

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 26, 2005**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 05/04/26

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, and welcome.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly an impressive group of 45 senior high school students from across the province. These students are participating, as they do annually, in a nonpartisan learning experience called the Forum for Young Albertans.

As students do each year, they come to the provincial capital to learn first-hand about the day-to-day workings of the provincial government. The students are working with politicians and representatives from the public service, the legal community, academia, and business to examine and review political concerns of the day. This week these students are breaking bread with all Members of the Legislative Assembly at a special dinner. On Friday the group is holding a model parliament in these Chambers, Mr. Speaker, and I trust that the members of this Assembly will remember to model first-class parliamentary behaviour for the students today.

The students are seated in the members' gallery and the public gallery, as I understand. Mr. Speaker, I won't mention each name individually, but I'd ask them all to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Madam Deputy Premier.

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of 15 staff from the Public Affairs Bureau touring the Legislature today. I won't list each name individually, but I can tell members that the group includes communications staff from Children's Services through to Infrastructure, Seniors and Community Supports, as well as staff from the Alberta call centre and the Queen's Printer bookstore. These valued and dedicated staff are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, from the oil sands capital of the world, the regional municipality and city of Fort McMurray, two grade 6 classes here today with parents and teachers from l'école Dickinsfield school and Boréal school. They were actually rock climbing last night. I didn't get a chance to rock climb with them, but I look forward to doing that in the future. I'd like to ask the students and teachers and all the parents that are with them on this important trip to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Jodie Bakker. Jodie is a graduate from the University of Alberta criminology program. She spent the last year working for Alberta Justice as a research officer in management and leadership services. Jodie took the initiative of doing an e-mail to my office asking if she could job shadow for a day because she was interested in learning what the minister did and to see the political process in action. She is with us today visiting the Legislature. I'd ask Jodie, who is in the members' gallery, to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you a member from my constituency of Calgary-Shaw. His name is John Bachynski. There are two things noteworthy about him. He lets me put a big sign in his yard during elections, which I appreciate, and the second is that he's the father of a constituent of mine who is now 6-8 and growing. He's 15 years old, and Centennial high school is basing a lot of their future basketball hopes on him. I'd ask him if he'll rise, John Bachynski, a member of my constituency.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a good friend of mine from Lloydminster. Mr. Glenn Soloy has spent many, many years working with the governments of Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories both in restructuring and in many of the affairs with the First Nations people. Glenn is here to watch proceedings today. I'd ask Glenn to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you two members of my constituency seated up in the public gallery, and the third member is my secretary. Kim Hutchings is the secretary for the Douglasdale community association. She's been there for 16 years. She was one of the original founders of the Douglasdale Estates Community Association. As well, Darrell Hutchings. If they could rise. And the person that keeps me organized daily, Donna Elms.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you 21 visitors from the Trochu Valley school in my constituency who are visiting the Legislature today, accompanied by their teacher, Bill Cunningham, and parents Ruth King and Kathy Samson. Although they're not in the Assembly right now – well, five are in the gallery, and they've already been introduced by the Premier as young Albertans in the Forum for Young Albertans. The rest will be in during question period, but I'm sure they would appreciate the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, your group is not in right at the moment. We'll do it later.

Ms Evans: Thank you.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Office of the Chief Internal Auditor

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To give the impression that someone is guarding tax dollars, this government created the office of the chief internal auditor, which they refer to as their own CIA. When you look at the committee that oversees the chief internal auditor, you see that the only two public members are both high-ranking PC Party insiders. To the Premier: could he explain how appointing the PC Party's vice-president of finance and one of the Premier's closest buddies as the only public members on the government's internal audit committee provides objective oversight of the government's expenses?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, the chair of the finance committee would have some financial knowledge. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has not named the other person. If he names him, I'll find out if he is, in fact, a close buddy. Lots of people purport to be close buddies. Maybe he is a close buddy. The only other person I can think of is Mr. Halpin, who's a fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, very qualified, but he happens to be a friend too. Nothing wrong with that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that official government of Alberta documents state that the Auditor General is expected to "rely on the work of the [chief internal auditor]," isn't this just a way to have the PC Party insulate this government from the efforts of the Auditor General?

1:40

Mr. Klein: No, Mr. Speaker. That's wrong. The answer is wrong – or the question is wrong. The answer is right, of course. Jack Halpin I don't think is on the audit committee any longer. I think it's George Cornish he alludes to. George Cornish was the former chief commissioner of the city of Calgary, a very knowledgeable individual.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Finance: given that the committee of the internal auditor is chaired by the Deputy Minister of Executive Council, what role does the office of the internal auditor have in the investigation into the Alberta Securities Commission?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, none at this point.

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

Securities Commission

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this Assembly the Minister of Finance said in regard to the Securities Commission controversy that she has personally "researched the documents entirely" and that she could not find one identifier in those docu-

ments "that gives the identity of any of the complainants." It's right here on page 974 of *Hansard*, actually. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. Given that no complainants are identified, why won't she, in the interests of openness and accountability, release those documents publicly?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I think that if he'd have researched *Hansard* back maybe a week or two ago when I answered this question previously, I explained very clearly that those documents were provided to me on the condition that they would not be released by me under solicitor-client privilege. I accepted those documents under that understanding and that undertaking, and I remain committed to that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A simple question to the Minister of Finance: who is the client in that arrangement?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the clients, in my understanding of that undertaking, are the persons who came forward with complaints.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. To the same minister: will the minister categorically deny that there has been any interference in enforcement and investigations at the Alberta Securities Commission?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a couple of things very clear. First of all, the Alberta Securities Commission is a quasi-judicial body and operates at arm's length from this government. In most instances that's what the opposition would want. Therefore, I do not involve myself in the day-to-day operations of that commission, nor do I think it appropriate.

Secondly, the issues that have arisen at the commission, primarily, as I understand it, in the human resource area, did not come up in one day. Certainly, it'll take probably more than one day to fix them. I am pleased that the commission has brought in some external management consultants in the human resource area and have given me every undertaking that they wish to resolve these issues as quickly as possible.

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

Electricity Deregulation

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even top Tories cannot support their flagship policy, electricity deregulation. Top Tories are reluctant to gamble on long-term electricity contracts because they know that electricity deregulation has driven the price far too high. My first question is to the Premier. Why is this government continuing to penalize electricity consumers for the benefit of electricity companies?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that is false. What we want to do is to let the private sector prevail in accordance with our government's policy of promoting entrepreneurship and free enterprise. The hon. member is obviously alluding to media reports that stem from a draft discussion document, as I understand it, that was prepared for the Utilities Consumer Advocate. So nothing is final yet, but when the final report comes in, either the Minister of Energy or the Minister of Government Services or both will be reviewing those recommen-

dations and subsequently will be making recommendations to cabinet and caucus.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the Premier: given that top Tories are not interested in buying into electricity deregulation, why is this government continuing to force expensive long-term electricity contracts onto reluctant residential electricity consumers?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is totally false. Customers have the choice. I'm the top Tory, and as far as I know, I'm still on the regulated rate. I don't pay that much attention to it, but I can tell you what my bill is for my condo here in Edmonton. It averages about \$24, \$25 a month. Now, admittedly, I'm not there that much, but I keep the air conditioning going, and I keep the fan going. [interjection] Yeah, the fridge is going, and when I'm home, I watch television, leave the lights on. I try, you know, and conserve energy when I can.

But I'm the top Tory, Mr. Speaker, and I'm on the regulated rate, so no one is forcing me to do anything.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the top Tory: why hasn't the top Tory purchased a long-term electricity contract if it's such a good deal? Why do you expect Albertans to buy into it when you won't?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, they have a choice. They have a choice, and that's what this issue is all about. It's about choice. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with choice.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Utilities Consumer Advocate Advisory Council

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP opposition has obtained and will table the report on retail electricity options that the Minister of Government Services tried yesterday to dismiss as a draft. This final report of the advisory council is a scathing indictment of the deregulation of electricity. The advisory council expresses disappointment that consumer protection is not even on the radar screen of the government, and instead electricity policy is being driven for the exclusive benefit of companies. This is to the Minister of Government Services. Why is this government hiding, deflecting, and spinning a report from its own advisory council that concludes, "We are surprised and disappointed that consumer protection is not even a decision criterion considered by the Department."

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, that is a draft report that the member has. As a matter of fact, that report is dated February 23, and on February 17 the committee held another public hearing in Vauxhall, so of course they didn't have time to incorporate into the draft report the results from that meeting. As a matter of fact, the final report, after it has gone through the whole process, will be out for public viewing. This is in response to a discussion paper that the Department of Energy has issued. This is the committee's draft response to that discussion paper.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it doesn't say "draft" anywhere on it.

Given the advisory council's scathing criticism of Conservative deregulation policy, will the minister start doing the right thing on behalf of smaller electricity customers and stop forcing Albertans to choose electricity retail options that even the minister himself admits are a bad deal?

1:50

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, that last part of his preamble – I haven't even discussed publicly and/or with the minister the issue about whether I have a contract or not. Clearly, since the restructuring of electricity started to occur, there has been some 3,000 megawatts of generation created, and there is not one bit of public debt connected to it. That is just one. We'll readily admit that the retail section of the restructuring has not matured yet, and of course we're looking at the possibility of extending the RRO. That's what this discussion paper is all about.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, will the minister admit that he's misled the House about this being a draft and admit that he's forcing the committee to rewrite it to suit the government?

Mr. Hancock: Point of order.

The Speaker: There's a point of order recognized.

Does the hon. minister want to respond to the question? There were three questions in there. Take the first one.

Mr. Lund: Well, maybe I'll deal with the first comment, about misleading. There is nothing misleading about what I said yesterday nor what I'm saying today. That is a draft report, and there will be another report that will be dealt with. That one is simply a report that was sent in originally.

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

Griffith Scott Middle School

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents in Millet are interested in the future infrastructure improvements at the Griffith Scott middle school. Could the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation inform this Assembly what government is doing to replace or renovate the school?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On March 22 of this year I met with the Wetaskiwin school board to discuss this very issue. This issue is a very pressing issue as the audit score of this particular facility is 1,040, which is actually one of the highest audit scores that we have in the province. They have subsequently put this school forward on their capital list, and we're certainly going to be looking at it.

Mr. Johnson: To the same minister: since, as you mentioned, the audit score is 1,000 or higher, why has this school not been renovated prior to now?

Dr. Oberg: That's an excellent question. In 2001 this school was actually awarded money to be replaced, but the school board came to us and said that rather than replace the Millet school, they would sooner build a new school in Falun, which is also within the school board area. The money was subsequently transferred to Falun at that

particular time. The Millet school has now come back on their priority list, and we're currently considering that.

Mr. Johnson: My final question to the same minister: how is it determined whether the school will be renovated or replaced altogether?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a couple of answers to this one. First of all, the typical answer is that if the cost to renovate a school is 75 per cent of the cost of a new school, we will undertake building a new school. The school board has asked us for \$2.7 million. It's estimated that a new school would cost about \$5.7 million.

The interesting component of this, in talking to the school board – and this is where the hands on of talking to the school board actually helps – is that, apparently, this school is built on a zonolite formation, which has caused it to shift almost continuously. It will bulge and then decrease. So I think that what we have to do in this particular case is take a very serious look at the engineering diagrams and see whether we should replace it purely because of where the school is as opposed to the actual cost of doing this because it may well benefit us in the long run to do that.

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

Missing Computer Tapes and Microfiches

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Information and Privacy Commissioner released a report on the investigation into the loss of computer tapes and microfiches containing personal and private information on 77 Albertans. The shipments of these tapes were not tracked. The Alberta Pensions Administration Corporation was not even aware that the microfiche copies were being produced of each pension cheque and that the microfiche processing was done by a private-sector vendor. My questions are to the Premier. How will this government protect the private information of Albertans and prevent further incidents of information loss or even theft?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't know whether the hon. member is talking about health tapes or pension tapes. In either case I'll have the appropriate ministers respond. I can preface it this way. Whenever these matters come to our attention, we take whatever steps are deemed necessary to protect the rights of individuals and the privacy of individuals. But I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, on the pension tapes I can tell the hon. member that the Alberta Pensions Administration has accepted all of the Privacy Commissioner's recommendations. The Privacy Commissioner did say that there was a limited amount of personal information on those. In fact, the APA, or Alberta Pensions Administration, did individually talk to or inform each of the affected individuals, and the APA will be working with IBM to develop better processes, ensuring that this doesn't happen in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So given that no action against IBM, the information records private contractor, has been taken and that the loss of these private records was discovered in

January but not reported to the government till March, can the Premier tell us how the government plans to react when another breach occurs? Will these private contractors ever be held accountable?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, again I'll defer to the hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, the very best action to take in this is the action that has been taken, and I believe that making sure to the very, very utmost of our abilities that there are no further breaches is the best way to respond. As I said, we have accepted all of the Privacy Commissioner's recommendations. We are working with IBM to ensure that there are safeguards, that there are checks in place to ensure as much as you humanly possibly can that this breach does not occur again.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you. Given that IBM and the Department of Restructuring and Government Efficiency both confirmed that producing the microfiche copies was a continuation of an old practice, will the Premier or the hon. Deputy Premier instruct the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency to stop this costly, unnecessary, and potentially risky routine?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that that has already occurred. It was identified that it was not necessary today to retain microfiche, and that practice is not intended to continue.

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

School Construction in Calgary

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier our government announced a \$9.2 billion capital investment in infrastructure for the next three years, including \$3.1 billion in municipal infrastructure, \$2 billion in highway construction, \$1.6 billion in health facilities and equipment, and \$1.1 billion in schools and postsecondary institutions. This is very good news. Reflecting the inquiries from my Calgary constituents, my question today is to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. What is the capital investment in infrastructure for education at all levels allocated to the Calgary area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Included in this particular budget is roughly \$175 million for K to 12 school infrastructure. Those are projects that, yes, have been announced before, but these are schools that will either be started or finished within the next three years. Through to the hon. member, there are 16 new schools that are included in those 20 projects.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental question to the same minister: hon. minister, given that you base the sharing of \$3.1 billion in capital investment in municipal infrastructure on population, how do you allocate the \$1.1 billion capital investment in infrastructure for education in a highly populated area like Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much. The simple answer to this, Mr. Speaker, is: on need. When we look around the province, we see schools of different ages and different conditions. Quite simply, there is a higher need in some areas than in others. If we had all of the school districts on the same need, then I think there's a lot of merit to what the hon. member is talking about, on a per capita type of funding scheme. But, unfortunately, at this particular time we do not have that, so therefore it is based on need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question to the same minister: hon. minister, in terms of investment in education, how do you plan to address the pressing needs from the fast growth area of Calgary, Alberta's strong economic engine?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I recognize that the hon. member is from Calgary, which is certainly a booming part of the province, but in reality there are a lot of booming parts of the province, including northern Alberta, including southern Alberta, including central Alberta. It's a very nice problem to have, but we do have to keep on top of the educational needs. We do have to keep on top. After paying off the debt, this has freed us up significantly for some of the things that we can do. Again, we're going to be looking very, very closely at the school needs of all the school boards in the province because, realistically, the whole province is a strong economic engine at this particular point in time.

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

AAA Cattle Company

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week this government disregarded its own processes when it approved the feedlot development of AAA Cattle Company near Didsbury. The company had expanded beyond the terms of its approval, and the Alberta Court of Appeal also ruled against this, stating that there had been no proper assessment of risk to the environment. My first question to the Minister of Environment: given this ruling by the Alberta Court of Appeal, why has the government failed to do a proper environmental impact assessment before allowing the NRCB to expand the operations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to first and foremost say that this government is without question committed to protecting and managing our water supply and the environment. As you know, I've referred to it in this House in the past as blue gold.

In the case that the hon. member mentioned, Alberta's role is to consider issuing, of course, a water licence under the province's very progressive Water Act. The impact assessment that the hon. member makes reference to is used there in terms of collecting specific information and data to assist the decision-maker, and in this case it's the NRCB, the Natural Resources Conservation Board. In addition, before we issue a water licence, we want to make sure that

there is enough water available for the existing water users and, of course, for the use of the actual licence.

Mr. Speaker, let me just say that in this particular case a comprehensive review based on historical data that we work in close association with shows that there is ample water available. I can assure the hon. member and all members of this Assembly that we want to make sure that the conditions of monitoring and reporting, which are part of our licence, will continue to ensure that this valuable resource will continue today and well into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: given that this company had been stopped in the past for illegal development without approval, why is the company now being rewarded?

Mr. Coumts: Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me explain. The Natural Resources Conservation Board is an independent, quasi-judicial board, and it would be very inappropriate for me to comment on the decision. However, the decisions that are in place balance the interests of the livestock industry as well as the environment and public safety.

I can talk about the process, Mr. Speaker. In this particular instance the NRCB followed the Court of Appeal's direction. They reviewed the environmental risk of AAA Cattle, particularly on its pre-existing operations. The review looked at AAA's updated application and took that into consideration in their decision as well as considered stakeholders such as the county of Mountain View, I believe, plus Alberta Environment and Alberta Transportation and the committee for the Lone Pine neighbours and the community members.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. Again to the Sustainable Resource Development minister: given that the original approval was only 2,500 head of cattle and the NRCB is now allowing 18,000 head, how can the public be confident that you are protecting the public and environmental interests?

Mr. Coumts: Mr. Speaker, as I said – and I would be very cautious here – the Natural Resources Conservation Board is an independent, quasi-judicial board. I do not enter into their final decisions. The board has a good process, and we are responsible under the legislation for the process. We are also responsible to the legislation that is under the Agricultural Operation Practices Act. Therefore, the board takes that process, considering the legislation – they have open hearings as well as court appeals, and every operation is reviewed on its own merits and considered on its own merits and its own application. The NRCB has been working for the last three years and doing a diligent job on this for confined feeding operations in the province, and it's the responsible way to go.

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

Daily Physical Activity in Schools

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of our government's attempt to increase physical activity amongst our youth and in response to the recommendation contained in Alberta's Commission on Learning, the Minister of Education has announced the daily

physical activity initiative. This will require all students in grades 1 through 9 to participate in 30 minutes of daily physical activity, and school boards are now preparing for its implementation starting this fall. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Can the minister explain the rationale behind the initiative and mostly how he expects this to happen?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think the rationale is predicated on two premises, one of them being common sense and the other one being a study that was done back in the year 2000. Now, the Learning Commission looked at both of those predications and also determined that obesity amongst our youth is growing at a very alarming rate. As we all know, in later years and even in some earlier years that can lead to problems and complications with things like diabetes and heart attack and stroke and so on. So when our Premier announced the new health and wellness framework in his speech in January or February of this year, it was contemplated that the daily physical activity, which is going to start in September of this year, would be the first part of that particular initiative, and that's how we see it being implemented.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. For my first supplemental: will the minister please clarify what he meant in his comments that he made to school boards last month where he indicated that physical activity must be safe, structured, and supervised in order to qualify as daily physical activity?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you for that question. That's a very good question because I, too, have been receiving letters from some school boards asking for that clarification, and I hope to put something out that will be a follow-up to the message I sent out about a month ago. I should get that out within the next few weeks.

Mr. Speaker, in a nutshell safe would mean in accordance with the safety guidelines as teachers and principals would know them, structured would mean something planned, and with respect to supervised that, too, would be in accordance with the school regulations, where we mean supervised by an adult or someone like that who's actually in charge. It should also be an enjoyable activity, and students also should have an understanding of the importance of that activity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. For my final supplemental: assuming that this initiative is successful for grades 1 through 9, is the minister considering making physical activity mandatory for kindergarten through grade 12?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that in a perfect world and if there were more time in the school day, we would see physical activity being mandatory right throughout the entire system because those are habits that shouldn't stop at the end of the ninth year or the 10th year.

However, let me say this. Within the broader spectrum of a curriculum review and the new health and wellness framework that we are now working on for implementation in September of '06, I will take that comment under advisement because it has been asked by others. I would do it with the caution and cautionary advice that the school day right as it sits today is extremely busy already, and the options right now are not that abundant.

Tobacco Reduction Strategy

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, the government has recognized the immense cost of cancer on the health system by increasing funding for the Alberta Cancer Board by 25 per cent this year, an increase of almost \$48 million. Increasing funding to address patient treatment and growing drug costs is not a sustainable solution, especially when the government had the perfect opportunity to reduce important cancer risk factors but instead made the choice to support a weakened smoking bill. My questions are to the minister of health. Can the minister explain this inconsistency between policy and action?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would approach it this way. I presume that the increase that we have given to the Cancer Board is being applauded by the hon. member opposite because at 25 per cent it recognizes the costs of cancer drugs, the technology that should be in place, and funds as well as possible the initiatives of the Cancer Society and the Cancer Board in making sure that we do as much as we can to attack cancer. I believe that relative to the discussion on the private member's bill that was given third reading yesterday, it would not be appropriate to comment.

2:10

Ms Blakeman: What a shame.

Again to the same minister of health: given that smoking is the leading cause of preventable illness and disability and accounts for nearly 20 per cent of all deaths, why has the government not taken a more active role in prevention?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has taken an active role in prevention. In fact, this government is notorious for its tobacco reduction strategies. The work that we have done with youth, the work that we've done in recognizing the importance of looking after youth and addictions is unprecedented. Since shortly after the year 2000 a very aggressive tobacco reduction strategy has been in place. But if today we are being flogged for what happened yesterday, may I remind the hon. member opposite that at least three members of the hon. opposition chose to vote for the bill that will provide for Alberta's children an opportunity to visit public places without smoke. Now, that is a considerable step forward.

Ms Blakeman: To the minister of health again: does this government, in fact, have a concrete plan and a definitive timeline to create nonsmoking in public places?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, contrary to what some might assume would be the appropriate way to proceed with this, we have only recently had that bill pass in the House. There's an opportunity for royal assent. There's an opportunity for dialogue with the regions. We have a tobacco reduction strategy currently in place, but it will be amended given the more aggressive stance that this government has taken as a result of discussions in this House yesterday, a stance that will see us move forward on the tobacco reduction strategy and look beyond that strategy to what opportunities we have in the future in areas which I have been approached about dealing with a tax on discount cigarettes and dealing with the positioning of the way we market cigarettes in various places where people can buy them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Kindergarten Programs

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in 2003 the Learning

Commission recommended the expansion of junior kindergarten and full-day kindergarten for at-risk children. Despite overwhelming evidence that junior kindergarten and full-day kindergarten make a huge difference to the lives of high-needs children, the government has been dithering on implementing these recommendations for more than 18 months. My question is to the Minister of Education. What is the holdup? Why has the government not proceeded on these two very important recommendations?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question, and I like the way that he's framed the latter part of it. Those are two important initiatives that were recommended for the very proper reasons by the Learning Commission. What government said was that we would take those recommendations and study them a little more carefully, a little more in depth. We would talk to the system. We would talk with other education stakeholders to make sure that we help in particular those children who are deemed to be at risk.

Now, in furtherance of that, Mr. Speaker, I did canvass all 62 school boards during January and February, and I found there still to be a very wide-ranging split opinion on both the issues of: should there be a junior kindergarten program introduced, and secondly, should there be a full-day kindergarten program introduced? What the school boards told me in a nutshell is that 95 per cent of our aged five children already are in a kindergarten program. However, with respect to the junior kindergarten some felt that it was just too early an age for four year olds to be away for too long a period of time. So we're still considering both options at this time.

Mr. Martin: Well, considering and studying and dithering.

The question to the minister is simply this. The evidence is overwhelming that this is especially important for high-risk students. Why could we not at least begin to start at that level and do it right away?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do put over \$100 million into kindergarten programming already, and within that \$100 million we do help children who are deemed to be at risk. Now, there are many definitions for what we refer to as at-risk children. Some of them can be language deficient, or they could have a numeracy problem. We provide additional monies through ESL. We provide additional monies through PUF, the program unit funding. We provide hundreds of millions of dollars for special-needs children and for other special remedial help programs. So the suggestion is a good one. It is under consideration. No decision has yet been made, but as soon as it is, I'll be communicating it one way or the other to this House and to the public.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, let's be a little more specific. Given that the Edmonton public city centre education project won a Premier's award for excellence last year mainly because of its innovative programs and early childhood education such as junior and full-day kindergarten, why is the minister not pushing ahead with these recommendations now? Eighteen months is long enough.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, in actual fact we are pushing ahead with coming to a decision on it, but the fact is, however, that there are split opinions on this. Now, after we get past the educational concerns of the educational stakeholders – the teachers, the principals, the superintendents, and the trustees – we still have a group out there called parents, who have the ultimate responsibility for their children. In many cases they have written and they have expressed an opinion. I have to listen to their concerns as well, and they're not quite as sure yet about either of these two decisions.

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

Sale of Liquor to Minors

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past few weeks my constituents have been asking me what our government is doing to keep alcohol out of the hands of minors in this province. My first question is to the Minister of Gaming. Can the minister please tell me how he knows that licensed establishments are not selling liquor to minors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Graydon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year for the past three years the inspectors from the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission have gone out to the liquor stores, lounges, clubs, and bars to see if those liquor licensees are complying with the policy. It's called the under-25 ID policy. It demands that serving staff ask for ID from patrons if they appear to be younger than 25. Last year a team of younger looking AGLC inspectors visited 1,659 licensees across the province and tried to purchase alcohol. Those inspectors were asked for identification 1,385 times. That equates to an 84 per cent compliance rate.

To answer your question, I know that licensees are asking persons who appear to be under the age of 25 for ID. They've been investigated, and that's the 84 per cent compliance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is again to the Minister of Gaming. Upon hearing his answer, I'm wondering: are you saying that the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission is sending minors into licensed establishments to purchase alcohol?

Mr. Graydon: Well, Mr. Speaker, all AGLC inspectors are over the age of 18 years of age, and they would never – I repeat, never – ever send a minor into a licensed establishment. Last year Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton and Mount Royal College in Calgary were contacted, and student inspectors were hired from those colleges who were enrolled in the law enforcement and the security diploma programs. Having the opportunity to be an AGLC inspector is a valuable and positive learning experience for these aspiring enforcement professionals.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the same minister: why do you feel that this has been such a successful policy compared to others?

Mr. Graydon: The owners and operators of Alberta's licensed restaurants, bars, and lounges are, indeed, a hardworking and responsible bunch. The AGLC does a lot of work with them to ensure that they know the rules. We have an educational poster that we display in licensed premises, Mr. Speaker. It says, "Hard to Tell – Have to Ask."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

2:20

Special-needs Education

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Too often this government strikes a task force, sets up a committee, commission, or study only to have it collect dust on the shelf. When it comes to this government's misguided health reforms, this inaction is a blessing, but when it comes to providing educational support for children with special needs, we need strong leadership and a firm commitment. My question to the Minister of Education: now that the wasteful grade 4 achievement testing is gone, when will the minister take serious action on developing a system-wide early identification and screening process for children as recommended in the government's own five-year-old study?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Commission on Learning had something in the order of 95 recommendations. As I recall, the government responded and accepted something in the order of 86 of those recommendations. Three were left up to study, and three may have been rejected outright or something along that line. In addition to accepting the ACOL recommendations, government also spent something in the order of \$340 million to implement those recommendations that could be implemented. That's a significant commitment given the importance of that particular report.

Now, specific to the earlier grades, as I indicated in response to a question just earlier this afternoon, we are very well aware of what some of those complications are for those young people, and that's why we've augmented our total education budget this year by more than 7 per cent. There are 287 fresh, new millions of dollars going in, for a total of \$4.3 billion this year, and within that envelope there will be ample money to help out the very students that this particular member is asking about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When will the minister make this a priority by committing the ongoing dedicated funding for educational specialists since school boards still say that they don't have enough necessary resources?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, a good question. I'm a very strong believer in having more specialists, and I think that in the short term, perhaps the medium term, I would like to see an increase in guidance counsellors and other counsellors as well as education specialists. Let me just give the hon. member and others here one example. We're trying our best to increase speech and language therapists as one speciality, and we would if they were available to be hired. The fact is that there's a world shortage in that area, and I just cite that as one example. As soon as we can see more people being trained in audiology and speech therapy programming, we'll be more than happy to take them into the system so they can help our children.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister provide the Assembly with a timeline for when teachers will be given support, including adequate preparation time and professional development opportunities, to deal with the special-needs students in their classrooms?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there's been a rapid increase in the number of special-needs children who require special help. In fact, that's one reason why we increased our funding this year for mild and moderate and for severe special-needs children, and those

increases have been very significant. For example, severe special-needs students are now going to be receiving about \$14,415 per student in that category alone. So we've done a lot. We're up around the 300 million-plus mark for dollars spent on special-needs programming. I do recognize that more needs to be done, hon. member, but you have to do this within the limits available, and you have to do it in tandem with the school system so as to not overload or overburden.

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

School Operation and Maintenance Funding

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've met recently with representatives of the Wild Rose school division and the Black Gold school division in my constituency, and they've expressed concerns about the level of operation and maintenance funding provided to school boards. This concern is in light of the rising costs of utilities and the ability of school boards to meet these costs. My first question is for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Was there an increase in operation and maintenance funding to school boards in budget 2005?

The Speaker: The hon. minister will be debating that budget tomorrow.

Dr. Oberg: Yeah, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just going to comment on that. In the proposed budget that will be before the House tomorrow there is \$351 million for plant operation and maintenance included in that estimated budget. That is a very, very small increase of \$2 million this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first supplemental is to the same minister. Given that maintenance and utility costs are on the rise, can school boards expect relief in the coming months?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very difficult for me to comment on that, considering that we are just dealing with our budget tomorrow. I think the school boards have put a strong case forward. Certainly, the Wild Rose and the Black Gold school districts have put forward very strong cases as to the increasing costs that are out there on operation and maintenance. So although we are just dealing with our budget, we certainly are cognizant of these issues in the school boards as they are perceived today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. How is funding for school board operation and maintenance currently calculated, especially in light of some of these rural boards that have older schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently there are about four different things that are taken into consideration when it comes to the amount of operation and maintenance money that a particular school board receives. There's utilization, sparsity, distance from a major centre, and quite simply the size of the school. We are

currently, though, working on different ways around this particular formula, and I think that there probably are some better ways out there. It's currently under development, but we're looking very closely at some better proxies than what is out there currently. We're working very closely with Alberta Finance to ensure that this formula will be coming out, and I hope to have this formula in place very soon.

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

Insurance Costs for Nonprofit Sector

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a result of this government's downloading, Alberta's volunteer and nonprofit organizations are expected to provide ever-more vital services to those most in need. Sadly, they are struggling with the high cost of insurance. Often these organizations are forced to settle for reduced coverage and higher deductibles. My question today is for the Minister of Finance. Since it is this ministry's responsibility to regulate the insurance industry, why does the government appear to be doing nothing to protect the voluntary sector from the escalating costs of insurance?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think there's any question in anybody's mind that the opposition have supported public insurance. If that's not correct and if I'm misunderstanding, I'm sure I'll be corrected.

Mr. Speaker, we did discuss this issue somewhat in my estimates. I did say that I have a similar concern. We're finding that many towns who used to carry the arena, the riding academy, a number of things like that, on their insurance have had to tell these volunteer organizations that they can no longer do it because, of course, of this cost of settlements and the liability issue.

I can tell you what we have done with ag societies in particular. There are some 300-and-some of those. We got the ag societies together through their association and looked at a group insurance package, which did work for a great number of those and reduced their costs significantly. I think we can continue to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister at least exempt these organizations from the hidden 3 per cent insurance premium tax?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's nothing hidden about the 3 per cent tax. It's very much there. We have had discussions about that tax. If the tax were removed, would the policies go down 3 per cent? Interesting debate and comment. Again, we discussed that during my estimates.

Mr. Speaker, I think what would be more practical would be for those of us in our various areas who have voluntary groups to try and look at a group insurance package. There are companies that will do that. Most of these volunteer groups have overall associations, umbrella associations, and a good model for this is what has happened with the ag societies in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'll be calling on the first of six in just a few seconds from now, but might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I had the privilege of spending just a few moments with the Elderberry Belles chapter from Sherwood Park. This is a group of ladies with the Red Hat Society. Our Premier noted how lovely the ladies look in their red hats. They I think improve the lives of all of us in Sherwood Park with their attention to being lively and enjoying life, and it contributes to the health and wellness of our community. Please today, members, would you join me in welcoming these lovely ladies. There are 10 in the members' gallery.

2:30

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

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly Shawna and Jenna. Jenna is here studying Alberta's legislative process on a grade 6 field trip. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

I have a second introduction through you to Members of the Leg. Assembly, Mr. Speaker, two staff members from my department, Shawna Brilliant, research assistant, and Kristin Hillenbrand, legal specialist. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Armenian Genocide

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over 90 years ago my grandparents escaped the brutal massacre of the Armenian people by the Turkish Ottoman Empire. Ironically, it was a Turkish family that saved the lives of my grandmother and my grandfather. Although both their families were among the 1.5 million Armenians murdered by the butcher battalions, my grandmother always taught us that it was better to love your enemy. Her story and her lessons are not forgotten.

On April 24 of each and every year people around the world, including Canada and the United States, remember the first genocide of the 20th century, the brutal annihilation of over 1 and a half million Armenian men, women, and children, just as every year on April 22 we remember the Jewish Holocaust.

There is a connection between the Armenian massacre and the Jewish Holocaust. They were both predetermined, carefully planned genocides, and because people around the world chose not to acknowledge the brutal butchering of the Armenian people, Hitler was encouraged to brutally butcher the Jewish people. After all, Hitler said, "Who remembers the Armenian genocide?"

As we remember the Armenian genocide we, too, remember the other massacres that remain a source of pain and horrible suffering today. We also remember that hope survives these atrocities. Today many people in Armenia and Turkey now work to support peace and reconciliation through the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission and are attempting to restore their economic, political, and cultural ties.

I wish to extend my warmest wishes and expressions of solidarity

to all Armenian people at this solemn time of remembrance. If anyone in history should ever ask again, "Who remembers the Armenian genocide?" we can say that we remember.

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

Education Week

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today during Alberta's Education Week to pay tribute to the teachers, principals, and trustees of Alberta's public and separate school systems. Working with parents and the dedicated professionals in the public service, these individuals do so much to support quality public education for Alberta students.

I'm particularly pleased by this year's theme, Public Education: Proud Legacy, Inspired Future. Public education has played a central role in building the Alberta we know and love. Ensuring that every Albertan has the opportunity to succeed, flourish, and contribute to this great province is the best legacy we can leave to younger generations. In fact, it's more than a legacy; it's a profound duty.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain. Many schools still struggle with the legacy of underfunding, others needlessly face the threat of closure as a result of poor planning and policy, and almost all: important educational needs that are not being met.

Amidst the problems lies great potential. The foundation of this potential is our teachers. Beneath all the performance indicators, utilization formulas lies a relationship between teachers and students. This is the key. For education is a social process dependent on the professional educators having the ability and opportunity to engage students in this process to inspire them.

Let's reflect for a moment on what this engagement requires in our second century. It requires that we meet the needs of educating an increasingly diverse public. It requires that we recognize and fully support the diverse learning needs of our students. It requires that we engage parents more effectively, not just in fundraising and cutting cheques for school fees. It requires that we help principals provide educational leadership to their colleagues in the classroom, and it requires that we recognize the true value of schools to their communities as well as the value of the communities that schools at their best become.

Thank you.

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

Education Week

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pride that I rise today to echo some of the comments of the fine hon. Member for St. Albert and add perhaps slightly different perspectives as well. I'd like to recognize all the great people associated with education in our fair province, from kindergarten to grade 12. Education Week, indeed, is April 24 to 30, and our Albertan people can be very proud of the great educational legacy that has been built in this province over the past 100 years.

During this week back in 1905 two school districts, Leachville and Coalfields, began educating their students. Throughout 1905 another 119 school districts were formed as the new government of Alberta took shape, and that was just the start of something incredibly special. Today many results show that Alberta's students outperform students from across Canada. Not only that, on the international stage they score the highest marks in reading and are among the top three in science and math.

Mr. Speaker, their parents' efforts are inspiring as well. Albertans

enjoy one of the most educated populations in the country with 55 per cent of 25 to 54 year olds boasting a postsecondary education.

As is the case with so many other personal, professional, and political realms, Alberta continues its attitudes and actions of firsts. For example, Alberta is the first province to establish a registered apprenticeship program, or RAP, to help students begin to learn a trade while in high school, and Alberta is the first province to establish a technology system that has 99 per cent of Alberta schools connected to the Internet.

Mr. Speaker, many of my aunts and uncles were educators, and my mother taught me a bounty of lessons in my youth. That's for sure. My father taught me five subjects in high school. A couple of careers ago I spent 13 years in three countries at all grade levels as an educator and administrator, mostly here in Alberta. As such, I have just a tiny bit of first-hand knowledge of the great sacrifice and contribution involved with those in education today. I trust that our hon. members will join me as they congratulate the people in their local areas for the incredible things they've done in education.

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

Agricultural Industry

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I met with the people involved with Growing Canada and Growing Alberta, the Canadian Association of Agri-Retailers, and CropLife Canada. Our professionals and businesses in agriculture play a vital role in nourishing our lives in Alberta, Canada, and the world. It is important to know that Canada's agriculture and agrifood exports amount to over \$25 billion per year. Canada's balance of trade in processed agrifood products has shifted from a \$2.1 billion deficit in 1989 to a \$1.8 billion surplus in 2003 and growing.

Agriculture in Alberta increasingly contributes major parts in these areas. During the past 40 years, through commercial fertilizer and related high-yield farming practices, our farmers have tripled food production while using less land. Our fertilizer production is valued at \$3.8 billion in export and \$2.5 billion in our own agricultural use. To fertilize the crops only with manure would require an additional 7 billion cattle. We would have to clear the rest of the world's forests to grow the cattle forage required.

Our agriculture technologies have strong track records. Our dwarf wheat introduced in 1960 helps increase yields by 70 per cent. Our genetic technology introduced in 1973 allows crops to adapt to the prairie environment. Canola, introduced in 1974, now leads the world with its production of 75 per cent of global business. The first biotech crop production in the world was in Canada in 1995. The golden rice produced with Canadian technology in 2000 improves the health of the world's billions of undernourished people. With the improvement of plant nutrition and growth the agriculture in North America generates about 454 million tonnes of oxygen annually, helping to counter the so-called global warming.

So, Mr. Speaker, let's grow Canada, grow Alberta.

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

2:40 Health Sciences Ambulatory Learning Centre

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the government of Alberta announced a major investment of what is sure to become a major landmark in our beautiful capital city. I'm referring to the health sciences ambulatory learning centre at the University of Alberta hospital. This facility will change the way patients are diagnosed and treated and how medical students are trained. It will provide co-ordinated diagnostic and specialist

services all under one roof while providing unprecedented research and educational opportunities for health sciences students from various faculties in a team-based approach.

Mr. Speaker, this will mean that a patient who meets with a specialist and then requires a series of diagnostic tests or consultations with other health professionals will have more time, care, and convenient services. In addition, University of Alberta health sciences students will have interdisciplinary educational opportunities, and graduates will provide more comprehensive and balanced patient care.

I had the opportunity to be at the event today to introduce my hon. colleagues the ministers of Advanced Education, Health and Wellness, and Infrastructure and Transportation. I was able to see the kinds of results that are achieved when health authorities, postsecondary institutions, and governments work together for the benefit of all Albertans. Mr. Speaker, by investing \$577 million in such a health and learning centre, the government of Alberta shows once more that health and postsecondary education are top priorities.

In closing, I would like to commend Capital Health and the University of Alberta for their commitment and vision. The health sciences ambulatory learning centre will be great for Edmonton and great for Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Environmental Sustainability

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are rightfully concerned about their environment. The people of this province have told this government time and time again that environmental sustainability is an issue for them but to no avail. The government's own It's Your Future survey showed that the environment is one of the top priorities for our province. How did the government respond? Not a dime in new spending in this year's budget for the environment.

What's more, the Energy and Utilities Board is proposing to revise their enforcement policy. The proposals will allow industry to jump two or three regulatory steps at the discretion of the boards. The new policy was developed without any public input, and instead of setting out guidelines for industry that they must follow, they have changed it to regulations that the industry may follow. This policy will result in an increased risk of environmental damage as well as an increased risk to public health and safety. This government is undermining what small public confidence there was left in the EUB.

All of this while coal-bed methane production is proceeding full steam ahead. Sour gas wells in close proximity to populated areas are being drilled. Our water resources are being taxed by industrial and population pressures, not to mention the impact of climate change on our air, water, and soil.

Our environment minister likes to call water blue gold, Mr. Speaker. Does this mean that the strategy is to sell off this resource to the highest bidder? Where is the EUB when we need them?

Farmers and landowners have banded together to fight the changes in the EUB. They, like most Albertans, want a stronger, more independent board with real environmental regulations. Let's face it. The EUB has a 98 per cent compliance rate because it's so easy to meet those needs.

Mr. Speaker, it's time for this government to come and listen to the people it purports to represent.

Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, by way of a historical comment today, on this day in 1887 Joseph Ora Card and a small group of Mormons founded the community that was to become Cardston in

Alberta. They were dryland farmers. They introduced a variety of new crops, and they began the introduction of irrigation in southern Alberta. Their temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was the first Mormon temple built outside of the United States.

head:

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Private Bills has had certain bills under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that the following bills proceed: Bill Pr. 1, Bow Valley Community Foundation Act; Bill Pr. 3, Medicine Hat Community Foundation Amendment Act, 2005.

The committee recommends that the following bill proceed with amendment: Bill Pr. 2, the Camrose Lutheran College Corporation Act.

The committee also advises that its consideration of the following private bill will be deferred to the fall 2005 sitting of the Legislature: Bill Pr. 4, Brooklynn Hannah George Rewega Right of Civil Action Act.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Private Bills has had under consideration the fees charged for petitioning for private bills and recommends that Standing Order 87(1) be amended to increase the fee to \$500 for petitioning for a private bill.

As part of this report I will be tabling five copies of the proposed amendment to Bill Pr. 2.

Mr. Speaker, I request the concurrence of the Assembly in these recommendations.

The Speaker: This is a debatable motion.

The last recommendation has caught the attention of the chair. Is the hon. member saying that the committee is amending the Standing Orders of this Legislative Assembly?

Dr. Brown: Not at all. Mr. Speaker, we're requesting that the appropriate standing committee would take that under consideration. We're simply recommending that the standing order be amended to increase that fee.

The Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Opposed? Carried.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition from some good Albertans from the fine Alberta communities of La Corey, Red Deer, Millet, Blackfalds, Hinton, Lloydminster, Medicine Hat, Two Hills, Alberta Beach, and other communities, and it reads:

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

Mr. Speaker, there are 109 petitioners on this petition.

head:

Introduction of Bills

Bill 40 Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 40, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2). This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, by brief explanation I should say that this amends the Personal Income Tax Act to enhance and expand the Alberta family employment tax credit effective July 2005 and to index the phase-out threshold and credit amounts to inflation effective July 2006.

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a report entitled Recommendations to the Utilities Consumer Advocate on Retail Energy Options for Electricity produced by the Utilities Consumer Advocate Advisory Council. The report finds that discussion papers on retail options for small utility consumers are "without consideration for consumer interests."

Thank you.

head: 2:50

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Stevens, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act the Law Society of Alberta annual report, 2004. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Human Resources and Employment, a package of information relating to the memorandum of understanding between Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and Alberta Learning for the entry of temporary foreign workers for projects in the Alberta oil sands.

Speaker's Ruling Items Previously Decided

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to moving to the point of order, I have to advise the members of an administrative matter that we need to deal with by way of this definition. If hon. members look in the Order Paper, members will find Motion 507 in the name of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. That motion standing in that member's name is due to be considered next Monday evening, May 2, under Motions Other than Government Motions. The motion reads: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to prohibit smoking in public buildings and indoor workplaces."

This motion raises issues virtually identical to those considered in connection with private member's Bill 201, which received third reading just yesterday, April 25, 2005. The chair finds that Motion 507 duplicates the issues already debated and decided by the Assembly with respect to Bill 201.

This is not the first time that this type of issue has arisen in the Assembly. On March 28, 1995, Speaker Schumacher ruled the motion by the then Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark concerning electoral boundaries out of order on the grounds that it violated the

rules of anticipation found in Standing Order 23(e) as there was a government bill, Bill 20, Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, 1995, standing on the Order Paper for second reading. This rule is based on the principle that the same question should not be raised twice during the same session.

Speaker Schumacher quoted *Beauchesne* 566(7) as follows: "A motion dealing with the same subject matters of a bill, standing on the Order Paper for second reading, cannot be considered." The rationale then as now is that a bill leads to a more effective result than a motion, as stated in *Beauchesne's* 513(2) and *Erskine May*, 23rd edition, pages 388-9.

In this case Motion 507 does not merely anticipate a debate, but it clearly deals with a matter already decided during this session. Bill 201 received third reading yesterday. It is fair to say that its ultimate fate and contents were in doubt up to the concluding vote.

The chair could have ruled the hon. leader's motion out of order earlier, but in fairness to the member and in keeping with the latitude the chair gives private members, there was no intervention. At this time, however, it is clear, even clearer than the 1995 example, that the House would be considering the same issue twice. To allow the motion to proceed would depart from the precedents of the Assembly and mark a relaxation of the rules as they have been applied.

Clearly, this is a unique circumstance, so in keeping with the practice of this and in granting private members the greatest leeway possible in bringing matters before the Assembly, the chair is willing to relax the interpretation of Standing Order 39.2 and to invite the hon. member to present a revised motion to the Clerk's office by the end of business tomorrow afternoon, Wednesday, April 27, 2005, for inclusion in Thursday's Order Paper and debate next Monday evening.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order under our Standing Orders 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another member." Earlier today in question period the leader of the third party used a word that I don't believe is parliamentary, but worse yet, the word "misleading" – the dictionary definition of that is, of course, is: cause to have wrong impression about someone or something.

I believe that he violated 23(i) on two accounts. One was to make it sound like the draft paper that is a matter of discussion was in fact not a draft. Of course, that is absolutely not true. The fact is that in due time you will see a final report from that committee. I guess that worse yet was that it seemed to be indicating that I was trying to leave a wrong impression, Mr. Speaker, and in fact that is anything but correct. I have no reason to believe that the member did not have yesterday a copy of the draft report.

I find it extremely interesting because in *Hansard* on page 976 from yesterday the member asked a question of me. I won't read the whole question, but the part that is relevant to this discussion reads, "Will the minister please tell the House why, in fact, the government is stamping 'draft' on this report?" My answer to that was, "That's so interesting, Mr. Speaker, because when that draft report came through, the government didn't put 'draft' on it." Now, the member, I noticed today, does have that report, and I notice that there is no "draft" on it. So what was his motive yesterday for saying that there was "draft" on the report?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on this point of order.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the hon. leader did not have the report. Today we do have the report. It was given to us yesterday. I was there when it happened. I have never seen a draft report in all my years of being in politics or in other businesses that didn't say "draft" on it if it was a draft report. Here is the report. Nowhere does it say "draft" on that report. So it seems to me that if the minister is saying that it's a draft report and said a number of times yesterday that it was a draft report, then that just doesn't follow. If it's a draft report, it would say "draft" on it. The minister has already alluded to that.

So we have to take that this report, the recommendations of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, was submitted as a final report; otherwise, it would say "draft." In that case, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that it was misleading if this was not a draft report. One could speculate: if we have a final report here, why wasn't it being released to us? That was part of the question. It seems so logical that if this report came out in February not saying "draft" on it, we have to take into consideration that it's not going to be very favourable or what the government wants. What's going on in that period of time? Why is that not being released publicly so that we have to leak it here, get it to us, do what the government should be doing?

It seems to me that at the very minimum a draft report is a draft report, and this does not say "draft" on it. So I would say to the Assembly that it seems to me quite misleading when you call it a draft and we don't have a draft report. When we see it, it doesn't have "draft" on it. So what are we to take? That this is some sort of final report.

The other fact is that this was done on February 23. Here it is two months later, and we haven't even seen the report, Mr. Speaker, so we have to wonder as an opposition what's going on in those previous two months. I don't think the minister has much ground to stand on. If it had "draft" on it, he might have something to complain about, but it does not have "draft report" on it.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is a fairly important question that needs to be addressed, and I'd like to raise a particular issue. First of all, our rules are very clear: ministers, members making statements in this House are to be believed. The minister said that it was a draft report. The hon. member says that because he has a copy of a report – he doesn't know the origin of the report. He doesn't know where it came from, or at least he hasn't identified that. He doesn't know whether it's a draft report or not.

Mr. Martin: It was tabled in the House.

Mr. Hancock: Tabled by whom?

Mr. Martin: By me just a few minutes ago.

Mr. Hancock: The hon. member says that it was tabled in the House, and therefore that answers the question of whether it was a draft report or not. The fact of the matter is the hon. member does not know.

The Speaker: Can you just speak through me, please?

Mr. Hancock: I'd be delighted, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: The hon. member has no knowledge as to whether

it's a draft report or not a draft report. All he knows is that somebody purloined a report and gave him a copy of it. The hon. minister knows whether it is a draft report or not a draft report and has said so in the House. The hon. minister, by the rules of this House, is to be believed.

3:00

If the hon. member wants to know why that report that he has in his hands from whatever source he got it, dated February 23, has not been released to the public, that's a fair question. If he wants to know what's happened since that time, that's a fair question. If he wants to question whether anything further has been done with the report, that's a fair question. If he wants to ask whether, since the time of the minister saying that it was a draft report, a full report has been prepared, that's a fair question. But for him to get up and say that the minister is misleading the House because he said that it's a draft report and the hon. member with no personal knowledge otherwise doesn't believe so and then impugns the integrity and character of the minister by saying that he's misleading the House, that is not appropriate.

Therefore, I would suggest that it's a very valid point of order raised by the hon. minister.

The Speaker: Thank you very much for that participation. Hon. members, let me just first of all draw to your attention certain citations in *Beauchesne*. *Beauchesne* 494, Acceptance of the Word of a Member.

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

Then I'd draw your attention to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, and I take you to page 526.

In dealing with unparliamentary language, the Speaker takes into account the tone, manner and intention of the Member speaking; the person to whom the words were directed; the degree of provocation; and, most importantly, whether or not the remarks created disorder in the [Assembly]. Thus, language deemed unparliamentary one day may not necessarily be deemed unparliamentary the following day . . .

Should the Speaker determine that offensive or disorderly language has been used, the Member will be requested to withdraw the unparliamentary word or phrase. The Member must rise in his or her place to retract the words unequivocally. The Member's apology is accepted in good faith and the matter is then considered closed. However, if the Member persists in refusing to obey the directive of the Speaker to retract his or her words, the Chair may refuse to recognize the Member until the words have been withdrawn or may "name" the Member for disregarding the authority of the Chair and order him or her to withdraw from the Chamber for whatever time is determined.

So we have a situation today where the word "misled" has been deemed parliamentary on some occasions and unparliamentary on other occasions. We did have an occasion here earlier in the year, on April 17, when a member used the word. It dealt with a point of order, but it was not directed against a particular individual, and it basically said something quite differently than is being said today.

Today the statement is very, very clear. The hon. leader of the ND opposition said the following: "Mr. Speaker, will the minister admit that he's misled the House." That was a direct statement against the minister, and clearly our rules prohibit such statements.

So, in conclusion, this language is unparliamentary given that it's been directed against a minister, and I'm requesting the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to withdraw the remark. But I'll accept the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, who is his spokesperson today, to withdraw the remark unequivocally, please.

Mr. Martin: Well, I cannot withdraw another person's remarks. I'll take your advice back to the hon. member.

The Speaker: Then this will be the last time that I'll accept this to happen. If the member knows that there's a point of order against him, he has a responsibility to be in the House to deal with the point of order.

Member, you should instruct the hon. member, please, who happens to be the leader of the ND opposition, that I will not recognize him tomorrow until he withdraws the remark.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

head: **Main Estimates 2005-06**

Environment

The Deputy Chair: As per our Standing Orders the first hour will be allocated between the hon. minister and members of the opposition, following which any other member may participate.

The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I intend to be brief to allow questions from the members across the way and, of course, from all members of this Assembly.

First of all, I'm very pleased to be here to present Alberta Environment's business plan and budget for the fiscal year. Albertans have told us that the environment is a major priority for them. In fact, during last fall's It's Your Future survey over a quarter of a million Albertans said that the environment is a top priority and on the minds of them and their families. I'm pleased by that, and it's really encouraging because Alberta has experienced tremendous economic and population growth, fuelled by our success in attracting investment to our province.

It requires balance: how we have environmental principles, which are so important in protecting what I refer to as the mother ship of our environment in terms of what we've been blessed with, and at the same time in a province such as ours, that has a bounty of natural resources, how we balance the economic pressures that are attracting so many people to our province. Obviously, I believe that our environmental principles are first and foremost if we're ever to be successful in any of those other principles that I've made reference to. This combined with growing demands for information and participation has put a tremendous amount of pressure on our ministry.

In fact, I pose a question to you all, a rhetorical question. For example, in 1995 the Ministry of Environment had 55 requests for information under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Last year, we had almost 1,250 requests, which accounts for over 45 per cent of the entire government of Alberta. So if you can imagine, 45 per cent of the requests for information

were by our bosses, Albertans of course, and this is only one of 24 ministries. That percentage demonstrates a tremendous amount of pressure and interest as well, I might add, by Albertans. Overall we continue to meet the growing expectations of Albertans for action and input.

I want to thank Members of the Assembly, in particular the Environment critic from Calgary-Mountain View, for attending the first environmental conference, that took place last week. Amazingly, we anticipated over 200 delegates; in actual fact, we had close to 700 delegates, which reinforces the statements that I made earlier. I also want to thank the Chairman of the Standing Policy Committee on Energy and Sustainable Development, the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, who also participated in that conference with me last week. I appreciate the participation of both members from this Assembly in that important conference.

3:10

My ministry's operating budget this year will in fact increase by about \$12 million. This is the first increase over the past five years for our ministry. We have been challenged by that economic growth that I made reference to earlier and the demands of Albertans for a sustainable environment but also a vibrant economy. We need better government-wide policies, though, and part of the business plan this year, I want to say, is about how we continue to break out of our silos for the policies and rules and regulations that affect our environment because the environment, I believe, doesn't have any political stripe. I believe the environment crosses all boundaries of every corner of our province, our country, and, for that matter, every corner of the world, even though I realize there are not corners to the world. The point is that it crosses every boundary because we all know and recognize how important the environment is to us.

I want to say that a cross-ministry partnership, supported by information and knowledge and resources of our stakeholders and environmental conditions, is so important as well.

I also just want to take the opportunity to introduce, actually, two members of the Environment ministry who are with us today; that is, the Deputy Minister of Environment, Peter Watson – if Peter could rise – and also my executive assistant, Laurent Auger. As you can see, our incredible staff that are here with me today are going to address, hopefully, all of the questions that are being asked in this important debate this afternoon.

The budget for the Ministry of Environment last year was approximately \$125 million. This year increasing it by \$12 million puts it at almost \$138 million. Again, as I said, this is an increase for the first time in numerous years. About \$10.2 million of that is going to be used for key stakeholders in terms of building on the success and a better way to manage Alberta's resources and protect our environment. We've allocated about \$10.2 million of that particularly to launch our budget relative to the important assessment and information relative to protecting our environment.

I also want to say that there is \$7.8 million for expanding and monitoring networks and technology upgrades so that the information systems of our staff, our partners, and Albertans throughout the province can better communicate effective environmental management. This requires reliable, accessible information.

About \$2.4 million will go towards policy development and innovation, and of course this investment will help us develop new policies because we have to continue with our attitude that we can always do better, be it in health care or education or the environment. There holds the three perhaps most important priorities of this government in terms of what Albertans have told us.

I'd like to say that as we go forward down this important path, the investment will help us in developing and integrating existing

policies. I refer to it as IRM, an integrated resource management approach, where we continue to break out of our silos so that we can in actual fact work on a more comprehensive plan. If you really think about watersheds, air quality, no matter what part of the environment I'm talking about, they do not look at political borders or institutional or jurisdictional boundaries. You know, we need to take this approach in terms of what boundaries it crosses over. That's why we work so closely with the British Columbia government as well as with the Saskatchewan and Manitoba governments on important issues of water monitoring.

I also just want to take a moment to move towards climate change. Alberta and its partners are truly, I believe, Canadian leaders and in some ways world leaders in taking action on climate change. As you know, this Assembly, of course, approved and passed the only climate change legislation in Canada. I believe that is an important part of the leadership that Alberta shows. But, again, we can take the attitude that we can do better.

I believe also that investing in technology and research and renewable energies is equally important. I had the honour and privilege of being with my federal counterpart, the Minister of the Environment, in Buenos Aires in Argentina just shortly after becoming Minister of Environment. We talked about the importance of renewable energies and technologies. It's important to recognize that technology is only one part of the equation of continuing to build on our environmental sustainability.

I want to be able to say that we will maintain our climate change program at its current operating level. Once again, we have Climate Change Central based in Calgary but work taking place in all corners of this province. This \$2 million over the next three years will continue to support practical actions, which I believe is so important. I want to say that part of our budget is introducing once again, because of its success, retrofitting and doing more energy fits for things such as furnaces. In fact, Albertans can benefit from and have benefited from the retrofit of their furnaces in the past, but now we're actually moving to washing machines and other devices that can help in practical applications to help become more energy efficient.

Let me conclude, Mr. Chairman, by saying that Albertans place a high value on the environment. The renewed investment that I am proposing will demonstrate our government's continued commitment. Obviously, as we go down the road into the future, there are so many important initiatives that I look forward to speaking about further this afternoon such as the Water for Life strategy and a lot of others.

I will yield my time now to perhaps address some of the budget that is in the Ministry of Environment. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It'll be my pleasure to answer any questions.

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

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the minister for submitting his budget for review.

Alberta is the richest province in Canada. Albertans rightly have the expectation that we should be finding leadership on all fronts, especially on the environment, which, as the minister has clearly stated, is the mother ship of all else that we do. Leadership, Mr. Chairman, for me means commitment. It means having the courage to stand up against a lot of forces that would undermine and take advantage of and exploit our environmental commitment. It means listening to the public. It means transparency to those who have an interest, a vested interest, a long-term interest in our environment. It means treating the resources that we have, this natural capital that we have inherited and that we pass on to our children and grandchild-

-ren, as an inherently valuable resource in and of itself quite apart from what it provides monetarily.

We have had tremendous development, industrial and resource extraction, in this past decade particularly, and because of the boom there is a real sense in Alberta that there may be some compromise to our environment. There's a strong sense, frankly, that we don't believe that anyone in this government knows if we are managing our resources sustainably. The question for most Albertans is whether in this deregulated environment anyone is ensuring the long-term sustainability of our natural capital.

To do this, to know whether we're managing our resources sustainably, we have to know what is there. We have to have an inventory of our water, our soil, our forests, our natural capital. What is the flow through in these areas? What is the depreciation? What is, indeed, the value of leaving it the way it is, including, Mr. Chairman, a measure of cumulative impact? This has been talked about for many years, and there's an urgent need for us to develop the capacity to measure the impact not only of isolated activities in our province but the total impacts in a particular bioregion which depends on that bioregion for its sustainability.

The talk of sustainable environment otherwise becomes simply rhetoric. How much water do we have? How much arable land? How certain are we about the long-term impacts of our massive oil and gas extraction, including coal-bed methane? How well do we know the long-term implications of this experiment of which we are all a part? What about our food production in the future, with more and more land being taken up by expanding cities and towns and resource extraction? What is going to happen to our tourism, hunting, and fishing when in every quarter, every section of land we have development encroaching?

3:20

The very least we expect from the Minister of Environment is to begin to provide the tools for good decisions, for good policies rather than the crisis and catch-up and secondary role that this department has played for decades. Alberta Environment must begin to set limits for our development, and that is going to be the test for this ministry.

In terms of the budget, Mr. Chairman, \$138 million constitutes less than 0.5 per cent of our budgetary expenses this year, grossly inadequate to fulfill what Albertans have said is the third most important priority in this province. This is an outrage, it's an embarrassment, and it's a shame to all Albertans that we place so little value on the protection of this vital long-term resource. The questions remain. Given \$138 million in the budget, how are we spending it? Are we getting the best value for long-term protection of our natural environment? The answer would require an ability to measure, again, to monitor, and to make public how we are doing on the key indicators of sustainability.

The Auditor General in past reports has indicated that there is a need to make a closer link between goals, indicators, and outcome measures, and I know that the department is working on that. It's clear to me that there needs to be more resources applied to this, and not only applied to the measurements, Mr. Chairman, but to the analysis of the measurements. Data is just data until it's interpreted and transmitted to those who can make decisions in the long-term interests of protecting the environment.

Let me go on, then, more specifically to look at some of the programs and the spending priorities. With respect to the much-discussed Water for Life strategy, the budget is much the same as last year. It's fundamental, especially to those of us who live in southern Alberta, that we invest in and use wisely the water that has been given to us. It appears and there's scientific evidence to show

that this resource is indeed depleting not only as a result of climate change but also as a result of the depletion of our mountain glaciers.

I've mentioned the need for establishing an inventory of water, surface water and groundwater, so that we can establish the extent to which we are managing it sustainably. I don't need to reiterate that. That's fundamental, and it's a clear and expressed value for Albertans.

The government has also stated that it has allocated money in the Infrastructure budget for implementing the Water for Life. While infrastructure is an important dimension of water quality, it says nothing about the need to sustain water quantity over the long term. The allocation of \$27 million to infrastructure will effectively develop water management infrastructure, but how will this contribute to the long-term sustainability of our water supplies in the lowest rainfall areas in southern Alberta? Why was there a decrease in this infrastructure investment over last year? It dropped, in fact, from \$30 million in 2004-05, by \$2.4 million this year.

Can the minister explain how infrastructure funding for the existing problems will indeed protect the water that we have into perpetuity? What projects are being initiated to ensure our sustainability with these dollars particularly?

We need to measure increasingly how dollars attached to particular programs translate into results in the long term. How much of the money is being used to develop and implement a watershed source protection framework that addresses, again, the cumulative impacts on a watershed on a larger scale, including the wetlands that are so vital to not only the biodiversity but also to ongoing inflows into the water supply?

The government states that water conservation and sustainability is a priority, but they continue to call for interbasin transfers as opposed to looking at a long-term plan that will ensure adequate supplies into the future based on conservation measures and minimizing the need for interbasin transfers. How is it that Stettler county in Bill 11 has been allocated up to 10 times more than was actually needed on a population basis? It appears that we're planning for growth instead of saying to an area, "This looks like a critical area; it's time to start thinking about limits to development in this area," such as Okotoks has done. It set a limit on its boundaries. It set a limit on its growth. Anything without limits is clearly in this context going to require continued, ongoing, special dispensation from this government to provide interbasin transfers and piping and great expense not only to the pocketbook but to the environment itself.

In terms of climate change I need to acknowledge the important contribution this department has made through Climate Change Central in its communications, its advocacy for climate control, for greenhouse gas reductions at the citizen level, at the corporate level, at the municipality level. I see some excellent material and some excellent vision coming out of Climate Change Central, and I want to acknowledge that. I'm not sure that \$5 million, again, is going to be sufficient to do that when this has become the pre-eminent issue in the 21st century for all of us in the western world, indeed all of the planet, to deal with. I have to hope that that will continue to be an important role for Climate Change Central.

I would say that I would also like to see some breakdown of what the evaluation of Climate Change Central is. What impact is it, in fact, having on citizenry? What impact is it having on industry in terms of greenhouse gas emissions? Recycling is part of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Are we moving towards especially organic material being recycled, composted as opposed to going into landfills and creating more greenhouse gas? How much bang are we getting for the \$5 million in Climate Change Central?

The other aspect that needs to be said about climate change is,

again, the setting of limits. This government and the federal government, in fact, are both very reluctant to set limits. We must have limits if we are going to make an impact on climate change.

Intensity measurements are one step towards meaningful and absolute reductions in greenhouse gases, which is what we as a country have committed to. We as a country in the north have, clearly, tremendous advantages with respect to our resources, our capacity to adapt to climate change. In fact, living in an area where we are less likely to be flooded, where we are less likely to have extreme weather events, where we have more capacity to respond to emergencies, where we can deal with the transmission of infectious diseases that are moving north through mosquitoes and other arthropods: all of these things say that we have an ethical imperative to be leaders on the greenhouse gas issue. I see a straggling in the federal government, and I see a straggling in the provincial government on this issue. We are not leading the way as we could be. As a pre-eminent country in the world we should be showing real leadership on greenhouse gas reductions.

If we cannot learn to live within the means of the planet, we will pay a huge price. This is not being discussed enough. We read every day in the newspaper about how impossible it is for business to meet these targets, how impossible it is for Alberta to meet these targets. We don't hear how seriously this climate change is going to impact the health and well-being of millions and millions of world citizens, including Canadians and especially our north, where food supplies and ice flows are changing dramatically. The tundra, the permafrost is gone in many places, and we're already seeing dramatic changes there.

3:30

So we have to take this seriously, and I would like to see a very vigorous, constructive dialogue with the federal government. I resent as an Albertan the inability of this government to work with the federal government on issues of such importance and mutual benefit.

I noticed that in relation to line 3.0.2 under program 3, sharing environmental management and stewardship, the allocation of \$5 million, then, for climate change was a decrease from last year. Why was there a decrease? What does that mean in terms of our commitment to climate change action?

On page 220 of the business plan under line 1.13 the government states that it will "initiate actions that make Alberta a leader in energy efficiency improvements, carbon management strategies and adapting to climate change and variability." What new programs can you manage given the limited budget that you have? What new initiatives are planned? How will these programs make Alberta a leader? Given the current crisis in the number of inspectors in your division, how can we give assurance that these investigators and inspectors are really going to be able to match the task that's needed in relation to greenhouse gas emissions and monitoring those good practices of energy efficiency leadership that we feel we can take?

What performance measures do we have in Alberta Environment to ensure that the programs are having the effect that we have called for? Can the minister explain what progress has been made to ensure that the largest emitters will indeed reduce their emissions?

Again, I look to the minister for leadership in relation to our federal/provincial relations and a more constructive relationship than has been there in the past.

In terms of reclamation and emergency preparedness, page 220 of the business plan, the ministry states that it will "resolve contamination and liability issues through flexible tools and incentives to promote the restoration of contaminated sites to productive use." On page 225 there's an estimate of \$4.9 million for reclamation

purposes, which is down from \$5 million. What does that mean? How is it that we can reduce our investment in reclamation and contamination?

Given the December 2004 licence liability report from the Energy and Utilities Board, stating that there are 31,000 unreclaimed abandoned wells in Alberta, can the minister tell us how he expects to monitor the remediation and reclamation of these sites with such a shortage of resources? My understanding is that we actually visit the sites of only about 10 per cent of these wells that are shut in and reclaimed. Clearly, that reflects an inability to do a full assessment and raises the question of liability for all Albertans in the foreseeable future.

What is the ministry doing to ensure that more environmental assurance staff are monitoring the refineries, the batteries, and the other infrastructure, the pits, mines, and wells that are in operation around the province in increasing numbers? How can we be sure that in this environment these spills and contamination sites are actually being reported and addressed? How do you ensure that the surface isn't being cleaned up while the subsurface is grossly contaminated unless we do more visiting and monitoring on-site?

What programs is the Ministry of Environment involved in in terms of emergency preparedness? How much money will be dedicated to this strategy since, again, the increasing anxiety of Albertans is reflected with the growing encroachment of oil and gas developments closer to populations? Is the minister involved in rapid response to emergencies, especially in relation to the release into water and airborne contaminants? How assured can we be that these will be identified early and communicated to the public?

In relation to compliance and enforcement – and I'm looking here at line 2.0.2, page 140 – there will be \$9.4 million allocated. This is an increase over last year. Given the lack of environmental officers to ensure compliance, how will this slight increase give us assurance that we are conducting inspections, or we are doing appropriate monitoring and issuing appropriate environmental protection orders? How can we know that these inappropriate actions are actually being responded to and stopped and fined, in fact?

Can the minister provide a breakdown of what proportion of the staff have been changed over the past decade? My understanding from looking at the budgets over the past decade – it's difficult because you split off from Sustainable Resource Development – is that there does not appear to be any substantial increase in your staff capacity over the past decade.

More specific to the financial questions, line 1.0.5 of the estimates indicates an increase in funding from the previous year in corporate services. It's up to \$7.9 million from \$5.8 million. What does this extra \$2 million constitute? How is that being spent, and how does that add to the strength of the department in carrying out its mission and goals?

Line 2.0.7, again an increase of about \$2.9 million in policy development and innovation. Can you give us details on what this consists of? What policy initiatives has this resulted in?

Line 2.0.3, an increase of \$17 million from last year's \$14 million for monitoring and evaluation.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, the 20 minutes allocated to you has now elapsed.

Dr. Swann: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, would you like to respond, or would you like more members to participate before you respond?

The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you very much. I also thank the hon. member for some important points that he's made that I believe are important to all Albertans. I want to just take a couple of moments to add to this important debate. I think that's important, as I said, to all Albertans and all Canadians.

I want to first comment relative to the issue of Climate Change Central and the leadership that Alberta has taken but also in reference to, in fact, the federal government. I just want to reflect for a moment back to just recently in December. Indeed, it was my honour and privilege on the invitation of the federal government at a COP 10 conference, where, in fact, the federal Minister of the Environment shared half of his time in addressing 187 nations with the province of Alberta, talking about not only is this province recognized for its natural resources in terms of what we have but also why we cannot be viewed as the environmental capital of Canada when it comes to some of the leadership we've demonstrated.

The hon. member and others are aware that we are the first province in Canada to have the electronic recycling program that we launched just a couple of months ago, but also the federal Ministry of the Environment asked for Alberta's advice relative to the importance of technology and renewable energies. Now, those two points are only two pieces of the puzzle when it comes to reducing greenhouse gases in terms of protecting our environment when it comes to the glacier and in terms of what is taking place. We all have a role to play in terms of working towards that.

I want to say in terms of the relationship federally with both the Deputy Prime Minister and the federal Ministry of the Environment that on my invitation, of course, they visited Calgary. Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, they visited Calgary at Climate Change Central, which we often refer to as C3. This is really very interesting from the perspective that it's a public/private partnership, where it's not just driven by government. It needs to have stakeholders from all sectors. I'm just very pleased to say that the public statements made by the federal Minister of the Environment as to Alberta being a leader in having the first agency of its kind was something that's a tribute not just to the ministry but literally to all of those that are involved.

3:40

I want to say that I will share the hon. member's comments with the board of directors, who are made up of NGOs, who are made up of industry, who are made up of government officials at our next board meeting that's going to be taking place in Calgary. Relative to the good work, the president and CEO is Allan Amey, and I do know that they continue to do good work in advocating on behalf of the environment in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, which I think is so important.

Also, I want to say in this House that recently we talked about what we are doing regarding so many wells being drilled in Alberta. Of course, we have an important enhanced oil recovery program. How are we going to better conserve the water that we have? It's such a rich resource in our province, but we have to do a better job in terms of how we manage that natural resource.

If I can give an example, it's my vision that we will continue to be, you know, good managers of water, but I believe that's not good enough. It may be okay as a North American standard, but we have so much to learn from other water users where it is truly considered rare and in such incredibly short supply. I use the example of Israel. The Israelis, of course, are the most incredible managers of water because they're in a desert that has a dense population. It's my hope that each of us in North America and specifically in the province of Alberta will continue with their consumer behaviour. It's about how

we modify behaviour in terms of conservation. It seems like we don't want to wait until we have such a short supply. Let's do it today in terms of what it is and how we manage.

Energy conservation in terms of water conservation is so important in terms of what we're doing. As I mentioned in this House yesterday relative to enhanced oil recovery, we want to make it and continue to make it a top conservation initiative that, certainly, I as minister and I know representatives of this government are committed to.

I want to take a moment, though, to also make reference to the issue of engaging other agencies in developing a common strategy for environmental monitoring, that the hon. member has made reference to, not only the monitoring but also the evaluation and collecting data. Once that inventory of data is collected, then the question is: what do we do with it? Certainly, this ministry over the next year is engaging so many agencies, of course, in terms of collecting that data, then analyzing that data as we go forward with our Water for Life strategy, which I believe is so important

The hon. member also mentioned recycling and, of course, organics. You know, it's such a top priority in terms of our municipal waste action plan. Of course, that was released recently this year. So we are continually working with our stakeholders on that waste management program. I'm very proud of the leadership we demonstrated when we released that program. We want to continue with that in terms of organics, in terms of recycling.

You know, composting continues to be a top priority. I ask members of this Assembly: how many in this Assembly today, in fact, compost? I had the privilege about a month ago of meeting with Dr. David Suzuki, who is considered to be a leading environmentalist when it comes to so many initiatives. In actual fact, on the invitation from Alberta he, of course, participated at a very exciting program at the Cochrane school, where wind power as well as solar panels were used in terms of generating enhanced energy for that school. The students I truly compliment in terms of that initiative. It really gives me comfort knowing that our students in the province of Alberta play such an important role in terms of the seeds we plant for the future, ensuring that sustainability for it.

He also makes reference to, I believe, an important point on the tools for continuous improvement. I want to say that some of the tools that we want that he made reference to, you know, are in terms of developing innovative support, planning for activities, guiding our decisions, and ensuring environmental quality but also sharing in the environmental management and stewardship. We're all in this together in terms of the mother ship that I made reference to earlier, that I believe crosses over all political boundaries.

Reviewing and updating Alberta's wetland policy and developing an action plan are very important in terms of the implementation plan that we're going forward with.

Establishing our provincial water advisory councils.

Also educating and scoping and preparatory work for development of a government-wide provincial land strategy are very important for us, which is, of course, one of the objectives we want to continue to build on.

Also educating Albertans to better understand the value of this rich resource that we have in terms of water, in terms of our Water for Life strategy.

It's my hope that the environmental principles and standards that we develop, that we continue to build on based on the important data that we collect and the analysis that we have, are some things that we've got to continue to build on. Some of the ministers on the front bench here that are economic ministers, we have to ensure that balance is right because there is no question the province of Alberta has a reputation for its development of industrial wells, going from

10,000 to 20,000. Well, we have to ensure – and it's certainly my mandate as Minister of Environment – that that balance is right, to ensure that we don't jeopardize.

A good example of that is if we look to the neighbours to the south. If you look at how they have managed their water in terms of the water canals and diversions that they've done in the United States with over 330 million people, if you examine what they have done relative to where we are with only 33 million people and 3 million in Alberta, we have a tremendous opportunity to learn from that history of what our neighbours south of the border have done and haven't done right, based on the tremendous industrial development as well as the people that are of course consuming.

If you look at the city of Los Angeles today, they have more people than our country, over 35 million people. Of course, how they divert and try to consume and how they conserve water is putting tremendous pressure on them. Well, I'm proud to say that the province of Alberta has 3 million people, and the issue and the challenge for us is how we continue with our practices and our behaviours to ensure that the tools that the hon. member makes reference to are in place, to ensure that we will never ever be faced with what larger centres in the United States are. In Colorado and in Los Angeles, you know, they are in literally, I believe, a situation where we can learn from that history in terms of what we do managing this valuable resource that we have.

I want to also say that implementing the CASA, the clean air strategic alliance, electricity sector recommendations is so important as a tool. Also, implementing, of course, our climate change action plan will continue to be a top priority of ours as well.

So I want to say, Mr. Chairman, that we continue to consult, to learn from our history as we go forward. Also, if I could just use an example. In terms of our inventory of surface water and groundwater we want to continue to expand on our monitoring networks that we have developed. That is so important as well as part of our additional \$12 million that is part of our budget.

So, Mr. Chairman, I want to say today that as we go forward, I share in many of the outcomes that we're looking for. I think should we base our success not only on the money we spend but also, more importantly, on the outcomes that we achieve. Of course, all of us in this room and in this province are stakeholders and have a role to play to achieve those objectives.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate having the opportunity to rise to speak on the Environment budget here this afternoon. I would like to thank the hon. minister and his staff, I guess, as well for putting together a very readable, comprehensive budget. I have my questions in several categories, which I will address in clumps, and then the hon. minister can answer them as he sees fit.

3:50

I must say that in doing a number of these budget estimates over these past few days, I've found this Ministry of Environment one perhaps more troubling than the others. I know that we hear a lot of rhetoric in regard to the importance of the environment and environment protection, but you know people put their money where their mouth is, and when we see the budget for the environment here, in fact the overall budget as I'm reading it has only increased by 4 per cent. Considering, at least by the government's own estimate, a 2 and a half per cent inflation rate, then we could really see almost a negligible increase to the overall environment budget here in Alberta for this coming year.

Quite frankly, I find that disappointing because there are just so many prescient issues coming to our attention and becoming so increasingly obvious in regard to environmental degradation in the province of Alberta that, you know, we can only reinforce our commitment, if, indeed, there is a serious commitment on the government's side to the environment, by putting money forward. Show us the money where we can in fact make substantive differences in the way that we conduct ourselves personally, through business, governments, and agriculture so that we do at least try to approach a sustainable culture here in this province, at which we are entirely unsuccessful at this juncture, I would suggest.

I appreciate as well the minister's enthusiasm. I think that I have been impressed from the beginning with his interest in the environment, but you know at the same time I sort of feel sorry for the lack of tools that he has been given to make substantive changes in our environmental practice here in this province. The ministry, as I have come to know it over these past few months, has been systematically sort of dismantled in terms of its teeth, its clout, its ability to effectively monitor the different aspects of the environment across this province and to administer directives to other ministries as to how they should proceed. It's an unfortunate circumstance, and I can only wish the minister some better tools in the future to be able to work with perhaps the very most important part of our Alberta heritage, which is the physical environment around us.

As I said, I'm only seeing a 4 per cent increase, and I would like to ask: why only such a small amount considering the reinvestment that has been going on in other ministries and the perceived increased focus in the environment, as often expressed by the minister?

It seems as well that the ministry has focused its expenditures this year. My understanding is that you're taking money away from the sharing environmental management and stewardship program quite substantially, a decrease of 18 per cent, and putting more money into the ministry support services program, probably a comparable percentage amount, up by 19 per cent. Within the ministry support services program spending is increased in the human resource section and corporate services. I'd be extremely curious to understand: what's the change in priorities here? What's the change in focus that would suggest such dramatic moves of money from one area to another, increases and decreases respectively?

As of the 1st of February, 2005, there's been an environmental fee imposed on new computers, related equipment, and televisions. I applaud this initiative, and I'm hoping that we can see the monies collected from that fee to target specific environmental concerns, especially in relation to recycling or dealing with electronic equipment specifically. The new fee will cover the cost of collection, which is great, transportation, recycling materials, public information and awareness programs, and such things. What I would like to know is if you could tell us approximately how much so far has been garnered from this program. I realize that it's only a couple of months in, but what's the direction? How successful has this been so far, and what changes need to be made perhaps?

I just want to have a reassurance here, again, that this environmental fee will specifically target the disposal and/or recycling and/or reusing or reduction, all of those r's, of electronic equipment specifically and not just go into general revenues.

My next group of questions is in regard to enforcement and monitoring of our environment. Of course, this is such a massive task. It's such a daunting task that, again, I'm quite disappointed with the amount of money allocated to this most important part of the Department of Environment. Without proper monitoring and enforcement the ministry is rendered ineffective and unproductive. Say, for example, the program for assuring environmental quality

has its budget increased by \$7.5 million, an increase of 9 per cent. I guess it's something, I suppose, but it seems inadequate to just how wide ranging this assuring environmental quality mandate really is.

Consider, for example, the clean air strategic alliance recommendations for this area. The CASA board of directors recommended that ambient air quality objectives for numerous substances such as nitrogen oxide and benzene be developed. As well, the same report also recommended that additional information on other substances including aluminum and radionuclides be compiled over the next three or four years. So I'm asking: can the minister please inform us if these recommendations are being implemented and, if so, where in the budget have these resources been allocated? I'm curious to see that.

Also, the Auditor General in his 2003-2004 annual report recommended that the Ministry of Environment improve its "process for developing new performance measures and ensure the measures in its business plan assess the results each goal aims to achieve." This is the very core focus of the Auditor General and how he evaluates the relative success or failure of each ministry, and it seems as though the Ministry of Environment is the most wanting in this regard. I know it's perhaps the most difficult place to measure but certainly wanting, nonetheless.

The ministry accepted the recommendations of the Auditor General in principle and said that "these recommendations will be considered in preparing the 2005-08 Business Plan in the context of the government's standard for 2005-2008 ministry business plans." So I'm asking, of course: has the ministry, indeed, updated its performance measures in accordance with the Auditor General's report? According to the ministry's website, the last time that there was a comprehensive review was way back in 2001, so I'm very curious to hear a specific update on this information, and I think many people are as well.

Furthermore, the Water for Life strategy is a new initiative I would like to applaud. I certainly appreciate the different stakeholders that have been brought into the process, and it certainly is a comprehensive and much better funded initiative than others. The Water for Life strategy calls for performance measures in order to be effective, as well, for measuring success, and I'm just curious to know what has been done in regard to those. Say, for example, a drinking water safety initiative providing an indicator for the "performance of facilities delivering safe drinking water, and demonstrates continuous improvement of facilities" and their operations. A very large but essential task. To provide affordable, safe drinking water to every citizen and every resident of this province I think must be a priority. We need performance measurements to ensure that that's being done safely every step of the way.

4:00

Water quality and doing an assessment of what exactly we do have. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has pointed out on a number of occasions, until we have a comprehensive inventory of our water cycle here in this province, it becomes almost a moot point to be dealing in percentages and bits and pieces of things here and there when we don't know how much we are in fact dealing with. If we do – I'm not going to use the word, that "m" word – it's confusing without a baseline from which we can work. Confusing indeed.

Finally, I would like to – well, almost finally – just speak specifically to one site and one coal mine. I think it's interesting just to look as a case in point at the Cheviot mine sort of southwest of Hinton. I think it brings up a number of interesting points that I've been talking about in terms of monitoring and doing adequate measurements before a company is allowed to come in and do their work.

The minister approved a list of recommendations designed to lessen the impact of the road to the Cheviot mine. One of these recommendations was that wildlife, including grizzly bears and wolves, killed by the trucks driving to and from the mine be reported to the government within 24 hours of an incident. I would like to know specifically if the ministry could release those numbers and, perhaps, put that onto the ministry website if this mine comes online and stays functioning, as it seems to be.

You know, one of the things that I found the most disconcerting about the Cheviot mine project is that the mine was approved and the site was approved with some degree of comprehensiveness in terms of an environmental assessment but the road that goes back and forth from the mine was not. In fact, in terms of overall square kilometres of impact on the land this road is much larger and much more damaging to the environment in this area than the actual mine. So, you know, I find it very difficult to believe that the existing regulations are adequate for us to be truly protecting the environment.

We've had exchanges before where, you know, I've been asking about regulations and adherence to regulations, say with the Lubicon incident, and while the ministry comes back by saying that all of the rules have been followed, I think that we need to take an honest look at whether those rules are adequate in themselves. Sometimes it seems like regulation is a dirty word around here, but that's the reason that we have a Legislature in the first place.

I think that we need to revisit some of these regulations and give them teeth and give them impact so that people follow them. You can throw all the carrots around you want, but a lot of these energy companies and mining companies are not particularly vegetarian in terms of eating or chasing after those carrots. They could use a stick just as easily, and they'll stay around and they'll follow those rules because they know that the returns are so much of a windfall for them, regardless, that they'll follow the rules. Lots of responsible companies are happy to follow strictly enforced, comprehensive rules. We're not doing anyone favours by letting them off easy.

Anyway, back to the Cheviot mine. We're talking about the road specifically as a case in point, if I might say. Can the ministry explain any steps taken to ensure that wildlife are less likely to be killed in the first place on this road? I was speaking to Mark Boyce, a University of Alberta biologist, and he said that the Cheviot mine is in one of the best bear habitats on the eastern slopes anywhere in the Rockies. Undoubtedly, the mine does disturb bears. How is the ministry ensuring that the impact on the bears from human activities is minimized?

Finally, talking about climate change, of course this is just a massive area unto itself. I do echo the Member for Calgary-Mountain View in certainly saying that Climate Change Central does produce good things from what resources it does have, but to suggest that Climate Change Central is the linchpin that's going to effect proper limitations in greenhouse gases in this province is facetious at best. I mean, Climate Change Central is a way for different groups to get together and share ideas and come up with suggestions, but to suggest in any way that it would actually impact the reduction of greenhouse gases to the levels that we are required to do so in this province is absolutely – I won't use the "m" word again – confusing at best, I would suggest.

I think that we could do a lot better and we must do a lot better, or I think that we will be an embarrassment to our children and grandchildren when they see how little we did at the crucial point in history when we should have done something. Five million dollars, I would suggest, for the climate change program is an absolute token amount. I think that it reflects a deep lack of commitment toward climate change in this province, and it's really nothing more than

public relations money, you know, to make things look like there's something going on when there's really not much going on at all.

What we do need to arrest climate change is a real reduction in our output of greenhouse gases, including large final emitters, in this province. In fact, some of the deals that have been going on with the feds and Stéphane Dion I find to be objectionable at best because what they're doing is constantly reducing the amount that final emitters need to contribute to our reduction in greenhouse gases. Of course, the bulk of the responsibility is then being shifted onto regular consumers, hard-working Canadians and Albertans in particular who will have to bear the brunt of the cost of dealing with climate change. That is quite frankly embarrassing, and as a representative of some 45,000 Albertans I refuse to let that stand as an alternative.

There has been some talk about using underground storage facilities to deal with CO₂. Until this technology becomes realistic, I think again that it's misleading to always come up with this sort of patent solution that makes everyone think that we can deal with this without having to make any comprehensive change in our lifestyles or economy or what have you. The CO₂ injection process is being bandied about a lot these days amongst industry representatives, and I read about it in the press a lot more.

You know, I just say that we must try to be as honest as possible with these sorts of solutions and realize that they're only a piecemeal solution at best. Again, it's confusing for the public to suggest that, you know, if we inject all of our CO₂, we don't have to worry, and we can keep blasting around with our Dodge V-10 trucks and SUVs and heat your house at any point that you want to.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, the 20 minutes allocated to you have now elapsed.

The hon. minister.

4:10

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you very much. I have a question across the floor that I'll ask first of all. Are there any members on the opposite side – I say to the opposite side and I'll also ask to this side – who drive SUVs? I'd be very interested to know. I'm proud to say that I turned in my SUV, which was a government vehicle, and drive a much smaller vehicle. In fact, I'm looking at a variety, but I have a very small vehicle.

Having said that, I must admit that sometimes I want to be sympathetic to those who do drive occasionally. I use the example when I travel the massive highway 63, travelling to my own home constituency. I can say that wildlife, of course, travels that highway, and the ideal situation there would be to have wildlife fences, like we'd have on every highway. Maybe in the years to come we'll have wildlife fences on every highway as you see in our national parks, of course Banff and Jasper where they have esthetically pleasing wildlife fences. In fact, that is something that I can't disagree with the hon. member. But we recognize that members have the choice of a variety of vehicles on all sides of the House, of course, as our members choose to use. I guess ultimately we're all in this together in terms of climate change.

In terms of industry playing a key role and in terms of large final emitters, what they do and how they do it, they have a role to play. If I could use just one small example in terms of the oil sands and emission intensity. In actual fact, because of technology and the investment that they have put into technology, which I am a huge advocate of continuing on, they've reduced, in terms of emission intensity per barrel, the actual CO₂ emission by about 50 per cent over the last 10 years. Is that good enough? No, it's not. Can they do better? Yes, they can, and sure, they will based on the important

work that we have done and continue to do through Climate Change Central.

I made a public statement that hon. members may not be aware of at the Alberta Chamber of Resources. I indicated to the CEOs of industry across all parts of Canada and Alberta that it's my responsibility to keep their toes to the fire when it comes to what they do today, what they are doing tomorrow, and what they plan to do 25 years from now, their reinvestment.

My encouragement – and I'd be interested in terms of this important debate – would be that I would far prefer that the money is kept right here in the province of Alberta, at both hon. members' universities: the University of Calgary for the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View but also here at the University of Alberta for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, which I had the honour and privilege of being able to teach at. Why don't we keep that money right at these institutions rather than a plan of having it going across the sea? It's a global issue, and we recognize that. But why do we want to see money, billions of dollars, leaving our province and our country to go to buy a piece of paper called a carbon credit?

Globally it is an important issue, but I'd far prefer that that money is used right here as one piece of the puzzle in technology at the University of Alberta or the University of Calgary or the University of Lethbridge, where they are doing wonderful work on water. I know the minister of infrastructure is working with the University of Lethbridge as well.

The fact that emission intensity has been reduced by 50 per cent per barrel over the last 10 years is good. It's impressive, but we are looking for even greater technologies, where someday we can say proudly in this Assembly that it's actually zero emission in terms of what is coming out of the resources that we are in fact utilizing.

I want to say also to the hon. member with all due respect that my calculation is that we're just almost at 10 per cent in terms of our actual financial increase this year going from where we were last year. I'm just doing some quick math here, but, again, a 10 per cent increase of funding for Environment, which I certainly appreciate the Minister of Finance's close ear on when she, of course, heard our presentations at Treasury Board when we came forward, working together.

I want to say that as we go forward, the \$3 billion that has been utilized and allocated, the only province in Canada that \$3 billion is going toward not only physical infrastructure but the human infrastructure that the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View mentioned earlier when he talked about human infrastructure and what that means. In fact, I just had a meeting today with a gentleman from a conservation group that is going forward, and we talked about how we can use all of our waste, about creating the natural trails that we have through Trailnet, which is just one good example of how we can do that. But I want to say that some of the \$3 billion for infrastructure going to municipalities will go toward, of course, water treatment plants and water infrastructure, which is so important. So the almost 10 per cent increase in our budget is so important.

I also want to say to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder that you have my assurance and reassurance when it comes to all of the dollars going towards a recycling plant. In fact, I invite all members of this Assembly, if they would like, to visit one of our sites down in Rimbey, Alberta. I want to say that all of that money goes directly into recycling for the mercury and for the electronics that are melted down. That is going directly to the whole issue of helping our environment. It does not go back to any other fund but is specifically targeted for that particular authority, and I'm very proud of that.

Also, a couple of other issues on computer information. That's so

important in collecting information. We have about a \$3 million upgrade that's going to be taking place, part of our increase of \$12 million. That's going to be, of course, to help us with infrastructure tools in terms of our environmental monitoring, which is so important. I believe that Albertans continue to have an important expectation of government in terms of that.

I failed to mention, though, just in terms of a statistic – I don't know if members would be aware that from an electronics recycling perspective, our management recycling authority will continue reporting back to me on a quarterly basis. But I'm also very pleased by the fact that with electronic recycling, did you know that we have recycled to date about 900 tonnes of material? If you can imagine 900 tonnes, you know, in terms of the electronics that we have, that's a lot of the laptops that we see in here and others that are being recycled. I think that's important.

I might add also, if I could share with you, that tomorrow I have a conference call with all of the provincial ministers of environment or similar ministries and also the federal minister. It was really quite interesting that they were all asking how it is going in terms that we are the only province in Canada that has a recycling program. It's really quite interesting. Also, I want to compliment the predecessor of this ministry, Dr. Lorne Taylor, for his work in terms of his vision, in terms of going forward on that. I think it's been very, very important, and it's being recognized across the country.

In terms of climate change, we are the first ones with a law. We're the first ones with an agency. But I also want to say that we are now consulting with stakeholders relative to being the first ones to get an equivalency regulation. That is so important relative to getting it right and dealing with this very complex issue.

Sometimes I look at performance measures, and I want to just take a moment because the hon. member rightly mentioned: how do we measure, and what are our performance measures? Specifically, we'll continue to work on improving our performance on a variety of issues. But if I could just give you eleven examples: from a drinking water safety indicator to a river water quality index, to an air quality index, to an effective infrastructure, to a flood-risk map, stakeholder satisfaction as well as municipal solid waste, our initiative there, renewable and alternative energy generation, not to mention of course the beverage container return rate that we have and are very pleased with, and also our used oil recovery rate, and finally our water use efficiency and productivity indicator – just a small example of measurements that we're using in terms of being able to measure how well we are doing.

I want to say to the hon. member that he raises some excellent points relative to where we are. I also want to say that in terms of the issue of compliance and enforcement, which the hon. member mentioned, a significant element of next year's program will be the implementation of the compliance assurance education strategy. Again Alberta has been a leader in working with Albertans and industry to ensure that they understand the role they play in protecting our environment.

Of course, education is so important. In fact, not that long ago I was meeting with some chief executive officers, a combination of environmental and industry people, and I told them that I would prefer to not talk to them but to their children because I believe, in actual fact, that their children, from what they're learning in our education system today, are the ones that are planting the seed in terms of influencing not only other young students but also their parents and grandparents. I think that is encouraging, and I guess I remain optimistic as an elected official that young people will continue.

4:20

I saw CEOs shaking their head, but I'm, like: "If you don't get it by now, figure it out. If you're not going to hear it from government

regulators and other elected people, then you're going to hear it right at home from your spouse or from your children or your grandchildren." That is a network that we want to continue to enhance because, as I said earlier in my opening remarks, we all have a role to play, not just the CEO of a company, not just the president of the Sierra Club or the Suzuki Foundation. We all have a role to play in that.

As minister I want to say that if I can in any way, shape, or form be a bridge to so many of those areas that appear to have been polarized in the past – and I'd use just one example. It appears that environment people, which I meet with each and every day, are concerned with the environment. But you know what? It's okay for them to be sustainable in terms of recognizing that dollars are so important to achieve their objective, just like from industry's perspective it's so important to recognize that the environment principles are so important to their children and their families, not just what they're doing at their company. So we have that understanding and bridge between environment principles and economic principles.

I'll continue to be that bridge and not have a polarized world. In actual fact, I used it in here, and I'll try it again, about commonality, if I could. It was by Robert Frost where he talked about in the final analysis the most common human link being that we all inhabit this small planet, we all breathe the same air, we all cherish our children's future, and we're all mortal.

If you look at the polarization that takes place between some of the development that goes on in industry and environment, the challenge for all of us is if we take that as the starting point. In fact, last week at our environmental conference, that the hon. members in this Assembly are fully aware of, we talked about connecting and collaborating, not compromising but connecting and collaborating, where environmental principles can be maintained and sustained well into the future once we're long gone.

The question we should be asking is not what we are going to do for the next 25 years or the next 100 years but what will this place look like a thousand years from now? We have over 6 billion people in this world today, and the reality of it is that we have to change our behaviour. We ultimately have to change our behaviour if we are to be able to reach – as I shared with some of the hon. members yesterday, scientists are predicting that we actually should be able to, if conservation practices are enhanced, allow 20 billion people on this small Earth of ours, 20 billion over the next long period of time. But today we need to change. We've got to be thinking like the Israelis think when it comes to water management today because they're faced with that shortage. We've got to think in terms of what people in the Netherlands are doing when it comes to recycling.

I made a comment. I said that it's my hope that there will be no landfills in the future in this province or, for that matter, in this country. What I meant by that – I used the example of the small condo that I rent in the community here. I take my waste, limited as it is, down to a chute that goes into a bin, that ultimately, then, is trucked away to a landfill. It's my hope that we will have an underground landfill right in the municipality. The municipality, then, will convert that waste into useful energy in an environmentally friendly way, where there are no alleyways and dumpsters so that we ultimately can be conserving and using our resources as valuably as we can.

I want to share this with you. A Conservative, a former leader, Preston Manning said – and it was very interesting; he of course worked with the Canada West Foundation – that today the challenge for the next political party is how importantly they pay attention to the environment. But I think our challenge can even go further. It's

not for a political party; it's for our society. As a society where is it that we're going to go to in terms of protecting the mother ship?

I believe that the word "conservative," that we all use and where our party comes from, still comes from the same root word that "conservation" comes from, and the word is "conserve." Be it a conservative or be it a conservationist, the bottom line is that "conserve" means: don't waste my natural resources and don't waste my money. I think that those two principles are very important as we embark on the future of what holds in terms of environmental principles. Each of us has a responsibility.

I just want to say to the hon. members that have asked questions that I'm trying to cover off as best I can some of those. But the tools that we have, the data we collect, and what we do over the next period of time will be the ultimate challenge if we are truly going to sustain the importance of protecting our environment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. I don't know if I should name them or not, but there is a car company – you will recognize the commercial pitch when I say it – that keeps saying in its commercials that – should I name it? – at Ford we keep thinking about the perfect sedan or how to build a sedan or how to build a great sport utility vehicle or whatever. And, you know, whenever I hear those commercials, the thought that always occurs to me is, well, you know, that's great that you all sit around and do the thinking about building a great sedan or a great car or a great vehicle, but as the guy who might be persuaded to drive one of your vehicles, all I care about is that you get on with building it. Mr. Chairman, I'm feeling a little bit of that same sentiment here today.

The minister certainly, I think, cares in a philosophical, theoretical way, in principle, about the environment. I think he cares deeply about it. He may even have hugged a tree or two in his day. I don't know. And, by the way, if he has, I would say that there's absolutely nothing wrong with that, and I would support him in that endeavour.

Nevertheless, we have I think here a couple of specific problems in these estimates in terms of how the minister is going to play his role. And, by the way, I fully agree with the minister that this is a shared responsibility that has nothing to do with political parties, with partisan politics, with politics for that matter. It has to do with all of us changing our ways. It has to do with all of us grasping the concept of sustainability, first of all, and then taking real concrete steps to change our ways so that we live a sustainable lifestyle. Right now the average footprint of an Albertan – in other words, the average amount of resources that an Albertan consumes in terms of the lifestyle that we lead – represents somewhere between six and seven hectares per person. It has been expressed in another way, that if everyone on planet Earth lived the highfalutin lifestyle that we do here in the great province of Alberta, we would need something like five planets Earth to support life at that level.

[Ms Ady in the chair]

So certainly action needs to be taken. And I don't know, Madam Chair, how we're going to take that action in meaningful ways with a budget – and we can use the minister's numbers if we wish – that has a \$12 million increase from last year's budget to this year's budget. Or we can use another way of looking at it which doesn't look quite so good: a net increase of \$5.5 million from the 2004-2005 forecast to this year's budget. It's not much of an increase. And I'd like to know specifically what can be accomplished with numbers like that.

For instance, there are 31,772 unreclaimed abandoned wells in the province of Alberta, according to the December 2004 licence liability report. I'd like to know how the minister expects to properly remediate these sites with an estimated budget of \$4.9 million for reclamation purposes, down from last year's \$5,005,000. I'd like to know what the minister is doing to ensure that more environmental assurance field staff are actually in the field. I'd like to know what the minister plans to do around compliance and enforcement. That area, line 2.0.2 of the estimates, sees a slight increase, \$600,000, over last year allocated to compliance and enforcement. I hope that at least some of that increase is going to hiring more environmental officers, but I would argue that \$600,000, even if every penny of that is spent on hiring environmental officers, is not going to make a huge difference. We have a real shortage, as the minister knows, of environmental officers to ensure compliance. It's been an issue in this province for years. It is a situation that his ministry can really only act on specific complaints.

4:30

By the way, this is nothing that is unique to this minister or this department or even this level of government. I mean, it happens at all levels of government in some areas, where you do not have enough compliance officers of whatever sort to be proactive. You're reduced to, you know, waiting until somebody complains. Like in the city of Calgary, for instance, there are not nearly enough bylaw officers to enforce the bylaws. Now, in many respects given the city of Calgary that's a good thing because there are far more bylaws than any city of a million needs. But, for instance, if you've got a dog running loose, a dog bites, you know, and you complain, eventually a bylaw enforcement officer will get around to you, but the bylaw enforcement officers don't exist in numbers to be on the lookout for dogs running loose, that sort of thing.

Taking that back to what we're talking about here in terms of the environment, if we want to achieve the kind of environmental stability, I would argue, that the minister is talking about, it's not enough to just have a minimal staff of compliance officers who can only act when they get a complaint because that is reactive; that is not proactive. Every time you react to something like an environmental complaint, you are in essence shutting the barn door after the horse has bolted. The environmental damage has been done. Some of that can be remediated. Sometimes all of it can be remediated. Sometimes all of the damage can be repaired, but sometimes it can't.

So I wonder if the minister can tell us specifically how many environmental officers his department intends to hire over the next fiscal year, how far \$600,000 will go in that area or how much of that \$600,000, in fact, he's going to spend in that area.

Can the minister provide a breakdown of the percentage of total staff change, let's say, in the past decade for the Ministry of Environment? Can the minister provide the number of environmental officers and investigators employed by the ministry for the past five years? I don't expect the minister, of course, to have those numbers necessarily at his fingertips. I would be quite satisfied if the minister would undertake to get back to us with those numbers.

I want to take a look at page 219 of the business plan, strategy 1.4. It states that the Ministry of Environment will "work with other ministries, governments and stakeholders to begin to implement . . . Water for Life," which we have been told time and time again is vitally important to all the people of Alberta, to this province's future, going forward, and to this government. Again, I think it is tremendously important in theory and in principle. I just worry that there aren't the dollars going to this that can actually put that importance into practical terms.

Some of the implementation strategies include:

- Developing and implementing a phased, long-term strategy to protect Alberta's drinking water;
- Developing water management objectives and priorities for watershed plans to sustain aquatic ecosystems, and enable sustainable economic development; and
- Supporting best management practices in sectors to improve the efficiency and productivity of water use.

Some questions around that, Madam Chair. Can the minister provide specifics, please – specifics, please – as to how he will achieve these goals with other ministries? What other jurisdictions is he in consultation with, and could he report to this House, please, on the progress of those consultations? How can the minister follow through on these goals, as laudable as they are, without adequate funding? Or if the minister believes that this funding is adequate, can he convince me?

Are there any other ministries involved in implementing Water for Life besides Infrastructure? I know that this perhaps should be mined in more detail when we do the estimates on the Infrastructure and Transportation budget, but if I'm looking correctly here, there is an allocation of \$27.6 million in the Infrastructure budget to effectively develop and maintain water management infrastructure, and that is a decrease of about 2 and a half million dollars from last year.

We have been told by no less than the Premier, the top Tory, as he described himself earlier in this House, that, in fact, much of the implementation of the Water for Life strategy was going to take place within the area of the Infrastructure budget. I guess I would like to know: is the commitment of Infrastructure here only for the upgrading and maintenance of existing water treatment facilities? What about new facilities for water treatment? What are we doing additionally? What are we planning to do additionally, not just to hold our place, not just to – if you'll pardon a dreadful pun here since we're talking about Water for Life – tread water but, in actual fact, to move forward with the Water for Life strategy?

I fully agree with the minister. His predecessor did an awesome job in coming up with that strategy, shepherding it through. It's an excellent policy document. It needs to be considerably more than a policy document. We all know that. It needs to be implemented, and it needs to be implemented in the most timely fashion possible. That is what concerns me. We're not really doing that, I fear. We're just trying to stay put, just trying to hold our place. I believe the minister knows that we need to move forward with it, and we need to make progress quickly.

So I wonder if I can prevail upon the minister – and I'm a little bit leery of asking the minister to respond right now because I know that there are others who would like to get some questions in on the floor. Of course, it's up to the minister to decide how he wants to respond, but I'd be willing to hear briefly, orally now some of these specific answers, or if he wants to provide more detail, since we are running short of time here, and take some other questions, that would be fine with me if he'd provide those in writing, as well, or any combination thereof.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Boutilier: Madam Chair, I thank the hon. member for some important points that he has raised, and I will endeavour to answer many of his questions.

Starting with our staff. Within the Ministry of Environment, of course, over the past five years there were many other branches that now are potentially in Sustainable Resource Development and other areas. We have just under 800 full-time members on our staff, with a budget that the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has noted. It is our intention this year to be hiring just over 20 more environmental

enforcement officers and staff to the Environment ministry. Is it enough? No, it's not, but certainly it's better than the alternative. So we are moving forward. That will bring our complement to over 800 members on the environmental team.

I would like to say also that on the Water for Life strategy – and I appreciate what he has acknowledged – presently, today, we have over 500 either private or public water facilities. I think history is such a wonderful teacher that we can learn from the situations that took place in Walkerton. It's just one example of what we or any province or any country never wants to see happen in terms of a loss of life because of poor quality and not proper monitoring and other things that took place.

4:40

I want to say, of course, that I'm looking eagerly for the review, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View mentioned earlier in his remarks, relative to not only collecting information, analyzing it, and determining what changes we have to make. It's almost a system study. First of all, we analyze. Then after we do the analysis, we interpret. Then after we interpret, we have to implement, of course, and that is an important part of our Water for Life strategy over the next period of time.

I want to say from a compliance and enforcement perspective, which the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has brought up, that we respond to about 13,000 calls per year. In fact, we do on average over a thousand inspections.

It's almost like a bylaw to a degree. In fact, in my former life as a mayor and an alderman, of course, sometimes complaints are initiated based on people who call in to complain about something that's going on, and that's okay. In fact, I have examples of where we had enforcement officers that were too eager in the bylaw department because they were going around and putting tickets on cars that actually were turned the other way on a typical street. I had a person come over to me when I was mayor, and they took a picture of my car that was parked the opposite way on the street too. This was about 10 years ago now, and at the time what we began to realize was that on the street someone was washing their car, and they turned it the other way to be able to get to the hose to use the water to wash the car, and we had an overzealous – it really is so important to use discretion in terms of how we apply.

As my grandfather once said, you know, the whole problem with common sense is that it's not so common. I could add another term to that, that when he said "the whole problem," he did insert a particular profession that we seem to be about in this Assembly when it came to common sense. So I am trying to take heed of his remarks relative to being in public office and applying some common sense.

We do require more staff – I recognize what the hon. member is saying – as I'm sure other ministries do. From a reclamation perspective I could just use one example. The underground petroleum tanks, or UPT, as it's referred to, does fall in part under, of course, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, which in my previous ministry I had the honour of going forward with, where we commissioned \$80 million that was used for underground petroleum tanks, where we took the high risk. But presently in my Ministry of Environment under reclamation, of course, we have just under \$5 million specifically for reclamation, particularly in the Smoky River coal mine, which is just one example.

I want to say from the onset that the ultimate responsibility to ensure that the proper remediation and reclamation is taking place – for instance, in this example and others, oil and gas, they have the financial responsibility to do the proper remediation and reclamation of abandoned sites or whatever the activity is. My responsibility is

to ensure as a regulator that they are doing their job relative to the rules that we have and the regulations we have.

I once again will commit to this Assembly that in terms of the laws we have in place, they are first and foremost in terms of environmental initiative. Second of all, ideally it would be wonderful some day not to have to have laws, but we require laws and regulations because of the fact that we can only judge industry, we can only judge others based on our lowest denominator, not by the ones who excel in environmental sustainability but those who are not doing the job. In fact, what they do is taint all the others that are doing good work. So where we have been of course focusing is on 10 per cent of our high-risk activity areas, based on their history, based on their reputation, and based on practices. We have taken that approach, and it's been very successful for us from an enforcement perspective when it comes to what different activities are going on within our province.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

On the 10 per cent increase that the hon. member mentioned earlier, I want to say that in terms of some of the things we're embarking on this year on top of just the Water for Life strategy, we're moving forward aggressively with our climate change plan, our regulation and our consultation, our electronics recycling. Our new standards for coal-fired power plants, of course, are an important initiative, not to mention our air and watershed groups as well, which are so important as we go down this road in what I call important enforcement and compliance.

I want to say at the beginning, though, that the words "enforcement" and "compliance," I had some stakeholders say that they sound like strong words. In other words, they view them as nail them and jail them as opposed to fair and square. Certainly, I can say to the good people that work in the Ministry of Environment, they're experienced, they're young, they're energetic, and they're committed. So I believe and it's my observation that for those over 800 employees that are in the Ministry of Environment, they have the passion that I think is an important ingredient in ensuring that that common sense that my grandfather talks about as important be applied to rules and regulations and, at the same time, to how we can enjoy the wonderful bounty of natural resources that we've been blessed with in this province.

Some of the information going back 10 years, unfortunately, I do not have, but we'll endeavour to get that to you, hon. member.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to reference my remarks, first of all, to goal 3 in the business plan. Goal 3 states: "Albertans work with others to safeguard the environment." Under that it states what it means. This means "the Ministry works collaboratively with other ministries, governments, organizations, associations and communities to effectively manage the environment." Then it goes on to say, "With knowledge and opportunity, Albertans can be actively involved in caring for the environment." It goes on, then, to talk about strategies, and in relation to water strategies 3.11 states: "support Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils to continue watershed management plans," and 3.13 states: "support the work of the Alberta Water Council on watershed management issues in the province." So my comments relate, then, to watershed planning as is stated here in the business plan.

My concern really relates to the progress that is being made in terms of watershed planning as it relates to the Battle River watershed area, and that includes the Pipestone Creek area, which feeds

into the Battle River, and Driedmeat Lake, and so on. This watershed or waterway provides water for the Camrose area. It provides water for Wetaskiwin. It provides water for other centres further down, such as Forestburg and so on. Last year we ran into a rather serious problem where there was a shortage of water, and they had to open the weir at Cold Lake and let extra water down, which meant that the level of Cold Lake was lowered considerably. But there is some urgency here in this watershed, particularly as we consider the economic development of the area.

So my question to you is: what is being done in terms of studying the alternative solutions to this particular problem that exists? What is being done in terms of making decisions on the alternative action that would or should be taken?

I notice in your budget that there are dollars for Water for Life. There are dollars for water operations. I noticed in the capital budget that there is \$171 million over three years for planning, but I don't know how any of this relates to this particular issue and this particular problem. I would like to know from your department how advanced we are in studying this issue and coming up with a solution. So could you enlighten me on how this budget, then, addresses this issue as it relates to my constituency and other surrounding constituencies as well?

Just to conclude, going back to my original comments relating to goal 3, making reference to other ministries that might be involved in coming up with a solution here, I would ask: what other ministries are involved in this and where might I find dollars for this particular study and to solve this problem in other budgets, perhaps? Can you enlighten me on that?

Thank you.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member. From a perspective of watershed planning, ultimately, as we look in terms of how we go forward, our Water for Life strategy, of course, deals with many of those issues. The hon. member pays specific attention to the Battle River relative to the situation there, and he's absolutely correct. In fact, I've appreciated his insight on how we move forward with the knowledge that we have garnered in the past and from the money, of course, a lot of the infrastructure money, that we are going to be utilizing to assist the hon. member's particular area. The Battle River area is in the ministry of infrastructure.

4:50

I do know that the minister is very much aware. We work very closely in terms of my ministry and the policies we develop in watershed councils as well as our watershed planning and with the ministry of infrastructure, who has the money for doing some of the weirs, some of the diversions, some of the ways that we can ensure that in the future and well into the future.

The hon. member is fully aware that in his particular area it's a growing population. There are tremendous pressures that are being faced in his area. More people are moving there now that they celebrate the Alberta junior A hockey championships. They continue to go back. I'm not too particularly pleased with that one, though, in light of the fact that they actually defeated the community and junior A team that are in my area.

The money is there to direct it so that the planning that we have already undertaken, that we're moving forward on, will be used in a way that makes the most sense, that common sense I talk about, ensuring that we conserve the water that we use and even find better ways to do it so that it can be enjoyed by all Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I want to state right from the very beginning that I have faith in this minister. I believe he's sincere, and there's no doubt in my mind about his integrity. But what I see is that all the other kids got brand new shiny budgets, taking into account population and inflation, and his ministry received hand-me-downs. Unfortunately, funding, especially in this province, is symbolic of importance. This was brought out by two previous speakers. That's a concern for me.

Another concern I have is not only the stewardship and the accountability of the Environment ministry, but, being a member of the Public Accounts Committee, each time we question a particular ministry, it's almost typical that it's a new minister. There seems to be very little continuity from year to year with all the ministry changes. It is my hope that our current Environment minister will have a chance to set and realize a vision although given the funding that he's been provided, managing the vision will be difficult. I find it, as I say, frustrating that when we go to ask questions about a specific year's budget, we don't at the same time have a chance to see where that department is going or what the vision is. We don't get a sense of continuity from year to year. To me this is where accountability and stewardship need to be improved.

I also believe that this minister has been placed in a very difficult if not impossible position due to the fact that he's Environment minister and he is also the MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Within that particular constituency that he represents there are so many different demands coming at him that I think that sometimes he must feel that he's a referee wearing a striped shirt and carrying a whistle.

We have heard from the delegation from Fort McMurray about how their infrastructure is very much in need of support increase. The public infrastructure is not able to maintain where the private infrastructure is headed, and we have this great demand for more and more oil: let's cash in on the world markets; let's produce, produce, produce. But within the member's own constituency what is happening at the public level and what is happening at the private level do not jive.

He's also put in a kind of difficult position because as the Environment Minister he has to improve environmental expansion within his area so that further houses can be built, and they're extremely necessary. I'm not stating that this is a conflict of interest. I'm just saying that the minister is wearing so many different hats that I'm sure it must cause a great deal of difficulty.

He's being pressured by industry to provide developmental permits. He's being pressured by the citizenry to allow greater land expansion for housing developments. There are pressures on his own environmental responsibilities within his area because the tar sands and the ponds and the extract continue to grow, and what will be done with them in the future, I think, is a large concern. To me, what I equate it with is the Sydney tar ponds in Nova Scotia. It's not the kind of legacy that we want to consider in the environment. So I do have a great deal of sympathy for the minister because he has so many things to juggle, and he doesn't have a budget that reflects the importance of what he has to juggle.

The other concern, again, that has been brought up by previous members is the lack of co-operation between the two levels of government, between the federal government and the provincial government. We have had cases – and I've repeated them before – of outfits like Shell, BP, Petro-Canada, and Suncor who have already met the Kyoto protocol requirements. They've done it with existing technology. Suncor, especially, is one of the bigger players in this area, and if they can control their emissions voluntarily and with current technology, I don't quite understand why this government isn't pushing some of the other big players for similar environmental

responsibility and stewardship. These company's bottom lines went up, not down, when they showed this type of stewardship.

The other area that I'm concerned about is the co-ordination between, say, Energy, Sustainable Resources, Community Development. It seems that the protection of the environment is potentially in a conflict, an ongoing conflict, with industry and the pursuit of wealth. It always seems that the environment is the last consideration. We've been told frequently in press releases that we mustn't bite the hand that feeds us, but unfortunately that hand is not only feeding us; it is constraining the quality of our life.

There is some kind of need for a communications ministry, and I certainly don't believe that RAGE has that ability to co-ordinate the various related ministries. There has to be an interrelationship between, as I was saying, Energy, Sustainable Resources, Environment, and Community Development, which is responsible for a portion of what I think should be under Environment, and that's parks and protected areas.

I'm not convinced that there's sufficient talking between departments, that there's an ongoing dialogue. As I say, I've experienced this in the wilderness, where people weren't exactly sure who was responsible for what. When we magnify that by thousands and thousands of employees, we have to eliminate that confusion. Unfortunately, the thousands of employees aren't available within this environmental department. They should be, as far as I'm concerned, the ultimate steward, the ultimate assessor, the ultimate approver. While you have to balance economy with environment, given the choice of the two, I will favour environment. So we need that kind of communication to take place.

Also, we've referred to – and it has been brought out in one of the member's statements today – the role of the AEUB. Frequently we hear the term "arm's length" applied to this organization. It's certainly not arm's length from industry. Industry supplies 60 per cent of the Energy and Utilities Board budget. That's hardly arm's length. Then the other 40 per cent of the budget is basically made up by the government and, as was noted, a 98 per cent approval rating for exploration and development and a constant pressure on this Environment minister and ministry to speed up approvals.

5:00

Again, I talk about the minister's own backyard where we're talking about billions and billions of dollars of development and yet insufficient road work, insufficient infrastructure. To me the balance has been lost. In terms of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board I don't believe they're representing the public concern. I believe they're representing the concerns of private industry based on the approval rating.

Just one last thing. If the Environment minister could consider the possibility of taking over the area of parks and protected areas, to me that would go a long way to having consistency in policy. I would also urge the Environment minister to think about the low percentage of parks and protected areas we have. I know that it's not strictly his ministry, but he has an overriding responsibility for the environment. Right now with the ongoing sale of public lands and the fact that only 4 per cent of Alberta's lands have been set aside for parks and protected areas, and even within those 4 per cent there are industrial intrusions, I think very soon we need to increase that percentage. We need to increase the enforcement of the protection of the area, and we have to have ministers in place long enough for a vision to be realized.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thank you very much to the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, and I want to say that many of the comments that he raises are, I think, very, very on the mark relative to work that has to be done. In fact, it's really quite interesting that the Ministry of Environment in its present structure has been in place now for just over four years. It's true that history can be an excellent teacher in terms of doing a comparative analysis. In fact, we then have to ensure that what we are comparing is accurate so it gives us true data – that's important, as members have mentioned earlier – in terms of the appropriate action.

I would like to just ever so briefly talk about some things that are happening that may not be directly suggested in the budget, but let me try to fill in some of the gaps. It's coming from northeastern Alberta, my home constituency. There have been duly noted important questions raised relative to the massive investment that's going on and also the footprint and cumulative effect that is taking place, not only just for species at risk but, as well, in terms of what's taking place. I want to say that the approach, you know, that we are trying to take is one that is more based in the community as opposed to where jurisdictional boundaries are. We want to look at things in a way that takes a look at the global picture. That may even cross over to other borders. It's something that we have to continue to do.

I do feel, of course, having played hockey, that not only am I a referee with a whistle; I want to provide assurance to you that as Environment minister I'm the only referee with a whistle that also is carrying a stick. I'll call it a hockey stick, but it's a stick that is appropriately used where deemed appropriate. So I appreciate the hon. member's comments.

Because of the things that are taking place in northeastern Alberta, my family and my neighbours and the people where we live actually value the environment equally if not more than others because of what we're seeing taking place. You know, some of my very close friends that I worked with on municipal council are aboriginals: Chief Boucher, Chief Waquan, Chief Cyprien, and Chief Janvier. You know, we enjoy a city of 70,000, yet you can be on a float plane, enjoy the waterways, and still be out in the country within minutes from what will soon be perhaps the third largest city in all of Alberta at the growth that it's going. But we've got to ensure that that balance is right. I totally agree with the hon. member relative to that.

If I could just briefly say, about a month ago I was invited, in fact, by the Alberta Chamber of Resources, which is made up essentially of industry folks, to comment, and in actual fact, to their credit, they invited the Minister of Energy, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, and the Minister of Environment, and it was the first time ever that they had all three ministers in a room during their annual general meeting. We had a very healthy discussion. It was where I was quoted as saying that I intended to hold their feet to the fire when it comes to their responsibility for proper reclamation and remediation and in terms of also the social responsibility that they must do.

What I'm encouraged about is our initiative right now relative to IRM. IRM is integrated resource management, where we break down the silos that have been mentioned here this afternoon in the budget discussion. No matter what ministry we're involved with, be it Infrastructure or SRD or Energy or Environment, we need to come together relative to policies because each of our ministries, as much as we're silos, crosses boundaries.

I want to say that a former Deputy Minister of Environment, who then actually became the deputy of Executive Council, of course has done some excellent work on this. He is Vance MacNichol, and they referred to the MacNichol report, and of course I'm studying the report. It's not a public report, but I'm quite eager to say that it appears to be the most talked about report that's out there.

The ultimate mandate for us will be as we go forward. The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne is chairing the committee, a sustainable development committee called integrated resource management, where we are going to be going forward with what's referred to as a more integrated – in fact, let me put this challenge out here today. What worked 30 years ago in this work that we are initiating as the chair of the standing policy committee may not be where we go in the future.

If I can give you an example. The AEUB, that the hon. member mentions, as a regulator of SRD and the NRCB, and the regulation that we have within my own ministry – we are doing a comprehensive review to say: is the NRCB, is the AEUB the environment regulators that we have? Perhaps there's a better way than what was working 30 years ago. Perhaps there's a better way today based on what Albertans, our bosses, are telling us relative to how we manage the resources that we have and that we value so dearly.

I want to say that in this budget I believe the integrated resource management of the three ministries and others that are involved is going to play an important role in terms of new policy development, and when we develop what that policy is, then there is limited interpretation of what that means in terms of managing our resources.

So I'm excited by my other colleagues as well. When I heard from the Alberta Chamber of Resources that it was the first time that they had three ministers in a room talking about this integration – because as much as industry looks for certainty, one thing for sure is that if we can find a better way, we will never compromise our environmental standard and the environmental commitment that we have. So if we can become more effective – and I want to say this. The word streamlining does not mean compromising. If there is a way, maybe it will not even look like the AEUB in the future. Maybe it won't look like the NRCB. Maybe it won't look like the environment regulator. Maybe there is a better way, but one thing for certain is that we need to break down those silos.

In fact, some of the questions in the Assembly this afternoon talked about important issues. There are a variety of regulators and quasi-judicial bodies that are involved. Perhaps there is even a better way of doing it, that my ministry and other ministries are committed to doing, and on that you have my solemn pledge.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would ask, just in making my final comments, that the minister make the MacNichol report available to us. If it's leading us in a specific direction with respect to regulation and integration of regulation, I would hope that we would have a chance to have some input into that.

Thank you very much for your feedback.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much. You have my commitment, as I'm studying through the report, that I will make it readily

available because I think it will create a very healthy debate as we all have ideas on how best we want to see this Alberta look in the future relative to protecting and conserving our important resources.

5:10

The Deputy Chair: Are you now ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Environment for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, you are ready for the vote.

Agreed to:

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases | \$136,003,000 |
| Nonbudgetary Disbursements | \$1,000,000 |

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report the vote for the Department of Environment and request leave to meet again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Webber: 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.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$136,003,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,000,000.

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:13 p.m.]

