some more

specific information. You can give that to me in writing or orally, if you like.

My next question is in respect to the Métis subsistence hunting and fishing area. I would like to ask the ministry if they are going to provide extra funding to solidify the membership lists in the Métis community because, of course, with the Powley agreement I believe we have some not confusion but some new developments in regard to hunting and fishing rights, so perhaps providing some more funding to developing membership lists would be useful.

Will the government be providing funding for education to Métis, First Nations, and hunting and fishing groups on this issue? I think each member of this Legislature should be receiving a great deal of correspondence from different groups in regard to the new developments in hunting and fishing rights, and I think sort of an overall education and consultation process is in order at this juncture to try to give some clarification to the public in regard to the hunting and fishing rights of everyone, really.

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

I have a question as well. My understanding is that there are \$10 million set aside to provide for the partnership with the Métis Settlements General Council to establish self-reliance in preparation for the end of the current funding agreements I believe in 2007. Are these settlements sort of ready? Is that a firm number or a firm date for those things to happen? What's being done as well, then, in conjunction with that to ensure that Métis nations will in fact be self-reliant by this date of 2007? I'm curious to know that as well.

By the government's own numbers the off-reserve aboriginal people of Alberta – we've been discussing this previously – have twice as high an unemployment rate as members on reserves. I should say it's twice as high as the overall unemployment rate in this province. So we're looking for specific programming – I know you spoke to this to some degree already – for employment training and direction in the urban areas because this is where, I believe, the highest unemployment level is for people off reserve.

Perhaps one of the things that comes first to my mind in terms of funding – and it's an important question – is that of urban housing. As the hon. minister has mentioned, we are experiencing a migration of people, a movement of people from rural to urban areas. This is sort of inevitable, and in a way we welcome the migration into our urban areas such as Edmonton, but the housing situation is critical. Affordable housing in Edmonton and Calgary and Lethbridge and Red Deer and other centres, Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie, is severe. I know specifically in regard to aboriginal people moving to, say, Edmonton, in my constituency, there's a real acute need for more affordable housing. I'm wondering if there is a provision to budget for this from this department or to steer some directive from this budget into infrastructure, for example.

My last question would be in regard to the Lubicon Cree situation, which is ongoing and developing quite quickly in perhaps less than favourable ways. I would like to ask what's being done to include the Lubicon Cree, which are still without a treaty, in consultations involving the oil and gas exploration on their lands or the disputed lands. It's developing into a potentially volatile situation, and I would hope that this department could find resolution to that somehow.

Those are my specific questions in regard to the budget, and I welcome the response of the minister as she sees fit to do so.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I will address some of Edmonton-Calder's specific concerns. Then if I am not as thorough as he would like me to be, what we could do is go back, and I can find the questions, and I'll write to you about some of those because some of them I think will take a little bit more time than what we can find tonight.

The overall spending. You were talking about Métis. As you know, the Métis harvesting – this actually does have something to do with Edmonton-Meadowlark as well, on the Métis side, the Powley decision. Powley is actually an aboriginal rights decision, not a hunting case, and it is possible that it could have implications beyond harvesting, is what we assess. This is a matter for the future. For now harvesting is enough for us, and that's what we've been dealing with and trying to make sure that we take care of the concerns that are out there.

Community Development is a valued partner. You were asking about Community Development. They are part of what we've been doing and certainly are at the table with us. We're trying to ensure that those ministries that are to be at the table are at the table with us to address their concerns from their perspective. We co-ordinate and we try to get their input, whether it's Sustainable Resource Development or whether it's Justice or whether it's Community Development, to deal with the issues that they're responsible for. So they are definitely a valued partner.

Costs relative to the Métis, as both of you have asked, are contained within our existing budget, and that's what we've been dealing with in terms of the funding for the membership. The Métis community have certainly taken that on themselves and are working with us in terms of determining who is a Métis, which is an important part of the test for the community basis and self-identifications and that nature. They are taking care of that portion. However, we're involved to make sure that it does follow and meet the test that has been brought forward by the Powley decision.

You were talking about the Métis Settlements General Council, and are they going to be self-sufficient by 2007? We're wanting to ensure that we work with them as we work through the transition. We have got a process called the transition assessment planning, and that brings the concerns that they have and the areas of budgeting that we have to deal with, and that'll go through the process within government as we've always done.

We'll continue to work through that to make sure that we can see if there is going to be a gap that's going to result maybe from today to 2007, and we'll make sure that we continue to work with the Métis settlements so that we can address the concerns of a shortfall, should there be one. The \$10 million will end as of 2006, as I indicated, and certainly we want to make sure that we have a way to be able to make that transition, so we'll continue to work with the Métis settlements. They have actually brought forward the concern to our table, and we have now started that process to address the very issues that you're bringing to the table. I want to thank you for your interest there, though.

10:00

The unemployment rate. It's true that there is a huge unemployment rate that we have to be able to look at, and that's why it's important that we continue to work with Human Resources and Employment and also with Education and Advanced Education not only on the educational side but on advanced education to make sure that we have pre-employment training and also to ensure that there is going to be trades training and to ensure that if people want to go to university, they have that ability, as I indicated earlier, so that they can see that there are opportunities for them that they can achieve once they get to that point. So we'll continue to work with the various ministries.

As I indicated, my ministry works with other ministries. We don't deal with program delivery; however, we encourage the various ministries to incorporate these ideas into their ministries. As a result, I've seen some really good activity that has happened from the various ministries, ensuring that we do those kinds of planning and programming that would address those very issues. So it's a milestone, and we continue to make those milestones.

Urban housing. We do need more affordable housing, as you know, as the migration occurs. The cities are starting to feel that, and that's why we have the aboriginal committees and the cities that we've been working with as well as with western diversification to ensure that we address those very issues as we begin to see the concerns come forward. The only thing I can say at this time is that we will continue to do that and address it with those partners because we can't do it alone, and we don't intend to do it alone, but we need to be able to have the partners with us so that we can begin to work out these challenges that we have.

I call them challenges because if they're challenges, then we have to find solutions. As solution finders we can begin to address the concerns that have been out there for a long, long time, and we have to be able to work together to address those.

On the Lubicon situation I know that a lot of people don't know this, but as a result of my ancestry I'm eligible for membership in the Lubicon Lake band and, therefore, could theoretically share in the benefits of any settlement. I have actually handed off that file to the Minister of Justice to deal with that, so that's the reason why I don't deal with the Lubicon issue.

The issue of consultation, however, is another issue. That's another question from the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. It's been a couple of years at least since we started this process, and on the consultation what we have done is we took forward some information and some possibilities and some principles to First Nations. I met with the First Nation chiefs on a government-to-government basis, requested to have our technical people meet with their technical people so that we can begin to address the issue of consultation.

We have now reached a point where my colleagues will be looking at the consultation package once we've finished it, and then it'll go through the regular process. We're still at that stage. We're not finished yet, and therefore the consultation with First Nations doesn't happen to the extent that I believe that you and the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark have been asking about. So I think it's important to note that we haven't got to that degree yet. We will be, and I believe that we will get to that point eventually. That's the one that Edmonton-Meadowlark has been talking about. We will get to that point eventually.

The capacity building initiative. I think this is really new because you asked where the new money was going to go to. We are looking at capacity building to assist First Nations in developing an internal consultative process for resource development. That's what the additional money was for that we requested. Presently First Nations in Alberta do not have the physical ability to meaningfully consult with the government of Alberta or industry on resource development issues, so what we did was that we went forward and asked for more money for us to be able to work with First Nations to be able to do that.

The implementation of the consultation policy, of course, will create consultation fatigue, as you probably know with the small party group that you have, in First Nations under their present administration structure. Without adequate funding for capacity that consultation policy will probably not be successful or at least get to the goal to create a stable environment for resource development. So we wanted to make sure that we developed capacity within First

Nations to assist in a more stable environment for consultation with industry and, of course, the government on resource development issues.

We have money that we requested. The \$6 million that we had, the first \$6 million you asked about, was to be able to look at how we can develop the capacity within government. That was the first role because we also needed to develop our capacity within government, which we didn't have at the time. So it was divided amongst a variety of departments who were involved with our department. Once we finished that, then we went into capacity building for First Nations. With that, now we've got the economic capacity to be able to work with First Nations.

I'll write to you about the specifics relative to the additional money that we've asked for.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to get up and speak to this this evening. I want to commend the ministry in their vision and mission for aboriginal and northern affairs as they put out in the book: "an Alberta that includes the full participation of self-reliant Aboriginal and Northern Albertans in the province's opportunities and prosperity" as well as in their mission "to enhance Aboriginal well-being and self-reliance." Those are very worthy goals, and we're all wanting to attain those.

I guess I'll start and don't want to go over a lot of things, but I, too, would like a more detailed written answer on the breakdown of how the budget is being spent and especially on those huge budget increases. They are substantial, and I, too, would like that information in a written answer.

On page 114 the goal is to have aboriginal Albertans achieve "a socio-economic status equivalent to that of other Albertans." There I guess we're recognizing the fact that they're not equivalent to other ones.

One of the questions that I have is on unleashing innovation and that you're putting forward the SuperNet to aboriginal and northern communities. The question that I have, being from rural Alberta, is that you're putting in this connection. Is it just going to the schools? Is it going to community facilities? Do you have a program where it will actually get that last mile to their individual homes out in the country where many of them live? We spend a great deal of money to get it to maybe one area, but what percentage are we really getting it to when, in fact, so many live in a rural area? If you live more than three miles away from that hub, then they're not able to get the Internet. So I would like to know the answer on that.

Then I guess I have a little bit of a different angle, and I've received many letters and phone calls, and I've gone to meetings. But you have "supporting Northern bursary and stay-in-school initiatives." The question that I have in regard to that is not so much with the aboriginal but the programs that this government is putting out because of the socioeconomic status of a group that you want to encourage to stay in school. I guess I ask the question to the government as a whole that in section 15(2) in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms it talks about the amelioration of programs irregardless for "disadvantaged individuals or groups." If we find that this program is good for those that are socioeconomically challenged on the reserve, why would we not do that for other Albertans that are faced with the same situation and not just give it to one special group?

The last question that I have – and on this I've received probably the most numerous contact I've had – is on page 117, 1.4, which has been addressed a few times this evening. "Lead and co-ordinate participation of Alberta ministries with Métis governments and

organizations in developing and implementing appropriate arrangements for Métis to exercise harvesting rights.” The question that many Albertans are asking me is: why are we giving them special status?

This country was founded on harvesting and gathering and hunting. We no longer live in that age where we can go out and do that. Fish and Game and Sustainable Resources have looked at that, and we’ve got very good programs in place in Alberta. It seems like this proactive move of this government to allow another whole group special status to go out and to hunt and to harvest when up until now they haven’t had that privilege – to say that they need it for sustenance is somewhat confusing. How are they alive today if they haven’t been allowed to do it in the past? And now they get this special status. It just seems like if we’re going to really maintain our fish and wildlife and have a quota system, we can’t open up the door here and allow such special privileges in harvesting. Like I say, a great deal of concern with many outdoor Albertans concerning that.

10:10

I’d appreciate those answers and am looking forward to receiving them, written or oral. Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, I will also advise you that we will be within a few minutes entering into the second hour of the estimates, at which time I would be more than happy to recognize the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul should he wish to add any comments.

Ms Calahasen: That sounds like a good idea, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, let me talk about something that I think there’s been a lot of misinformation and misinterpretation of, what Powley and the Blais case are all about, because I think it’s important for Albertans to understand what this is. As a government we did not give Métis hunting rights. Those were actually recognized and affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada. What happened in the Powley case was that they recognized and affirmed aboriginal rights to Métis.

But on the other hand, on the same day they had the Blais case, which is Blais versus Regina in the fact that Mr. Blais said that he was an Indian under the natural resources transfer agreement in Manitoba. The NRTA, as you know, are under three provinces. So what happened was that he was not recognized. The Supreme Court of Canada said that he is not an Indian as recognized under the NRTA. The NRTA, or the natural resources transfer agreement, is what sets the limitations on First Nations hunting and trapping et cetera. So what happened was that with the two decisions what came out was that there was already a policy decision made. It wasn’t a policy by the government of Alberta. It then took into consideration that there was the aboriginal hunting rights for Métis but that potentially they could have had more rights than the First Nations.

So what the three negotiating groups did – and the negotiations took place with Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Justice, and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development – was that they then looked at what the issues were and tried to ensure that these rights would be confined under the NRTA; therefore, the limitations and closures and conservation and safety would be taken into consideration in those agreements. That’s basically what happened there.

What has gone out is that people are saying that we gave the rights to the Métis. I think that’s blatantly wrong, and I’d like to state here that that’s really not the fact. So we have to be able to address the

issue from the fact that if these rights are out there, how do we ensure that all the aboriginal communities can be under the same rule?

That’s, basically, why we went and did the interim measures. These are interim. That doesn’t mean that there might be a possibility of information that will come in as a result of the interim so that we can use that as we move in a direction of maybe a series or maybe final. We don’t know what that will bring until we know what these interim will do for us because that’s what interim is all about.

So I think it’s important for people to understand that also when those cases came forward, they didn’t tell us who it could be in terms of the specifics, but they also didn’t tell us where and when. We wanted to make sure that we could have those areas of concern that would otherwise not allow us to be able to deal with it in a way that we could manage the resource, so what we did on the negotiating was we talked about: who are the Métis?

We recognized a group called the Métis Nation of Alberta. We also recognized the Métis Settlements General Council. With those two agreements we then confined Métis to Alberta Métis, not necessarily across Canada. So then it would be that that community, whoever that community was, in this case the Métis Nation of Alberta and Métis Settlements General Council, those Métis would then be the community. In that way we would know if there is somebody who comes from somewhere else to be able to try to take advantage of what the Alberta scene was about. We confined it to that.

We also decided where the hunting would be, and we did it so that we called it harvesting lands. These are important because harvesting lands are all unoccupied provincial Crown lands in Alberta, the provincially protected areas, and other occupied provincial Crown lands in Alberta that have a designation or area designated for hunting, trapping, or fishing, as the case may be. We also talked about any privately owned lands in Alberta on which that person has been given permission. It’s not automatic. Under the agreement it talks about: you have to have permission to be able to go on these what we call privately owned lands.

Any body of water in Alberta in respect of which domestic fishing licences are issued and, of course, commercial trapping, commercial fishing were not part of that. We wanted to ensure that the commercial component was out of it. We wanted to make sure that we can look at it from a subsistence perspective.

We also wanted to ensure that we would deal with this situation from a perspective of making sure we had the relationship with that Métis community so that they can then also help us in terms of the policing aspect and so that they will also work on the conservation issue. That was a big concern for them as well. I want to thank them at this time and be able to say that this decision came out in 2003, and it took us till 2004 to come out with something that would be palatable for both sides so that we can deal with this as a conservation issue. We knew that we were dealing with a concern where people could be concerned on the conservation side, and that’s why we encouraged them to be able to allow us to work in a framework that would allow us to deal with these issues of safety, conservation, and to be able to determine where and who and when it can be done.

So we try to do everything we can to work with the Métis in that respect because, as you know, these agreements I think are basically trying to build a regulatory framework around the principles stated in the Powley and the Blais decisions.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to address some of the concerns and some of the questions that came forward as well.

First, I'd like to address the comments made by the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner if I may, and that's in regard to the SuperNet. I'm going to paraphrase, but I believe your question was: what is SuperNet doing for rural Albertans over and beyond? Maybe I can add a little bit to say that, number one, of course, the SuperNet is not only going to our schools but also going to our advanced education, our postsecondary schools, which provide access. We think that that is very important in the development of the areas where they are very isolated.

The second aspect I want to talk about is health and telehealth. In northern Alberta we have communities that are very isolated, are eight hours away from specialists. If we can incorporate a telehealth system that assists individuals to come into health care units or come into hospitals or come in to see their doctors and with the use of SuperNet be able to transfer some of the information – and I say information: taking an X-ray of an individual, bringing it forward to a specialist in Edmonton, and having the return of that expertise going back into the rural areas – it is very beneficial.

10:20

Also, when we talk about access – and you mentioned access for, let's say, the local individuals – the SuperNet is going to tie into all of the libraries, not only to the library systems but tie into the libraries, which will provide access for anybody to come into the libraries, use the libraries, be able to use the widened pipeline. We can also add the northern municipalities and their functionality with each other and with the centres and the government.

I'm going to refer as well to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark made a comment about housing. I want to say that we feel that it's very important for the government to make some land available – we talked about in Fort McMurray – for housing because it does provide pressures, and it does provide I want to say challenges to individuals that are there. From that aspect I will also maybe put a brief point in that I think we should stay out of the business of development but make sure that we have the opportunities afforded to individuals.

Some of the major challenges that we have in northern Alberta are, I will say, advanced education, temporary workers, and human resources. It is very important for our colleges to offer a curriculum that will assist individuals to be able to take courses that are necessary for oil and gas development, for forestry development. There is no doubt that there is a higher unemployment rate. The jobs are there, but we need to do training. There are individuals in northern Alberta, whether it be from the aboriginal communities or from municipalities or towns, that do not have the desire to come into the large centres to take their training. I think it is important for us to develop these individuals, to give them the opportunity to be able to learn, and to give them the opportunity to go to school in our northern colleges and provide those courses. I think that will assist in the minimizing of the need for temporary workers coming from other areas. I think that's one of the concerns that you had to kind of offset all of those vacancies that have been afforded because of the greater development.

There was a comment also made, I want to say, that asked something on the aspect of transportation. There is no doubt that transportation is one of our most immediate and our largest barriers. We need to be able to tie the communities together. We need the mobility in order to see the communities flourish and in order to see the north advance.

Someone – and I think it was the Member for Edmonton-Calder

– mentioned the aspect of working together, and I think it's very critical that our ministries do work together. There is no doubt that we need to co-ordinate between the ministries because when we look at the north, there is a major tying together. There is a major need for co-ordination. I talk about Transportation and Infrastructure tying in with Agriculture, where we need a container port coming out of the western part of the province to be able to bring product to market, which would be on the west coast. We talk, of course, of the co-ordination between Energy and Environment. We talk about the co-ordination between, as I said before, postsecondary colleges and our education systems and human resources. We need to work together in those aspects. I suppose I could go on and talk about seniors and children's services and health care.

We need to tie the ministries together and have a single focus of what is necessary and work together with aboriginal affairs and the Northern Alberta Development Council for what is the best advancement for northern Alberta.

Let me mention one other point that was mentioned: what else are we doing? One of our major attractions, one of our major renewable resources in northern Alberta is, of course, our parks, and our parks have basically quadrupled their budget to refurbish and rejuvenate those parks. I'll quote the minister but maybe not verbatim. The Minister of Community Development did say that our parks are the embassies to the world, and to our visitors it is Alberta's signature.

That development, as I said before, is a renewable resource for northern Alberta. It is something that can be accented. It will bring people to northern Alberta, and some of those people will be professionals, will be tradesmen, will be labourers, and will want to stay, and that will also address some of the labour concerns that we have.

Mr. Chairman, I think that that maybe summarizes some of the questions that were asked, and I thank the minister for giving me the opportunity for those questions.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I've just got a couple of short ones because they seem to be easier to answer, rather than going on with 20 of them, in being able to just pick a couple of them. A couple of specifics would be: how much consultation is there with the Department of Sustainable Resource Development to ensure that we have sustainable resources for future generations, which is always being talked about with regard to northern development? As well, what does the Northern Alberta Development Council do with regard to ensuring that there is a dialogue with the Sustainable Resource Development department?

When we talk about development and exploration, I think there needs to be more consultation with the Energy and Utilities Board. In fact, with the Lubicon and other cases, it looks like it's better to ask forgiveness than it is to ask for permission when we start with development. They wake up one day looking at the pipes and pieces ready to punch holes into this. The logs are already piled up, and they're waiting for, I guess, permission with regard to the utilities board granting them the access to already start drilling.

Are we talking about, in fact, monitoring and ensuring that we have fresh water for oil injection with regard to taking out oil, and are we talking about developing with environmental impact assessments?

Those are just a couple of specifics that I'd like to raise for question and consideration with this ministry.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity also to respond to the budget for the ministry. As opposition it's our responsibility and our privilege to raise questions around the business plan and the budget for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. I guess I also will be very brief.

Thirty-five million dollars is a lot of money, a lot of Albertans' money, and it's not clear to me either where the money is going. Could you say a little about where the money is going?

Secondly, how we're measuring the impacts of this \$35 million. I identified with you some of the goals that you've articulated in the budget. It's not clear how you can measure achieving those goals.

The third question has to do with what's happened in terms of the \$6 million in the consultation. Where does that money go?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, did you want to respond?

Ms Calahasen: I would like to respond to, actually, Calgary-Mountain View first, and then I'll go to Edmonton-Decore.

10:30

First of all, I would like to talk about where the money is going. Let me first address the \$6 million that we received in the beginning. What we did with that money was divide it amongst the various ministries, as I indicated to the question that was asked by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. What we did – it was actually three parts to the MR that I took forward, and of those three parts the first part was to be able to look at capacity building within government. So the money was divided amongst the various ministries. There was Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Justice, Community Development, myself, and of course Energy and Environment. So we all had areas of responsibility that would be able to deal with consultation issues. We all had a portion of that money – I think ours was \$1.28 million – that we received as a result of the \$6 million that I received. I'm probably known as the Six Million Dollar Woman, but I didn't get all the money.

We wanted to ensure that our partners – because it is a cross-ministry initiative. The cross-ministry initiative would mean that all my partners would have to be at the table to address the concerns from a consultation process. So we wanted to ensure that that would occur.

The second portion was actually to be able to look at the First Nations' dollars so that we can begin to look at how we get money to the First Nations, first of all, for traditional land-use studies so that they can begin to map their areas of where their burial sites have been, where their gathering places have been, where the possibility of the ceremonial sites would have been. So it would give us factual information as to where they have traditionally used the land. The First Nations got the money to be able to do those traditional land-use studies.

Also, the other part of it was to be able to get money to them so that they can begin to build their capacity as well. Not only is it government that has to build capacity; the First Nations must develop capacity in order for them to be able to be consulted. We wanted to make sure that they had those dollars so that they can begin to build their expertise. That's where the money went to. On this portion now we are looking at how we can look at First Nations' economic participation, and that \$2.7 million would be used on that specific so that they can begin to look on the economic side.

In my speech I talked about where that money would be used, and if you will recall, I talked about a portion where they would be working on looking at developing First Nations' economic capacity

to play a more meaningful role in Alberta's economy. It's a cross-ministry initiative as well, and it's with Alberta Economic Development and Alberta Human Resources and Employment. It includes building the skills, business planning, financial management, and knowledge and resources of First Nations to take advantage of existing and emerging opportunities. So it gives them the ability to be able to get those kind of skills so that they can begin to say how they can begin to take advantage of the Alberta advantage, as was identified.

So that's where that \$2.75 million will go, an aboriginal consultation initiative of \$1.45 million as well as \$150,000 for salary provisions. So when we're talking about those dollars, that's where the money will be going. [interjection] No. The \$6 million was before. This is now, the other money that I have been requesting for this year. I can write to you.

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

Mr. Danyluk: I'd just like to answer one of the questions from the Member for Edmonton-Decore. Your question was in regard to the dialogue between NADC and, for instance, SRD. To answer the question, I need to just kind of give you a little bit of a format on what NADC is and how they operate, and this is from the information gathering aspect.

The Northern Alberta Development Council has monthly meetings, and they do entertain presentations at those meetings from colleges, from municipalities, from individuals, from authorities, from community groups as to what they feel is important and what they feel should be advanced to the government or different parts of the government. At that time when we do have presentations, we do not only just have presentations in one area. We do circulate all over northern Alberta in different meetings, different months and try to get this information.

Then what we do is present it on to the ministries that it involves. So we take each isolated issue or else a collection of issues, and we do have a meeting with the minister. We do present it to the minister. Also, all of this information goes to our Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development minister. Just to let you know, what does happen is that those concerns of individuals are brought forward and are answered back. We make sure that we try to deal with those issues. If there are issues that need to be helped with, that is also another role for NADC.

I know that maybe I lightly just described, but I think I want to say that, yes, there is communication with different ministries. Yes, there is communication with Sustainable Resources. I can just use the example of Sustainable Resources. We have discussions with forestry. We have discussions with fisheries, trapping, leased land. Those issues all come forward, and we bring that forward to the minister.

Thank you.

Mr. Tougas: One last question and I think we're pretty much done. I believe that the minister in discussing the consultation process – I think you said it was going to be done "eventually." I think that was your term. Can you be a little bit more specific rather than eventually if it's been going on since 2000? Can you get a little bit closer or let us know: is it this year, next year? What are we looking at?

Ms Calahasen: It'll be this year. We are pretty close. As we do get to the point where we can share with you, we certainly will share with you that information. But we will go through our process and make sure we've finalized it and work with the First Nations and

make sure my colleagues are following through on the process that we have established. So, yeah, it'll be this year, and I'm looking before the end of summer.

Mr. Bonko: Just for some clarification then, Mr. Chairman. I'm getting some mixed signals, perhaps, from the members across. I just would ask it again, and perhaps I can get the answer then. How much consultation is there between the two ministries with SRD to ensure that there is sustainable resource development?

Ms Calahasen: I think this is really important. I know that my colleague was kind of making signals, and I think you misread that. What we have been doing is working together extensively, as a matter of fact, on every issue relative to land and resource management. So Sustainable Resource Development is one of the partners not only in the cross-ministry initiative on consultation but also on the Powley decision and a number of other issues that we have to deal with as we go through. Anything to do with Sustainable Resource Development that may affect aboriginal affairs or northern development, we certainly are at the table, and he never forgets us.

So it is extensive in terms of that consultation that we do have. It has to be. That's the only way we work, and that's why we call it cross-ministry initiatives. Cross-ministry means that if there's something that happens in Sustainable Resource Development, we have to be able to deal with it in Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, and if it affects us, then we are at the table. So we have those cross-ministry initiatives to address those very issues so that we're not looking through stovepipes.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm still struggling to get any sense of where the budget goes and how you measure the results. Maybe you want to comment on that or maybe you want to send it over in written form, but there's no way we could assess the budget without more information.

Thank you.

10:40

Ms Calahasen: Let me first of all talk about some of the measures. I specifically did not go into measures in my speech, hoping that I would be able to address it as we go through. We have specific initiatives under the various goals, as you will see in the budget. You will see that there are certain goals. Then we have the initiatives, and then we have performance measures. We look at the percentage of targets achieved in the cross-ministry aboriginal policy initiative, and we have an annual report that we do give out identifying what we've been able to achieve and everything that we have been looking for.

In most cases what we're finding when we're dealing with aboriginal issues is that we have very soft measures. We found that across Canada it's very difficult to kind of get hard measures, to be able to do that, so what we've been doing is slowly with our partners trying to find ways for us to be able to even do greater measures. If you have any kind of suggestions, I'm always interested to see what other measures we can be looking at. If you have anything that you'd be able to offer to myself, I'll certainly look at those and see how we can incorporate those measures in the following budget.

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Chair: The question having been called, after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$29,449,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply now rise and report the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, for the following department.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$29,449,000.

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

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

Bill 37
Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2005

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes, indeed, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance I just want to move Bill 37, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2005, at second reading.

Mr. Speaker, this act includes amendments to the Fiscal Responsibility Act and other acts covering the heritage fund and the endowments funds. These amendments to the Fiscal Responsibility Act would do the following. They would lock in the funds in the debt retirement account so they could only be used for repaying the debt, they would increase the nonrenewable resource revenue that can be used for budget purposes from \$4 billion to \$4.75 billion, and finally, these amendments would clarify some of the more technical aspects of the legislation.

Now, with respect to the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act and other endowment fund acts the amendments in this bill would clarify the transfer of money into those particular funds.

A few comments with respect to the debt retirement account, Mr. Speaker, if you will. Last year our government set aside sufficient

funds in the debt retirement account to repay the remaining accumulated debt as it matures. Alberta, of course, has become debt free. Three point five billion dollars in the debt retirement account will be locked in and will only be used and can only be used to pay off maturing debt as it comes due. Finally, it will continue to be against the law to run deficits in this province.

With respect to nonrenewable resource revenue limits there is an amendment that will increase the nonrenewable resource revenue that can be used for budget purposes from \$4 billion to \$4.75 billion, and over the last five years average resource revenue has exceeded \$8 billion, it should be noted. The outlook is for revenue to stay above the \$4.7 billion level in the medium term, so we feel quite comfortable with the amendment in that respect.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans told us that with accumulated debt eliminated and if resources are available, the government should address key priority areas much more aggressively. This amendment will in fact allow our government to do that.

Other, more technical amendments are being made to the Fiscal Responsibility Act including the following. The contingency allowance economic cushion will specifically be addressed, and the calculation of the contingency allowance economic cushion will be simplified in the process. Also, the contingency allowance will continue to be set at a minimum of 1 per cent of budgeted revenue for fiscal policy purposes. Finally, the previous requirement to set aside the net amount of the retained income of funds and agencies and capital cash requirements as part of the economic cushion will now be treated as an adjustment within the sustainability fund.

Just in wrap-up here, amendments are also required to clarify wording around a withdrawal from the sustainability fund for a

settlement involving a First Nation. Mr. Speaker, this is basically a housekeeping amendment that corrects omissions from the amendments that were made last year.

Finally, with respect to heritage and endowment funds amendments to the heritage fund and the endowment fund acts will clarify the transferring of money into these funds from the general revenue fund. As funds become available, the amendments will allow the transfer of the following to occur: \$500 million to the medical research endowment fund, \$500 million to the science and engineering research endowment fund, \$3 billion into the heritage fund for the advanced education endowment, and, of course, \$1 billion into the scholarship fund.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would urge everyone's review, consideration, and support of Bill 37, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2005.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to adjourn debate on Bill 37.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been another excellent day in the Alberta Legislature, and on that note I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:49 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]