

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 19, 2005** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 05/04/19
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

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

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a 27-member delegation from the city of Grimma, Germany, led by Bürgermeister Berger, the mayor of Grimma. His Worship is accompanied by two aldermen; the consul general of Germany based in Vancouver, Mr. Michael Schwandt; and the honorary consul of Germany based right here in Edmonton, a man who needs very little introduction to us here, Mr. Fritz Koenig. Also accompanying him are Mr. Joerg Diecke, alderman, head of the partnership committee. In the delegation are business leaders, academics, and municipal leaders.

The mayor and his delegation are visiting Leduc this week and earlier today signed a joint partnership declaration between Grimma and Leduc, marking the first official relationship in North America for Grimma. This relationship builds on the 2002 twinning agreement between Alberta and the province of Saxony, where Grimma is located, which has already led to initiatives in the fields of education, training, science, and technology. Our Speaker visited Grimma, toured the city, and met the mayor. Grimma was in the spotlight during the floods of the summer of 2002, when the people of Alberta helped raise emergency disaster relief funds. These were matched by Alberta's Wild Rose Foundation.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that our honoured guests please rise in your gallery and in other galleries to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly guests that are seated in your gallery: from Capital City Savings & Credit Union, Mr. Dennis Horrigan, vice-president, direct banking; Mr. Doug Forsyth, vice-president, community branches; Ms Gail Stepanik-Keber, vice-president, marketing; Mr. Tim Downey, president of Priority Printing Ltd.; from Access Media Group Dr. Ron Keast, president and CEO; Mr. Ross Mayot, vice-president, administration and business affairs; and Mr. Gordon Sheppard, producer, creative services.

Capital City Savings & Credit Union Ltd., Priority Printing, Access, and Canadian Learning Television are community sponsors of the School at the Legislature program. This program gives grade 6 teachers from all over our province an opportunity to relocate their classrooms to the Alberta Legislature for an entire week. In the

fiscal year 2003-2004 over 714 students from 29 classes attended the School at the Legislature program. This program is supported by 29 teachers and 310 volunteers. We're very grateful for the support we receive from our community partners.

I would ask that our guests now rise and receive the very warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two grade 10 students who are participating in the Westlock Rotary Club youth exchange program, which is sponsored, of course, by the Westlock Rotary Club. With us today are Paula Mustonen, who is visiting Alberta from Finland, and Dawnia Myshak, who will be travelling to Switzerland in July. Accompanying them is an old friend of mine, actually, Mr. Les Dunford, a Rotarian who is also the editor of the *Town and Country*, which appears in several newspapers in your constituency, Mr. Speaker. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know, in the city of Fort McMurray our city slogan is We Have the Energy. But it's not just about oil energy; it's also about youthful energy. Today it's my pleasure through you and to members of the Assembly to introduce students, teachers, and staff from Father Beauregard school. Of course, this is a Catholic school in Fort McMurray and quite appropriate on this day, when a new Pope was announced to the world. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd like to welcome the 45 grade 6 students, vice-principal Micheal Chaisson, teacher Mrs. Williams, and teaching assistant Mrs. Arbter. I'd like to invite the parents, teachers, students, everyone to please rise and show this Assembly we truly do have the energy in Fort McMurray.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent of mine from Brazeau county. Cecil Andersen is a farmer and rancher, and his wife, Colleen, serves on the David Thompson health authority board. Cecil and I had lunch today, and we discussed the CAIS program, the interim Métis harvesting agreement, sour gas exploration, and other easy issues such as these. I'd ask my guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of Panties Productions, who are taking their original production of *Burlesque* to the Alberta Scene in Ottawa. *Burlesque* is the story of the British comedienne Lydia Thompson and the introduction of the all-female extravaganza to America, which is particularly appropriate today, being the anniversary of the legislation giving women the vote in Alberta. They are sitting in the members' gallery. The writers and performers of *Burlesque*, by the way, were nominated for two Sterling awards this year as well as being the hit of last year's Fringe, so I would ask Jocelyn Ahlf,

Belinda Cornish, and Celina Stachow to please rise and the artistic team and crew, Jesse Gervais and Tomas Brabec, also to join them. If you would all please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I have a second introduction for you today, Mr. Speaker, another very special guest, and that is Mark Meer. Mark is best known to Edmonton audiences as Susanna. Her show, *Oh Susanna*, has become an institution in Old Strathcona's Varscona theatre. Hosted by Mark as Susanna Patchouli, this Euro-chick variety show features interviews, municipal gossip, local musicians and actors, plays by children, grilled cheese sandwiches, and all kinds of fun. I would ask Mark to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you two combined groups from another fine school in my constituency of Edmonton-McClung. This time it's Ormsby elementary school. Today we have 51 visitors on their tour of the Legislature. My grade 6 friends are accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Linda Vanjoff and Mrs. Alana Eaton, teacher assistant Miss Megan Grainger, teacher assistant Miss Rushika Fernando, teacher assistant Miss Carole Desranleau, and two parents, Mrs. Brenda Johansen and Mr. Barry Olsen. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe our guests are in the gallery as yet, but we will recognize them when they enter soon. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 15 members of the Red Hat Society. Their group leader is Ms Isabel Maltby. They're the first chapter of the Red Hat Society in Fort Saskatchewan, which is an international society promoting fun amongst all 50-plus aged female members. This international society is now present in 20 different countries and 49,000 different chapters. This local chapter calls themselves the Crimson Chicks. If they are in the gallery, I'd ask them to rise, and if not, we will recognize them when they enter the gallery a little later.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, because of the historic nature of today, I'm going to give my historic comment now. On April 19, 1916, an act to provide for equal suffrage received royal assent in Alberta. The bill gave women absolute equality with and the same rights and privileges as men. That was for the first time in Alberta. It was also for the first time in what was then known as the Commonwealth. Women were allowed to vote in provincial elections and hold provincial office.

Since June 17, 1917, when the first two women, Roberta MacAdams and Louise McKinney, were elected as Members of this Legislative Assembly, 56 women have served as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, including the 13 currently sitting as members today.

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to

introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly two guests in the members' gallery who are here in Edmonton for a trade show and workshop. They operate Hang-Ups, a photo and art framing business in Lethbridge and Carmangay. Would Nancy Allen and Sean McFarland, the son of the Member for Little Bow, please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Municipal Infrastructure Program

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This provincial government has had a long history of fighting with the federal government over the notion of receiving money with strings attached, yet the same government then turns around and treats municipal governments in Alberta with the same Big Brother mentality. It is the height of Tory hypocrisy. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Given that this government has announced that municipalities will have to vet spending plans for infrastructure funding through the Minister of Municipal Affairs, is it the intention of this government to micromanage infrastructure plans made by elected municipal governments?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quite the opposite. At the announcements that were made on Thursday, with the minister of infrastructure and myself in attendance, we made it abundantly clear that the program is to be as flexible as it possibly can be, that the priorities are to be established by locally elected councils, but that we wanted to have an opportunity to ensure that the priorities of the program were directed towards basic infrastructure and that the basic infrastructure was taken care of before moving into issues such as recreational facilities. We're trying to ensure that someone doesn't build a rec centre and then come back a year later and advise us that their sewer system needs upgrading.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that the infrastructure money provided for municipalities only addresses the infrastructure debt created by years of downloading provincial responsibilities onto our cities and towns, does this government have any plan to provide long-term, sustainable funding for Alberta's municipalities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three billion dollars is a lot of money in anyone's books. Municipalities appreciate the fact that this is one-time funding, but we've also indicated that we hear their concerns with respect to long-term, sustainable funding. This is an opportunity for us to engage in that discussion and over the next five years, hopefully, come up with a resolution to long-term funding. In the meantime \$600 million a year for five years is a very significant portion of that discussion that needs to take place.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: does this government have any plans to increase the autonomy of

Alberta's municipal governments, reflecting the fact that they are themselves democratically elected government bodies?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I indicated on Thursday, when I was asked the same question in Calgary, that I'm prepared to have that discussion. I'm not prepared to give the answer at this point, but I'm certainly prepared to enter into that discussion. I think it deserves some discussion.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Social Assistance Rates

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government gave \$45 million to horse racing in the budget but not one extra dime to poor families needing social assistance. Poor families have seen inflation erode their meagre rate by almost 40 per cent since 1993, when this government cut the rates by 20 per cent. All religions call for assistance for the poor, and many cannot work. This government only grudgingly respects that. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. With surpluses mounting, can this government pause to think of those in need and give an increase to those on social assistance like they gave to the ponies?*

Mr. Cardinal: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a reasonable question. Of course, I'm reviewing that whole situation of the 11,000 caseload we have where people are not expected to work. We are reviewing the caseload for the core benefits and also the shelter benefits. Since 1993, of course, there have been a lot of positive changes in relation to the welfare reforms. In fact, people have received health care benefits since then, and we normally provided for other needs such as daycare, work clothes, children's school expenses, utility hookups.

But going back to 1993 – and the member mentioned 1993 specifically, Mr. Speaker – that's when this government announced the welfare reforms. That's when we had a caseload of 97,000, and 80 per cent of the people using the welfare system were single people and couples without children. Our strategy was to move these people back into the workforce, and the money saved would be spent in the high-needs areas, including children's services and persons with developmental disabilities. Both of those have ministries now.

Mr. Backs: Time for an increase.

A question to the same minister: will this government encourage the needy to work by increasing the welfare personal income exemption from \$115 a month?

Mr. Cardinal: Of course, Mr. Speaker, we are always continuing to monitor the situation very closely. Any adjustments we can make to assist those people that cannot work of course our government will make. But anyone that's able to work and is on assistance will always also be given support to find jobs and stay on the jobs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A further question to the same minister: can this government tie our social assistance payments to something like its own market-basket measure instead of having our needy wait year on year, cap in hand, hoping for a pittance?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course, we always continue to

review the benefits, especially for those people in the high-needs areas, the 11,000 cases that are not expected to work. We review them very closely, and no doubt within the next three or four months we will be looking at some changes.

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

1:50 Oil Well Drilling on Crown Land

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent resource development on public land near Sawn Lake, Alberta, without proper approvals confirms what many Albertans already know, that the oil and gas industry calls the shots on resource extraction in Alberta. Neither the Minister of Environment nor the Minister of Energy, charged with regulating this industry, has indicated that anything unusual has occurred. Therefore, my first question is to the Premier. Do oil and gas companies require any prior government approval before trees are cleared, water reservoirs affected, and ecosystems irrevocably altered?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. Certainly, they just can't go in holus-bolus and start to raze the forests and drill. There are lots of regulatory processes to go through.

Turning to another issue, the preamble by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, the \$45 million to . . . [interjections]

Dr. Swann: Supplementary to the Premier: given that illegal oil and gas development is occurring presently near Sawn Lake in violation of the public trust, will the Premier please explain to Albertans why this is allowed to happen?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the situation, as I understand it, is under review. It's being investigated. I'll have the hon. Minister of Environment respond.

Mr. Boutillier: I would offer to the hon. member that if he is aware of any illegal activity that is in violation of Alberta law, Alberta regulation, I'd ask him and encourage him to please provide me with that. We will take swift action, immediate action, continuing to protect the environment that Albertans truly do value here in this province.

Dr. Swann: I'll be tabling more pictures today, Mr. Speaker, on that case.

Again to the Premier: will the Premier take steps to restore public confidence in our regulatory bodies by stopping development and fining the offending companies?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know the situation well enough to stop the project, but I will assure the hon. member that all rules and regulations must be met relative to drilling activities and the removal of trees.

Of course, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is working on a framework agreement relative to the development of traditional hunting grounds. Perhaps she would wish to respond.

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

Long-term Care Facilities

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Serious problems faced by vulnerable elderly and disabled residents in this province's long-term care facilities have been well documented over many

*See p. 855, right col., para. 11.

years. These include inadequate staffing ratios, the need for better training of caregivers, lack of government inspections, and an overreliance on private, for-profit providers. Yet these long-standing problems have largely been swept under the rug while the government off-loads more charges onto residents in these facilities. My question is to the Premier. How can the Premier claim that seniors are well taken care of in long-term care facilities when they can go three or even four years without a government inspection?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, if that is indeed the case, I would ask the hon. member to provide evidence of that kind of neglect to the appropriate ministers. As I understand it, yesterday the Friends of Medicare held a news conference sponsored by the New Democrats. That news conference was to call for higher standards and more staff in long-term care facilities. Lynda Jonson, the spokesperson for the petition, says that she has witnessed staff and quality deficiencies in the system first-hand. Now, both ministers involved, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and the Minister of Health and Wellness, have offered to meet with affected parties to determine whether, in fact, this is taking place.

But I can tell the Assembly that improving long-term care is important to this government. We have been making progress. For example, we directed regional health authorities to raise the average hours of care each resident receives. This means more hands-on care every day for residents. But more importantly – and I think that this is the point that needs to be made – no allegation of abuse in publicly funded care facilities is ignored. None. As a matter of fact, we have put in place the Protection for Persons in Care Act, requiring mandatory reporting of abuse in care facilities. Every report is investigated. If they have evidence of abuse in long-term care centres, then report it according to the law.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, if long-term care facilities are indeed a priority for this government, why does the Premier not know how often they are inspected by government inspectors?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, again, according to the law, will the New Democrats obey the law – obey the law – and report?

An Hon. Member: Answer the question.

Mr. Klein: The answer to the question . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I don't need a lot of chatter from the other side. I don't need a lot of chatter from the Liberals or the New Democrats.

Mr. Speaker, if there are allegations, according to the law, will those allegations be reported to the appropriate ministers?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier tell the Assembly, once he has familiarized himself with the inspection regulations for our long-term care facilities, what action he will take to beef up inspections at those long-term care centres and assisted-living facilities? That's the question, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Klein: To answer the question, Mr. Speaker, I really don't know, but I will have the appropriate minister or ministers respond.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Métis Hunting Rights

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For several weeks reports have been circulating that numbers of bighorn sheep have been

killed by Métis hunters just outside our national parks ostensibly for subsistence reasons under the protection of the interim Métis harvesting agreements. These agreements allow Métis to hunt, trap, or fish for subsistence reasons and allow “the occasional sharing of wildlife or fish between Members,” but they do not address the issue of taking animals for other than their meat or the sale of animal parts, which is restricted under our Wildlife Act and regulations. My first question is for the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Given the fact that the bighorn sheep is the official mammal of Alberta and is a species at risk throughout much of its range and that trophy heads are extremely valuable, can the minister advise what mechanisms are in place to track the number of bighorn sheep that are being killed and to ensure the preservation of the gene pool in this treasured symbol of Alberta?

Mr. Coumts: Mr. Speaker, our role in Sustainable Resource Development is definitely to manage the resource, and we do that by constant monitoring and enforcement of the resource. We have been monitoring aboriginal harvesting activities since the 1930s, and we have several systems in place that assist us in doing that.

I can report to the hon. member and to this House that all male bighorn sheep must be registered by all hunters, including aboriginals. During the last hunt and up to the end of March there were 145 bighorn sheep taken in the province, and I can report that of those seven were reported taken by Métis hunters.

Dr. Brown: My supplemental, Mr. Speaker, is to the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. What sort of lists or tracking mechanisms exist to enable peace officers to know who is a bona fide Métis recognized by the Métis Nation of Alberta or a Métis settlement member?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, there are a number of ways that this is going to be done. Under the agreement we have, the Métis Nation of Alberta as well as the Métis Settlements Council will use their best efforts to advise members that when a member is subject to an investigation by Alberta officials of a potential harvesting offence, the member will identify himself or herself as Métis. When they have done that, Alberta will examine that the harvesting has been done in accordance with this interim agreement, and if that Métis harvesting has been done in accordance with this interim agreement and applicable legislation and regulations, Alberta will take no further action. However, should that not happen, then the applicable legislation and regulations will occur.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to talk about what kind of format will follow. There will be 45 days of . . .

The Speaker: Hon. minister, the rules prohibit legal interpretations.
2:00

Dr. Brown: My second supplemental, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Will the minister ensure that any new agreement with the Métis includes a provision specifically forbidding the sale of any animal parts taken under the Métis harvesting agreement?

Mr. Coumts: Mr. Speaker, under the provincial Wildlife Act we can prosecute anyone who tries to sell wildlife. It is illegal to sell wildlife and its parts regardless of who you might be. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development makes sure that it takes the lead in the continued negotiations with the Métis, and conservation is the key part of those particular discussions.

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

School Closures

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Accountable, responsible government is a precious commodity, one that seems to be scarce in Alberta. This government is eager to take credit for the oil and gas found in the ground but continues to avoid responsibility for public school closures. Closures are happening as a result of the policy guidelines and funding decisions of this government. My question to the Minister of Education: does the minister take no responsibility for the looming closure of four valued schools in Edmonton?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, funding for education in this province just increased by 7.1 per cent. A year ago today it increased by over 6 per cent. Two years ago today it increased by over 5 per cent, and I expect that it will increase by similar amounts in the years to come because we have an outstanding education system, and we are investing wisely in it.

With respect to the school closure issue, I have addressed that issue in this House countless times, and I'm going to address it yet again. If you carefully read through the regulations and the School Act, you will see that school closures and rumours to that effect are entirely at the whim of the local school board. You have former school board members in your caucus and in the NDP caucus. Why don't you talk to them about how the school closure process works? In that way, you'll find out.

Mr. Flaherty: To the same minister: can the minister update the Assembly as to whether proper documentation was provided to parents involved in the school closure meetings, or is the minister not interested in enforcing his own regulation?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, there are two questions there. Take either one.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the issue that I think the gentleman is referring to has to do with probably the cluster studies done by the Edmonton public school board. Now, as the member would I hope know, there is a set procedure and there is a set standard of information and timelines and time frames and so on that has to be adhered to and followed. To the best of my knowledge any time a school board undertakes a school closure process – it can take up to a year – they follow those particular guidelines. If the member has some indication that certain documents that ought to have been provided were not provided, then he should talk to the school board in question about that issue.

Mr. Flaherty: Parents need help.

A supplemental: what resources is the minister prepared to provide so that principals can work effectively with parents, who need to understand the long-range plan for renewing and building schools? What help will he give them?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, the cluster study included ample opportunities so far, perhaps more to come, for parents to have input. I assume that as part of their process there was a healthy exchange of information. If parents want more information, all they have to do is contact the school board or their trustees or the school superintendent's office, and they'll get that information. I don't know what information was provided by whom on what date for what purpose. It's all clearly spelled out, and each school board is

expected to follow that process. I would encourage the member to become more familiar with it.

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

Mount Royal College

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Advanced Education. People across the province, including my Calgary constituents, are concerned about access to postsecondary studies. Many are calling for Mount Royal College in Calgary to become a university in order to ensure that Calgarians have access to postsecondary education. In fact, this week there has been a letter-writing/petition campaign in the city of Calgary further calling for this to happen. My questions, as I said before, are to the Minister of Advanced Education. Can the minister advise us whether Mount Royal College has met all the requirements to become a university?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There isn't a set outline of criteria to become a university. It's not something that happens every day. There's no set procedure or process. What I can advise the hon. member is that we do have under the Post-secondary Learning Act the Campus Alberta Quality Council and that institutions that wish to offer baccalaureate degrees can apply to the Alberta quality council for approval of their degree program. The Alberta quality council will look at the institution to see whether it's capable of delivering the program and look at the program to see whether it qualifies for a baccalaureate degree and in that way ensure quality in the process.

We have committed, Mr. Speaker, to looking at the request from Mount Royal in the context of a process, an overall review of the postsecondary system, to determine whether moving Mount Royal from a college to a university is the appropriate way to go: what value it adds to the system, what value it adds to students in Calgary and southern Alberta and all of Alberta, what problems it creates and how we deal with those issues.

Mrs. Ady: Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the same minister. Has the minister discussed this approach with the officials at Mount Royal College, and are there other things that they could be doing in order to promote their request?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I have had a number of discussions with both the chairman of the board of Mount Royal and with the president of Mount Royal College. We have had discussions about their time frames, what would be helpful to them, what process they want to proceed with, and they understand the process that we're proceeding with, which will be a review of the system in the context of the overall system across Alberta. There are a number of decisions, not all of the same magnitude of the Mount Royal college/university issue, a number of issues that need to be decided in the context of that system review, and we will try and complete that review by the end of October this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

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

Youth Residential Drug Treatment

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The new money for youth drug treatment centres in Alberta is important for the care of children. The opposition agrees with the government that new spaces are needed. Our only concern is with the funding disparity for new spaces. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why is the facility in Calgary being appropriately tendered while the ministry is funding a new facility here in Edmonton without tendering?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wasn't aware that there was a difference in how the facilities were being acquired, but I will say that with the approval of Bill 202 we are looking at how we treat the youth. We're looking particularly at the emphasis in this legislation relative to detox and assessment, and we will be assessing our plans for how we advance what was in the budget, which was sufficient money to add some 34 staff in two locations to provide voluntary supports for youth. This new capacity to look at mandatory assessments will mean that I've instructed our deputy to take a full review of what our plans are and to see how we make sure that we have healthy protocols in place for these affected children.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:10

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. To the same minister: has the minister looked into the possibility of using existing programs in the Edmonton area rather than starting up a new program?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we've had an incredible example of the constraints that parents find themselves in when they have children with crystal meth addictions, for example, and they are looking to us to find new ways to treat their children and to respond to the needs of the children. So although there may be some capacity in existing facilities – and I won't suggest that they will not be used – the answer I've just given and will continue to give is that currently we are reassessing what our options are, taking a look at how we best provide for those children. In that case, the facility in Edmonton may be appropriate, but we also have to make sure that certain criteria are in place to make sure that it's secure.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. To the same minister: how are the 12 treatment beds being allocated in the seven other health regions outside Calgary and Edmonton?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, we will be developing a plan around that. Of course, those are voluntary beds. Again, when we have an opportunity for a review of what this new legislation can mean in terms of providing a comprehensive, well-structured plan, well-trained staff in place with the youth, when we take a look at what this new legislative piece will do, we'll be better able to answer how we will address other bed needs throughout the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Federal Gas Tax Agreement

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the province of British Columbia and the federal government signed an agreement to share federal gas taxes with their municipalities. My question to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation is this. Why hasn't Alberta signed a similar agreement?

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have been negotiating with the federal government and doing a very good job at negotiating with the federal government. I think what has happened in the past couple of weeks has added a sense of urgency to this. With the potential for an upcoming election in the federal government I think there certainly is a sense of urgency to get this signed. Indeed, I have been in communication with Ottawa, and we hope to have this signed within the next two weeks. We will be the second province in Canada to have this signed and, as I say, hopefully within two weeks.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is good news.

My supplemental to the same minister is: how much will Alberta municipalities get once that agreement is signed?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, the nice thing about this is that it is very sustainable funding. It's over five years and very sustainable funding. It starts off at \$40 million for the first two years, goes up to \$80 million, and then \$159 million for the fourth and fifth years. So the stability, the sustainability, certainly is there. There have been some musings that it will go on beyond five years, but we really haven't seen anything final to that.

It is good news. Even though it's not as much money as we gave the municipalities, it certainly still is good news.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, also to the same minister: how will those funds be distributed to our municipalities?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, one of the big things that we want and one of the things we do in this government is that we ensure that the bureaucracy is kept to a minimum, so we're going to be distributing it in exactly the same way as we've done our municipal infrastructure program. Certainly, there will be a ceiling for those small communities, and everything else will be delivered on a per capita type of arrangement. This has been an arrangement that has been accepted by the AAMD and C and the AUMA. Certainly, we want to ensure that as much money as possible goes out to the municipalities and is not used up in bureaucracy.

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

Parks and Protected Areas

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government has renewed its commitment to repairing decaying infrastructure in Alberta's national parks, which account for 8 per cent of our provincial land use. The provincial government, to its credit, is also starting to repair parks and protected areas, which together make up 4 per cent of Alberta's heritage land. A large portion of this year's Community Development parks and protected areas infrastructure budget will again be spent on restoring Canmore's world-renowned Nordic Centre. My questions are all to the Minister of Community Development. My first question: approximately what portion of the remaining money will be spent on reopening closed conservation offices and rehiring officers? Just ballpark.

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, this would be a more appropriate question to be asking in Committee of Supply. The hon. member knows or

ought to know that that is scheduled for the evening of the 11th of May, day 24 of Committee of Supply. I can share with him the broad numbers that are contained in the budget, which he has a copy of, and I would refer him to page 82 of that budget, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. Minister of Community Development: approximately what percentage of parks and protected areas will have their trails, buildings, and downed border fences restored?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, in approaching the issue of how to restore our parks to the kind of condition that they ought to be in, we've got to do it on a priority basis. It won't be done on the basis of a percentage of how many we'll be able to get done. There are some areas that remain in very, very good condition, that don't require any capital upgrades.

The long and the short of it, Mr. Speaker, is that I appreciate the hon. member bringing attention to the fact that we are making this effort. As an example, sir, under Capital Investment in program 5 on page 82 of the budget we are moving our gross expenditure to \$41.1 million. That is up from approximately \$9.36 million. So clearly a large investment, a significant increase, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Again to the hon. Minister of Community Development: will this government commit to a freeze on public land sales while setting aside more land for parks and protected areas?

Mr. Mar: Sir, that is not within the purview of the Minister of Community Development.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Abortion Services

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Women in northern Alberta are understandably concerned by Capital health's decision to no longer provide abortion services at the Royal Alexandra hospital effective May 13. This essential service should be provided in a public facility, and access should not depend on a sole, private provider. Waits for abortions are already two to three weeks, and longer waits simply are unacceptable. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What action will the government take to keep the Royal Alex clinic open so that women in Edmonton and northern Alberta requiring this time-sensitive procedure are not forced to endure even longer waits?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, Capital health, as they are delegated to do, made the decision to assign to a private clinic the responsibility for abortions for a very good reason. They wanted to accommodate in vitro fertilization at the Royal Alex and have made accommodation to do so. It is their expectation that the staff at the private clinic will be increased to accommodate the increased volume of traffic. In speaking with the chief executive officer of the Capital health authority this morning, I'm understanding that once the new facility is constructed at the Royal Alex hospital, once again medically necessary abortions will be performed in this publicly funded hospital.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: what steps will the government take to work with Capital health on a longer term plan to make abortion services available in a public facility rather than having women depend on an uncertain future of a single, private clinic?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, up until this point the Royal Alex has been providing the service. The clinic has got an excellent track record for providing service, has been accessible to women, and has been doing an exceptional job of counselling, so in fact the women in northern Alberta will not see a reduction in service or in service quality. I've already stated that the opportunity for public facilities to be used in future is part of their long-term plan. Currently they are making this kind of accommodation so that another needed service in northern Alberta for women, that women are asking for and that is important because this in vitro fertilization is an extremely important benefit of new technology – they want to accommodate it as well, and this is the best place for it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A further question to the minister: what steps will the government take to ensure that women in northern communities like Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray are able to access abortion services closer to home, putting a stop to the extra expense and delays involved with making a long trip to Edmonton?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's in fact an excellent question. The regional health authorities, especially in outlying areas, have challenges relative to the volumes of traffic that are there, and we've had an excellent presentation from Fort McMurray, from Wood Buffalo relative to their needs. We have been working with staff through Alberta Health and Wellness, with even the Capital health region to look at whether there are any linkages we can make with Northern Lights. For these outlying districts to provide the same level of service might not be practical, but we are working with them to ensure that as much as possible we provide the medically necessary services, and hopefully in the future we'll be able to abbreviate some of the wait and the inconvenience for people in outlying regions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

2:20 Benefits of SuperNet for Rural Alberta

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Access to the SuperNet will be a great benefit to rural Alberta in multiple applications. Telehealth used in conjunction with the SuperNet will allow for echocardiograms, MRIs, or dermatology images and pictures to be sent across the province to a number of leading physicians to provide the most accurate diagnosis without having a patient drive, as mentioned, hundreds and even thousands of kilometres to see their physician face to face. The technology is ready to help assist rural Albertans obtain the best the health system has to offer. We need the information infrastructure to be in place. My first question is to the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. What steps is the minister taking to ensure that SuperNet stays on track and doesn't fall further behind, preventing remote rural Alberta from having access to health services and health professions urbans living . . .

The Speaker: I think we got the gist of the question.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is certainly right. The SuperNet will be of great benefit to rural Alberta. It's good to know the construction of the SuperNet is at a point where the challenges of building 12,000 kilometres of broadband technology are behind us. In fact, 36 Alberta communities were connected to the SuperNet just last week, bringing the total to 201. That's exactly half of the 402 communities to be connected. But halfway isn't good enough. Bell and Axia are well aware that I intend to continue holding their feet to the fire with penalty provisions for construction delays that include a \$100 million performance bond. As such, there's no reason to believe our deadlines won't be met for rural Alberta. The SuperNet will truly be part of our centennial celebrations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. When SuperNet is completed and all rural communities have high-speed telehealth transfer capabilities, will mobile MRI units be introduced to provide approximately 300,000 rural Albertans access to leading-edge diagnostic services?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's certainly entirely a possibility. When I first received the opportunity to serve in this ministry, there were health authorities, health board chairmen that were telling me they were working in that direction. Alberta Health and Wellness is working with the radiologists and with the authorities to determine how best to provide standards of support for introduction of either mobile MRIs or some other capacity for regions to be sure to access the service. Currently if these tests are needed, doctors define the priority, and nobody is denied access to an MRI.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister of health also please tell us what other high-tech programs and services her ministry is looking into to help deliver high-quality health care to rural Albertans?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, Alberta telehealth provides service in 260 sites. Thirty clinical areas, including diagnosing lung cancer, monitoring heart and dialysis patients, and responding instantly to emergencies, are available. We have the leading record in Canada for our electronic record. We have 9,000 linked to the electronic record, and we are already seeing an impact in the reduction of duplication of tests. We know that our system is safer, and I think that we've advanced more in rural Alberta than they have in any part of Canada.

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

Insurance Rates for Small- and Medium-sized Businesses

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Small- and medium-sized Alberta businesses are being plagued by the escalating costs of all types of insurance: automobile, commercial, life, and disability. The government's auto insurance reforms, while chaotic in nature, have at least provided some minimal relief. However, they apply only to privately owned and operated vehicles and do nothing to address the concerns of Alberta's small-business owners. My question is for the

Minister of Finance. Why did this government make the choice to do nothing to protect small- and medium-sized businesses from skyrocketing auto insurance premiums?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, insurance is sold in this province under the private sector. When we looked at automobile insurance reform, we looked at the portion of automobile insurance that is compulsory in nature, thus saying that you cannot operate a vehicle in this province if you do not carry public liability and property damage. So it was very appropriate that the government ensure that insurance that we require people to carry be available to them at a reasonable rate, and that's, indeed, what automobile insurance reforms have done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the government undertake to review the property and casualty insurance issues affecting small- and medium-sized enterprises?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a concern, but surely the hon. member is not saying – well, maybe he is – that we should regulate all private companies and their operations. Should we not allow car dealerships to sell cars at a competitive rate? Should we not allow insurance companies to sell insurance at a competitive rate? It is a competitive business, and it is a business. We encourage people to shop around and make sure that they are getting the most competitive price for that. If I were to review property insurance, what would the review accomplish? That's my question. Perhaps the hon. member will enlighten me on where he's going with this in his next question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given outrageously high insurance premiums and reported record profits, will this government eliminate the hidden insurance premium taxes collected on all insurance premiums – all insurance premiums – paid by small businesses?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, there's a question I can answer, Mr. Speaker. Can I have the assurance that if we remove the 3 per cent tax on insurance, which partly covers the cost of regulating that industry in this province, the actual consumers will receive that benefit rather than the companies themselves?

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

Recreational Sport Fishing

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, a very wise man, who just happens to be my husband, always says that if you take your son hunting, you will never have to hunt for him; if you take your son fishing, you'll never have to fish for him. Thanks to this philosophy my family spent many happy camping weekends together, fishing the beautiful lakes and rivers of this great province. But something has changed. Many of my constituents are now going to B.C. and Saskatchewan to fish because the opportunities are much better there. My questions are for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What are we doing to support the fish populations in our lakes and rivers, and why are so many people leaving to fish in B.C. and Saskatchewan?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's lakes and rivers face the third highest angling pressures in Canada. We do have a tremendous sports fishery with about 300,000 fishermen. One-third of them don't pay for any fishing licences at all; they're either youngsters or seniors. We have a good fishery considering the fact that we only have 1,100 fish-bearing waters in the province as compared to 90,000 in Saskatchewan and many more deep lakes in British Columbia. Through our programs of conservation we really do have good success with ensuring conservation. I know that the hon. member is concerned about walleye fisheries in the province, and we've loosened up walleye regulations on 14 lakes in our province over the past two years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister: is fish stocking part of the solution?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, definitely fish stocking is a great part of our solution. We have a significant stocking program here in Alberta. There are about 300 waters that we provide fish stocking for, and 40 per cent of our recreational fishing comes from stocked waters. There are 3.5 million trout stocked in our province, and that's brown trout, rainbow trout, and brook trout. Natural populations, of course, are the most effective, but when trying to provide recreational fishing, we need to definitely have a stocking program.

2:30

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: given that revenue from fishing and hunting licences goes to the Alberta Conservation Association, does any of this money go to stocking fish in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Yes, indeed, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Conservation Association provides a tremendous amount of support to our provincial stocking program, and a breakdown of the revenue from fish and wildlife licences: 27 per cent goes to general revenue, 1 per cent goes to the Professional Outfitters Society, 22 per cent pays for computer systems for vendors, and almost 50 per cent goes to the association for fish and wildlife conservation. So a recent report from the ACA also shows that enhanced stocking involved 67 water bodies in Alberta and more than 118,000 trout in addition to many other fish programs in the province.

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

Edmonton Remand Centre

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The protection of basic human rights in Alberta applies to all people. In fact, the human rights act states quite clearly that "recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all persons is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace," quite powerful words that apply to all, including those housed in remand centres. My question is to the Solicitor General. Last week the hon. minister stated in regard to the Remand Centre that "these are corrections facilities for criminals." Can the minister explain if the people housed in the Remand Centre are included as all guilty of an offence, or does section 11(d) of the Charter of Rights of Freedoms apply?

The Speaker: Okay. For about the sixth time now in the last

number of days I'm going to say that the question period is not the place for legal interpretation.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The question the hon. member raised is that the Edmonton Remand Centre does house individuals that have been through court or are making their way through the court process. They're remanded into custody by a judge until their court case is before the courts. So, clearly, they have their rights with them. They have the ability to meet with a lawyer, discuss their cases with a lawyer, but they're there in a remand situation not as an offender.

Mr. Agnihotri: My first supplemental is to the Minister of Community Development. Given the well-documented Third World conditions at the Remand Centre, that constitutes a violation of human rights, will the minister investigate these abuses of human rights that are occurring at the Edmonton Remand Centre? It is the responsibility of the government to protect all Albertans.

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, it is not known to me what conditions are like in the Third World, and to try and compare them to the Remand Centre is, I think, a very, very difficult thing to do.

What I can say, however, is that the Human Rights Commission operates at arm's length from government. The government does not direct the Human Rights Commission in any way, shape, or form. It serves as a quasi-judicial function and as an administrative body determines its mandate and its process for investigating complaints that are filed against it or to it by, for example, in the case suggested by the hon. member, somebody who is in the Remand Centre.

I'm certain that the Human Rights Commission will take appropriate steps and process to investigate such things if somebody makes such a complaint.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: can the minister explain to the two men who were raped by the same inmate while under the government's custody why this government failed to protect their fundamental rights?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a confusion with respect to responsibilities. In this particular case the hon. member has talked about a criminal activity that took place on the site of the Remand Centre. So it's an appropriate step that the individual involved as a victim has redress by filing criminal charges. In any case where there is a criminal activity that is taking place – it matters not whether it's in the Remand Centre or outside of the Remand Centre – the appropriate steps are to be tabled by filing charges. It is not a matter of human rights in this case.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Gaming to supplement an answer.

Social Assistance Rates

(continued)

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier in question period in a question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning in his preamble he made a very inaccurate statement that the government was giving money to Horse Racing Alberta. The true fact is that Horse Racing Alberta has the ability to earn money – earn money – at the racing entertainment centres in four locations in the province.*

Based on the amount of entertainment money spent at those racetracks, a portion of that money is earned by Horse Racing

*See p. 849, left col. para. 5.

Alberta. As well, a portion of that money flows into the Alberta lottery fund to the benefit of all Albertans and many communities.

I would also point out that the economy of the province of Alberta benefits to the tune of nine times what they are able to earn at those racing entertainment centres.

The Speaker: As per our practices the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has a supplemental question to ask if he chooses to.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The interest of Albertans is clear in any monies that are spent by Albertans, and certainly the monies from lotteries are included in the budgetary monies. My question is to the minister. Because of this large number, \$45 million given to horse racing, that could be given to other areas and, of course, is brought from all these realistic monies that are coming from raising funds that could go elsewhere, why cannot some of this be given to the poor families of this province?

Mrs. McClellan: I'm going to make one more attempt at this, and I invite the hon. member to take part in our estimates and talk about the budgetary process.

The Minister of Gaming has clearly laid out that this money is not given to Horse Racing Alberta. In fact, they earn those dollars through the racing entertainment centres, Mr. Speaker. I invite the hon. members opposite to get more acquainted with an industry in this province that not only provides entertainment but provides jobs, many of them in the area in this city just northeast of this building. I would invite them to examine the jobs, the work they've done in education with a program for groomsmen at Olds College, the improvements in the backstretch, the child care programs that they have initiated, and look at an industry that has a proud history in this province and is making a very real contribution to the economy in this province.

The Speaker: There's only one supplemental question.

Hon. members, I'll introduce a number of members to participate momentarily, but might we revert briefly to the Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

The Speaker: All right. The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, and I think there's identification that's pretty obvious here, but please proceed.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the consideration of allowing me to reintroduce these very special guests. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 15 very special ladies from the city of Fort Saskatchewan. They're the first chapter of the Red Hat Society to be registered, and earlier I read more about their background. On their website they say: "There is fun after fifty . . . for women of all walks of life. We believe silliness is the comedy relief of life and, since we are all in it together, we might as well join red-gloved hands and go for the gusto together." I am so happy that you are able to stay here and rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Have a good look at their hats.

The Speaker: I think, though, an obvious correction must be made, hon. minister. There's not a lady up there over the age of 50.

The hon. Deputy Speaker.

2:40

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you Bea Niedersteiner, a co-ordinator, plus 30 other active seniors that are involved with the Didsbury District Community Bus Society. This trip to the Legislature today marks the very first trip for their newly acquired community bus, and hopefully they'll be able to get to use it many, many more times during our centennial year to tour our wonderful province. They're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: In just a few seconds I'll call on the first of six members.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Participation of Women in Politics

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta, home to the Famous Five, was in the forefront in extending political rights to women. Eighty-nine years ago on April 19, 1916, the Alberta Liberal government, led by Premier Arthur Sifton, passed the Alberta equal suffrage act, granting most, but not all, Alberta women the right to vote in provincial elections. They exercised this right in June of 1917 and elected Mrs. Louise McKinney and nursing sister Roberta MacAdams to the Alberta Legislature. For the first time in either a Canadian or British Assembly women were elected to serve as members.

In 1997 our province briefly led the country in electing women, with women holding 27 per cent of the seats in the Legislature. Unfortunately, this is the high mark in Alberta politics. Since then women have been rapidly losing ground, with only 13 women elected during the 2004 Alberta election, the lowest number since 1989.

This trend must be reversed. According to a survey released last fall by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada, 90 per cent of Canadians think electing more women will improve the political system. Canadians rank electing women higher than any of the other suggested reforms, including referendums and proportional representation.

If more women are indeed part of the solution to the burgeoning democratic deficit, Albertans are out of luck. In the last provincial election the Progressive Conservative Party offered only 12 women candidates, down from 17. Eleven of these were incumbents. We Liberals had 18 candidates, the same as last time, while the NDs managed to recruit 25 women candidates. Over half of the ridings in Alberta couldn't elect a woman even if they wanted to because all of the candidates were men. Unless there is a concerted effort by parties, pundits, nonpartisan groups, and electoral reform activists, Alberta's strong record of promoting women's political representation will be little more than a historical footnote.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, simply because the Famous Five were mentioned here today, I'd just give you an update. The maquette, the major statuettes that are located in Ottawa, a replica figure will be coming here shortly. We made the arrangements with the Famous Five Foundation to have them housed in this building for much of the 2005 centennial celebrations.

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

Youth Secretariat

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the spring of 1999 our Premier announced the formation of the Youth Secretariat, to be housed in the Ministry of Children's Services. The Youth Secretariat was developed to recognize the importance of youth in Alberta. Youth play a significant role in this province and have demonstrated to us that they are innovative and inspiring contributors. The Youth Secretariat allows government to communicate openly with young people and together identify and address youth issues. Youth have the expertise as well as the solutions. It is our responsibility to give them an opportunity to use their voices.

It is my honour to work for and with the youth of Alberta as the newly appointed chair of the Youth Secretariat. Together it is important to ensure that we have a solid youth perspective on all youth initiatives. In my conversations with youth, community stakeholders, and the ministry staff we have identified that the Youth Secretariat's priorities to date are illicit drug use, identifying gaps in services for youth, putting together a new Youth Advisory Panel, and working with other youth networks across Alberta.

It is quite evident that youth are committed to making realistic change for their peers who are confronted with addiction issues. We look forward to continued communication with young people as we develop effective solutions in this area. The Youth Secretariat will be assembling a new Youth Advisory Panel for Alberta. Youth input will be crucial in setting the direction for the Youth Secretariat in the coming year. I look forward to updating the members of this Assembly on Youth Secretariat activities and sharing the great work of our youth in effective change in Alberta.

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

Camrose Kodiaks Hockey Team

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night before a sold-out crowd of 2,200 the Camrose Kodiaks won the Alberta Junior Hockey League championships. They defeated the defending champion Fort McMurray Oil Barons 4 to 2 in game seven at the Max McLean Arena in Camrose. This is the third time in the last five years that the Kodiaks have won the Alberta Junior Hockey League championships. Led by head coach Boris Rybalka and assistant coaches Doug Fleck and Miles Walsh, this team of 24 up-and-coming hockey players came back from a 3 to 1 series deficit, staving off defeat by winning the last three games of the series.

The three provincial championships in the last five years are not their only accomplishment. In 2001 the Kodiaks won the Royal Bank Canadian junior championships. In 2003 they won the silver medal at the Royal Bank Canadian junior tournament. In 2001 and 2003 they won the Alberta/B.C. Doyle Cup. This is a very impressive record considering that the Kodiaks have only been in the Alberta Junior Hockey League for eight seasons. All Albertans are hoping this winning record continues when the Kodiaks first meet the Surrey Eagles this Friday in the 2005 Doyle Cup on their way to another Royal Bank Canadian championship to be held later in Weyburn.

The Kodiaks are owned and operated by the Camrose Sport Development Society, a nonprofit community organization whose purpose it is to promote and develop a strong sports program in the community. The Camrose Sport Development Society stresses the importance of combining a successful education with sport. Many of the Kodiaks of the past have been awarded scholarships to various universities.

The Kodiaks are proud to be members of the Alberta Junior Hockey League. The Alberta Junior Hockey League started in the

1960s with only five teams and now provides a high level of hockey for 15 Alberta teams throughout our province. The league itself encourages further education for all players, and it is an important part of our Alberta sport history.

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

Alberta: Land of Opportunity

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta, the land of opportunity. Alberta is the top destination for Canadian migration. Between 1996 and 2001 Alberta's net gain was around 120,000 citizens. In 2002 Alberta gained 18,000 newcomers. Last year alone 11,600 Canadians came, saw, and settled in this great land of Alberta. All indicators predict that this trend continues.

These are just numbers, but the real situation can be seen in the construction and expansion of residential communities, shopping malls, office buildings, warehouses, roadways, hospitals, schools, and many private and public facilities. The real situation can be felt in seeing the many happy faces at community events, the laughter of young children playing in the playgrounds, the waving of hands to new friends in the neighbourhood, the high traffic on the way to work, and the tasting of food varieties for dinner after a productive day.

In a recent newspaper headline it said: Alberta Is Number One Pot of Gold at the End of the Rainbow. I often wonder why Alberta has attracted so many hard-working people from many parts of the world and Canada. Positive can-do attitudes of Albertans plus sound governing policies must be the reason. The ancient Oriental proverb goes: good land, birds nest. May I say it politically, or rather Caofucius says: good government, people come.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is now like a well-disciplined and caring family, free of debt, living within its means. Without debt to pay, all of its incomes are dedicated to saving for the future and spending on essentials and growth development. All in all, Alberta is doing very well, but we cannot be complacent. We should keep on working together for this land of opportunity.

Thank you.

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

Pope Benedict XVI

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a most momentous day. Over one billion Catholics have a new spiritual leader with the election of Pope Benedict XVI.

At approximately 9:50 a.m. our time 115 cardinals from 52 countries burned their ballots from the fourth round of voting in the stove of the Sistine Chapel. White smoke, or, as they announce it, fumo bianco, poured out of Vatican City, signalling that they had come to a decision, and delighted crowds awaited, ripe with anticipation. Shortly after, Cardinal Jorge Arturo Medina Estevez appeared to introduce the newly elected pope, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. Cardinal Ratzinger addressed the thousands of people in St. Peter's Square for the first time as pope. He described himself as a humble worker in the vineyard of the Lord.

2:50

I cannot express how pleased all Catholics around the world are today. The College of Cardinals had the wisdom to elect a gifted theologian, a man who has been a very influential member of the Catholic Church. Joseph Ratzinger was formerly the archbishop of Munich and for many years the prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. He also sat as dean of the College of

Cardinals. He served in the papacy of John Paul II with dedication and is a very fitting choice to be our 265th pope and the first Germanic pope since the 11th century.

Without question Pope Benedict XVI has some big shoes to fill. Pope John Paul II was a great man and led the Catholic Church with wisdom and kindness.

I would like to congratulate the Catholic Church on the election of Pope Benedict XVI. I pray he will lead our faith and the world with the same wisdom, humility, and kindness as his predecessor.

Thank you.

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

Ken Fearnley

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We must express our gratitude to all those who provide affordable, safe, and secure housing for Alberta's seniors. One of the many not-for-profit organizations in Alberta that provide a secure and dignified way of living for seniors is the Greater Edmonton Foundation. The foundation has over 350 caring and dedicated staff, with an annual operating budget of \$15 million. This staff's prudent use of this budget provides housing to over 2,000 low-income seniors in Edmonton at 10 lodges and 10 self-contained apartment buildings.

Today I would like to recognize one of the many fine employees of the Greater Edmonton Foundation who recently retired after 13 years, Mr. Ken Fearnley. Mr. Fearnley was the chief administrative officer reporting to a board of directors appointed by Edmonton city council. Mr. Fearnley had a career that was outstanding as a public administrator. His dedication and commitment are an example for us all. At this time on behalf of all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly I would like to wish Mr. Fearnley and his family well in all their endeavours in his retirement.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank him for making our city, our province, and our respective communities a better place to live. His efforts do not go unnoticed nor unappreciated.

Thank you.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition signed by Albertans who are very concerned about the dangerous driving conditions faced by many workers in northern Alberta. In particular, the 428 people who signed are urging the government to "increase infrastructure development for funding Highway 63." This brings the total of this petition to 2,146 signatures.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise and present a petition from 108 Albertans in the fine communities of Rochester, Calmar, Rolly View, Sylvan Lake, Stettler, Clyde, and Edmonton. It reads:

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of around 1,350 signatures from Albertans who would like to see an increase in the number of caregivers per resident in long-term care facilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail received by my colleague the leader of the NDP opposition. The letter is from an oil sands worker who is concerned that bringing foreign temporary workers to work in northern Alberta will reduce his wages and prevent Albertans from being able to get their start in the trades.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies from a group called the Coalition for Alberta's Future, consisting of "five thousand citizens and families who own land in excess of 5-million . . . acres" and are seriously concerned about the need for reform and how the oil and gas activity is regulated in the province.

A second tabling, Mr. Speaker, if I may: the appropriate number of copies of photographs taken around the Sawn Lake area, where development has been occurring without permission.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling this afternoon, and it's a document inviting everyone to a school closure summit workshop, which is to take place this Sunday, April 24, at 1 p.m. at Duggan Hall at 37th Avenue and 106th Street. It is a meeting that has been organized to provide Edmonton public school board and, hopefully, this government "with input about the principles [that] should be used to guide" the public school closure process. It needs to be changed.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, it is my pleasure to table the appropriate number of copies of the fourth School at the Legislature Report Card 2003/2004. This is the Legislative Assembly educational program for grade 6 students cosponsored with community partners Capital City Savings, Priority Printing, and Access Media Group.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: Main Estimates 2005-06

Advanced Education

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to open Committee of Supply with a few remarks and then take the opportunity to answer questions from members with respect to the supply that we're requesting for the Department of Advanced Education.

Before I start those remarks, I'd like to introduce a number of people who are in the gallery to support me in whatever way they can, by signalling or waving or smiling or frowning or nodding or shaking or rattling or whatever it is that they can do to communicate with me, because we have a very, very dedicated group of people who work in and for the Department of Advanced Education, or, more appropriately, for the people of Alberta.

Having some familiarity, I think I can say that across government we have dedicated people working for Albertans. But I have to tell you that I am very impressed with and have had a great deal of assistance and direction from the people in Advanced Education. We've worked through the last three months postelection in a very truncated time frame, dealing with getting together the business plan for the newly constituted department, dealing with putting together the proposals, first of all, for the Premier's speech to the province at the beginning of February and then the throne speech and then Bill 1. This group of people and the people who work with them and for them have done yeoman service over the last three months and indeed through their considerable years of service to the province and to the people of this province.

3:00

I'd ask Dr. Bill Byrne, who's the deputy minister of the department, to stand; Phil Gougeon, the assistant deputy minister, adult learning; Shirley Dul, who's the assistant deputy minister of apprenticeship and industry training; Rai Batra, who we've just recently stolen from Community Development, who's the assistant deputy minister of strategic services; Gerry Waisman, who's the executive director of learner assistance – there's a man you want to know; he gives out \$480 million a year to Alberta students – Solomon Quarshie, acting director of financial services; and Michael Shields, director of communications. I'd ask them to stand because I want all members of the Legislature to be able to see what a wonderful team of people they have serving students in this province and advancing education.

Mr. Chairman, government has announced in Budget 2005 a strong commitment to advancing education that will go a long way towards addressing both immediate needs and future demands on postsecondary education in this province. These aren't just increases to line items in the budget. All these budget items are grounded in this government's overall 20-year strategic plan, a plan that's built on fiscal responsibility but one that looks to the long-term picture. This is a budget that puts wheels on that strategic plan.

This budget puts the leading in learning pillar into motion. Mr. Chairman, I would also say that although this is the Advanced Education department, we not only contribute to the leading in learning pillar but certainly to unleashing innovation, helping Albertans compete in the global economy, and above all making Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit. A key part of leading in learning is having a world-class postsecondary system based on accessibility, affordability, and quality, and this ministry has made concrete steps towards this goal by making it an integral part of our three-year business plan for advancing education.

Advanced Education's mission is for Alberta to be a learning society where all Albertans have access to the opportunity to develop the learning, work, and life skills that they need to achieve their aspirations and maximize their potential to the benefit of themselves and Alberta. To achieve this success, we've set out the four strategic priorities that will guide everything this ministry does

throughout the next three years. Those strategic priorities are leading in learning, one of the pillars in the government's 20-year strategic plan, so obviously it must be our ministry's main priority; access for all learners so that all Albertans have access to opportunities to achieve their aspirations and maximize their human potential; affordability for all learners to ensure that costs are not a barrier to a student getting an education; and quality and innovation. To be a leader in learning Alberta must continue to move ahead towards excellence.

All budget items are designed to address these strategic priorities and move Advanced Education toward succeeding in its mission, and that will ultimately move the Alberta government and Alberta closer to achieving our 20-year strategic plan. To that end, I'll go through the 2005 budget by looking at the four strategic priorities in the ministry's plan and key spending items under each area.

Leading in learning, a top priority in the government's 20-year plan, a key strategy in this ministry's three-year business plan. It's about the whole system. This includes all advanced education. Yes, university and college programs, but also literacy, trades and occupations, English as a Second Language, and other adult learning opportunities. That's the context for the 2005-2006 Advanced Education budget.

Over the next three years Advanced Education will increase its budget by nearly 30 per cent, or \$433 million, bringing the total program expense for the ministry to almost \$1.9 billion. This funding increase will begin immediately in the 2005-2006 year. Government is focused strongly on advanced education in order to leave a legacy of higher learning for the future, and a big part of that is making sure that the resource wealth that Alberta enjoys today isn't spent but is invested to help future generations of Albertans achieve their postsecondary aspirations.

That's where initiatives such as the access to the future endowment come in. In 2005-2006 the government will make a \$250 million initial payment towards the \$3 billion access to the future endowment. We asked Albertans what they wanted done with future surpluses, and they told us that advanced education was a priority. That's what this endowment fund is all about, Mr. Chairman: saving a portion of the unbudgeted surpluses for the future and investing them in a way which helps to create the future.

Another way we're preparing to lead in learning is by encouraging parents to save for their children's education through the Alberta centennial education savings plan. Funding for the Alberta centennial education savings plan in 2005-2006, its first full fiscal year, will be \$19.5 million. Mr. Chairman, the education savings plan has a greater good than just encouraging the parents to save for their children's future education. We know that people who have an expectation that their children will go to school have a greater degree of success in having their children go to school. By asking parents to consider opening an education savings plan at the birth of their child, we'll create the expectation at that child's birth that that child will go on to have an advanced education.

We're also increasing, Mr. Chairman, assistance to postsecondary institutions by more than 31 per cent, or \$382 million, over the next three years. That includes, as was requested by the postsecondary institutions themselves, sustained three-year budget increases of 6 per cent per year, or greater than 18 per cent, a \$205 million increase in base operating grants over the three years to enhance accessibility and quality instruction, \$90 million additionally in the access growth fund over three years to achieve the target of adding 15,000 postsecondary spaces, \$4 million annually to support degree-granting programs at private, not-for-profit colleges that weren't previously included. Funding to support operating costs of new

postsecondary facilities will increase from \$8.7 million in 2005-2006 to \$19.5 million in 2007-2008.

These line items will go a long way towards helping Alberta lead in learning, but as I've said before, more can be done. Does that mean more dollars? Better use of existing resources? New types of programs? We don't have all those answers yet, and that's why we're also undertaking a postsecondary education review this year. It will look at the funding issues. It will look at issues of affordability, and in fact it will look at the entire system.

Mr. Chairman, as I mentioned in the House earlier today, issues and decisions in the context of Mount Royal College versus Mount Royal university or other dramatic changes to the system have to be made in the context of Alberta as a learning society and what we need to have in place to make sure that we have the system necessary to make sure all Albertans have the opportunity to advance their education and that the education that Albertans can get here in our province will enable them to be world leaders.

The review will look at access and how we can make sure that there's a space for every qualified Albertan who wants to advance their education and how we can inspire Albertans to want to advance their education. In the meantime, Budget 2005 takes some very solid steps towards ensuring Albertans can find the postsecondary programs they want right here in their home province. As announced in the Premier's address in February, we're adding 60,000 additional student spaces by 2020. That's 15,000 in the next three years, 30,000 over six years, and 60,000 over 15 years. These spaces will be in universities and colleges and technical institutes, yes, but they'll also be in apprenticeships, in literacy, and in lifelong learning. Mr. Chairman, I can't emphasize enough that postsecondary education, or advanced education, is not just about the universities and colleges in this province. It's about every Albertan, wherever they're located in the province, being able to advance their education. It's about those Albertans who need to move to literacy as much as it is about those Albertans who want to move past the PhD.

As I mentioned, we're putting \$90 million in the access growth fund over three years to help achieve our targets. The government is also putting \$469 million into the postsecondary capital projects over the next three years, and \$17.6 million will be available in 2005-2006 to support a network of 180 community-based groups that provide access to programs such as family and adult literacy, English as a Second Language, and rural community programs in more than 80 communities across this province.

Mr. Chairman, I had the opportunity to speak to the community learning councils annual meeting and conference on Wednesday, just before the budget came down, in Calgary. There were probably 120 people there representing these 80 communities, many of them volunteers, many of them helping to make programs of adult learning available to Albertans in their communities. I want, again, to thank those volunteers and the people who work in that area because they help Albertans advance their potential.

We're also working very strongly to increase access in apprenticeship and industry training. It's a viable career choice for Albertans, helping Albertans meet the demand for skilled labour. Can't say it often enough, Mr. Chairman: a career in the trades, a career in the technology areas, in industry is a very, very viable career in this province and across the world. It's an area that we have to value as an advanced education because it is truly an advanced education.

3:10

Truly, there are very, very few places that you can work now that you don't need to have some form of advancement. I've said before even in the area of trucking, not to diminish that. That's a very good

career for those who want to do it, whose passion it is to drive. But if you want to be a truck driver, you need to know GPS technology, border crossing technology. You need to have skills and abilities.

In 2005-2006 there'll be a \$5.7 million increase for apprenticeship training, bringing the total funding to \$22.5 million. This funding will increase spaces in trades training to meet industry demands.

We want to also make sure, Mr. Chairman, that there are spaces in a high-quality postsecondary system at a cost that is affordable. We want to ensure that finances are not a barrier to a student getting an education. We're starting by addressing immediate concerns with a one-time \$43 million payment to postsecondary institutions to cover tuition fee increases this year. Scholarships, bursaries, and grants are a key to the student finance system, and we're increasing funding for scholarships, bursaries, and grants to students by \$7.5 million, to \$72 million this year. Also in 2005-2006 about 30,000 students will receive scholarships, including the new Lois Hole humanities and social sciences scholarship, that will provide \$5,000 to four postsecondary students.

Alberta's student finance system is a leader in the country, and this government expects to disburse \$105 million in student loans in 2005-2006. Mr. Chairman, \$105 million in student loans, but you add to that the \$32 million in learner assistance bursaries, \$48 million in maintenance grants and special-needs bursaries and the Alberta opportunity bursaries, and \$23 million in heritage scholarships, for a total of about \$200 million that is being provided to Alberta students from resources in this province and an additional \$270 million approximately that is managed by our learner assistance branch to provide over \$480 million to Alberta's students. That is a significant amount of money.

The combined federal/provincial yearly student loan limit is increasing to \$12,140 in recognition of increased costs for students. That includes a 2 per cent living allowance increase. Lifetime loan limits for programs of study will increase by \$10,000 for those programs that have not recently been adjusted. Undergraduate programs of study will go from \$40,000 to \$50,000. Masters programs will go from \$50,000 to \$60,000.

Alberta is also working to make sure that if a student must carry debt after graduation, the bulk of that is not Alberta debt. That's where the Alberta student loan relief benefit that I mentioned comes in. In 2005-2006 this program will reduce the debt of students in their first year of study by about \$32 million.

I'm pleased to say that according to the most recent national graduate survey, average university undergraduate debt in Alberta is the lowest in Canada, excluding Quebec. Quebec operates on a different type of system. It opts out of the federal finance system. Across the country, as I said, it's the national graduate survey which shows Alberta student loan debt the lowest in Canada. On average, Alberta graduates at all postsecondary levels have among the lowest debt, both provincial and federal, at graduation in the country. Of course, in addition to graduating with among the lowest net debt in the country, Alberta's strong economy and the lower cost of living allows graduates to pay off their debt more quickly than those in other provinces.

These are some of the ways that we're working to help our postsecondary students, and we're going to continue to find ways to ensure that finances, costs are not a barrier. Of course, affordability is a key part of the postsecondary review that we've promised this year. We're doing a lot of great things. We're continuing to find ways to be better, to do more, and to find innovations in the postsecondary system.

Final key strategy in the Alberta education business plan has to do with quality and innovation in advanced education. We want to continue to move forward to find newer and better ways of providing

world-class postsecondary education. The budget includes a \$12.8 million performance program to reward institutions for meeting their performance targets in terms of responsiveness, accessibility, affordability, and research. The performance envelope is something that government has provided in the past as a one-time funding item. Now we recognize this as a key to the quality of systems, so we're including it as a line item in the budget.

The government is also making strides in the area of apprenticeship with key innovations. We're increasing the availability of distance and mobile delivery of apprenticeship technical training, as requested by industry. For example, in the steam-fitter/pipe fitter trade we're working with the college system and industry to provide apprenticeship technical training at the camps in the Fort McMurray area where the oil sands workers are staying.

We're also implementing ATOMS, the apprenticeship trade and occupation management system, which will give clients and stakeholders access to apprenticeship and industry training services 24 hours a day seven days a week. The service can be used to register employers and apprentices, update employee information, register for training, pay fees. These initiatives will help to ensure that the apprenticeship system is even better and more responsive to students' needs in the future.

Mr. Chairman, this government has a plan for postsecondary education, and it's a plan we're working on in partnership with all advanced education stakeholders. This budget is part of an overall plan that melds the government's fiscal plan with its strategic plan for the future of the province. We're moving in new directions every day, and Advanced Education's budget and business plan is just a part of movement towards truly leading and learning, developing Alberta as a learning society.

Mr. Chairman, I've said it in the House before: Alberta has a great postsecondary system. We've built a solid foundation to ensure continued and future success. Our fiscal plan and our strategic plan will take it to the next level and position our system on the leading edge of advanced education anywhere in the world. The government will continue to work with all stakeholders in the system not only to determine our postsecondaries' immediate needs but to look forward to what postsecondary education in Alberta should aspire to; in short, to ensure that Alberta as a learning society makes Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit, unleashes innovation, ensures that we're leading in learning, and allows all Albertans to be able to compete in a global economy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and my thanks to the minister as well for that overview of the estimates for the Advanced Education ministry within Budget 2005. I think there are many good ideas in the works and many ideas that could be good, could be great and, hopefully, will be someday when they're properly funded. I think there are some ideas that are being held back from greatness by the level of funding being allocated to them.

Mr. Chairman, the minister said yesterday in question period that today I would "have all the opportunity in the world to explore and ask extensive and detailed questions" and maybe even get a lesson, if I wish, "in how the student loan system works and how remission works." So I will get to those questions, and I look forward to the answers.

I want to start out, though, just with a very brief quote from one of a number of e-mails that I've received over the last little while having to do with people's thoughts, stakeholders' thoughts on what would constitute an ideal provincial budget for postsecondary

education in the province of Alberta, their budget wish list, if you will. This comes from an instructor at NAIT who says:

Increased accessibility is a wonderful goal. However there is a "serious" need to increase base funding . . . to institutions to repair the damage done by years of neglect. So it is not the total monies that go to post secondary education . . . it is how the funding is directed and the strings that are attached.

With those comments in mind, some questions. I'd like to start around the area of base operating grant increases if I could because, as the minister knows and, I think, as the minister has probably been told by a number of the same stakeholders that I have spoken to over the last several months, the fundamental problems in the advanced education system in the province of Alberta, as great a system as it is and as great as it aspires to be, really need to be addressed by a substantial increase to base operating grants. Institutions' operating costs are going up by about 6 per cent a year. Rather than improving the situation, this increase apparently just keeps them treading water. They're still behind where they were in real dollar per student terms back in '92-93, before cuts to postsecondary education began.

But I wonder if the minister could redo the math for me, if he would, please. He talks about a total increase over three years of \$205 million, or a little in excess of 18 per cent. That's in the three-year business plan, and of course years 2 and 3 of the business plan are subject to potentially major revision once we get to writing the actual budget for those years. In the budget per se for 2005-2006 he commits to a base operating grant of \$81 million. Now, Mr. Chairman, \$205 million minus \$81 million is \$124 million, and divided by two, that's \$62 million a year. So it appears that there is some fairly significant front loading of the increase in base operating grants. It appears that the percentage increase in year 2 and year 3 will not keep up with what's being done this year.

3:20

By my calculation we're actually doing about a 7.2 per cent increase this year, so my question to the minister is: why has he taken this approach? Why not an across-the-board 6 and 6 and 6? Even better, why not 8 and 8 and 8? That would perhaps get us closer to actually getting our colleges and universities the money that they need to function properly over the course of the next three years.

Also, what I don't see addressed in here – I'm not sure, and perhaps the minister can enlighten me on this: where it would be introduced, whether it would be introduced within a budget framework or within legislation – is a gap in base operating funding between institutions in the province, between the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary. I think that needs to be addressed possibly via a base instructional unit approach, as they use in Ontario, and I wonder if the minister would comment on that possibly.

Now, program spending increases. The minister, yes, did say that program expenses over the next three years, should we stick to the business plan, will increase by \$433 million, or almost 30 per cent, to reach \$1.9 billion cumulatively, but most importantly we're here to talk about what will happen in this coming fiscal year. There program expenses will increase by \$196 million, but capital spending – and again I want to focus on this year. The minister rightly pointed out that over the next three years of the business plan, if we stick to it, we'll increase capital spending in postsecondary education institutions by in excess of \$400 million, but this year capital spending is apparently being cut by \$117 million.

Now, that's my reading of it. I wonder first of all if the minister agrees with my interpretation, and if he does agree that my interpretation is correct, I'd like to know why he's done it this way. If he disagrees with my interpretation, I'd like an explanation of how

things are really working because no matter how I crunch the numbers, it looks as though we have sliced capital spending for this year from last by \$117 million. So if we cut on the capital side by \$117 million and we add on the program side by \$196 million, we're really only ahead by about \$79 million for the fiscal year, and that's considerably less bang delivered by considerably fewer bucks than it appears on the surface.

If the minister could answer this, please: what would be the impact of this on the access plans to add 15,000 spaces by 2008? Perhaps the answer is in year 2 or year 3 of the business plan; I don't know. I refer back to a study done by and a request made by Campus Calgary, which is the coalition of the five postsecondary institutions in the city of Calgary, in which they've said that there is a need for almost 20,000 spaces in Calgary alone. They attached a cost figure of that of \$1 billion, and that, yes, would have been over five years. We compare that to this ministry's plans to increase access by 15,000 spaces province-wide over the next three years for, more or less, \$433 billion. So I guess my question there to the minister – there are a number of questions. What is the plan? How will the increase in spaces be funded by his ministry? Does the department have a full base of understanding of supply versus demand of students regionally; the 30 per cent gap in spaces between Calgary and Edmonton again?

Mount Royal College, as I understand it, continues to operate with 30 per cent unused capacity. If Mount Royal College was, in fact, a high school, under this government's utilization formula it might be skirting the danger of having to close because it has too much unused space. My understanding is that Mount Royal continues to operate with 30 per cent unused capacity while turning away large numbers of students every year because it has yet to get extra money for additional instructors to fill the classrooms that it added a couple of years ago with capital funding from this government. So capital funding is obviously very important, yet if you don't follow it with appropriate operational funding, you end up with unused classroom space. Given the space crunch in so many other institutions, it's a bit of an anomaly.

On the access growth fund and the increases to that, \$90 million over the next three years, I wonder if the minister can share with us some details of enrolment growth, expanded apprenticeship training capacity. How many of these spaces are real spaces? How many are virtual spaces? How far will the money go?

I'd also like him to address, if he would, Mr. Chairman, the question: why funding envelopes? I mean, the system forces universities to try and find ways to move money that's in the funding envelopes out of funding envelopes to pay for ongoing programs and other expenses that aren't really being met. I got this from an instructor at SAIT who said that one-off funding, which refers essentially to envelope funding, is no substitute for ongoing, reliable funding. Either the opportunity to use the money is lost, given the size of many of these projects and the lack of time to do proper planning and consultation before you have to spend the money, or more likely, it's not spent in the best way possible. He made the note in an e-mail to me that neither is acceptable to him as a taxpayer. So I think that's a good question that deserves an answer.

Still on the access issue, the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer, a question which, I hope, is not too far off topic. I think it relates here. If it doesn't, I am sure the minister will be pleased to tell me that it does not. Again using Mount Royal College just as an example, 50 per cent of Mount Royal students are in university transfer programs, but to this day there is no guarantee of acceptance to the University of Calgary in third year. Even if all other things are equal, if the Mount Royal student and the University of Calgary student have the same marks coming out of second year, no

guarantee that the Mount Royal student will be accepted in third year. That is an access issue.

On student loans. You've got \$105 million in student loan disbursements and \$35 million allocated to the loan remission program, so I come back to my question in question period yesterday. I would love and welcome and encourage clarification from the minister of the claim that virtually all the money that's provided by the provincial Students Finance Board from Alberta coffers gets remitted.

I would also like to remind the minister of my request yesterday in question period for documentation to support the claim that Alberta students end up with the lowest debt of any students across the country. We found out today that, in fact, that's the lowest for students across the country in any province except Quebec. Of course, given events in Ottawa and the fallout from that, one doesn't know from one hour to the next, but the last time I checked, Quebec was still a part of Canada.

The annual loan maximum. It was interesting and encouraging to me and I'm sure to a lot of students in this province to hear that among other adjustments to the student loan program there's a 2 per cent increase in living allowance, but I wonder if the minister could provide on a sort of – I know this is very, very difficult to do on an average basis, and I'm not sure whether I should ask for this by sector or by city or how. In fact, I'm going to leave it up to the minister to decide how to answer this question.

Could he provide us with some information, some more or less typical information, for a university student in the province of Alberta, which certainly means that they go to school in either one of two big cities or in the city of Lethbridge unless they're going to Athabasca? If that student requires the maximum student loan, how much money is left over for that student to live on after university tuition and residence fees have been paid? I'd like to know about that.

3:30

I'd also like to know a little more about the tuition rebate, of course, which is a one-time \$43 million expense. What happens next year after the one time is over? Many concerns from many people who have e-mailed me that it's going to mean, as Christine Johns, vice-president external of the Graduate Students' Association of the University of Calgary, said:

At the University of Calgary, tuition is still increasing to the maximum allowable amount. If nothing is to be done, in two years time students could be experiencing close to a 12% increase in one year . . . in order for Universities to even begin to think about not raising tuition to the maximum allowable level, [the university] needs a dramatic increase to base operating grants.

Some comment there. Knowing full well that the affordability review is coming, I wonder if we could get in advance of the review a little more detail of what the minister is thinking.

Finally, the access to the future fund and the \$250 million which is being put in this year. I suppose \$250 million is nothing to ever sneeze at except that it seems like such a shadow of the promise that was held out when the \$3 billion cap was mentioned in the bill itself. Where is the commitment beyond the minister's stated good intention and that of the Premier, who himself is one of these days or months or years going to step down, to put more of the \$250 million in? There is no commitment to do that in this budget that I can find. Maybe the minister can find it for me.

You know, the budgeted fund income for investment purposes in '06-07 and again in '07-08 is essentially \$11 million. It goes up a little bit, you know, in '07-08 because it's made a little interest on the interest, I guess, but again there's no more principal for it to be earning income on.

Since an endowment fund is supposed to produce proceeds to invest in, in this case, excellence in postsecondary education, this works out to an amount for investment in excellence that is equivalent to \$61 per student, or 16 cents per student per day, the equivalent of said student taking it upon himself or herself to return three empty pop or beer cans to the bottle depot each and every day, and at least the student knows that the bottle depot is still going to be around next year. So I wonder if I could get the minister to comment on future plans to grow this fund much more quickly, much more significantly, and in much more of a perpetual fashion than he has committed to thus far.

On that note, I will take my seat. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A number of good questions there. I hope I can read my writing, which is not always the easiest thing to do. Stakeholder thoughts; increasing across the board; serious need to increase base funding; how funding is determined; why 6/6/6 and not 8/8/8; where do you find the 6? The bottom line is that this budget provides for an increase in base operating funds of 6 per cent per year this year and in each of the next two. That's a promise. It's printed in the line. You'll very seldom find that these lines go down year over year unless something catastrophic happens. What you tend to find is that they go up.

The interesting thing is that institutions and many others in the province have asked for sustainable funding and have asked to know year over year what their funding is going to be. Well, the reality is that they have known year over year what their funding was going to be. They just didn't like the level of it. In fact, the year over year was 2 per cent, and that wasn't good enough. They told us so, and they were right. So it's moved to 6 per cent. They were expecting maybe 4 per cent.

I can tell you that the boards and the presidents that I've talked to are very, very happy with the level of base funding increase, both the amount this year and the amount committed over the three years. The 6 per cent is more than their inflation. It helps to cover the costs of unfunded students. It helps to cover some of the things that they've been scrambling on. They've asked, actually, that we do the funding in this way, that we look at increasing the base funding on an appropriate, sustainable, year-over-year level, and that's what we've done. We've done it at a level which is more than what they were expecting, more than what they were asking for. Indeed, in the global package it basically meets what the universities indicated in a letter to me they would like to have and would allow them to make some commitments with respect to access, which is what we wanted to go for.

Now, the other question that the member asked relative to funding and distributing base funding is the so-called gap or the allocation between institutions or between geographic regions. Of course, this is one of the strange things that has come forward over the last couple of years. People think that there ought to be a balance, as though a student were a student were a student, and that you can take a look at an institution and average the dollars over the number of students and say that some institutions are being shortchanged because their per-student average is lower than somebody else's per-student average. Of course, that's just a wrong way of looking at the world. Institutions have different students and different programs, and some of those programs have higher or lower expenses, so you have to fund on an appropriate basis.

The good news for the hon. member is that we're doing a funding review this year. We've promised every five years to do a funding

review. There's a funding review being done this year. If there are inordinate gaps in the way funding is allocated to institutions, that will be resolved. Every stakeholder, every institution will have the opportunity to comment on it, to participate in that review, and to ensure that their institution is fairly heard and fairly measured against what happens across the system.

We have to always look at these things, and in fact it's our role. In Advanced Education we don't actually deliver education. We provide the framework for the system and make sure that there's a system context and overall learning policy for the province, a way in which we can look at Alberta as a learning society. We work with the institutions and the community learning councils and the others to make sure that educational opportunities are there, that they're accessible, affordable, and equal. So when we talk about the gaps, first of all, one has to be careful about saying that there are more spaces in this place than there are in that place.

I hesitate to say Calgary and Edmonton because I don't want to get into parochial discussions about whether Calgary is doing better or whether Edmonton is doing better. The fact of the matter is that they're different places. They serve different populations, different geographic regions, and you can't measure it that way with any real sense of purpose. What we really need to do is to make sure that Alberta students have a place to go, an appropriate place for them to advance through education, and, if it's not here, that they have opportunities outside the province and can maximize their human potential. That's what it's about. It's not really about whether there are more spaces in Calgary or more spaces in Edmonton or those sorts of things.

I would ask the hon. member to take the broader view and to look at the system as a whole as to how we can make sure, working together, working collaboratively with the system, that we have the best system and we have an opportunity for every student that wants to go.

Capital spending, the whole mix of capital spending. I mean, when we get into this question of whether there are 15,000 spaces or 30,000 spaces, a lot of people tend to think: well, where are these students going to sit? Well, we have to build the 21st century campuses, the 21st century system, not the 20th century or, heaven forbid, the 19th century system. It's not about a new chair for every one of those 15,000 new spaces. It's about making sure that there's access, that there's a place.

That's going to be partly dealt with by e-learning opportunities. It's going to be partly dealt with by more apprenticeship spaces, partly dealt with by delivering mobile classrooms, partly dealt with by having courses offered at the campsite in Fort McMurray so that it's accessible to the workers there when they're off shift and able to take the learning side. It's about making sure that there's an opportunity in a small community to get ESL if that's what the need is or to have access to literacy programs if that's what the need is or a teacher training program or a nursing assistant program or a nursing program. You see opportunities where, for example, the University of Alberta has entered into arrangements with Blue Quill so that they had the first graduating class off campus of teachers from Blue Quill up in the St. Paul area. Those are the types of things we're looking at.

3:40

It's not about building two new universities. I mean, you talk about 60,000 new students, and you visualize it in the context of that meaning the size of two new universities. But you're not talking about actually building two new universities; you're talking about making sure that the spaces and the places are available. If you actually looked at the capital needs across the province, most of that

capital need is not in classroom space. Most of that capital need – and there is capital need – is in labs, is in space for academic staff. It's not the classroom space that's really in a crunch. In fact, if you had more instructors, you probably could utilize the classroom space much better.

The hon. member mentions Mount Royal College and the 2,500 spaces that are available. He expressed it as 30 per cent of the available space in Mount Royal College. Yes, we've got to take up that space. We've got to make sure that that space is appropriately used, as we do right across the system. So the single-point-of-entry process that we've promised in Bill 1, where people can apply online and have their application apply to all of the appropriate colleges or universities or technical institutes that they want to go to, will help us to make sure that we make the maximum use of the space. Also, the funding that's available will fund places in those institutions that if they have more space and more opportunity to offer courses and they have the demand, we can provide the funding to ensure that that happens.

Campus Calgary. Yes. In the process I would caution the hon. member with respect to the use of the number of 20,000 spaces, although over five years that may be an appropriate projection. There's been a lot of talk, particularly in Calgary, about the lack of access, and there's a significant amount of double, triple, and quadruple accounting in those numbers. There is a need for more spaces – there's no question about that – and this budget and this three-year business plan will address that in spades. But the global number that's been reported across Calgary in the media about the tens of thousands of spaces that are needed right now to accommodate students is not a reality. The reality is that it's probably closer to 2,000 or 2,500 spaces across the province of immediate demand that needs take-up, and that can be accommodated, I believe, within the resources that we've talked about.

We addressed the question of Mount Royal and its change of status, but Mount Royal can of course address space issues earlier on without the necessity of addressing the university issue, without impacting the decision on the university issue, and indeed can address the transferability issue by sitting down and working with other institutions in the system. There's no good reason why an agreement can't be made between Mount Royal and the University of Calgary or Mount Royal and Athabasca University – in fact, they have an agreement with Athabasca University – so that there can be an automatic transfer, automatic entrance if students achieve a certain level of standard. Of course, we don't tell the universities or the colleges what their admission requirements are, but given the admission requirements that they had, they certainly can work out an arrangement.

There is no good reason why Mount Royal students in a transfer program would not be able to know that there's a place for them if they successfully complete their transfer program. There is no good reason for that, and I will be working as a mediator or an arbitrator or in whatever type of process I need to to bring the system together so that there are no dead ends for anybody in the system. It's a ladder approach: people can take a course in one area and move to the next area. We have with the Council on Admissions and Transfer one of the jewels of the system across this country, indeed in North America, in terms of ensuring that people know where one course will take them into a next course or one program will take them into a next course. We need to do more on that because we ought to be in a position where every bit of learning that you do enables you to do the next bit of learning. That's certainly one of the agenda items for me.

Why funding envelopes? Well, purely and simply it's a good way to ladder, again, the system. The base funding is necessary,

absolutely. But if you put it all into base funding, sometimes you find that – and even institutions will tell you this – the pressures will drive the spending. So we want to make sure that there's money there for performance, there's money there for research, for example, and there's money in this budget which will help to provide some of the indirect costs of research. I think it's about \$12 million. We need to fund that directly to the places where that research is happening. So that's an envelope as opposed to a base-level budget item.

The student loans issue: \$105 million and \$35 million. What the hon. member ought to do is add those two numbers together, not subtract them, so \$105 million in student loans going out. That's not spending; that's an asset. It's converting cash to a loan asset, so it's not a spending item.

In addition to that, \$35 million goes out to students in student loan relief benefits. A first-year student in their first course of studies doesn't get a provincial loan; they get a federal loan. Once they've maximized the federal loan, the money that we would have given them as a student loan in their first year we now give them as a student loan relief benefit. So they don't get a debt; in essence, they get a grant. So \$105 million in student loans go out from the province; \$35 million additionally goes out in student loan relief benefit for first-year students in their first course of studies. I might say, Mr. Chairman, that in addition to that there is, and the line item that shows it – did I say \$35 million? Probably it's \$32 million this year on student loan relief.

But there's a total of \$80 million including that \$32 million which goes out for maintenance grants, special-needs bursaries, Alberta opportunity bursaries, achievement scholarships, and an additional \$23 million for the heritage scholarships. So the \$105 million and the \$35 million, just two of many numbers which add up to a whole lot of student relief and student assistance in this province. Then, of course, we add in the money that the federal government puts into the process, which is a considerable amount of money, and that means \$480 million going to students this year in this province for student assistance.

The loan maximum, asking about providing information for a university student: how much is left over? The programs provide for variable natures. Obviously, you have single students who are just leaving home, single students who are still living at home, married students, married with children – I guess that's a TV show or was. But there are many variables as to students and how much they get for cost of living. The long and short of it is that cost of living is often a lifestyle choice as much as anything. The question is: is there sufficient for a student to be able to afford appropriate living accommodation, appropriate food accommodation, appropriate supplemental living expenses?

The cost-of-living allowances are on the low side. Students raise that as an issue. The Students Finance Board has raised that as an issue. That's an issue we'll probably have to deal with, and I'm sure that's an issue that will come out loud and clear in the affordability review process, and it may be something that needs to be addressed over the longer term.

Again, I would go back to the fact that it is a variable expense. It's something that you can do a lot towards dealing with yourself as a student. For example, you can get a part-time job if you want to have a higher quality of life or a higher standard of living. You can do as many of us did when we were at university. I'm sure, hon. member, that when you went, you had to mitigate your living costs, so you probably shared accommodations, as I did.

I lived in a house where we had 15 students in the house. It only had four or five bedrooms, but there were 15 of us living there. In fact, the room that I lived in, there were three of us. I chose to live

in that room because, quite frankly, I couldn't afford a higher level of accommodation. But I did want to go to school, and I did want to live at or near the university instead of living with my aunt, so I made the choice to move out of my aunt's house. She lived in the west end. I moved into a fraternity house at the university, and I lived in a room with two other people. That was a quality of life choice that I made. It would have been a much, much, much better quality of life, if you measured it in terms of space and place, to live at my aunt's place. In fact, she would have made the meals. But those are choices you make.

I was chairman of a housing corporation at the university for a number of years, providing student housing for members of a fraternity and others who wanted to rent a place. It's interesting how the lifestyle choices change over time. Now you can't rent a double room very easily. People don't want to live two to a room. They like to live in a single room, and they need a place to plug in their computers and things like that. Things change.

The bottom line is that cost of living is important. The cost of going to school is something we need to look at. We need to do the affordability review. We need to make sure that it's not hazardous for someone to go to school, that they're not starving to death when they go to school. But there's a balance between how much society pays for the education and how much a student and their family pay. It's the students themselves who drive the question of the quality of life that they want or need to have in order to go to school. So that's a very important part of the equation. I don't say that to diminish at all the need to have appropriate cost of living, to be able to look at it across the province and say: how do we supplement it in areas?

3:50

Indeed, students can supplement across the province. If they live in a high-income area or a high-cost area like Fort McMurray, for example, they can always afford themselves the appeal route to supplement the amount of resources because their cost of living is higher than in other areas.

Tuition rebate. What will happen next year? Good question. Don't know. Would like to know, so we're going to spend a good year looking at it to say: what are the costs of going to school? What are the finances to go into those costs? How do we make sure that costs and finances are not a barrier to a student getting an education? Tuition is part of that package, but it's not the be-all and the end-all. Tuition is one of the costs. If you're coming from rural Alberta to a residential college or university in Edmonton or Calgary or even Lethbridge or some other place, the cost of living and the cost of travelling to school and the other costs are as big or greater a barrier than the tuition costs. So they have to be looked at in context.

The \$43 million that we put in this year was essentially to hold things steady for the year so we could have a focused review on the cost of going to school, and we've put in, as well, a substantial increase in the operating budgets for the institutions. So our clear expectation is – and I think all the institutions know this – that they will not do a double bump next year. But in terms of the overall context of how we get to how much tuition cost they should charge and how it gets paid for, it's part and parcel of that review process.

Access to the future fund. I love to talk about the access to the future fund. It's a wonderful concept, a concept which was originally brought to me – of course, I lived through this concept once before because I was on campus in the early '70s and graduated in the '70s, and there was a triuniversity fund.

Mr. Dunford: So you're the guy that got all the cheap tuitions, eh?

Mr. Hancock: I got the cheap tuitions. But you know something? I didn't earn as much when I graduated. So even though my costs of going to school were less, the return on my investment was substantially lower at the time. So it all balances out, of course.

I think I was talking about the access to the future fund. Well, how this idea came to us as a government was that in the '70s – that's where I was; I was in the '70s – there was a triuniversity fund. In fact, the assistant deputy minister of adult learning joined government at the time to administer that fund. Unfortunately, it was a fund that was spent down rather than an endowment. So the difference between that fund and this fund is that this is an endowment fund, not a spend-down fund, and this is a fund which is going to be available to all institutions and everyone in the postsecondary sector, not just the universities. But apart from those two substantial differences the concept has been there before and has been very useful.

So we have the Bannister chair in business at the University of Alberta. Now, why would I say the Bannister chair? Well, because Harold Bannister came to government about two and a half or three years ago with a concept.

I'll have to continue this later, I guess.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to put a few comments on the record and ask a few questions of the Minister of Advanced Education during this Committee of Supply debate on the Ministry of Advanced Education budget. Just a few questions that I have been keeping in my little notebook. One is: why do we see the capital plan going down? We're seeing cuts to the allocations: in '04-05, \$228 million; in '05-06, \$111 million, for example. So I'm just wondering why we're seeing that. I mean, I think at some point the figure \$10 billion was being tossed around as the infrastructure deficit in the postsecondary system, so I'm very concerned to see cuts to allocations there.

The next thing that's occurred to me is: can the minister provide us with information? This ministry, in fact, during my time here has been one ministry, then two ministries, back to one ministry, and it was two ministries before that. So we seem to get into this cycle with the government breaking it apart and putting it back together. The interesting part of it, Mr. Chairman, is that the money never goes down. So when it breaks apart to create two departments, there's great justification that, well, you know, now we've got two office spaces and two deputy ministers and two of this and two of that, so we need more money. But when it comes back together again, guess what? It doesn't reduce. In fact, it goes up.

So in the minister's office we've got a 42 per cent increase; deputy minister's office, 100 per cent increase; finance and admin services, 10 per cent; communications, 28 per cent. What gives? They should have saved us money putting these two departments back together, and we've got in some cases some fairly substantial increases. So I'd like comment and justification on that, please.

I do appreciate the efforts by the government to put more money into postsecondary education. The struggle that I see is one of trust. We know that there has been, however you want to term it, a starvation in this sector for some time, severe cutbacks, very low maintenance. However you want to describe it, the advanced education sector has been on a pretty low-cal diet for a long, long time. Again I'll note here the infrastructure deficit that's been created as well.

So now we have the government promising to put all kinds of money in, but it's in a lot of different piecemeal ways and a lot of sort of this fancy project and that fancy project or program. What

I'm seeing is mistrust from Albertans going: does this really mean that we're going to get more money and it's going stay, or is this somehow not going to turn out the way that we want?

I hear the minister talking about a three-year commitment. In fact, it's laid out in the budget books, but it's going to take a lot more than three years to restore what we had, to come back to the level that we had in advanced education, and more than that to achieve any kind of excellence in these areas. If I could get him to comment briefly on what the longer term vision of either this minister or the government is, I'd appreciate it. Let's talk 10 years out; let's talk 20 years out. I appreciate that there's a three-year plan here, but if we go through a three-year plan and then we're all going to tighten our belts again, then we did not even catch up to where we were before.

The Liberal plan for the use of surpluses contained two very specific investments into postsecondary education. One, of course, was the postsecondary endowment fund, which we now call the legacy fund. The government more or less took the whole idea and used it for their access fund, which is fine. I'm happy to let them take that idea. It's all for the good. We also had that an additional 5 per cent of any future surpluses would go specifically into the arts and humanities because we recognize that this is a group that doesn't fall comfortably, doesn't fall at all actually, into that sort of research-based, attract outside money to sponsor chairs. It just doesn't fall comfortably into that category like science does, for example, and even the maths. You just don't get a company that's really interested in sponsoring a chair in philosophy or French language or the fine arts, for example.

So those areas have really suffered severe cutbacks, and nobody is stepping up to the plate on them, which is why we as Liberals recognized that we still need a world where we have artists and philosophers and English majors and people who study languages and anthropologists. We believe that that's important for our society, and we didn't want that sector to continue to fade, frankly. We specifically targeted money there to help address that problem. I'm wondering if the minister, in any kind of blue-sky-envisioning exercises he did, if he or his government ever looked at addressing that imbalance with the arts and the humanities versus the other sectors, that are a bit sexier and attract that kind of investment dollar and research dollar that is so sought by the universities now, frankly, directed to be sought by the government, who values these things and I think even somewhere has a performance measurement based on whether they can attract those kinds of research dollars. That just doesn't happen in the arts and the humanities.

4:00

I appreciate that there is a Lois Hole scholarship that is going to benefit four students to the tune of \$5,000. But, you know, that would barely cover their tuition depending on which faculty they're in, and that's not addressing that whole range of educational opportunities and contributions to our culture and society as a whole that I'm talking about.

The minister has talked a lot about creating those spaces, and he's made it very clear that we are not to expect actual spaces, that he's looking at a combination of virtual spaces and other creations of access for students to be able to learn. I'm wondering if he has anything that he can table before the House that's showing us a successful version of this done somewhere else. Has any other country or province engaged in this? Can he give us some kind of success story or cost-benefit analysis or study in any way, shape, or form? Again, this is part of the trust factor. We're going out a bit on a limb here believing that these spaces are going to be created virtually. We want to know that that's going to have the effect that we think it's going to have.

I'll just give you a short example, Mr. Chairman. A long time ago when the cutbacks first started, the government had a saying: we're going to give people a hand up, not a handout. It was a great choice for a spin, for a slogan for the government to use because it really sounded good, and lots of people started singing that song along with them. But I think for many of those that were on the receiving end of that, it really meant something far different than what was being said.

What we saw years down the road were things like increased numbers of children on the child welfare rolls, which I think can be partly attributed to the cuts in the social insurance and a number of families and people being removed from the social assistance rolls. So, you know, great slogan, but it didn't turn out the way that most of us thought it was going to. I'm a little concerned that we're getting the same thing here. Great slogan, great idea, sounds like it's going to do what we want it to do, but not too sure that that's where it's going to end up. So I'm looking for anything the minister has – and surely he must have had something – that can give us some backup, give us something to prove that this is, in fact, a workable idea.

A number of the institutions in my constituency and, indeed, many of my constituents are in need of ESL training. There are various programs that are offered through the government. I would argue not enough. On the one hand, we say that we want new workers coming in here and making their homes here, and people often complain to me – like every time I'm speaking to a group – that the information that they were given in their home country about what the possibilities were here in Alberta is vastly different from what, in fact, is reality. They're very frustrated that their foreign qualifications are still not recognized here.

I don't know where foreign qualifications rests any more. It's been moved around so much in the government. Maybe it's under Advanced Education, maybe not, but it's an integral part of welcoming new Canadians into our social and educational and working fabric and helping them to get up and running so they are working with us and thriving in their own life, making a good living, raising their children.

I've always felt that we don't do enough ESL training, but tied in with that very much is that I also get a lot of concerns expressed by people about the level of subsistence that they're allowed while they go to school taking these various ESL courses or sort of make their way into the workplace, bridging courses that are offered, particularly by NorQuest College but also by some other institutions.

So two issues there. One, are we looking at offering additional ESL training? Is it possible that we could look at underwriting or giving more funding to those specialized, business jargon courses? I mean, every business has its lingo, has its jargon, and it's very difficult when you're speaking a second language to be able to pick up those buzzwords that are very specific to the area that you work in and specific to the idiom that you're in. If you come here speaking Russian, it's darn hard for you to pick up the buzzwords in the engineering field, for example, because your Russian ones aren't the same in English. They use different words.

So there are a number of levels of ESL that I'm questioning here: base funding for ESL, just the amount that we fund; specialized ESL for, you know, high-functioning professionals that are working hard on a second language to move and be very successful in their professions; the recognition of foreign qualifications and whether we're going to get enough support and funding into those areas to work again at a useful level. I can't believe how long that department or agency has been in existence and how low a profile it has and how many complaints I hear about foreign qualifications not being recognized. It may not be your area, but it ties into part of what we're doing here.

Also, the subsistence level of funding that is available for students attending ESL is low. You know, if we thought SFI was low, they're right in that range. Some of these students are trying to live on, like, \$300 or \$400 a month is my understanding, and then there's their tuition level. So we're losing folks that we could have functioning at a much higher level in our society and from which we all gain because we can't expend a few bucks at the beginning. It's another instance of being penny-wise, pound-foolish. We're being too cheap on the front end, and it's costing us a lot in human resources on the back end.

I'm wondering about the health centre funding that was received by Grant MacEwan Community College. How far ahead does this commitment go? Is the government going to hang in there? Now, this is partly an infrastructure question, I know, but is Advanced Education envisioning right through to the completion of this project and, indeed, to the rest of the projects that Grant MacEwan is envisioning as part of their downtown campus? Again, I don't want to see promises for long-term stuff that just never comes to fruition. How far has the minister gone in concrete plans on this? And if it's only three years, fine. Let us know. At least that tells us where we're at.

There's something else I want to question the minister about that's come up recently with this idea, in the universities anyway, of creating a position called lecturer, which I understand is a non research-based worker in the university system. I am really concerned about this and what it's saying or what I read into what it's saying about the government's understanding and value of universities as places of higher learning, of research, of challenge, of thought, in fact.

If we now downshift because we need cheaper people to teach the courses and somehow participate in a mortarboard factory, and they're just supposed to stand in front of the class and churn out that learning to whoever is sitting in front of them without understanding the content, I'm really concerned that we're moving away from the idea of institutions of higher learning and that we are getting more and more into the production of specified degrees as set out by the private sector. That's my overriding concern about what I'm seeing here.

When I was told about this idea of a lecturer – you know, we've seen that in a number of ways. The Solicitor General is still kind of thinking about these deputy constables, which would do a lot of the same functions as a police officer but get paid less. Then there's the question about: well, do they carry guns or not? In the university system we're now talking about . . . [interjection] Yeah. Well, we won't have the lecturers carrying guns. No.

Again, there's talk about a lesser level, somebody doing most of the same work of a higher paid individual, but this individual has – what? I don't know. Less training? They get paid less, certainly. I think that changes what we're doing with our universities, and I'm really concerned about what this signals as a long-range, value-based outlook from the government. I'd like to have the minister talk a little bit about what he's seeing there. I think ultimately that compromises intellectual freedom, and I think it takes away the challenge that we need to be coming out of our postsecondary institutions, to challenge us all about how we think about things. I don't think they should be mortarboard factories, and I particularly do not think they should be driven by the private sector, but that's what I'm starting to think I'm seeing.

4:10

I just don't understand why this government insists on constantly trying to dumb down a profession and pay it less. What is wrong with people earning a decent or a good living doing what they were

trained to do? What's wrong with that? Why do we constantly have to put in a junior level of something and pay them less for doing more or less the same job? It's just wrong. That's a personal expression of concern from me.

Another thing that the Liberals were talking about during the election that I got great reception on was blue-skying. Since we've got so much money, we could be extraordinary. We could set stuff in place today that would just make us blow everybody away. You know, we have the ability to be astounding, and I'm not seeing that kind of vision coming from the government.

One of the things that I'd looked at and had tried was the idea of having the second year of university provided free; in other words, no tuition. Not the first year but the second year because it's the second year where people seem to stumble, where they figure out that they've chosen the wrong path of learning, and they don't have the money now to go back and start over. They kind of have to plow ahead, or they've run out of their savings, and they're going to have to take time off to go and work.

It seems to be the second year where it's tougher for folks, and that was the one where I was thinking: well, gee, if we looked at tuition free for the second year, how far ahead would that put us? I started to look at some of the innovation that was happening in Sweden and some of the Scandinavian countries, and that was starting to look very interesting. Now, I didn't have time to completely follow that through, but did any of that sort of visioning come up as the minister looked at what to do to reinvest into Advanced Education?

I've given some very specific questions there and then quite a bit of questioning of his vision for the future of education. So I'll take my seat now and listen carefully to his response. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, some interesting comments. But I want to go back to where I left off because there was one question I hadn't fully answered from the hon. member earlier, and that's with respect to the access to the future fund, the \$250 million that was put in this year.

I think I was at the point where I was saying that Harold Bannister, whose family had endowed the Bannister chair in the '70s, had come to us several years ago saying: wouldn't this be a great idea in the centennial year to put in place an endowment fund? In fact, the Edmonton-Riverview Progressive Conservative Constituency Association, if I may say that, brought a resolution based on that proposal some time later to an annual meeting of the Conservative Party, actually – I think it was two years ago now – and it was endorsed I believe unanimously, but I could be wrong on that. If it wasn't unanimous, it was certainly very strongly endorsed.

I know that I had a number of conversations with Harold and with other members of government and talked about how we might move to endowing the future with the unbudgeted surplus revenues that were coming in because as a Conservative government, as any prudent government would do, when you have a volatile revenue stream like royalty revenue from oil and gas and revenue from land sales, which varies dramatically over time, it's not prudent to put your base budget on spending all of that revenue, nor is it appropriate to spend all that revenue on current Albertans.

Some people have said: "Well, it's our money. Send us a cheque." Well, it's not. It belongs to future Albertans as much as it belongs to us, so we have to find a way to manage those nonrenewable resource revenues in a way that builds the future. Again, we checked with Albertans through the It's Your Future survey and were told that Albertans wanted us to invest in the future. They

wanted to invest in priority areas of health care and education, they wanted to invest in infrastructure, which serves the future, and they wanted us to help build the future.

That's where the endowing the future concept built from. The Liberals like to say that it was part of their election platform. Well, they must have been listening to one of the constituents in Edmonton-Riverview who was talking about it long before they were. But it doesn't matter whose idea it was because it was a good idea. We don't need to fight over whose idea it was because now the idea because of this government is being implemented and implemented in a way which really will truly endow the future.

Now, the \$250 million is a bare minimum. It's a start. No question about that. Because we are budgeting revenue on a prudent basis, there can be an expectation, there probably should be an expectation in any given year – in fact, in the last two years we've seen that – where the prudent budgeting of resource revenue is outstripped by the actual amount of resource revenues. So while we're budgeting I think it's \$42 a barrel for oil as a forecast – and everybody knows that forecasting oil prices, forecasting gas prices is a very difficult thing to do. We're forecasting oil at \$42 a barrel and, I think, gas at \$5.60 or so, \$5.80. We know that the price of oil has been over \$50 a barrel for the last couple of months and has been as high as \$57 a barrel but as low as just over \$50 a barrel, so the volatility is even seen there.

So it's not prudent to put in the budget, you know, \$55 a barrel for oil and then say: "Okay. We're allocating that surplus to the fund." It is prudent to say: \$42 a barrel for oil and \$5.60 or whatever it is for gas. That gives us a surplus over and above the \$4.75 million that's being taken into revenue for program spending in terms of capital dollars and those sorts of things and allows us, then, to say: "Well, there's \$250 million that can go into the access to the future fund, which actually we hadn't intended to budget for – it is to come out of the surplus revenue – and, by the way, \$500 million to the heritage medical research fund."

So a strong start but just a start on endowing the future. The promises we made: \$500 million to the heritage medical research fund, which the Premier announced in January. That's about advancing our education because that's about driving research and development of research in this province. That brings the best and the brightest to this province to teach, to advance knowledge, all the things that the Member for Edmonton-Centre was concerned about in terms of cookie-cutter approaches and mortarboards. Well, no, I'm sorry. That's not the reality in this province now. That's not the reality in this province in the future.

The reality in this province is that we had the foresight as a government some 30 years ago to set up the heritage medical research fund, which has paid dividends in this province in terms of the amount of research that happens in the medical area, and now we're topping that up with another \$500 million. So that's endowing the future. Putting another \$500 million into the engineering and science research fund, colloquially known as the ingenuity fund, to drive research in that area, which again will bring and attract the best and the brightest to this province so that that research drives learning, drives knowledge, and drives teaching – that's an enhancement, too, and that \$500 million is in Bill 1.

The \$1 billion to the heritage scholarship fund, enhancing a scholarship fund that was set up by an earlier Premier and Progressive Conservative government, I might say. The demands on that heritage scholarship fund have outstripped the supply, so it's very prudent to endow the future by saying: "We'll put a billion dollars in. It'll be an endowment. We'll spend appropriately out of that on an endowment basis so that the fund remains there in perpetuity and

continues to grow and continues to provide that sort of funding, that scholarship and bursary funding, for Alberta students."

Of course, the access to the future fund, the \$3 billion access to the future fund. No one else in this country, that I'm aware of, has promised \$5 billion to enhancing, to endowing the future. No one has put away the money that's been put away already in terms of the heritage medical research fund and the ingenuity fund, and no one has promised the \$5 billion. And not just promised it. There was some skepticism in my critic's voice earlier when he was asking: when will we see it? It's in the act. The act says that there will be \$3 billion.

Actually, the hon. member brought forward an amendment to the act to try and take the \$3 billion out of the act, and I said to him: "No, no. Leave it in. Leave it in. Hold our feet to the fire. Make sure that we contribute that \$3 billion to the fund." It's in the act, and by being in the act, Albertans know that that's a commitment that this government has made to build that fund out of surplus revenues, out of the nonrenewable resource revenues.

4:20

Yes, because we recognized out of the current projections that \$250 million could go in and that that will drive out under the spending rule \$11 million, we've put the \$11 million into the out-years in the budget in each year as spending. But I don't think we should be under any illusions. If the oil and gas revenues continue as they are, that fund will be built, and that fund will drive out \$135 million, and it can come none too soon, Mr. Chairman, because people are already lining up. People are already calling and saying, "I want to make a gift to the university or to the college" or "We've been in discussions." The colleges, certainly, and the universities are calling and saying, "Somebody has stepped up to the plate, and we've been talking to them, but this access to the future fund has encouraged them to finalize the gift because they know it'll be matched, and they want to know that the money that they'll provide will be matched."

These aren't gifts that will drive specific private-sector control of the universities because the universities are under board governance. They have academic independence. They set their quality standards. They're not driven by the private sector. These are people who have earned money in this province and want to give some of it back. These gifts are coming from people who have benefited from the strong economy in this province and have earned money in this province or as a result of an education they've gotten in this province.

I'm going to get to the answers to your questions. Honest I will. Mr. Chairman, I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, who had some skepticism in his mind, should put his mind at ease because there's the commitment in the act. It's there. This government has made the commitment that surplus revenues will go to the fund. They're going to have to go to the fund faster than anybody might think because . . .

Mr. Dunford: He can sleep at night.

Mr. Hancock: He can sleep at night indeed. He can sleep at night knowing that advanced education is in good hands with this government.

We not only have made the commitment to endow the future, Mr. Chairman. We've made the commitment in our strategic plan, which we've published – this is the second year that it has been published – indicating that in our 20-year look forward, advancing learning is a key component of unleashing innovation, leading learning, competing in a global economy, and making Alberta the

best place to live, work, and visit. Endowing the future is critical to the success of that program. So he can rest easy.

Now, Edmonton-Centre wanted to know about the capital plan and why it might be going down. What the hon. member should know is that we have changed the way we budget capital, so instead of having a finite number each year that has to be spent or it's lost, driving projects in an inordinate way or an inappropriate way, we have a long-term capital plan. Capital that's budgeted can flow through that capital plan. We've talked about a \$9 billion plan. That's a lot of money in anybody's books, \$9 billion dollars to build infrastructure in this province, whether it's roads or whether it's hospitals or whether it's schools or, yes, indeed in the postsecondary area.

That capital is very necessary to build the labs so that research can happen. We have, for example, at both the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary health research innovation facilities going up. Those are going to advance learning and advance knowledge, and Edmonton-Centre was concerned about mortarboards being bought or some foolish notion. The reality is that research is happening. The ambulatory learning centre, a really novel partnership between Capital health and the University of Alberta to change the way that health education and health professionals learn and practise together, change the way that we deliver diagnostics and health services and how we learn more – that's in the capital plan, and that's going to go forward.

So the capital plan is a more fluid plan than ever has been allowed. We have a capital fund, so surplus revenues – that's where the challenge is going to be, the balance between surplus revenues going to building the future in terms of the capital infrastructure of the province, including postsecondary, and building the future by endowing the future in the endowment funds. What a good struggle to have: whether you build the future on the physical infrastructure so that you can build intellectual capacity or whether you build the future by endowing the future so that you can encourage a greater private-sector involvement in ingenuity projects like the Lois Hole digital library. What a wonderful, wonderful problem to have: how to split that up.

Talking about splitting up, the Member for Edmonton-Centre was concerned about the department being amalgamated into one and split into two and why the costs never go down, that they always go up. Well, I don't know what world she's lived in, but in the world that I live in, we've had huge technological improvements over the last 10 years, and technology costs money. One would expect that one would acquire some good technology so that you can do things better, cheaper, faster, so that you can give more information to more people.

In fact, we've gotten asked written questions from the opposition over the last couple of weeks that I've tried to address in terms of making sure that they have information about how many students receive student loans and how much they received in student loans and breaking them down, please, by institution and by default rate and all that sort of thing. Well, if you don't have the best in computing technology, you couldn't possibly even dream about getting that kind of information. You need to have management of information. That's just one way that costs go up, obviously.

While you can look at the numbers and say, "Well, you know, you've split the ministry and you've amalgamated and costs have always gone up," the reality is that costs do go up. What we do know is that again there's a Ministry of Advanced Education in this province, that there's a minister who's passionate about advanced education and will pursue that. We've built it into our strategic plan, and we've made it a number one priority this year, and it's going to be worth every single penny that gets spent on the office and the administration, I can tell you.

Cutbacks. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre talked about cutbacks. Well, I'm looking at numbers, Mr. Chairman, which indicate that we spent a little over a billion dollars on postsecondary education in '92-93 in this province, and we're spending a little over \$1.9 billion projected in the 2007-08 budget. There was a period of time when we were going through some severe fiscal restraint, in 1995-96, when that number dipped below the one billion dollar mark, but since that year of '95-96 there have not been any cutbacks in advanced education. The budget has grown and grown substantially. In fact, the uptick on that chart is very impressive.

But I can say this. We have made a huge commitment. It's been a public commitment. It's in our 20-year strategic plan. We've published it. It's been in the business plan. It says that advanced education is a priority. It says that leading in learning is a fundamental pillar of the 20-year strategic plan. It says that unleashing innovation is another fundamental pillar. You can't unleash innovation unless you're leading in learning, unless you have the top researchers and the top people finding new ways of doing things. So I think that any skepticism about that should be clearly put away, and as my seatmate here indicated earlier, she should be able to sleep at night.

The question of pursuing excellence is clearly, clearly part of the goal of this government, pursuing excellence so that Albertans can compete in the global economy, so that we can have the quality of life. That addresses another of the issues that the hon. member mentioned, quality of life. Living in a province like Alberta is not just about going to work every day, although some of us get excited about going to work every day. I know I do. But it's not just about going to work every day. It's about the full range of quality of life. It's about safety in our community. It's about having a good education system so that our children can seize the opportunities that are here. It's about having a good health system, and yes, it's about the arts. It's about the quality of life that's provided on the arts and the cultural side of the agenda. Yes, those are very important parts of it.

Now, I don't know why the hon. member thinks that there's no money here to support that because the access to the future fund isn't restricted to engineering students. It's not restricted to building engineering facilities. That might happen, but it is available across the board.

Indeed, the scholarships that have been announced, not just the Lois Hole scholarships, which are a very important symbol of the respect that we have for the former Lieutenant Governor and her commitment to the arts and humanities, but also the other scholarships which we're putting in – yes, that's only four scholarships. That's modest. It was only one piece of it. The Lois Hole digital library, however, will expand the ability to transfer knowledge and print resources and to digitize print resources and three-dimensional resources right across the province, and that will be funded out of the access to the future fund.

4:30

One of the reasons we put that in the throne speech was to show the broad parameters of the access to the future fund, the capacity of that fund not just to match private gifts, which is a very important way of encouraging people to give back to their community and to help build their community, but also to show the way in which the fund can be used on ingenuity and new ways of transferring knowledge, new ways of delivery, those sorts of things. So a very important part.

Also, the billion dollars going into the scholarship fund will be able to afford opportunities for students right across the board, not just in engineering, although certainly in trades, where we want to

encourage the trades. There will be more support for students in the trades and assistance to students taking the trades, but it's not limited to that.

Creating spaces. We're talking with stakeholders in the community, looking at best practices around the world, on how we deliver education in the 21st century. That's got to be a fluid approach. That's not something that I'm going to sit down and say: after three months in the department I have all the answers about how we advance education in the 21st century. Quite frankly, even someone with 35 years of experience in the department, I would suggest, would not have the temerity to sit down and say: I know all the ways that you can deliver education. No.

What we're talking about is working with people in our system, looking at best practices around the world, finding ways to make sure that every qualified Albertan who wants to advance their education – and quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, every Albertan is qualified to advance their education. What we need to have is a system which allows them to do that, indeed encourages them to do that.

Foreign qualifications was raised. The hon. member obviously missed that line in the budget which shows that the international qualifications assessment budget is going up by 37.8 per cent – I couldn't believe it when I looked it up – 37.8 per cent, from \$677,000 to \$930,000. That's another one of the untold stories that we have: international qualifications assessments. We have people who are ready, willing, and able to go anywhere in the world to assess qualifications if we need to bring people here to work in this province. I heard somebody earlier table an e-mail from somebody who is concerned that qualifications would go down. Indeed, that's not the case. We have our international qualifications assessment service, which makes sure that we can establish the qualifications, the credentials, of people from anywhere in the world, and we do that.

But we need to put more of a focus on prior learning assessment on international qualifications and make it more readily available. Indeed, I hear the complaints that the hon. member hears about people who come here with qualifications and can't work because they can't get entry, although we've added in the last little while 10 more internships, for example, for people who want to practise medicine here. Indeed, we need to work harder on those complaints because we need those talents.

English as a Second Language. Obviously, support for immigrants, developing an immigration policy for the province, working together with the Minister of Economic Development and the Minister of Human Resources and Employment so that we can have an immigration policy in this province which values people from other parts of the world, whether they've come to other parts of Canada first and then come here or whether they've come directly here. We need to value those talents, we need to welcome them, and we need to make sure that English is not a barrier to their success, specifically in the areas that they want to practise.

Mr. Chairman, I see that my time has come, so I'll have to continue answering those questions a little later.

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

Mr. Taylor: Very quickly, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for recognizing me because I know there are many others who want to speak to this. But I did need to get on the record based on what the minister had to say about the access to the future fund, the \$250 million commitment to actually put hard cash dollars in there as opposed to the \$3 billion figure, which, in fact, is a cap, a floor, not a ceiling, and his comment that I moved an amendment to Bill 1 to

try and remove that figure. I tried to remove that figure for the precise reason that it is a ceiling, a cap, and not a starting point.

So while the minister likes to talk in glowing terms about getting it up there to that \$3 billion mark, where it produces \$135 million of investable income, the fact remains that the bill as it's written now – and that amendment was voted down in this House – doesn't commit the minister to anything. It says that up to \$3 billion may be put into that endowment fund. There is not a commitment beyond the \$250 million in this document. There is not a commitment to put another dime into that endowment fund. I know the minister wants to; I can see it in his eyes. I know that he has every good intention, and I know that the minister is passionate about advanced education. I also know that from time to time Premiers shuffle their cabinets, and maybe his successor isn't going to be as passionate about advanced education as he is.

Mr. Chairman, a recent opinion survey of Canadians on who they trust in various professions revealed that 16 per cent of Canadians trust politicians. We were at the bottom of the barrel. That is precisely why I want the minister to commit to a program and a schedule of putting money into the postsecondary education endowment fund, the access to the future fund, so that the people of Alberta can see that he really is going to make good on his intentions, on his promises. We don't have a commitment yet.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would hazard a guess that the statistics that the hon. member has used, saying that 16 per cent of people don't trust politicians . . .

Mr. Taylor: Do trust.

Mr. Hancock: Do trust. Yes. I would suggest that most don't. I would suggest that the biggest part of that problem has to do with much of the mudslinging and things that go on in this process. We should all make a commitment to do a better job of holding all of us up as very trustworthy in doing the people's work because I don't know anybody who's run for office and been elected to this office who did it for self-aggrandizement or for their own personal gain. In fact, anybody would be an idiot to run for this job for their own personal gain. With the amount of time and effort that goes into this job, you could make a lot more money in the private sector.

So I just wanted to say that because you throw it out saying: "People don't trust you. Why should we trust you?" People don't trust people because you're always talking about the fact that people don't trust you when, in fact, you should be talking about that we've put the commitment into the bill which says that we're going to put in \$3 billion. Yes, we ought to put in more than \$3 billion. I would hazard a guess – and this would be only a guess and not a commitment – that when we get to the \$3 billion or even before we get to the \$3 billion, the emphasis in the system is going to be so strong and the number of good projects is going to be so high that we ought to add more to the endowment fund to endow the future of postsecondary in this province. I would aspire to that. I think you aspire to that.

That was the purpose you brought forward the amendment, I think a well-meaning amendment, to take the \$3 billion out of the act and, instead, allow us to aim higher. Well, I aim higher, but I also know that if we put \$3 billion into the act, people can see that as a commitment to put \$3 billion into an access to the future fund, and that's a commitment we should aim at.

It's also interesting – and I raise this with a little bit of trepidation – that when we talk about a cap on tuition fees, everybody says that

it's a target and everybody's going to get there, but when we put a cap in the \$3 billion fund, you say: what's the commitment you're going to make to get there? I mean, at least we should be consistent in our critique.

Mr. Chairman, there were a number of other things that I wanted to address because I think it should be clear for every member of this House and certainly in the public that this government is committed to endowing the future. We've made a commitment to \$5 billion out of nonrenewable resource revenue to endow the future. We've committed in the budget documents to put \$500 million into the heritage medical research fund. We've indicated \$250 million into the access to the future fund, and we have Bill 1, which talks about the billion dollars for the heritage savings trust fund, which talks about \$3 billion in the access fund, which talks about \$500 million into the ingenuity fund. That's a commitment that people can take to the bank.

So I hope we can put that to rest because, yes, I would have loved to have said, "Let's budget for a \$50 price of oil, and let's show that that excess revenue is going to be in there." I would have even loved to have a line in the budget documents which said that 50 per cent of excess revenues are going to go into the fund. What Albertans know with Bill 1, the Premier's commitment hopefully when it passes this Legislature, if the members of this Legislature agree to pass it – and I hope they will – is that Bill 1 makes a commitment on this government and this Legislature to put money into that fund, \$3 billion, and \$1 billion for the heritage scholarship fund. That is a commitment that's not been made by anybody else that I know of from public money across North America.

The hon. member raised in discussion a number of times endowment funds from private universities in the States. I think he mentioned Princeton and Harvard, private universities in the States, which have had some 200, 300 years to build endowments and most of those endowments being built by graduates sending their money back. Well, what we're planning to do, Mr. Chairman, and what we've set in motion here with this endowment fund is a way in which our universities, our colleges can go to their grads. And we're seeing that: Grant MacEwan yesterday, the largest donation in its history, a \$5 million donation to the health care learning centre from Bill and Mary Jo Robbins, residents of Houston, Texas, who have business operations in Alberta, giving a little bit of money back, encouraged to do so, money which presumably could be matched by an access to the future fund, starting that process that the Princetons have had 200 and 300 years to build those funds. We're starting that process in Alberta with this endowment process, and it's going to be exciting. It's going to be very exciting.

4:40

I was talking earlier about foreign qualifications and ESL training, and I want to mention that the Member for Edmonton-Centre is bang on with some of her comments with respect to maximizing human potential, making sure that immigrants to our community can not only learn the English language and have access to ESL programs but through NorQuest and institutions like NorQuest can find job-specific language, which will help them be successful in their jobs. We know that at NorQuest, for example, if you want to take a nursing assistant program, you can take a course which will assist you with the language specific to that job. Those are exciting things, and we need to do more of that.

We need to work with Human Resources and Employment with respect to living allowances for people who need to be supported while they advance their education. Grasping that human potential, helping Albertans be the best they can be: that's what this is all about. That's what we aspire to, and that's certainly what I'm working with my colleagues in government to achieve.

The Grant MacEwan health centre has been talked about, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre raised the issue of capital planning for that. It would be absolutely ludicrous for us to announce that we're supporting the first year of building for a project like that and not have any intention for the second year or the third year. Obviously, that's part of a capital plan, and one of the beauties of the capital planning process that we now have available to us is that we can cash flow that. We can say to an institution: "That's an approved project. Yes, you can go ahead starting to do it." Or we can even say: "Well, go ahead and do the planning. Do the planning on a Bow Valley College. Go ahead and get that done."

Then before we make a commitment to the growth, obviously, there are a whole bunch, 30-some institutions in this province – and that's just the postsecondary institutions – and all of them have capital plans, so obviously there has to be prioritization. There has to be a strategic approach to how we move forward with them, but we need to work with each institution with respect to their aspirations. Obviously, once we say, "Yes, you can go ahead and build that building," the cash flow for that building has got to be there over the period of time of its build or the period of time that the postsecondary institution can process it.

The hon. member raised issues about a position called a lecturer, and I hope she's not suggesting that as Minister of Advanced Education I should go over to the university and tell them how to staff up or what kind of staff they should have, what sort of academic staff they should have, what they should be asking them to teach or not teach. Surely she wasn't suggesting that.

What I think she was trying to address, though, is the need for quality in our institutions at every level. In some cases that will be quality teaching, exclusively quality teaching. In some cases that will be research and a knowledge search, that we can advance knowledge. That's what the ingenuity fund and the heritage medical research fund are funding research in. There are all sorts of other research grants.

In fact, our universities are doing very, very well at bringing in research grants so that we can advance knowledge. We have people doing research and also teaching and involving graduate students in the research. We have our colleague from Foothills-Rocky View, who indeed was a political science professor, I believe, at the University of Calgary and, I'm sure, did some research in that capacity and added to the base of knowledge and wrote articles, some articles that I've read, Mr. Chairman, and that, I would say, are well worth reading. Some I may have to review again.

Mr. Chairman, government is not about telling the universities or the colleges how to do their job in terms of the quality of learning and the quality of teaching. It's about making sure that we understand that there needs to be quality of learning and quality of teaching. There needs to be those opportunities and appropriate funds in place to ensure that that happens and to ensure that they can do that, that the research happens that drives the creation of new knowledge and the ability to transmit that knowledge, that we have the technology available so that where it's appropriate, knowledge can be transferred in an easier mechanism.

My first class in university was an economics 200 class, and there were about 350 people in it. We had an excellent instructor, but she did stand at the front of the class and gave a lecture.

Now, with modern technology I might be able to actually access some of that knowledge electronically and perhaps have a better opportunity to be face to face with the instructor in a discussion group rather than sitting in a lecture hall with 350 people. I don't know. Different people learn differently. What we have now are many different ways of delivering educational opportunities, and we ought to be able to access them all, and we ought not to critique

them by saying: well, we're dumbing down the system by hiring a lecturer. Sometimes a lecturer might be appropriate, but far be it from me to tell a university who they should hire or what they should hire or what their qualifications should be.

I think that addressed most of the questions I had, Mr. Chairman, so I'll take my seat and see if there are more.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wonder how much time is left. It's quite a sight to behold to see our Minister of Advanced Education talking about the future of advanced education in this province, talking about advanced education for the 21st century with such glowing words, such optimism, and such passion and commitment. I must say that it's a sea change in the way this Legislature has heard the minister responsible for Advanced Education talk about it in the past. So I'm with him. I share his passion for advanced education and wish him luck with his colleagues sitting around the cabinet table as he seeks support from them for his plans.

With respect to this budget certainly there are steps in the right direction, I must say. The 6 per cent increase in base funding is certainly something that will go some way in addressing the concerns of institutions in the postsecondary system, the advanced education system, from universities to colleges to technical institutes.

The Premier here was quoting the other day the, I think, vice-president or provost of the University of Alberta as saying how hugely good this news is, you know, for the whole system. I just want to add here the concern that the Council of Alberta University Students, CAUS, has. It had a less glowing view of the budget that we're discussing here today. They talked about the government taking baby steps instead of great strides in the postsecondary education system. I just wanted to put this on record so that there is an understanding of the way different parts of the system view where this budget is going, how good a news it is.

Certainly, the budget today, if we keep going in this direction at least on the monetary side, fiscal side, will help institutions begin to repair some of the damage that institutions have suffered not due to any of their fault but simply because of the chronic underfunding over the last 10 years that they have faced from year to year. The minister talked about a 2 per cent increase, you know, on the average over the last 10 years on an annual basis. The costs have been going up for each of these postsecondary institutions at a much faster rate. The number of students going there has been increasing. The programs that they're offering: the expectations are that they should have more and more programs.

So all the institutions have been falling seriously behind on an annual basis with respect to their annual budgets. As a result, they've had to respond and have done lots of things, the first of them, of course, was to continue to increase tuition fees at rates which students found unaffordable and unacceptable. They have been protesting about it. This government came up with a very innovative tuition fee policy, the 30 per cent cap. I heard and saw the former Minister of Advanced Education walking in with a cap in hand which said: tuition cap. Well, tuition cap or not, tuition fees have been going up 6 or 7 per cent every year.

4:50

The increase has been certainly considered unaffordable by students and seen as not sufficient by institutions because they began to see tuition fees as a cash cow. That's the only source that they had where they could raise more funds in order to meet the deficits that were caused by the government's deliberate underfunding of the

institutions over the last 10 years. The result has been, as I said, an increase in tuition fees and the resulting increase in student debt loads. That's true here; that's true in other parts of Canada.

There have been shifts within the universities and colleges with respect to emphasis on programs. Cannibalization is a word that's used by academics. I met with representatives of the Faculty Association of the University of Calgary just a couple of weeks ago, and this word was used, the cannibalization of programs. When the government encourages or gives some incentives for the university to introduce a new program, the veterinary sciences college is one example, then the University of Calgary has to find funds from within in order to implement that particular program, to introduce that. In order for the University of Calgary to do that, they had to find monies within the system as is, take it away from existing programs and move it to a new program, a new college that's being set up there.

That's not the story just at the University of Calgary. That has happened in every institution, particularly at the university level. The University of Alberta is no exception to it. Funds have been going down for faculties of arts. Humanities programs have been cut back. Courses have had to be cancelled. Courses that were offered on a yearly basis which were needed for students to complete their degree programs on time began to be offered every alternate year to deal with the problem of unavailability of funds.

Faculty composition has changed dramatically over the last 10 years. More and more part-time teachers are being hired, more and more sessionals are being employed, and the full-time faculty numbers have been going down. Many sessionals have been hired on soft money, not on hard cash that is there from year to year. So there were uncertainties created within the institutions, the postsecondary system, with respect to faculty recruitment, faculty retention, the quality of instruction in classrooms.

The size. The minister said that when he was a student, in the first year he was in classes of 200, 250. That might have been an odd case then; now it is a regular happening, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Minister. It's not something to be celebrated. As a matter of fact, the drop-out rate from our universities and colleges is close to 40 per cent, according to the minister's own numbers here. These are students who qualify to get into college or university. They are not students who come with questionable academic records or background. They come with good preparation. They meet the admission requirements, the entry requirements. Yet 40 per cent of them do not complete their programs. Huge wastage of their resources, public resources, and a very great loss to the future of the province. The question must be asked: why is it that such high drop-out rates, such high rates of failing to complete, are there in the system? The minister hasn't really quite addressed that issue.

On the tuition fee issue, the minister has broadened the notion. He no longer wants to talk about a tuition fee policy as such; he wants to talk about affordability. I hope this is not a phrase that he will use in order to skirt talking about having a firm tuition fee policy in this province for our postsecondary students and postsecondary institutions. I hope he will tell this House that he will not encourage institutions in this province to continue to use increases in tuition fees to fund ever-increasing deficits in terms of their operation funds, that he will make a commitment to provide enough operating grants so that universities and colleges don't have to every year resort to huge increases in tuition fees.

I want to hear him talk about it not only in terms of, you know, the affordability in terms of the overall costs. Sure going to college or university is expensive. People have to pay money for their board and lodging, travel, all of these, particularly students who live away from major metropolitan centres. They have to leave home to come

to a university or college to get their education. Their costs are certainly higher than the costs of those who live close to or in those metropolitan centres.

The issue of affordability must not allow this minister and this House and this government to take its attention away from addressing the question of tuition fee increases. Tuition fee increases have been used by this government as a matter of policy to fund institutions in this province; 30 per cent was a cap. That has been reached in some places. In other places it will never be reached because the costs are going up so dramatically that we will not be able to reach that level for many years to come in most of the institutions. But that doesn't mean, therefore, that tuition fees should be allowed to increase indefinitely and at a rate which students, 80,000 of them in this province, do not find an acceptable rate at which they should grow.

On the overall minister's vision about advanced education for the 21st century – and he used quite a bit of time when addressing the questions posed to him by other hon. members on the budget to talk broadly about his vision of the strategic plan and how the postsecondary education vision that he has fits into that. He talked, I must note, about this fluid situation, that he cannot talk specifically, that he can't talk in any firm terms about what the system should look like over the next 20 years, but he has ideas. I'm sure the minister has ideas, and that's fine. But is the minister willing to in fact create a public forum to talk about the shape of the future education system, the system of the 21st century that he talks about?

Albertans are well-educated citizens. They have ideas that they want to share with the government. They want to have an opportunity where they can freely talk about this, perhaps in the form of an independent commission. I want to ask the minister: will he be willing to commit to using the opportunity of setting up a commission such as I'm proposing, one somewhat similar to the Learning Commission? It did a splendid job of going around the province listening to Albertans – parents, students, teachers, school board members, academics, experts from all over the place – and came up with 90-some recommendations, one of which was about asking this government to establish, in fact, a postsecondary education commission along the lines of the Learning Commission, an independent entity that will hold public hearings.

The hearings will be public, and Alberta citizens from all walks of life, not just corporate executives, not just university presidents, not just members of the boards of governors but ordinary, regular Albertans will have an opportunity to come and speak to this commission, share their views, share their vision of where Alberta should be going in terms of designing a postsecondary education system, an advanced education system, which will be a matter of pride for all as it serves the needs of the 21st century as it unfolds before us. I ask the minister to respond to this.

There are many questions that need to be addressed as the advanced education system evolves, the issues, of course, of affordability, accessibility, that the minister himself has identified as two important issues; the issue of the expansion of the system – what parts should expand? – whether we need more universities. Do we need to put a cap on the number of universities that are there? There's the issue of the role and place for private, for-profit institutions as part of the system, and the minister has remained, unfortunately, relatively silent about his vision and his own view with respect to the presence and the growth that's taking place of the private, for-profit sector within the postsecondary system.

There are NAFTA implications in there. Once you allow these institutions to set up business in the province, how can you deny them public funds? Are there NAFTA implications? The point is not, Mr. Chairman and minister, to simply shake your head and say

that you have no concerns about it, that that simply isn't the case. You haven't sought any firm legal opinion on it. You haven't heard in a public forum Albertans talk about the implications. I'm sure you'll get legal advice there too. The legal community will come forward to perhaps give you some advice on that.

5:00

These are questions that need to be asked. The role of the private sector, the private, for-profit sector within the system. There is a need to raise questions about governance. There is the Postsecondary Learning Act, which is an act which really centralizes the authority into the hands of the Minister of Advanced Education in ways which have been unknown in this province in the past. In debating that bill, we talked about one of the major problems with that act being the high degree of centralization of power in the hands of the minister.

I find the same problem with Bill 1 with respect to the way the minister wants to appoint the advisory council on the access fund. There's a concentration of powers into the hands of the minister, which, in my view, must be questioned and questioned seriously. Now, Albertans want to have a say in telling us, telling this Legislature, telling this government, telling this minister what kind of governance structure they want for their system: the governance within each institution, the governance across the province. Where should this power reside and how should it be shared among Albertans coming from various walks of life?

The issue, Mr. Chairman, with respect to advanced education for the 21st century which must be addressed by the commission such as the one that I'm talking about has to do with the role of the corporate sector in funding, in financing the system of advanced education. I just want to draw the attention of the minister – it's good bedtime reading for him, I think – to a book that has just been released two months ago, in February. It's called *The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education*, by Jennifer Washburn. A couple of brief comments on what's in this book. Barton Bernstein, professor of history, Stanford University, says this about this book:

This hard-hitting book will provoke controversy, upset rank-and-file citizens, and ignite the concern of faculty and alumni. Washburn raises fundamental questions: Who owns and controls university-produced knowledge? Who should own it and benefit from it?

Now, these are questions that need to be addressed. I am sure the minister in his own office can't address this. His able deputy minister: I doubt the deputy minister should be required or asked to address it. It's an issue that must be addressed by citizens of this province, to whom this system after all belongs. Let me give another quote here, by William Greider. He's the author of the book called *The Soul of Capitalism*. He's saying that

Jennifer Washburn's meticulous reporting and insightful analysis reveals how corporate intrusion is undermining academic freedom – and the foundations of scientific inquiry – within our nation's most prestigious institutions of higher learning.

He's talking about the U.S., but I'm sure it's a question that is pertinent for this province. It must be asked, must be addressed, and must be addressed comprehensively.

In the minister's plan, as I'm looking through his strategic plan here on Advanced Education, there's no concern with asking these questions. They're fundamental questions. We can keep on pouring more money into the system, but unless he asks some extremely important fundamental questions at the same time, we may find 10 years down the line that we have wasted some of those most precious resources that we are now committed to investing in the system.

The system needs a comprehensive, a close, and deep look at it. In this province it was in 1973 that the last comprehensive look was

taken at both the K to 12 part of the education system and the postsecondary system. It's about time, 32 or 33 years later, that we commit ourselves to undertaking that kind of exercise. Albertans want to have input. Their input has proven valuable in the past, and I'm sure, if invited, they will enthusiastically participate and be able to contribute a great deal to setting the direction of the advanced education system for at least the first 20-some years of the 21st century that we have moved into already.

Mr. Chairman, I will conclude at this point and let some other hon. members have an opportunity to speak.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My comments relate to the postsecondary institutions that have taken in in good faith over the past couple of years students that have not been fully funded by the Department of Advanced Education. I'm wondering whether the minister could enlighten us as to whether or not the 2005-2006 budget makes provision for full formula funding for all of those students that have been unfunded and, secondly, whether or not there is some provision in the budget separate and apart from the 6 per cent increase in the operating funding for those unfunded students.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to ask the hon. minister what is in the budget for our independent universities. Independent colleges and universities contribute a great deal to the education of Alberta students. They are funded at a fraction of the rate of public institutions, and they build their own buildings and require no capital budgets, so they are much on their own as far as building their schools.

The independent schools are not affected by the tuition freeze that applies to the public universities. Public universities seem to be getting an increase in base funding to compensate for the tuition freeze that does not affect the independent schools. Will the independent schools get the same benefits this year or in the years to come? Does the budget allow the independent schools to catch up?

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was hoping to ask the minister a few questions relative to the Learning Commission. If I've got it straight, I think he talked earlier in the discussion about a framework for funding postsecondary education. This blanket went to a decentralized level to each institution to follow. What I was trying to get at last night, listening to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development – I was wondering if the government as such, through the framework of funding that he was talking about, would ever consider some incentive funding.

When I looked at the Learning Commission, Mr. Minister, I looked at the need for aboriginal teachers, for example, and I looked also at the need for specialists in the area of remedial programs, career counselling, administration, and board governance. I was wondering, sir, if that could be covered under the framework, that institutions would be given an incentive nomenclature. For example, when I took my masters, I went there under the auspices of the government of Alberta having career counselling needs in the school system. That was the incentive: I would come into the institution, take training, but I had to serve three years in the school system that I had come from.

I see this as a particular challenge, and I think – and I'm sincere about this – that it's important that a government of the day take the

initiative to show leadership where there are particular needs for incentive funding. For example, last night we talked about – and I know this is not related – the fine arts. There's a time when we have to stimulate and direct, I believe, and provide leadership. I do believe that in terms of the aboriginal framework – and I know the argument about federal funding and everything else on that. But I talked to a former dean of the faculty yesterday, and he said: why not have incentive funding to help this kind of initiative and get that whole thing looked at?

I'll just talk about two other things, and then I'll sit down, sir.

5:10

The question of seniors going back through extension programs. I know one of the things that we hear about extension programs is that they are self-sustaining, that they don't need incentive funding. But let me suggest, sir, to you that there are people out there that I know of, in my constituency for example, that lack the dollars to go on. I think it would be fortuitous for them if we could have some stimulation or some help where they can take courses in such things as legal matters, pastoral care, helping with taxes, advocacy, bereavement, those kinds of initiatives. I think it would be very, very interesting to have you look at that, sir, if I may. They will return: "We're not dead yet, although we may look like we are. Come back into our communities and serve a very sincere population that is there."

The other thing that's dear to my heart that's left out – then I'll just sit down very quickly – is the whole area of student services. I really, sincerely would like your insight into this because I think it's somewhere forgotten in many institutions, and maybe you could just share your experience as to how this is funded. I didn't have a chance to study the budget as much as I'd like to. How do we get money for that from institutions?

I'll sit down. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have other questions. I'll bring them up later on.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I realize that our time is short, so I just have one quick question for the minister. The Member for St. Albert just talked about incentive funding. I guess my question is somewhat similar. I noticed in the budget that there is almost \$13 million that will be awarded to public postsecondary institutions through a performance envelope, and I think that's a great idea. I guess it's something that I feel is needed in our postsecondary institutions as well as perhaps in our K to 12 basic education. My question is: how will this work, and what is meant by a performance envelope? Perhaps the hon. minister could flesh out the details on that for us.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to commend the minister on the budget focus on advanced education.

My question is just regarding the yearly student loan limit, that's now increasing to \$12,140. The increasing loan limits will put students further into debt. How is the government going to address affordability of postsecondary education? That's my question number one. I would love to hear some comment from the minister regarding students attending private universities in terms of financing, in terms of assistance because with private universities, we don't have to provide capital funding to them.

Perhaps, if you have time, you could comment on the foreign

students in Alberta. How do we encourage them to come here and pay a lot of dollars to take their education from us and to build a good relationship down the road when they go back to their country and become the leaders there?

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I think we're very short on time, so I will just put my questions forward. If I could get some answers in the future, that would be great.

My first question would be in regard to: would the minister care to make a comment on the fact that there is no money in the budget, as we can see it, for planned operational and capital growth? Is this going to be funded by tuition increases?

In conjunction with that, with regard to tuition we would like to ask about when we would see some stability and affordability put into the tuition fee question. With all of the money that's being put in, we still have tuition fees that have more than doubled in the last decade, and it's becoming increasingly unaffordable for many students to even consider going to postsecondary education, regardless of what endowments might be available to them.

As well, I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona did mention this, but, you know, it bears repeating. Why does our province have such a low completion rate for postsecondary education? We're approaching a 40 per cent noncompletion rate for postsecondary students, and this is unacceptably high. We would like to see something in the budget to address this specifically.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the following question after considering the business plan and proposed estimates of the Department of Advanced Education for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$1,582,176,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$117,400,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Chairman, it is with a great deal of regret because I didn't get the opportunity to go on – I was going to say go on at length, but that would have been a bad comment – to answer some of the questions, but I will commit to answering the questions I didn't get to in writing.

I would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Webber: Thank you, 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.

Advanced Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,582,176,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$117,400,000.

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 8 p.m., at which time we return in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:19 p.m.]

