

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 2, 2005**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 05/05/02

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, please join in the singing of our national anthem. It will be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Please participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

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

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a delight it is today to welcome two classes from Strathcona Christian Academy. They are accompanied by their teachers, Alan Foster and Gord Robideau, parent helpers Mr. Wade Marke, Mrs. Deeann Knott, Mrs. Bauman, Tonya Shurvell, Heather Eifler, and Gange Morgan, with apologies on that pronunciation. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of all of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly a group of 26 grade 6 students from Rimbey elementary school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Garland, Mrs. McNaught as a teacher aide, and some parent helpers, Mrs. Service, Mrs. Braat, Mrs. Nawrot, Mrs. Vandenhoven, and Mrs. Adam. These are great kids from Rimbey. I was talking to some of them a while ago, and some of these kids actually went to Europe last winter and played hockey there and came home with a silver medal, so congratulations to them. I'd like to ask them to rise in the members' gallery and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some very special people. In particular, our staff are very special to us, but the mothers of staff are even more special to us. Today I'd like to introduce – and I'll ask her to rise – Ms Valerie Kincade, who is the mother to David Kincade, one of the researchers

with the Liberal caucus. She is a risk management consultant at the Atlantic Health Science Corporation in Saint John, New Brunswick. She's here today with her daughter, David's sister I think, Mrs. Kendra Johnson. I'd ask her to please rise. Mrs. Johnson is employed as an air traffic controller with Nav Canada at the Edmonton International Airport as well as being the mom of four kids. They've both risen, and I would ask the Assembly to please give them a warm welcome.

My second introduction today, Mr. Speaker: more special people. These are staff in my office. Today we have joining my staff Cheryl Williams. She is going to be the summer student in my office from now until the end of August. She's just completing her second year of a bachelor of arts degree in anthropology, so she can study how humans behave in a constituency office all summer long. Thank you very much and welcome. With her is Jane Wisener. Jane is from the Maritimes, but we got her to come out here. She ran a very successful campaign during the last provincial election and gave us my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and I thank you for that, Jane. She is now the constituency manager for Edmonton-Centre. I would ask you all to welcome them, please.

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

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce a guest in the public gallery. This man has recently moved to Drayton Valley from the great city of Montreal. Currently in Drayton Valley he is one of our reporters for the weekly paper there, the *Western Review*, so he's going to give me lots of good stories after today. I'd ask John Michael to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Tony Clark. Tony is currently the sessional research assistant with the NDP caucus. Tony is a dedicated and hard-working member of our group. As a rough-and-tumble rugby player no one messes with him. I'd like to ask him to rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly today.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a young student who's just back from completing her second year at Western. The daughter of my communications director, Michael Shields, Sarah Shields is with us today, and I'd ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very talented and dynamic young lady from Lloydminster. Miss Kierstin Smyth has already packed a lifetime of accomplishment into her few short years: she's a swimming coach; she's a music instructor; she's majoring in the faculty of arts, political science and history; she's a Rutherford scholarship winner; amongst many, many others. She's here today with Bart West and Aleksandra Nowacka. She's doing a summer internship with ATCO with regard to government relations. I would ask that all three rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Securities Commission

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day the efforts of the Alberta Securities Commission to prevent a proper investigation into its operation grow more desperate. We now have a situation in which the ASC is placing unacceptable conditions on a proposed systems audit by the Auditor General. It is making many people wonder what there is to hide there and is increasing the calls for a public inquiry. To the Minister of Finance: in other situations does the office of the Auditor General normally have completely unfettered access to files and people when they do their audits such as, for example, of government departments?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker. I know that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition is referring to a series of audit letters that have gone back and forth between the Alberta Securities Commission and the office of the Auditor General. The Auditor General will audit the processes and systems at the Alberta Securities Commission, and we will await his results.

1:40

Dr. Taft: I'll try the question again, Mr. Speaker. In other situations does the office of the Auditor General normally have completely unfettered access to files and people when they do their audits, for example of government departments?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I think that question is more properly placed to the office of the Auditor General. However, I can tell the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that in all departments that I have been minister responsible for over the period of the last 17 years, the Auditor General has had full access and complete co-operation.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, if the minister is so determined to have the Auditor General investigate the ASC, has she asked the part-time commissioners to ask Mr. Linder to exercise his authority within the Securities Act and allow the Auditor General access to enforcement files?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, as I understand from the references that I've received from the passing back and forth of audit letters, the Auditor General will deliver an audit letter to the Alberta Securities Commission tomorrow, and they will begin their audit.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thirty-five employees of the Alberta Securities Commission have sent a letter to the Minister of Finance stating that they are afraid that, quote, the continued deterioration of the work environment will negatively impact the future of the organization and the health of the Alberta capital markets, end quote. These employees say that in light of the dismissal of the director of administrative services they feel too intimidated to speak to consultants investigating problems at the commission, but all 35 will make their names available to the minister if she agrees to keep their names confidential. Again to the Minister of Finance: what information concerning interference with

enforcement cases in the Alberta Securities Commission does the minister now have in her possession?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the hon. Leader of the Opposition is referring to the letter that, as I indicated in the House, I received last week. It does state: Dear Minister McClellan, We, the blank – then written in handwriting is 35 employees. They did say in the final paragraph of the letter that they had spoken to a few of the above – I assume that that's the 35 – and that they were willing to bring their names forward. They felt certain that many others would, if approached, as long as they were guaranteed confidentiality.

Mr. Speaker, I have said repeatedly – in fact, I think I'm the one that stands in this House day after day and supports their request for confidentiality and anonymity. However, Mr. Speaker, other than speaking here today, I can't convey that to the employees because not even one signature was there for me to reply to. So I have said that if they wish to provide their names to me, I will hold them in confidence and then approach their concerns, those that are specific, with the commission.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What information concerning interference with enforcement cases at the Alberta Securities Commission does the minister now have in her possession?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I have references in that letter. Most of the information in that letter – and I think it was published on the front page of the *National Post*, so I don't think it's a secret – is around human resource or employment or workplace issues, but there were references to the regulatory side. In my recollection, I have a letter from one of the previous employees who worked in the enforcement division. I have a letter, which I think has also been made public, from another previous employee in the same area.

What is difficult is that they refer to things that they didn't agree with on the regulatory side, but they are not very specific. It's very difficult to deal with something when they do not give you a specific example or case. So that's two. I've had probably three or four letters that I've seen to date from the public inquiring about this as well as a letter from I think you'd call this lady an advocate from eastern Canada and two offers of help from consultants that work in this industry in eastern Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need to get to the bottom of this, so when will the Minister of Finance do the right thing and call a full public inquiry into the controversy at the Alberta Securities Commission?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I have complete confidence in the Auditor General of the province of Alberta. Absolute confidence. The Auditor General will do his audit of the Alberta Securities Commission. He has agreed to bring on some extra people to give this a priority and to bring the results to us just as quickly as he possibly can.

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

Enron Activities in Alberta

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A detailed examination of the Project Stanley scheme here in Alberta written by Mr.

Seabron Adamson, Enron's hired consultant, estimates that the cost to power consumers due to Project Stanley was \$45 million in one single day. To the Premier: has the government on behalf of power consumers asked for a refund of the more than \$45 million that Enron's Project Stanley cost the Alberta Power Pool in one single day?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, not to my knowledge, but I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The \$45 million does not take into account the legislated hedges. I've said over and over again that Albertans were protected, that that money would have gone back into the Power Pool, and that anything that was above a certain capped rate that any of the generators could have had prior to the power purchase arrangements being sold – they were protected. There was no way in which \$45 million could have benefited at all Enron.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Energy: has anyone from the Department of Energy or the market surveillance administrator's office on behalf of power consumers interviewed Mr. Seabron Adamson, the author of this report? Have you talked to the author?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, there was an extrapolation in that report of \$45 million. It's correct in that, but it failed to take into account the legislated hedges that would have seen that all of those monies that were above the capped amounts at that stage would have gone back to consumers. It was put in place to protect consumers. It was put in place while there was an introduction and transition to deregulation, getting accustomed to the new rules. If there was any volatility of that kind in the marketplace, consumers would be protected.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the Frontier Economics report was available on the U.S. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's website since April of 2003, when did the Alberta Department of Energy or the market regulators first review this document?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we're talking some time ago. I don't have the specific date. I am fully aware that this has been known and has been reviewed, and in that case, to ensure that Albertans were protected, the market surveillance administrator did look at this. They did examine it and ensure that Albertans have been protected.

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

Health Care Privatization

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During February my NDP opposition colleagues and I travelled around the province to hear first-hand Albertans' concerns and solutions for our health care system. Albertans told us that they want a more comprehensive system where public funding covers not only hospitals and doctors but, eventually, needed drugs, home care, and long-term care.

Albertans told us that they wanted a stronger public system rather than endless experimentation with delisting, user-pay, and privatization schemes that cost more and deliver less. My question is to the Premier. Why won't the Premier admit that the reason that he keeps pushing the failed privatization agenda is to enable private health care corporations to pick the pockets of taxpayers and not because it will do anything to fix health care or give Albertans the health system they want and deserve?

1:50

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The health care symposium is not about private, for-profit health care. It's about looking at what exists in other jurisdictions and finding out what works and what doesn't work and discarding those things that don't work and considering those things that do work. There is nothing wrong with that. As a matter of fact, I think it's an extremely good initiative, something that has never been done before in this province. The ultimate goal, of course, is to achieve sustainability in the health care system so that it's there for you and me when we need it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, if the objective is to eliminate those things that don't work, will the Premier then cancel the provision of joint replacement and cataract surgery in private clinics in Calgary, which cost more and have longer waiting lists?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't know that to be true. I do know that it has taken tremendous pressure off the public system. It simply makes sense. It simply makes sense that if you can go someplace else, you don't go to the public system. It involves simple mathematics. You know, the more people who don't go to the public system, the less pressure there will be on the public system. It makes sense. It's mathematically correct.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, math has never been the Premier's strong suit.

If in fact it costs more and provides longer waiting lists and if there is no public option in Calgary, why is it preferred to do it through private delivery, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it's poppycock what he talks about. You know, if he can't understand me and very, very simple arithmetic, maybe he can understand the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the time that the Calgary health authority signed a contract with HRC for hip and joint replacement, it added an extra capacity to treat 500 people who had considerable pain and suffering while they waited on long lists. It's true that we still have a lot of people on this, 4,800 at last count last week, but we are making a difference. The new process with the arthroplasty and the work that we're doing in the three clinics across Alberta: we'll continue that. We are enhancing the service; we're not detracting from the service.

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

Natural Gas Rebates

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past few years this

government has recognized the extra expense to Albertans coming from the increased cost of natural gas. Though we understand that we live in a world where energy prices are dictated by commodity markets, it's nevertheless made Albertans rather fearful to open their gas bills every month, especially in the wintertime. Albertans are also grateful for the natural gas rebate, which has been in effect for these past few years, but it's due to end early in 2006. Greenhouse operators are especially concerned in order to plan for their future. My question today is to the Minister of Energy. Does the minister intend to renew this rebate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The natural gas rebate program was put in over a three-year period, and he's correct in mentioning that it's scheduled to end in the spring of 2006. As part of that, there was a commitment that we would undertake a review of that. Our department has already begun some initial review of that program, and that will likely be completed later this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: would the minister agree to extending the rebate indefinitely and making it for a full 12 months rather than for just five months?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, while I would like to emphasize that Albertans have benefited tremendously by this – over half a billion dollars have been given to Albertans in a time of high prices of natural gas, when we received the royalties, to see that Albertans benefited from their Alberta energy advantage – I would say that it's a little premature at this stage to say whether that program would be indefinitely continued. That's part of the review process that we're undertaking.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: if the outcome of the review were to suggest not extending or renewing this rebate, will he then consider a rebate for those rural users such as greenhouses, exotic oil processors, and irrigators, some of whose bills are in excess of \$30,000 per month and some of whom may not qualify for any rebate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to highlight in light of those commercial greenhouse operators, forage dehydrators, grain dryers, agriculture irrigators that the program was actually modified to see that they could accommodate their months of highest usage. They could choose any five months in the year where they had the highest usage and apply for the rebate on those months. They can yet have through to June of this year to apply for that if they have missed it for the 2004-05 year, and we would encourage them to do so.

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

Midwifery Services

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thursday, May 5, marks the International Day of the Midwife, but midwives in Alberta are

finding it increasingly difficult to operate because of a lack of recognition and funding. In 1997 money was put toward developing the integration of midwifery services evaluation project, and since then the entire midwifery community has been anxiously awaiting a decision. My questions today are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. When will the integration of midwifery services evaluation project report, now eight years old, be released publicly?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, although I cannot tell the hon. member opposite when the report will be released publicly, I can assure you that there is still work being done relative to the Health Professions Act relative to the integration of service delivery by other health professionals and disciplines. We have been paying attention to what the midwives have been saying, that they can work with us, and with the inception of primary care I look forward to the day when even more service involvement can happen because of the involvement of midwives.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: will the minister restore the position of consumer representative back to the Midwifery Health Disciplines Committee?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I have been looking at a number of the committees that have been providing advice and support in the health care delivery system. I have not yet made a decision relative to that, but I would welcome the hon. member to provide me a briefing on how she believes that that would be an important addition to the committee.

Ms Blakeman: Happy to, Madam Minister.

The third question to the same minister: given that midwife-attended home births cost the system \$2,800 compared to a \$4,100 price tag for a hospital delivery, when will the government instigate reforms for a sustainable health care system and include midwifery services under health care coverage?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly it's an important distinction the hon. member has made, but quality health care isn't all about examining the bottom line. Quality health care is about engaging in those practices that deliver the health care, as it should be, to people who are in need of it. The hon. member has pointed out the cost-effectiveness of midwives. We've had some conversation between the other partners – the physicians, family practitioners, and others – and I know that midwives anxiously await the results of that. When we're ready, we will provide further information to the House.

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

Health Symposium

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health care is a great concern for my constituents as well as for Albertans and Canadians at large. My constituents worry about access to and quality of health care. They also worry about the increase in public spending on health care and the cost to themselves. Given that tomorrow there is a symposium in Calgary with international experts, my first question is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister explain why the government is hosting this symposium?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the most important reason is that in Canada we rank third out of the OECD countries on the amount of money we're spending. Alberta has consistently been one of the biggest spenders in health care.

However, in terms of performance, Mr. Speaker, while we have an amazing health care system, a wonderful, publicly funded health care system, we only rank about middle of the pack in performance. We believe that the opportunity to listen to 27 speakers from nine countries will enhance not only the regional health authorities' understanding of some of the best practices elsewhere, but we'll all learn from that exchange of ideas and information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:00

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the subject of health care is heavily politicized and my constituents have been confused by political campaigns, my straight-to-the-point question is to the same minister. Will the symposium lead to increased privatization in Alberta?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that our critics would like to say that we're challenging the Canada Health Act. We believe that it's about improving quality. It's about improving access. It's about improving patient care. It's not about challenging the Canada Health Act. It's about doing the right thing for Albertans so that they continue to support a system that they know is better than in most places anywhere in the world.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Centralized Teacher Bargaining

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government tends to centralize power, which has consistently hurt the ability of local authorities to carry out their mandates. Local school boards are charged with bargaining but have been stripped of their ability to raise money, and the province hasn't always funded the local settlements. Some school boards are now supporting a move to centralized bargaining despite considerable evidence that such schemes don't work. My question is to the Minister of Education. Is the minister prepared to implement this centralized bargaining model despite the fact that it is opposed by teachers and close to half of the school boards across this province?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I suspect that the hon. member is referencing recommendation 81(a) as it appears in the Alberta Commission on Learning report, which called for a province-wide or provincial bargaining association to be established. Now, that particular motion went forward. It was supported by the Alberta School Boards Association membership, and I expect to receive a copy of it any day so that I can review it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What specific evidence does the minister have that centralized bargaining will produce more productive labour relations or superior educational outcomes for communities than local bargaining? What evidence does he have?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think that the Alberta Commission on Learning did an incredible job with an enormous amount of in-

depth study and review of best practices and various types of bargaining models before they made that recommendation. I'm sure that if the member wishes, we might be able to find some of that information for him. The fact is that they brought forward the recommendation because they perceived there to be an imbalance between the way the ATA, the Alberta Teachers' Association, was able to negotiate versus the way individual boards were able to negotiate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the minister considering moving educational decision-making even further away from the local level by eliminating elected school boards and appointing regional boards across this province?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think the key word is, obviously, "local," and this was a decision made by those locals on the weekend. As soon as I have a chance to review it with the Alberta School Boards Association and perhaps other education stakeholders, that will be a time, then, to give an appropriate answer to those kinds of questions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe we can learn more about this issue. Alberta's Commission on Learning made 95 recommendations to the provincial government. A lot of progress has been made on the 86 accepted recommendations, but some are still under review. Recommendation 81, for example, called for a legislated employer bargaining model, but some people are concerned that a provincial employer bargaining association might weaken local relationships between school boards and local ATA members. My question to the Minister of Education: can the minister explain the true purpose of recommendation 81 and why it has been delayed?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, recommendation 81(a) sought to correct what the Alberta Commission on Learning saw as an imbalance between a very powerful and highly structured Alberta Teachers' Association in comparison with a loosely knit group of local school boards. Those were words that the Alberta Commission on Learning used or words to that effect. It's proven to be a very sensitive issue. At the time that it was brought forward to the government, the government said that this would require further review and study, so it went to the Alberta School Boards Association. They did a review. They did a study. They did a preliminary vote in November of 2004. That vote said: go ahead and find a model and bring it back. That model took time to develop, and that really is part of what the delay has been about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How will the outcome of this weekend's vote by the Alberta School Boards Association affect local bargaining?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, if government were to accept what the local school boards accepted this past weekend, it would really mean that local bargaining would become centralized bargaining, and you would have a parity of models. What the ATA currently has, the Alberta School Boards Association would then have, so essentially that's what would happen.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: can the minister tell us what the next steps are to address the results of the ASBA vote?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I believe I have a meeting already set with the chairperson of the Alberta School Boards Association. The purpose of that meeting is for me to first of all receive a copy of this new model, which responds to recommendation 81(a), and at the same time have an opportunity to chat about it and review it in more detail, discuss it, and at the same time, too, to meet with other stakeholders. I understand that the Alberta Teachers' Association have also contacted my office, and they want a meeting, so I'll meet with them as well.

I think, Mr. Speaker, it's important to also note that there was a second vote that was taken, and that one has to be looked at in tandem with 81(a). It's generally referred to as 81(c), and in a nutshell that particular vote was with respect to what can and cannot be bargained for should a centralized unit in fact come into place. So things like pupil-teacher ratios, classroom size, minutes of instruction would all be put on the table.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Gang Violence

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Early Sunday morning the community of Mill Woods once again was jolted by the sounds of gunfire. This incident caused yet another fatality, the third in the past two weeks. Even when such events are targeted and not random, residents of my constituency are extremely concerned that the next bullet may hit them or their children. My question is to the Solicitor General. What is the Solicitor General doing to facilitate antigang activity by the various municipal police services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was indeed a tragic incident that occurred this weekend, where the life of a 19 year old was taken. Again, the Edmonton Police Service homicide unit and the gang unit are investigating. There are highly skilled and trained officers that are investigating this incident.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the larger question is the drugs that are involved in 98 per cent of these cases. It's just shown that it took the life of a 19-year-old boy. Our condolences are, obviously, with the family of this young man.

Mr. Speaker, gangs are a breeding ground for organized crime. This government has supported the Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta as well as the integrated response to organized crime by providing funding for them each year. As well, these officers that belong to these units work with the Edmonton Police Service, the RCMP, and the Calgary Police Service. They do have the skills to investigate this, and they, obviously, are at this present time.

Mrs. Mather: To the same minister: given that more constables on the street are the most effective way to fight crime, will the minister commit to providing additional funding to major urban police services to hire more new officers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Solicitor General did

provide the Edmonton Police Service with \$10 million in municipal policing grant funding this year, that they can use towards whatever they feel is necessary for their police service budget. We've increased the amount of funding by \$6 million, from \$37 million to \$43 million, for municipal police grants this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. Again to the same minister: can the Solicitor General tell us what types of preventative strategies are being developed to help keep our kids from being drawn into the gang lifestyle?

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of programs throughout the province. They do vary by school board in conjunction with the school resource officer; that is, a police officer that works in the community. A number of those programs are done by the local police service, whether it's a municipal service or the RCMP. In fact, some special constables that are hired by the municipalities are as well providing instructional and prevention programs to school classes from grade 7 to grade 12. Some of those programs include DARE. Some include some other projects.

2:10

As well, Mr. Speaker, the school resource officers that are in our high schools and in our junior highs are a tremendous resource for school boards and for those schools to utilize to speak to the kids, to let them know that drugs and their involvement in drugs are, obviously, a criminal activity. They do see the bigger picture in the fact that a number of young lives have been taken throughout Alberta in the last few months.

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

Securities Commission (continued)

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Finance minister is not exactly showing stellar leadership when it comes to the Alberta Securities Commission. One day the minister vows to protect whistle-blowers, only to be sandbagged by the ASC commissioners, who fire the director of administrative services while he's on medical leave. Then the ASC hires a forensic auditor to try to catch other whistle-blowers. Finally, the ASC refuses to co-operate with the Auditor General's investigation called by this minister. My question to the Minister of Finance is simply this. When will the minister have had enough of the senior brass at the Securities Commission thumbing its collective nose at her and the province's Auditor General, and when will she take decisive action to put a stop to it?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated in an earlier answer, the Auditor General and the Alberta Securities Commission have been exchanging letters of audit and responses to letters of audit. This is not uncommon. What is uncommon is that we trade them and exchange them in the press. Because of the interest in this, a lot of that is happening right now. Any government department that has been audited by the Auditor General's office would probably exchange a letter of audit, or we'd get a letter of audit and respond to it.

Mr. Speaker, I made it very clear in my earlier answer that the Auditor General, subsequent to their discussion last week, is submitting a letter to the Alberta Securities Commission tomorrow,

Tuesday, on the audit. The Auditor General will conduct his audit of the Alberta Securities Commission. Under the act that is in this Legislature, the Auditor General has the power and the authority to conduct that audit, and he will do it.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, on the question of letters of audit and audit letters going, it seems to us, the public, that the Auditor General should have every right to go in and do the audit, as the minister wants. What is the holdup?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it's not a holdup. I mean, this is I think moving along quite quickly. They had discussions last week, exchanged letters, and on Tuesday – that's the Auditor General's time frame, not mine. I think that in view of all of the activities that the Auditor General has, he's moving this along quite expeditiously.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Securities Commission operates under statute, and if any of the members wish to read those statutes, they would understand their obligations. I think the Alberta Securities Commission understands their obligations. I don't think that the minister has to direct them or call them or let them know how to interpret their legislation. Certainly, I have every confidence that the Auditor General understands his power and authority, and he will carry that out.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, to the minister: does it not seem passing strange to this minister that the Auditor General, who, we said, is a top officer of this Legislature, has to go hat in hand to the Securities Commission before they'll offer him the right to do what he's supposed to do?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, that speaks to maybe the naïveté of the member, or maybe he just doesn't understand that in any audit process it is an accepted procedure that you have an audit letter, or a letter of audit. It outlines the parameters of your audit and prepares whoever you're auditing for to have the material available to you. That is done in every audit that I've been involved with, in any department that I've had responsibilities for. That is a common practice. What is not common is that we share them with the press.

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

SuperNet

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. [interjections] Yes, this man right here. In February the minister announced a completion plan for the Alberta SuperNet. We were told that rural communities would be able to connect to Internet service providers by April 30. That date has come and gone. Have we hit the mark, or is the SuperNet schedule still falling behind?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We reached a very significant milestone on Friday afternoon. Our completion plan definitely hit the mark. I'm pleased to report that 421 of 429 communities are now ready to connect Internet service providers via the Alberta SuperNet. We have eight more rural communities to go, and we're working closely with each community to jointly address SuperNet construction needs as quickly as we possibly can.

I'm proud of the work that we've done with Bell and Axia and

with the efforts over the last two months that they did to make this happen. The rewards are clear. We're able to bring high-speed to all rural communities. What a huge milestone to meet and in our centennial year. It's great to live in Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Webber: Again to the same minister: I'm wondering why there are eight remaining communities still not hooked up. When can we expect to be able to take advantage of the SuperNet?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, at this point we only have eight more points of presence to go, and we did not schedule these sites for April completion because we knew that there were challenges in a few different areas of the province. Throughout the SuperNet's project it's been a joint effort with each individual community, and there are local construction needs to consider. The remaining sites will be completed between now and September 30. That's the date we announced that the whole network would be complete.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Webber: Thank you. Again to the same minister: can he tell us what the next step is toward full SuperNet completion?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes breaking large projects into smaller phases means that we can make a better tracking process, and we can track it better. We did that in February when we announced that we would be completing in three different phases. We hit our first target, and now nearly 400 – 400 – rural SuperNet communities are ready to connect to service providers. The next milestone is June 30, when the majority of our facilities will be connected. In February when we made this announcement, we had less than 500 connected, and today we have over a thousand connected. That's significant progress.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AISH clients have recently received news that the long-overdue increase to AISH payments will be implemented by this government. The 5 per cent of AISH clients who live in assisted care facilities have not been so fortunate. Albertans with disabilities so severe that they require daily living assistance in a care facility are provided with room and board, which is paid to the institution, and a measly personal living allowance of \$175 a month. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Why are the AISH benefits increases not being implemented for all AISH recipients, including those in the assisted care facilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member indicated, we do have a specialized program within AISH, which is known as the modified AISH program. It is for about 2 per cent of Albertans, which is approximately 800 Albertans of low income that have a severe disability. Those people reside usually in a long-term care setting that can provide the type of assistance that they do need,

but some are moving to designated assisted living, which is a bit of a lower level of medical care. The amount of funding that is available for people with modified AISH is based on a per diem set through Health and Wellness of \$42 per day, which is a little over \$1,200, and that includes, then, accommodation, meals, laundry, health care needs, prescription drug costs, et cetera. Quite a wide range. Also, they do receive, as the member indicated, \$175 per month for their personal care needs.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. To the same minister: does this government consider the needs of assisted living care clients to be less than those who are able to live independently?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, not at all. In fact, I'm surprised the hon. member asked that question. As I said, this is a very specialized program for people with a severe disability that reside in long-term care centres, and in fact the amount of funding that they receive is above the basic AISH program. With the basic AISH program, as you know, we've recently increased the benefit to \$950 immediately and a thousand dollars by the end of the year, but the AISH client that the member is speaking of is a client who receives a benefit of almost \$1,400 a month for all of that listing that I had described regarding health care needs and whatnot and who also receives a benefit of \$175 per month.

Ms Pastoor: Again to the same minister: will this government review the level of funding it provides to disabled Albertans living in care facilities?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, yes, I'm pleased to answer that as well, Mr. Speaker. That's in keeping with recommendation 11 in the AISH review report. The chair of the AISH review, the Member for Strathcona, who is also the chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, has been meeting with staff in the department. Part of that will be the modified AISH benefit. I think you're asking the question about the \$175 benefit, and that is being reviewed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Regulatory Reform

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has recently praised British Columbia's efforts at cutting red tape and reducing regulations. My question is to the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. While Alberta is known as one of the most effective and efficient governments in Canada, might there be a need to follow in the footsteps of British Columbia?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I certainly don't mind giving credit where credit is due. The B.C. government is well on their way to regulatory reform, and I believe that they could have a good model for success. I don't think we have to reinvent the wheel here. I think we can look at other places where there's success. In fact, I plan on and I've been trying to get some meetings with them, and I think I'll be meeting with some of the people from B.C. that brought this in as soon as their election is over and when our House comes out of sitting.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: with Alberta's new regulatory review initiative will this focus on the number of regulations we have in place or the cost of enforcing those regulations?

Mr. Ouellette: We're in the midst of defining our regulatory secretariat's mandate and where the focus should be, Mr. Speaker, but I would expect that it will encompass both the number of regulations and the cost of those remaining regulations.

Interestingly enough, I was in Washington, DC, last week where I discovered, among many other things, that the Gettysburg address has 266 words. There are 1,322 words in the Declaration of Independence. Even the Lord's Prayer has 66 words. Yet I'm told that one state's regulation on the sale of cabbage totalled 26,000 words.

Of course, the need for regulatory reform is not confined to south of the border, Mr. Speaker. We will forge ahead with regulatory review and cutting red tape and streamlining services to benefit all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will this new initiative on regulatory review be a one-time-only initiative, or do you envision it to be an ongoing effort?

Mr. Ouellette: Without question, Mr. Speaker, regulatory review is here to stay, at least as long as this government is in place, which will no doubt be during my lifetime and my children's lifetime. Regulatory review would become a permanent feature of this government's ongoing efforts to strengthen the Alberta advantage.

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

Support for Active Living

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sports play an important part in building a healthy community and enhancing our quality of life. It fosters the kind of spirit that contributes to a vibrant community. This government has pledged to take steps to make Albertans the healthiest people in the world. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. Given that the recent budget did not provide any additional funding for sports and recreation, does this mean that active living is not a priority for this government?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, quite to the contrary. If one looks at the budget for the Department of Community Development, significant amounts of money have been spent through centennial legacy projects for restoring aging infrastructure for recreational facilities. We look also at what we've done with parks as an example, a quadrupling of the budget for parks, clearly an important part of our recreational infrastructure, \$17 million reinvested in the Canmore Nordic Centre, a remarkable piece of infrastructure required for sport and recreation.

I think that the hon. member needs to expand his understanding and definition of what recreation is, of what sport is. It's not simply what's funded through the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation, but there is an enormous infrastructure worth hundreds of millions of dollars in this province that allows kids to play hockey, allows children to play on sports fields, to be out in the

winter at recreation venues throughout the province. So, Mr. Speaker, we have a very strong commitment to this.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: given that the Alberta sport plan was submitted to the government in 2003 but has still not been implemented, will the minister tell us if he's planning to consider implementing any of the 180 strategies put forward?

Mr. Mar: The simple answer is yes, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta sport plan is a document of some extensive recommendations. At this point we've looked at a number of different options in terms of getting the sport plan out there and how it might be funded. We've taken some steps that have gone beyond the sport plan. As an example, we recently met with the province of British Columbia and cosigned an agreement with that government with respect to joint use of Olympic infrastructure facilities so that Canadian athletes will have access to some of the best facilities both in British Columbia and Alberta in their efforts to become medal winners at the 2010 Winter Olympics in British Columbia. So there are steps that we're taking with respect to the sport plan. It is not a complete set of responses at this point, and there are some elements where we've gone beyond that which has been set out in that plan, sir.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: will this government commit to implementing long-term policies to support our grassroots and high-performance athletes?

Mr. Mar: We already have, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of a number of members today, but first of all the historic comment of the day.

2:30 Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: On May 2, 1923, Florence Lassandro, née Filumena Costanzo, was hung for the murder of Constable Steven Lawson at the Fort Saskatchewan jail. She was the first and only woman to be hanged in Alberta.

In 2003 the Calgary Opera and the Banff Centre commissioned and produced an operatic version of her involvement in a sordid tale of booze smuggling and crime in the Crownsnest Pass. The opera *Filumena* opened Canada's National Arts Centre's two-week festival of Alberta culture, Alberta Scene, in Ottawa last Thursday.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and privilege to introduce to you and through to you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 22 visitors from Holy Cross collegiate in Strathmore. There are 16 grades 7 and 8 students as well as Mrs. Holly Rawlek, Michele Barrett, Shirley Boiteau, Mr. Glydon, Mrs. Bauhuis, and Mrs. Murray. I would ask them all to rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so happy today to introduce to you and through you the second half of 150 students, teachers, and parent helpers from the Percy Baxter school in Whitecourt. They are currently studying local government and are visiting the Legislature today to learn more about what goes on in this building. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them all to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Members' Statements

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

Alberta's Research Environment

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government's 20-year strategic plan talks about how it will achieve the goals of unleashing innovation and becoming a leader in learning. Two recent announcements move us closer to this commitment to building a world-class research environment in Alberta and highlight the province's ability to attract and retain the high-quality professionals needed to move the innovation agenda forward.

Last week the province announced that Dr. Stuart Kauffman, a medical scientist known around the world for his groundbreaking protocols, has chosen Alberta as the place to work on his research, which involves new ways to treat cancer. Dr. Kauffman is the latest in a line of world-renowned researchers brought to the province by the Alberta Informatics Circle of Research Excellence, otherwise known as iCORE, which was established in Alberta in 1999. iCORE was created to strengthen the province's university-based research system and attract top talent to the province. Alberta is now home to some of the world's best researchers working in emerging areas like wireless communications, artificial intelligence, and nanocomputing.

Mr. Speaker, another important incentive for keeping and retaining graduate students is scholarships. Last week the Minister of Advanced Education announced that more than half a million dollars in scholarships are being awarded to 35 graduate students studying in a variety of fields, including clinical psychology, electrical engineering, neuroscience, and molecular and cellular biology.

Mr. Speaker, all Albertans should be proud of the investments the government is making in the future and the world-class research environment being created in this province. Alberta continues to be one of the best places to live, work, and raise a family, and by supporting this talent and fostering an environment for education and innovation, this province definitely has a bright future ahead.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Emergency Preparedness

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about the importance of emergency preparedness. Earlier today I accompanied the Minister of Municipal Affairs as we demonstrated the emergency public warning system to municipalities and broadcasters in the constituencies of Medicine Hat and Cypress-Medicine Hat. This event showcased the province-wide system and how it uses radio, television, and cable broadcasts to warn Albertans of life-threatening disasters and emergencies. With this implementation in southeast Alberta it is my understanding that the entire province is now covered.

As this week is Emergency Preparedness Week, it is important to all Albertans to know the role they play in keeping themselves and

their families safe. Floods, fires, tornadoes, and severe weather are some of the scenarios that can occur to any Albertan at any time. Being prepared means understanding the risks to your area, devising a family emergency plan, and making sure you have necessary resources on hand. Work with your family to prepare an emergency plan. Make sure your family understands the plan, and practise it at least once a year. Further, be sure your child's school has your current contact information. You should also be familiar, Mr. Speaker, with the emergency plan for your workplace and keep a list of emergency numbers close by.

Having emergency kits on hand is another essential element of being prepared. Kits for your home should include basic equipment like waterproof matches, a small flashlight and batteries, and a can opener. You'll also need to have food and water available and should also include candles, a crank or battery-operated radio, prescription medications, and copies of your important documents.

These are just some of the steps Albertans can take in preparing for an emergency. Alberta is seen as a leader in emergency management by helping Albertans, its municipalities, and other stakeholders prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies in Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Wetaskiwin and Camrose Leaders of Tomorrow Awards

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to recognize the efforts of young volunteers in my constituency and the achievements of eight of my constituents.

Each year both Wetaskiwin and Camrose hold separate Leaders of Tomorrow award ceremonies. These awards recognize young people who have made exceptional contributions to their communities by volunteering. Between the two ceremonies there were 68 young people nominated for their commitment to volunteering. While only eight received an award, the appreciation of the hard work of all those nominated was shown at both of these ceremonies.

On April 18 four outstanding Albertans from Wetaskiwin and the surrounding area were recognized for their efforts. They are Destiny Schmidt, Katherine Fraser, Sonja Fedorak, and Christopher Kirwan. On April 21 the achievements of four exceptional young people from Camrose and the surrounding area were acknowledged by their community. They are Kalynn Dobos, Kari Arnston, Jordan Lee, and Erika Mundel.

Those honoured during these ceremonies ranged from six to 25 years of age. The causes to which they donated their time include church organizations, mentoring other young people, helping out at school and with sporting activities. While the organizations which benefit from these volunteering efforts are as different as the young people who donate their time, one characteristic binds these people together. This is a desire to make their community a better place to live.

These individuals have been recognized by their communities as leaders of tomorrow, and their actions leave no doubt that they are also leaders of today.

Thank you.

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

Nursing Week

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise today in recognition of Nursing Week, which will be celebrated across Canada and around the world from May 9 to May 15. The

theme for the week will be Patients First: Safety Always, which is very reflective of how committed our nurses are to ensuring that Albertans receive the best-quality treatment available.

Nurses are often the front lines of health care systems and play an incredibly large role in providing top-quality health care for all Albertans. A nurse's job and dedication doesn't end with their shift either. Countless charity and volunteer organizations depend heavily on the time and expertise donated by the incredible people who take up nursing as a profession.

Nurses don't just work in large hospitals in our major cities. In rural Alberta especially our nurses help administer care to nursing homes, home-care programs, clinics, and a variety of other services, including a very useful Health Link call centre. They are critical in ensuring and maintaining a high quality of life for rural Albertans, and we need to continue to encourage nurses to relocate in rural Alberta.

We need to remember not to take for granted all the hard work nurses do to improve Albertans' lives and our quality of life. I ask all Albertans to go out of their way during Nursing Week to thank one of our wonderful nurses for the job that they do every day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

2:40 Events Attended by Member for Calgary-Varsity

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the evening of Saturday, April 16, members of the Canoffer group, which began with 10 families who had originally immigrated to Fort McMurray from the southern state of Kerala in India in 1980, held their 25th annual fundraising banquet. Over the quarter century the group's membership has grown by hundreds, and their aid donations to a variety of countries and causes have grown by the thousands. Local CBC radio host and Calgary volunteer extraordinaire Jeff Collins was the emcee for this great event that I had the honour of attending in my Calgary-Varsity constituency.

During the afternoon of Sunday, April 17, my wife and I had the pleasure of attending the Chrysalis 10th annual achievement awards, which recognized the tremendous volunteering accomplishments of developmentally challenged individuals, their families, and a whole host of volunteers and corporate sponsors who recognize the value of these individuals' contributions and provide numerous workplace opportunities for them to demonstrate their talents. The Chrysalis sponsors and business partners include Casablanca Video, Chrysalis Awards Committee, Chrysalis Charitable Foundation, Chrysalis staff and volunteers, Community Natural Foods, Country 105 FM, Leland Industries Inc., Marjorie and Francis Lefaire, the Red Cross Society, and the Delta Bow Valley Hotel.

I've never seen so much pride and so many hugs at a single event. My hope and that of the Chrysalis Society is that the Alberta government will step up to the plate by recognizing and providing funding for this highly supportive program.

This past weekend at the University of Calgary the public, including all members of this Legislature, were invited to attend a health care conference co-sponsored by the nonpartisan Friends of Medicare and the Parkland Institute entitled Weighing the Evidence. The hon. members for Edmonton-Centre, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, Edmonton-Calder, Calgary-Mountain View, and myself along with over 300 concerned Albertans heard international, national, and provincial experts praise the Canadian system of inclusive, publicly delivered, administered, accountable, and affordable medicare.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Definition of Marriage

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the privilege of attending a pro traditional marriage rally in Mill Woods, right here in Edmonton. At the rally Bishop Fred Henry of Calgary expressed his concerns over the complaint filed against him with the Alberta Human Rights Commission. He questioned how a pastoral letter written by him and published in a Calgary newspaper could cause a complaint to be filed against him. This really is an attack on his rights to freedom of religion, speech, and association.

The Supreme Court's reference decision regarding the definition of marriage did not give an answer to the fourth question posed by the federal Liberal government, which asked if opposite-sex requirements for marriage are consistent with the Charter. The Supreme Court has stated that to answer this question has the potential to undermine the government's stated goal of equal civil marriage. There is no compelling basis for jeopardizing acquired rights, which they say would be the potential outcome of answering question 4.

The court also pointed out that it was only the Attorney General of Canada who has publicly adopted the position that the opposite-sex requirement for marriage was unconstitutional, not Parliament or the Supreme Court. This is contrary to their decision in *Egan versus Canada*, where it was stated that same-sex marriage, "neither in its purpose nor in its effect . . . constitute an infringement of the fundamental values sought to be protected by the Charter." The court did not say that the government should change the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples, only that it was within its jurisdiction to do so.

It is evident that the Supreme Court has given provinces the opportunity to defend traditional marriage. Alberta is in the position to do it. This government can respond to the majority of Albertans and its own caucus and entrench and protect traditional marriage in Alberta for the benefit of all Canadians. All we have to do is nothing to lose this battle. We can protect traditional marriage, but we must act now.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, as this is the first day that we're sitting in the month of May, at this time I'll advise hon. members of the various dates and weeks that are being commemorated in the month of May.

We already know that the year 2005 is the International Year of Microcredit and the International Year for Sport and Physical Education, but more importantly, it's also the Year of the Veteran.

May is Cystic Fibrosis Month, Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month, Medic-Alert Month, Huntington's Disease Awareness Month, Speech and Hearing Awareness Month, Hepatitis Awareness Month, National Fitness Month, Hearing Awareness Month, Museum Month, Motorcycle and Bicycle Safety Awareness Month, Asian Pacific Heritage Month, Red Shield Appeal Month, Child Find's Green Ribbon of Hope campaign month, and the Light the Way Home campaign. April 1 to May 30 is also Girl Guides sandwich cookie weeks, or month. April 23 to May 23 is National Physiotherapy Month. April 25 to May 1 is Library Week.

May 1 was May Day. May 1 was also the Annual Hike for Hospice Palliative Care. May 1 to May 7 is National Summer Safety Week, as it is Spinal Health Week, as it is Emergency Preparedness Week, as it is National Forest Week, as it is International Composting Awareness Week, as it is International Youth Week, as it also is North American Occupational Safety and Health Week, as it also is Drinking Water Week and Allergy Awareness Week.

May 2 to May 8 is Respect for Law Week, as May 2 to May 8 is also National Hospice Palliative Care Week, as it also is National Mental Health Week. May 3 is World Press Freedom Day. May 3 is also World Asthma Day. May 4 to May 5 is Provincial Leave a Legacy Week. May 5, later in this week, is Holocaust Memorial Day, Yom ha-Shoah. Also, 60 years ago was the armistice, the signing of peace, between the German invaders and Holland and the liberation of Holland. It's also the day on which the bully and coward Adolf Hitler killed himself.

May 5 is also the International Day of the Midwife. May 5 to May 7 is the multiple sclerosis carnation campaign. May 6 is International No Diet Day. May 6 to May 15 is Information Technology Week. May 8 is World Red Cross Day, as May 8 is also Optimist Day of Non-Violence. May 8 to 15 is Alberta Crime Prevention Week. May 8 is also Mother's Day. May 9 to May 15 is National Nursing Week, as it also is National Mining Week. May 10 is National Denim Day. May 10 is International Day for Physical Activity. May 12 is International Nursing Day, as it also is Canada Health Day, as it also is Fibromyalgia Awareness Day. May 14 is Raise the Flag Day. May 15 is International Day of Families.

May 15 to May 21 is National Police Week, as it also is Emergency Medical Services Awareness Week. May 16 to May 19 is the Children's Forum. May 16 to May 22 is Intergenerational Week. May 17 is World Telecommunication Day. May 18 is International Museums Day. May 20 to May 26 is National Road Safety Week. May 21 is the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development.

May 22 to May 28 is Safe Boating Week. May 22 is International Day for Biological Diversity. May 23 is Victoria Day. May 24 to May 27 is Aboriginal Awareness Week. May 25 is National Missing Children's Day. May 25 to June 1 is the Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories. May 29 is International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, as it also is Schizophrenia Walk the World day, as it also is World Partnership Walk day. May 30 to June 5 is National Sun Awareness Week, and May 31 is World No-Tobacco Day.

So that's important in the event that members want to give recognitions this month. We don't want to miss anybody.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to present a petition from some good Albertans from the fine Alberta communities of Brooks, Lacombe, Fort McMurray, Fort Saskatchewan, Sherwood Park, and the beautiful Stampede city of Calgary. 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.

There are 104 fine Albertans on this petition.

Thank you.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to table on behalf of the hon. leader of the NDP opposition copies of

the final report from the series of public hearings we held across Alberta. The hearings provided an opportunity for Albertans to share their vision for a strengthened health care system.

Thank you.

2:50

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling this afternoon, and this is the most recently posted information, on April 25, 2005, of the current membership of Grid West. It lists here as active members the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, two representatives, Mr. Chan and Mr. Tiberi.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is a notice of amendment to Bill 15, the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2005.

I have a second, which is also a notice of amendment to Bill 15, the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2005. I have the copies here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that written questions standing on the Order Paper today stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, and 31.

[Motion carried]

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

Oil Sands Royalties

Q24. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

How much additional revenue from synthetic crude oil and bitumen royalties does the Ministry and Department of Energy estimate will be collected per year once the royalty rate for oil sands projects increases to 25 per cent for the years 2005 to 2015?

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This written question, if it was to be answered – and I certainly hope it will be – would provide all Albertans some information in regard to the long-term revenue forecast or projection for synthetic crude oil and bitumen royalty. Certainly, whenever we look at natural gas and by-products royalties and conventional crude oil royalties, they will be in significant decline by 2015 because, particularly with conventional crude oil production, there will be significantly less even if the price remains at today's levels or even goes higher. The western Canadian sedimentary basin is a mature basin, and in light of our dependence as a government and as a province on natural resource royalties, it is an important question.

When we look at synthetic crude oil production and the royalty holidays that some projects are having or are implemented under or are developed under in the oil sands, we see a 1 per cent royalty until

all costs, including labour costs, are paid for. It's a significant royalty holiday. We've used this royalty holiday to attract billions and billions of dollars worth of investment, but at the same time we're asking workers in those construction sites to work for less. The royalty rates are generous. When the capital costs and labour costs are paid off and we start collecting 25 per cent, exactly how much will we be getting?

Now, if we go back to the budget, for instance, Mr. Speaker, for 2003 and we go to the business plan 2003-2006 on page 137, we will see that the target for the synthetic crude oil and bitumen royalty was \$141 million. If we compare it to this year's budget, the estimate on the business plan for Energy at page 213, we see where there is close to \$400 million estimated to be collected, \$393 million to be precise. So that's a significant increase. It has certainly more than doubled from the budget estimate of two years ago. If we look at the budget for this year, we again see synthetic crude oil and bitumen royalty estimates listed at \$393 million. The forecast for the year before was \$674 million. So there's a significant range of estimates and targets here. It's interesting to note that for the fiscal year 2007-08 in the business plan for this year's budget, it goes up as high as slightly over \$700 million.

If I could have the information as outlined in Written Question 24, I would be grateful. I would read it with a great deal of interest, and I'm sure other Albertans would, too, because there is an impression – whether it's right or wrong, it's not my job at this time to say – that this is a royalty giveaway. If this information could refute that impression, I think we would be doing the entire province a service.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I appreciate that it would be nice to be able to give that kind of information – he's got from 2005 to 2015 – I'm going to have to reject Written Question 24 in the sense that we do publish the three years, but when you're extrapolating out on the record, "Here's what we expect royalties to be in an actual number," it's impossible to project one year out, let alone 10 more years out, what the price of oil is going to be, not just the price of oil but the differentials. With bitumen, which is based on bitumen versus the synthetic crude levels, we've got to build some upgraders to make sure that we've got it to that level, to make sure that we reduce the amount of the differential.

There are so many involved issues in getting to a calculation not just of the west Texas intermediate worldwide price of oil but then to get to a bitumen price and then even to project precisely all of the projects, the billions of dollars that are being invested over this next time, as to when they might precisely finish those megaprojects, when they'll come on stream, at what volumes of production. There's so much activity that all we could do is start providing scenarios: here's the range of possibilities. That doesn't necessarily supply the information that's requested so that we could give that projection.

What we do is – you see that on page 213 in our business plan of Energy – provide the next three estimates of \$393 million up to \$560 million up to \$710 million in each of those years. The good thing that is happening, I guess, with respect to this is that with the higher price of oil we are seeing a faster payout of those projects with less volume so that we are going to start realizing sooner the higher rates of royalty. We've seen it already on some of Suncor's. There are about 20 other smaller projects that have reached payouts. We're going to see it on Syncrude. Probably within the next year is projected for Syncrude. So we are starting to see that realized.

We will do our best in our estimates to project that forward, but

going out for 10 years is just too far to make it worth the paper that it's written on.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In looking at the importance of this issue – that is, royalties for Albertans – one of the key questions that many are asking me in my constituency is: given that the oil sands royalties are at about 1 per cent for well into the future, how can we be sure we're getting our returns from a public resource?

3:00

Indeed, the Auditor General in 2003 and '04 recommended some changes in the way we're assessing the royalty program for heavy oil in particular with a view to being more transparent, being more clear with Albertans about what could and should be expected of the returns on this public resource. The findings that were reported at that time included a review of 10 approvals out of 48 active oil sands projects, identifying certain deficiencies, some of which the department is making progress on but others not.

I quote here from page 128 of the Auditor's report. With specific auditing of five projects out of 48 active projects they found that the risk assessment in five files was deficient because it did not deal with certain common risks to the Department. For example, the risk that a project operator may have a history of making aggressive deductions, the risk of royalties being reduced by non-arm's length sales or costs, the risk of duplicate costs being claimed in the project or in two projects owned by the same organization, or the risk that recovered costs are not being reported in full to the Department.

Secondly:

For all five files, there was no indication of the nature of the work performed to ensure costs were eligible under OSR97 [which] requires that costs be directly attributable to the project, reasonable in the circumstances, incurred by or on behalf of the project owners, incurred on or after the effective date of the project, and incurred for one of ten purposes outlined.

Finally, "all five files did not document that the costs were paid in the time period required by the OSR97".

So the question of royalties I think needs to be addressed. I think the people of Alberta deserve to know just how long these are going to be deferred by new capital projects in order to maintain the 1 per cent royalty and that there is an accountable, transparent process to make sure that the huge resources and the huge potential revenues are addressed appropriately in this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must say that I'm very, very disappointed to hear from the hon. minister that we are not to receive that information. Certainly, the taxpayers and people who rely on government programs would be also very, very disappointed to learn that this government for whatever reason – we can look at the price or we can look at the paydown of those development costs by those respective oil sands developers – may change, but someone over there must have an idea of where we're going to be in the future. The minister certainly quotes page 213 of the business plan for the Department of Energy, but I would encourage the hon. minister and his staff, for that matter, to also look at page 209 of the same report.

We're talking in here, Mr. Speaker, of oil production in thousands of barrels per day. We have oil sands production listed at 853,000,

and going over to the year 2010 it doubles. Surely someone over there must know what kind of royalty take we're going to get, where that production is coming from. Is it coming from facilities that have paid down their development costs, or is it from facilities that have yet to pay down their development costs? These statistics are sourced from "Alberta's Reserves 2003, Supply and Demand Outlook 2004-2013, Alberta Energy and Utilities Board." So I would urge the hon. minister to take another look at this and perhaps visit the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board and see if they now have information that is through to 2015 and give us, please, the information that we are requesting with Written Question 24.

Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Board is also a source for this information in the Department of Energy's business plan. "National Energy Board: Canada's Energy Future Supply; Scenarios for Supply and Demand to 2025; Supply Push Scenario."

So there are all kinds of places where I think the minister in all sincerity could get this information. We're not asking for a figure that is going to be locked in stone, but certainly someone over there must know how we're going to be able to finance this government's expenditures in 2015 and what percentage of that will come from synthetic crude oil and bitumen royalty rates.

I think it's again a very important question. I'm again disappointed and I'm dismayed as well with the hon. Minister of Energy for being so reluctant to provide this information. I think there are organizations that would help the Department of Energy out. I realize that they're very busy these days trying to get a handle on electricity deregulation, but there have got to be some people over there that could perhaps phone the Energy and Utilities Board, the National Energy Board, or other departments to get this information. Perhaps the hon. Minister of RAGE, Restructuring and Government Efficiency, could help out if the minister's staff are all tied up trying to get a handle on and finding some solutions to electricity deregulation. In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed.

Thank you.

[Written Question 24 lost]

Student Loan Defaults

Q25. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Taylor that the following question be accepted.

What is the rate of default on Alberta student loans for students attending or graduating from all eligible institutions in Alberta broken down by institution over each of the fiscal years 1994-95 to 2003-04 inclusive?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would indicate to the House and to the member who raised the question on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Currie that we would be prepared to accept the question provided that there were certain amendments which would make it more readily . . .

An Hon. Member: Answerable?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. That was the word I was looking for: answerable.

I would therefore move an amendment to Written Question 25, that Written Question 25 be amended by striking out "attending or graduating from all eligible institutions in Alberta" and substituting "who have completed their studies," striking out "institution" and substituting "last postsecondary sector attended," striking out "fiscal" and substituting "academic," and striking out "2003-04" and substituting "2002-03."

The amended written question would then read as follows:

What is the rate of default on Alberta student loans for students who have completed their studies broken down by last postsecondary sector attended over each of the academic years 1994-95 to 2002-03 inclusive?

Mr. Speaker, in moving that amendment I would just inform the hon. members that the institutional level of rate of default information is currently not shared publicly. Rather, the information is available at the sector levels, such as the university sector, college sector, et cetera.

There are potential issues with respect to FOIP, section 16 and section 25, that may be harmful to the business interests of a private institution or economic or other interests of a public body. Therefore, sharing the institution-by-institution information, as I've indicated in response to a number of other questions that have been raised in the House earlier, would not be appropriate without having done the review and previously requested of the institutions affected the permission to share the information.

3:10

Now, as I indicated, we are reviewing that area and looking at the question of whether that type of information might be appropriate for students and parents and the public to have at hand in order to make appropriate determinations. So as we go forward, we're looking at the question as to indicating to institutions that that information will be shared, but with respect to historical information the advice we've received is that we would have to go back and make those requests, and that would be a significant pile of work to do. For that purpose, we're proposing that the question be amended to provide it on the sector level as opposed to the institutional level for the purposes of this question, not necessarily for the purposes of for always.

Default information is tracked on the basis of people who have completed their studies in the specific year in question. Information for 2003-2004 is not available because students who would have graduated in May 2004 would have a six-month grace period and then another six months before we consider the amount in default. That's why we've amended it to move the year back one year, because there are, in fact, no defaults for the 2003-2004 year as yet. Management reports associated with defaults are based on school leavers from the May 1 to April 30 period, the academic year. That's the reason for that amendment.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would move these amendments so that we can answer the questions in as appropriate a way as possible without moving into potential violations of FOIP and so that we can put the information into the categories in the manner in which it's actually collected.

The Speaker: On the amendment.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm responding to the amendment that's been proposed by the Minister of Advanced Education. We believe that it's important to be able to look at this issue of rate of default of Alberta student loans based on an institution-by-institution comparison, so that's why we keep asking for the questions worded the way that we do. We're not trying to be difficult. We just believe this is the way the information should be available not only to the opposition but, as the hon. minister noted, to the public and to the parents and students themselves. So I will protest again, but I understand why the minister has offered the amendment in the way that he has.

He did not comment or I didn't hear clearly as to why there was an amendment around students "attending or graduating" to "have completed." It doesn't tell us what's happening to student loans while they're in their undergraduate years but, rather, just once they

have completed their studies. We only get the final year rather than any of the intervening years and, again, not the total sum of information that we were looking for. So I question and protest that one as well.

I understand what he's saying about the sector. I still insist on the institution, and of course it often happens that the ministry can only provide us information based on certain dates or in this case academic years rather than fiscal years and the notation that the minister has already done on the default rate, finishing the last year available.

The rest of those changes are fine with us. I still argue that we should be able to get and the ministry should be able to provide the institutional information, but I have instructions from the member whom I'm speaking on behalf of, that is the Member for Calgary-Currie, to accept the amendment with the protest that I've put on the record. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is concerning to me, and I'd like to just enlarge on what the Member for Edmonton-Centre said.

We've had a proliferation of private institutions in this province. I'm sure that the minister has got complaints from time to time. We have to know what's going on with these private institutions because students are paying out big money to go to them. They're told that these institutions follow certain criteria, certain guidelines, and they get there, and it's not what they expect. I've had complaints in the constituency about this.

I guess the minister is saying that FOIP is involved here, and I'm not sure that I understand why. Surely this doesn't ask for, you know, an individual student's records or the rest of it; it's asking for an institution's. Certainly, through student loans it's public money going into these private institutions. Surely there should be some accountability here, Mr. Speaker. If we can get the information from the U of A or NAIT or SAIT or the U of C or Mount Royal or Grant MacEwan or whatever the case may be, the same accountability should be there for these private institutions.

I don't know how FOIP works to the minister. FOIP, I thought, was for personal information that might get out. If all of a sudden you're asking how many graduated in a global sense from a particular institution, I can't see how FOIP is involved in that. You're not asking for the individual names. You're asking for an overall record of how many people graduated and how many didn't. That seems to me pretty valuable information for parents if they're looking at students that are looking around for various things because the last thing people want to do – I've heard of one case where a student ended up with a \$13,000 debt and a useless course, so they're not going to proceed.

There's got to be a way around this FOIP. If we're going to give public money to private institutions, there has to be that accountability. I'd like the minister at some point to indicate why FOIP is a necessity to protect the institution, the private institution. FOIP to me is for personal information, that you wouldn't put out particular students or names, but you certainly should have a record of how many are in the school, how many are passing, and what's happening there.

So I'd ask, you know, on the amendment as to why that is the case. I know we'll get FOIP all the way along on some of these, and I think it's important for us to know.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: On the question as amended. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, do you wish to close the debate?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Please close debate.

[Written Question 25 as amended carried]

Student Loan Maximums

Q26. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Taylor that the following question be accepted.
What is the total number and percentage of Alberta student loan program applicants receiving the maximum allowable loan over each of the academic or administrative years 2000 to 2003-04 inclusive broken down by year, learning institution, and program of applicant?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I would indicate to the House and to the member raising the question that we would be prepared to accept Written Question 26 provided that it was amended to allow for us to provide the information in a compliant way. Therefore, I would move that Written Question 26 be amended by striking out “learning institution, and program of applicant” and substituting “undergraduate or lower program category, and graduate/professional program category.”

3:20

Mr. Speaker, the reason for proposing the amendment is that information on maximum allowable loans issued is tracked at the undergraduate or lower program level and at the graduate/professional program level only and not by learning institution or specific program of applicant. So getting the information, other than going through an extensive manual process to provide that information, could not be readily done. With the amendment we can at least provide information which could be made available based on the program level of study rather than by institution.

We are spending a considerable amount of resources in upgrading the technology that's available. I'm sure that with that upgrade there will be many variable fields available, and perhaps we'll be able to extract information in a number and varied ways. But at the present time, as I am given to understand it, providing the information in the way in which it was asked, if not impossible, would require a huge amount of manual work.

The Speaker: On the amendment.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, I want to be efficient with use of resources here, but it is highly questionable to me that this information is not tracked by institution. I, of course, will take the member's word that it is not, but I still find that very curious. It does not allow us to compare between. In addition, it's not allowing us to compare between what we would call the public system and private offerers as well, as was raised by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, which I think is an excellent point, especially as we move into an age where there are more private providers of education. We should be able to compare between institutions, especially when we're talking about student loans and those who have maxed out their possible loan program.

The second question that occurs to me is that in this question the minister is telling me that numbers are available from undergraduate and lower program categories and graduate/professional program

categories, yet in the previous question he told me that that wasn't available. It was only available for graduating as a final: “who have completed their studies.” I'll let the member explain to me on the record, then, what the difference is between those two. What strikes me is that the undergraduates appear to be available in this question. These are relatively similar questions. I'd like to know why it's not available in the previous question.

Again, I have instructions from the sponsoring member to accept the amendments from the minister, but if I may, I strongly suggest that we do look at tracking by institution. I'm very curious that we don't. I think that if that is truly an oversight, it's one that we need to address immediately.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, do you choose to close the debate, or should I call the question?

[Written Question 26 as amended carried]

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

Student Loan Appeals

Q27. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Taylor that the following question be accepted.

What is the total number of Alberta student loan program applicants who have appealed their award over each of the academic/administrative years 2000-01 to 2003-04 inclusive broken down by year, learning institution, reason for appeal, and whether the appeal was successful?

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Now, there is an extensive amendment, which the minister, I'm sure, will get up and go through. Once again, I note that we are unable to be provided with information broken down by institution, which again I think is an oversight. I look forward to the reasons that the minister will give for amending this written question, which I have now moved.

Thank you.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the last two written questions there was a significant difference between the two in that with respect to 25 we're talking about school leavers or graduands and default rates as opposed to the other one, which was maximum loans. The information is categorized and available in different ways depending on whether they're in the default category or the other category. I don't profess to be an expert on all of this stuff, but that's what I'm advised. So there was a significant difference between those two questions.

With respect to Question 27 I would indicate that we're prepared to accept this question. Again, it would have to be with an amendment. I would move to amend Written Question 27 by striking out “learning institution.” The question, then, as amended would be:

What is the total number of Alberta student loan program applicants who have appealed their award over each of the academic/administrative years 2000-01 to 2003-04 inclusive broken down by year, reason for appeal, and whether the appeal was successful?

Mr. Speaker, in moving that amendment, I'd indicate that all

we're doing is taking out the request to break it down as well by learning institution. While I'm sure that the same arguments apply with respect to this question as had been raised in the other ones – and I have to say that I don't necessarily disagree with those arguments; I think that information might be useful – the fact appears to be that we don't have it in that manner. Appeals are tracked by reason code, not by learning institution or any other format, so apparently we're unable to fulfill the request by learning institution.

Management reports identify successful appeals based on commencement of study period and unsuccessful appeals based on the date they entered the system. This is extra information just so that when the answer is provided, it can be provided in a context that you might understand it. Also, a number of appeals remain pending for periods of time awaiting additional information from the applicant. Therefore, in any given fiscal year the total number of appeals approved and rejected does not equal the number of appeals actually received in a given year.

Just so that you know, when we do get the information, the reason why it doesn't add up is because of the different methodologies with respect to successful appeals, rejected appeals, and the timing of appeals. We have 56 different appeal reason codes, and of course applicants may have more than one reason for their appeal, so that would be another reason why the information might not appear to add up.

We'd be happy to provide the information with respect to appeals provided that the requirement to do it by learning institution is taken out because, again, the management systems that we have right now apparently don't break it down in that fashion.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 27 as amended carried]

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

Theft of Public Property

Q28. Mr. R. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that the following question be accepted.
What is the total dollar amount of public property lost due to theft in the Department of Sustainable Resource Development for the 2003-2004 fiscal year?

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the reason for asking the question is quite self evident, and I will happily await the response from the hon. minister.

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

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development I would be pleased to accept Written Question 28.

The Acting Speaker: Any other questions?

[Written Question 28 carried]

3:30 Full-day Kindergarten

Q29. Mr. Flaherty moved that the following question be accepted.
What consultations, studies, research, or other information-gathering exercises pertaining to full-day kindergarten are

currently planned or under way under the auspices of the Ministry of Education?

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to indicate on behalf of my ministry and the government that we will accept Written Question 29 as it stands.

[Written Question 29 carried]

Calgary Ward 10 Election Process Investigation

Q30. Mr. Flaherty moved on behalf of Dr. Taft that the following question be accepted.
What is the total dollar amount spent by the Department of Municipal Affairs on the investigation into Calgary's ward 10 election process following the October 2004 municipal election?

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

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs I'm going to indicate to the House that we are prepared to accept Written Question 30 with some amendments. This information was shared with the opposition prior to 11 o'clock this morning, as per procedures, and I'd ask that the amendment be circulated if it hasn't already.

Briefly, Mr. Speaker, the rationale behind amending the first part of this question is because the process is ongoing. Therefore, to answer a question as to what the total costs are before the process is finished is not possible. The other minor change replaces the word "investigation" with "provincial inspection." This adjustment adds clarity and accuracy to the question.

The amended written question will read as follows then:

As of March 31, 2005, what is the total dollar amount spent by the Department of Municipal Affairs on the provincial inspection into Calgary's ward 10 election process following the October 2004 municipal election?

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 30 as amended carried]

The Clerk Assistant: Written Question 31. Dr. Pannu.

The Acting Speaker: There being no mover for the motion, the motion will be dropped from the Order Paper.

head: Motions for Returns

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate there was no mover for that last one because we might have been able to actually accept it. However, let's move on.

Proper notice having been given on Thursday, April 28, I'm pleased to move that motions for returns 27 through 43 inclusive be dealt with today.

Mr. Speaker, I might just add, there being no additional motions for returns, there are none to stand and retain their places following this motion.

[Motion carried]

Software Licences for Schools

M27. Mr. Flaherty moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents including but not limited to letters, faxes, memos, meeting notes, reports, contracts, and competing bids related to the October 2004 agreement between the government and Microsoft Inc. for the provision of Microsoft Office software to Alberta's educational institutions.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, this particular motion is directed to Alberta Education and also partly to Advanced Education, and I want to indicate to the hon. member that I'm prepared to accept this on behalf of government albeit with some amendments. I believe that the amendment on 27 has been circulated, and all members should have a copy of it now. In addition, I should just point out quickly that this information has been shared as of 11 this morning with the opposition colleague, which is, of course, the requirement as per our procedure.

Assuming that all members have now had a chance to look at it, I just want to indicate that this matter requires just a little bit of background information. If I might just speak to the amendment at this time, I would indicate the following. First of all, the contract in question deals with Microsoft Inc., and since the vast majority of school jurisdictions and postsecondary institutions in our province were already using Microsoft Office software, it was deemed best to enter into a broad, province-wide agreement that would reflect that particular fact.

So the provincial Microsoft licensing agreement in effect was arrived at, and it actually is going to save the educational system in this province in both sectors, K to 12 and postsecondary, about \$10 million over three years. That will be done by achieving some economies of scale. So that results in a cost savings of approximately 25 to 40 per cent. I thought that that information might be sort of important to have on the table.

Now, the scope of the information the way it was originally requested, however, in this particular motion for a return would have been rather extensive and would have required us to go back to October 2002, which would have meant spending considerable amounts of time and other resources to provide something akin to an answer for what was asked for.

In any case, Mr. Speaker, due to the business considerations by the various entities that are involved, including some competitive advantage considerations, it would have become necessary to consult with Microsoft Canada as well as with a very large number of account resellers that participated in the bidding process, and that would likely have proven to be an extremely lengthy and overly involved process, which, even after it had been attempted, might not have yielded precisely what the member was requesting in the first place.

As I've indicated, this is an important motion. I recognize that.

I should just indicate very quickly that prior to this particular agreement having been arrived at, Mr. Speaker, the school jurisdictions as well as the postsecondary institutions actually had separate agreements, which came out of their own technology budgets. Now, however, because our government decided to step in and take care of those costs directly ourselves as a government on behalf of the jurisdictions and the schools boards and the institutions and so on, we have been able to see a number of dollars freed up, which are dollars that now can be directed to other education priorities. So that sort of explains a little bit of the rationale behind it as well.

In the final analysis, Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to accept this motion with the amendments that have been circulated, and I would just now like to read that proposed amended motion into the record,

which I hope will suffice and accommodate the hon. member opposite and his query. That

a copy of the October 2004 agreement between the government and Microsoft Inc. for the provision of Microsoft Office software to Alberta's educational institutions and related documents including requests for quotations, list of vendor applicants, and other materials be provided as required.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and look for the support of the House on the motion as amended and moved.

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

3:40

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, and thank you for the explanation from the minister. I'm assuming, then, that he can provide us with supporting documentation for the claims of savings that he has just made, which is by way of reasoning for why the amendment is being modified in the way that it has been.

To me, Mr. Speaker, what the Official Opposition was looking for was transparency in a process. We're often told, "Oh, you know, you can view the contracts" and "You'll have a look at everything" and "Everyone can look at it themselves and figure out if everyone thinks that it's a good deal." But when we actually come right down to it: "Oh, well, sorry. No, you can't now look at this contract because it's covered under solicitor/client privilege" or "It's covered under FOIP" or "Sorry, you can't see it." So all the great promises of transparency and accountability are gone because they're now all cloaked in some sort of after-the-fact reasoning.

So if the minister is telling me that this is all going to be available, good. Then I'm glad we're on the record here with *Hansard*. I'm sure he'll be providing that information directly to the sponsor of the motion for a return. I do want to see any supporting documents that he has in support of his claims of savings.

Secondly, I'm not specifically familiar with this, but I take it that the October 2004 agreement between the government and Microsoft has not already been released in some other form and that, therefore, this is something new that is now being released by the government, when the amended order shows that a copy of this agreement will be provided. We were looking for quite a bit of detail that led up to the agreement. What all was involved in the negotiation? That's what we wanted to see. We also wanted to see, you know, notes and other things that help people make decisions about this. What did the contracts look like, for example, and the competing bids?

Now, I don't know if in the minister's opinion a list of vendor applicants – that's not the same as competing bids, and request for quotations is not the same as competing bids. So we're not getting what we asked for here. We're getting quite a different thing entirely. We asked for a whale and we're getting a fish. They both swim in water, but beyond that, there isn't a lot of connection between the two of them. Nonetheless, being in the opposition in this particular Assembly, we're always grateful for any information that we can manage to squeeze out of the government.

I'm sure the member is likely to support the amended motion. Nonetheless, I felt it important to get the rest of those points on the record. Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for St. Albert, would you like to close debate?

Mr. Flaherty: It's closed, sir.

[Motion for a Return 27 as amended carried]

Postsecondary Tuition Fee Documentation

M28. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Taylor that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents including reports, studies, statistical data, stakeholder submissions, meeting agendas, and correspondence prepared or received by the Ministry of Advanced Education, formerly Learning, between January 1, 2002, and February 28, 2005, relating to legislation or regulations governing Alberta's postsecondary tuition fees.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to ask the House to reject this motion, and I do that with some regret because, actually, I had wanted to accept the motion, but the material that I've received again indicates that a considerable amount of time – the estimate is about 30 days – would have to be spent in reviewing the requested stakeholder submissions to determine which portions would be exempted from disclosure according to FOIP.

Now, I'm not too certain as to what in stakeholders' submissions would fall into a FOIP designation, but I'm uncomfortable enough with the advice that I wouldn't want an order from the Legislature to return the information if indeed it was to violate the FOIP Act.

In addition, we've been advised that a further consultation with applicable institutions would be wise prior to the releasing of the information. So while this is a question which I would be happy to provide as much information as I possibly can on, because of the nature of the advice I've received relative to FOIP, I should have brought forward an amendment to say: subject to the requirements of FOIP. Then I would have found it acceptable. But I didn't do that on a timely basis, so unfortunately I'm going to have to ask the House to reject the question.

Ms Blakeman: Well, yes, it is most unfortunate. I will hold the minister to his comments in *Hansard*, to promising to provide as much of this information as he can without coming up against the constraints of FOIP.

Mr. Speaker, this is a perfect example of why the Official Opposition and members of the public get so frustrated with this government. That Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act was meant to share information of what was going on behind closed doors with government, and it has turned into exactly the opposite. It is about protecting and keeping information from the very people who should be able to see and scrutinize it.

I'm not specifically criticizing the Minister of Advanced Education in this particular case because I believe him to be an honourable man, but this is an increasing problem with this government. It is very indicative of its reluctance to release information and allow their decision-making to be a transparent process so that members of the Official Opposition, the third-party opposition, the single member of the fourth-party opposition, and members of the public can in fact follow along and make sure that they're in agreement with everything that's happened. It's important to know how government arrives at decision-making.

Here we've had several things happen around tuition fees in Alberta, and we can't tell how the government arrived at that decision. This is what people find frustrating. This is what leads people to find the government, you know, full of secrets and working behind closed doors and deal-making and all those other stereotypes which are heaped upon them. This is what makes people believe they're true.

I know that we've had reviews of the freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation, but I also note: those are all-party

reviews, and the membership on those reviews are reflective of the number of seats held in the House. So we end up with a Tory majority who once again votes that secrecy through. There's something really, really wrong with this system when members of the public cannot see how the government came to make its decisions. This is a perfect example of something that should be straightforward and easily accessible to everyone that is now cloaked in secrecy that doesn't need to be. It does raise people's suspicions and impairs the government's credibility when it tries to make claims of being open and accessible. It is obviously not.

[Motion for a Return 28 lost]

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

Alberta SuperNet Project

M29. Mr. Elsalhy moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents pertaining to the government's decision to transfer responsibility for the Alberta SuperNet project from the Ministry of Innovation and Science to the Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is something that has been on my mind as the critic for Innovation and Science and also on people's minds because the transfer happened immediately, with no warning signs, after the November election. The newly formed ministry was established, and it appears that they just wanted to create some sort of an agenda or a mandate for this new ministry. I would be real eager to receive information on the rationale behind this decision and why it was deemed to be appropriate and timely.

Thank you.

3:50

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

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

[Motion for a Return 29 carried]

Accreditation Approval for University of Phoenix

M30. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Taylor that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents pertaining to the government's approval for the University of Phoenix to offer accredited baccalaureate or master's level degrees in Alberta including but not limited to all submissions by the University of Phoenix to the Private Colleges Accreditation Board, PCAB, written decisions, or recommendations by the PCAB to the Ministry of Advanced Education, formerly Learning, correspondence between ministry officials and representatives of the University of Phoenix, and the ministerial order or order in council granting the approval.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'd earlier circulated a proposed amendment with respect to this motion for a return, but on further review, I'm going to ask the House to actually reject this motion for a return. The reason for that is that we've dealt substantively with the issues provided for in this motion for a return in

responding to Motion for a Return 2 and Motion for a Return 3, as proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, accepted as amended on April 11, 2005. The amendments that I was going to propose to this motion would have essentially put us in the same position, that we'd be providing the same information that we already agreed to provide, which is the letters of authorization and the other information regarding information relied upon.

This is substantially the same motion that has already been approved. Therefore, rather than go through the process of amendment, I just ask that the Assembly reject this one, and we'll respond as we've already promised with respect to motions for returns 2 and 3.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Well, given that the minister feels that it's essentially the same answer to the same question, then I'm asking that any information that is provided to the third party in response to their questions 2 and 3 also be forwarded to the Member for Calgary-Currie if the minister feels that it answers the questions he's raised, the documents that he has requested actually under Motion for a Return 30.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 30 lost]

Student Loan Repayment Systems

M31. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Taylor that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents currently in the possession of the Ministry of Advanced Education including but not limited to reports, studies, statistical data, and correspondence pertaining to income-contingent student loan repayment systems.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of government I'd be prepared to accept this motion for a return. In accepting the motion for a return, I would just provide some information to the House. We're not currently actively reviewing income-contingent student loan repayment systems. The current position – this is, of course, subject to the full review of affordability that will be taking place this year, so it could be subject to change – is that strategies are needed to ensure that debt levels are manageable upon completion of studies.

Programs to support debt management take many different forms, including interest relief, combined grants and loans, or through the Alberta student loan relief program, and it's not felt that it makes sense to provide loans to individuals whose income potential would make it virtually impossible for them to ever repay, even under an income-contingent repayment plan. For those reasons we haven't been actively engaged in looking at income-contingent repayment plans although, certainly, that's an option which could be or would be or should be on the table as we look at the affordability review.

It should be noted, as well, that as part of the pan-Canadian ongoing review of students' assistance the federal government, along with the provinces, is looking at debt management as a topic for review. Possible future options like income-contingency repayment, graduated interest relief, and other options will be on the table.

I think those are issues that will be explored more fully both in terms of our affordability review and then, of course, because we're part of an overall Canadian student loan program as well and often

try and align our programs. Those issues would be studied on a national level as well, with other provinces and with the federal government. We're not currently doing it now, so there won't be an awful lot of information there but certainly accept the question and provide whatever information there is.

[Motion for a Return 31 carried]

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

Anthony Henday Drive Project

M32. Mr. MacDonald moved on behalf of Mr. Chase that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a financial statement detailing the private-sector loan interest rate compared to that of the government for the proposed Anthony Henday Drive P3 project.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. Now, certainly we hear throughout the debate in this Legislative Assembly from one certain side the merits of three Ps, but there is also the argument to be made that the government can get a much better interest rate on borrowing than the private sector because, of course, we have a very, very good credit rating in this province as a result of the debt retirement. [interjection] Now, someone over across the way has said that it's good management.

It's the same Conservative government that spent this province, at one point, into the red significantly – there was an amount over \$20 billion – the same Progressive Conservative government. Then they took an Alberta Liberal policy of fiscal prudent management and implemented it. As a result of that policy and rather robust energy prices the debt paydown went a lot quicker than anyone had anticipated. Perhaps that is the reason why we have such an excellent credit rating. I know it is, and I don't understand why we would go this route with a P3 when we could do it ourselves.

Now, the P3s have been called by some other members of the House – the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has referred to it, Mr. Speaker, as rent to own. It's no different than rent-to-own furniture. We are renting to own a vital piece of our infrastructure, and I think the hon. member is correct. The former member for Edmonton-Glengarry used to refer to the P3s as "private political pork," I think is what he used to say. We still don't have any answers as to the benefit or the merit of these projects, and if we look at what's gone on in the courthouse in Calgary, well, that has not exactly worked out.

Mr. Hancock: It worked out very well. You haven't got a clue what you're talking about.

Mr. MacDonald: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education has stated that it's worked out very well and that I don't have a clue what I'm talking about, but the hon. member is wrong in that regard. We had this project. The Calgary courthouse is a P3, but it had to be abandoned because of increasing costs. I don't know how the hon. minister could look at this failure and view it as a success. It escalated beyond belief in costs. The government has had to take it over.

4:00

In fact, there were questions, hon. member, asked last week in Public Accounts. I'm disappointed that the hon. member hasn't had a chance to review the *Hansard* from Public Accounts because he would see that there were questions raised there about the total amount as allocated in the annual report for the department of

infrastructure, and no one could answer the questions. Hopefully, we will receive a written question very soon as to how all these costs were shifted around with the courthouse in Calgary.

In regard to Motion for a Return 32, Mr. Speaker, it would be good information to receive, and perhaps the government, when they provide this information to us, could provide once and for all the merits of these P3s. If it's so much cheaper to borrow money that way, show us.

Earlier this session, as a matter of fact last week, we found out that one of the government's programs that they talked about and suggested other Albertans buy into, the long-term electricity contracts, whether they were three-year or five-year contracts – the public was astonished to find out that neither the Premier nor the Minister of Energy nor the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne had thought it was prudent financially to buy into these contracts. So perhaps now they will provide us this information that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity is seeking. The public would be a lot more comfortable with this whole notion of P3s.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the time the hon. member took to ask the question, we could have laid a few miles of pavement, but we will accept Motion for a Return 32 on behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. I wish to move that acceptance.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to the motion, I can't let the remarks of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar with respect to the Calgary courthouse go by, putting that kind of absolute twaddle on the record. The Calgary courthouse project was a very good project, went ahead very well, went ahead under a P3 process for the full duration of the time, and is being built at a contract price which is exactly what was being proposed. It didn't rise in cost.

There was considerable confusion raised, primarily by people who didn't understand P3 processes with respect to how you account for costs and the different way of accounting for costs, whether you're dealing with the present value of long-term contracts or whether you're putting it on the books as a capital lease type of project or how you account for it. But the fact of the matter is that that project is going ahead on a contract which is the same price as it was originally intended. The process worked very well. The process got a very important piece of infrastructure for the Calgary and southern Alberta region into the ground on time.

The fact that the financing was changed to government financing from private-sector financing at the last did not make one whit of difference to the concept that went forward in terms of the P3 and making sure that the construction costs of that contract were very well known and well understood. For that hon. member to put on the record this afternoon that the costs are unknown and that the costs rose and the process drove the costs is absolute, pure twaddle.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak in favour of this motion. I think it's important information, and I'm pleased to hear the government is going to release those interest rates.

The P3s, however, you know, remain I think a way to hide information in many ways. There should be full disclosure of all contracts, all interest rates, all of the information that is pertaining to them just like in any other public endeavour. They become something, I believe, in the way that they've been established in this province, and under the Anthony Henday example, for example, that does not necessarily save money for the taxpayers of Alberta. That takes away the ability for other companies looking at the work being done there, for taxpayers in general, for all the many interested parties in Alberta to fully see a transparent process. It takes away from that.

The ability to build these projects faster is only because, I think, of the fact that the government is not willing to incur what I guess you might call debt, even though I wonder if we would have to even do that. It just does not, you know, answer the question: does it save money? Is it efficient? Is it something that is actually good for the Alberta taxpayer?

Many of your smaller contractors that work in areas like road building – in fact, I'd say the vast majority of them – are very displeased with this process and would like to see this type of process end. I'd like to see the government just do a full survey of all of the contractors working in the business to see what their responses might be. It is, indeed, a good comparison to call this a rent-to-own process. If anybody is looking at that, that's a business, of course, that fills a particular niche, but I certainly don't think it should be in a niche that we're looking for to construct public facilities.

That concludes my statements, Mr. Speaker, and I support the motion.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity I would like to express my gratitude to the government, and I look forward to receiving this information and reading it with interest. In conclusion, I would have to say, particularly in regard to the Calgary courthouse, that if it was such a fine idea to proceed with this, why was not the project continued as a P3?

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 32 carried]

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

Private/Public Partnership Proposals

M33. Mr. MacDonald moved on behalf of Mr. Chase that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of all projects that are potential P3 projects being considered by the government.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, I don't know how much further the government is going to go with these P3s, but we understand on this side of the House that there seems to be a genuine interest in the further contracting of P3s. Certainly, the three big ones to date have been, as we mentioned earlier, the Calgary courthouse, the Edmonton ring road, and – I'm just looking at the Infrastructure and Transportation business plan for 2005 through '08, and for the ring road in Edmonton there is a target to have in two years 40 per cent of the ring road open to travel. Certainly, the ring road in this city has been neglected for some time. Many citizens are relieved to see the progress to date on this ring

road, and they feel that regardless of how it's being financed or constructed, they are anxious to see the entire ring road completed.

4:10

There's also the hospital, Mr. Speaker, in the southeast sector of Calgary. The Auditor General has released a review of P3s in his last report. Certainly, the Auditor General in Public Accounts has gone on the record as stating that in some cases a P3 may be the way to proceed, but we all know what the AG had to say in regard to P3s. I'm sorry if it's a sensitive subject in this House, but I certainly have an alternative view than the hon. Minister of Advanced Education in regard to the success or failure of the P3 project that is the Calgary courthouse.

Now, when we talk about Calgary, we certainly recognize on this side of the House that there's an urgent need for a southeast Calgary hospital, and we have to question the planning, or the lack of planning, of this government. We all know that there was a hospital imploded or blown up in Calgary, and we have to question whether that was an efficient use of taxpayer dollars now that the city is in dire need of additional hospital space, hospital beds. That facility that was blown up was almost identical to the Royal Alex here in the city of Edmonton, and the Royal Alex is still providing very useful service not only to the citizens of this city but to residents in northern Alberta and throughout the province for some specific procedures.

Certainly, as we look at going ahead with a P3 in Calgary for a hospital, we forget sometimes that there was a perfectly good hospital there, almost the same model year as the Royal Alex, but for some odd reason this government decided to destroy it. I'll never understand the logic behind that one.

P3s, Mr. Speaker, have been reported as an inefficient way of doing business by other governments that have used them in the past, and I don't understand why we are so anxious in this province to continue with them. Certainly, a list of all projects that the government is contemplating under the P3 model would be information that would be of a great deal of interest not only to this side of the House but to the taxpayers. The Edmonton ring road has added \$40 million to the total cost that is estimated for that road over a long period of time. I think it's a 30-year period of time that this figure has been discussed as what the additional cost would be instead of just borrowing the money and building the road.

With that, Mr. Speaker, hopefully, we can receive positive news on Motion for a Return 33, the same as we did with Motion for a Return 32. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister for International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation we will accept Motion for a Return 33.

I just want to add a few more comments, though. There was some question raised in terms of transparency with respect to small contractors. I'd like to add to the record that with respect to transparency there was a full third-party review of the transparency of the P3 project, the Anthony Henday, and it got full marks for how all parties were included in drafting the proposal.

In terms of small contractors they were all involved under the Alberta roadbuilders. They, as well, were very satisfied with the process and also know that over the next number of years in this province there will be a considerable amount of work given not only the amount of capital that will be going into the provincial infra-

structure by the government of Alberta but also by the \$3 billion that'll be going to municipal governments.

There is an issue, or perhaps an area, the opposition does not pay attention to, and that is opportunity lost. The sooner this road is built, the sooner we will add to the total competitiveness of the north-south trade corridor. A study that was done in Edmonton indicated that truck movements were 25 per cent less efficient. They can spend all of the money on the rest of the north-south trade corridor, but there is a bottleneck here. The sooner we get the Anthony Henday completed, the sooner we'll improve the competitiveness and, especially, the truck flow from Grande Prairie down to Montana.

It also provides tremendous savings in the staging of the construction. We're going to be hard-pressed on the human resources side and also the number of contractors. Then the contractor will stage the various components of this construction, whether it's the bridge, the dirt work, or the paving, at the most appropriate times and as a result will also add to the savings on this very, very important but large project.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Backs: Mr. Speaker, you know, I'm pleased to rise in support of this motion, and I think it, again, is an important motion to see which projects are being considered in this. I take interest in some of the comments regarding the construction of roads and roadbuilding.

There's been a long and well-established bidding process in roadbuilding, and I know the government works very closely with the Alberta Roadbuilders and Heavy Construction Association as mentioned by the previous speaker. It has had an open bidding process for decades that has worked to involve many players in the industry and to involve many of the small contractors. The incidence of P3s begins a process where many of them are not involved through that same process. Sure, there were a number that were brought into the Anthony Henday project, and the ring road project in general is something that must and should go ahead quickly. But does it have to be done under a P3? That is not necessarily I think determined.

There can be found to be other financing means that would be just as effective and more effective and more accountable to the taxpayer and in effect be a better deal for the taxpayer in the long run. Many jurisdictions have found difficulties with P3s. They are indeed rent to own in terms of roads.

Certainly, with the Anthony Henday and other parts of the ring road process, it's important that it's staged with, you know, the roadwork being done and the paving being done in different parts. Usually the paving is done after the roadwork, and the bridge is usually done before the paving as well, because there's no paving to be done if there's no bridge to be paved on.

But the notion of P3s – I think we have to take a considerable look at it in terms of: how is it really of value to the taxpayer? Does it save money, or is it just an expedient factor to try and ensure that the government is not going into debt in order to fulfill a political promise of no debt when, in fact, in many of these types of projects debt is something that happens over time?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity I look forward to

receiving a list of all projects that are potential P3 projects being considered at this time by the government, and I appreciate the information.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 33 carried]

4:20

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

Appeals to Pensions Administration Corporation

M34. Mr. Miller moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all appeals received by the Alberta Pensions Administration Corporation for the fiscal years 1994-95 through 2003-04 inclusive.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since I was appointed as the critic for the Finance department, I have had many, many correspondences cross my desk outlining concerns with the appeal process and outlining concerns with the apparent lack of transparency of the appeal process. This caused me to ponder just exactly how many appeals are coming forward and what issues are being brought forward in those appeals; therefore, the motion for a return that the Assembly sees before it today.

I look forward to the response from the government. Thank you.

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 34 as presented by the member opposite, I'm going to have to indicate on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance that this particular motion, unfortunately, has to be rejected, hon. member. I'm going to just briefly explain why.

The subject in question is copies of all appeals received by the Alberta Pensions Administration Corporation. In actual fact, Mr. Speaker, administrative reviews that are conducted by the public-sector pension plan boards on behalf of the Minister of Finance involve very personal information relative to the individual plan members. As members here would know, those documents related to those kinds of administrative reviews are subject to the protection of privacy provisions under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

We have to keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, that the FOIP Act cuts both ways. Yes, it's there to allow information to be accessed, but it's also there essentially to protect individual privacy. Therefore, this particular motion as worded will have to be rejected.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Needless to say I am somewhat disappointed that we're not going to be able to see this information from the government.

Quite clearly, as the hon. minister has pointed out, the FOIP Act does work both ways. Unfortunately, it seems to work far, far more in favour of privacy than it ever does in favour of freedom of information. I'm certainly not the only person that has raised that concern. In fact, I've often heard members from the opposite side make the same allusion.

So I'm certainly questioning the value, I suppose, of that particular act in the first place. Having said that, I would suggest that that particular office, the freedom of information and protection of privacy office, seems to be very, very good at blacking out personal

information when we receive information from them. If that's the only concern, perhaps the minister and the government might consider releasing that information with the names blacked out because certainly we're not looking for the names of the individuals. What we're really looking for, as I had indicated, was the total number of appeal applications received and, in particular, the reasons for those appeals coming forward in the first place. That was the information we had hoped to receive. I certainly have no particular interest in the private information of those filing the appeals.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 34 lost]

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

International Health Symposium

M35. Mr. Martin on behalf of Dr. Pannu moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing an itemized list detailing the honoraria, speaking fees, travel, and other expenses being paid to each of the speakers and presenters to the international health symposium being held in Calgary from May 3 to 5, 2005.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is great fanfare that we've announced this symposium. We were not supposed to talk about health care during the election because it was far too complicated for ordinary Albertans to understand. We were said to wait for the symposium, and we'll bring in all these experts and the so-called third way, which is a code word. We believe and we know that it is for more and more privatization. So I think it's incumbent that when the government says that health care is not sustainable and if we're going to spend a lot of money on so-called high-powered speakers, then surely we, the people of Alberta, have a right to know what the cost is in this.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the government would see the need to be transparent about this major initiative by the government.

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to indicate that the government is prepared to actually accept this one, but I can't let the opportunity go by, given the comments I've just heard from the member opposite, because there are some inherent inaccuracies in the hon. member's perception of the health care system as it exists in Alberta.

Earlier today, for example, we heard about the wonderful announcement at the University of Alberta for the new Heart Institute, which commits \$156 million of provincial taxpayer dollars toward a first, a one-of-a-kind in this province. The week before we heard an announcement of \$577 million by the government of Alberta toward the health sciences and research centre at the university, and I could go on. But the key here is exactly the word the member mentioned and that is sustainability.

When it comes to this motion, which talks about a health symposium – and the purpose, in part, of that symposium is to look at ways that the health system, such as we know it, can be made sustainable so that it doesn't keep growing by 8 to 10 to 12 per cent across different jurisdictions for fear of collapsing under its own weight. Access, affordability, all of those things are part of that question.

This specific motion about the symposium talks about a process that we've put in place, which will be quite an open process,

obviously, to look to find best practices and to take a look at what other jurisdictions are doing. We in this province are not closed-minded enough to think that we in Canada alone have all the solutions to those sustainability issues.

So, that having been said, I'm pleased on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to accept this particular motion for a return as worded.

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

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly appreciate that we'll get the information, but I too would like to comment on the previous speaker's comments.

Almost all of us know that the name "the third way" came from Tony Blair in Britain, but it's become a code word. I think Albertans know this as well as anybody. The third way is more privatization. What else can it possibly mean? For the government to hide behind code words, the third way, this and that, and not be honest about their intention – and we believe the intention of this symposium is to highlight as much as possible the idea of more and more privatization. If you look at other parts of the world, some of the so-called privatization experiments by certain parties, certainly in Australia, which the Premier's talked about, they're backing out of them. They've been an absolute disaster. So we think that they're buying into a flawed system. No matter how you word it, more and more privatization leads us more and more to an Americanized system.

The idea that it's not sustainable. Of course, there are things we can do better in terms of the health care system. There's no doubt about that. The Member for Edmonton-Centre asked about midwifery. That would save money. There are ways that we can have a better system: community clinics, all sorts of ideas that can be done through the public system. We can have the alternate clinics. We can have cataract systems, that are costing us 10 per cent more in Calgary, done by the public system, as the Manitoba government has done, where they took over private companies and are actually making it work.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, the point that I make: the inflated dollars are a bit of a bogus issue too. The minister talked about that it can't be sustainable. If you look at the costs back in the '70s and with inflated dollars, it's really not that much more expensive today than it was then. That becomes just I believe a red herring so that we can move more and more, as this government has tried to do time and time again, towards private health care.

But in saying that, Mr. Speaker, at least we'll get the cost of this particular symposium, and we do appreciate that. Thank you very much.

[Motion for a Return 35 carried]

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

Canmore Nordic Centre

M36. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Dr. Pannu that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing details and costs of the construction upgrades at the Canmore Nordic Centre for the calendar year 2004 and to March 21, 2005.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason that we brought

this forward is that we're trying to get some handle on the figures. We notice that \$2,801,000 was mentioned in the supplementary budget estimates, and that follows, of course, June 2004, when the now Minister of Education announced \$16.5 million to upgrade the Canmore Nordic Centre in support of the bid to host a cross-country World Cup race in 2005. According to the Community Development website, the Canmore Nordic Centre is scheduled to be upgraded for the cross-country skiing World Cup in 2005. We're trying to figure out if the \$2.8 million is in addition to the \$16.5 million announced in 2004, and I guess following from that: have the costs of the upgrade increased?

We're trying to get this information, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This particular motion certainly touches a chord in my heart because, as the previous speaker just indicated, I was the one privileged enough to make the announcement along with our colleague from Banff-Cochrane. That was last year, and it was a great announcement for a very great project. The Canmore Nordic Centre is, of course, one of the wonderful legacy items from the Winter Olympics of 1988 in Calgary, which the Speaker and so many other members here are intimately familiar with, I know.

In this particular case, Mr. Speaker, what we found was that the world standards for cross-country skiing had changed. They have been updated significantly since 1988, and those particular premises had experienced a wearing down over the years, so it was deemed very advisable to improve them and at the same time to make sure that those construction upgrades catered to the new world standards and put that region of Alberta into the driver's seat for competing for the World Cup cross-country skiing, which the previous speaker just alluded to.

So that was done. Several kilometres of track have been improved. There may be some more tweaking to be done later this year and into the fall session. Different types of snow-making equipment might be required there, different tracking equipment, and so on. So there's quite a bit that had to be done.

The final thing I just wanted to mention for the member's comment here is that this summer in Edmonton we're hosting the World Masters Games. This will be the single largest participatory sport event in the history of Canada. We've got well over 14,000 athletes already signed up. Now, I only reference the World Masters Games for this summer because there is now also contemplated a World Masters Games for the winter, and Calgary and Banff-Canmore are going to be very much in the running, hon. members, as a result of the upgrades that are talked about in this motion.

So with that having been said, I'm very pleased on behalf of the hon. Minister of Community Development to indicate that the government is prepared to accept this particular motion as worded.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you. I'm almost tempted to quit now while I'm ahead, but there are a number more to go.

I'm not arguing that these things don't happen, but it's interesting that when we talk about sustainability, some things are sustainable no matter what the cost; others aren't. I take it that the minister is saying that there still could be some further upgrades from what we know from the budget estimates.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 36 carried]

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

Alberta Office in Washington

M37. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all memos and reports submitted to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations or his office by Murray Smith or any official at the Alberta office in Washington acting on Mr. Smith's behalf since Mr. Smith's appointment.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Smith went to Washington under great fanfare, and he's to do all sorts of wonderful things for the province, having the office in Washington. We're wondering what has happened so far. Certainly, the Premier's trip was a bit of a disaster in terms of the planning. We wondered what was happening with the BSE Montana court case where R-CALF surprised us all and won an injunction there.

It seems to me that Mr. Smith in Washington is certainly well paid, and there's certainly an office there that's sustainable no matter what the cost, if I could put it that way. So we would like some idea of what he's doing. From our perception here we don't see a lot happening.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. Perhaps some of those questions that are raised by the hon. member can be answered this evening when we're in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be accepting this particular motion for a return. It requests documents that would be considered advice to the minister. They are documents that would be exempted under section 24 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. There's also the added concern that release of any documents of this nature could potentially be harmful to our intergovernmental relations, as outlined in section 21 of the same act.

So, Mr. Speaker, for these reasons, unfortunately, I must reject this motion for a return.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, I probably should have quit while we were ahead with the first two.

I'm not surprised. I mean, FOIP seems to be sort of: whenever we want to use it, it becomes the reason. I'd say to the minister, though, that there has to be some accountability here. Here's a man making lots of money, taxpayers' money, a big office down there, and as I said, there was a great fanfare about what he was doing. It's not the government's money. It's not the minister's employee. This is an employee of the people of Alberta. Where is the accountability?

4:40

When one looks at the record – as I said, the Premier's trip, which wasn't well organized, and we see the BSE and R-CALF – we've got to wonder what's going on. What's the accountability for Mr. Smith in Washington? Now it's FOIP, I suppose, again. I think he's calling it cabinet solidarity or whatever they're calling it. I guess there's going to be no accountability for this person at all. How do we find out what is going on? That's the point, Mr. Speaker, that often with this government this is what happens: a Conservative

friend, down in Washington, lots of money, and he's supposed to be doing great things. How do we ever know? Certainly, the record of what I'm seeing right now is not very much. [interjection] Yeah. I guess we'll find out when the next screw-up occurs.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 37 lost]

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

Meetings of Private Colleges Accreditation Board and Campus Alberta Quality Council

M38. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Dr. Pannu that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the minutes from the Private Colleges Accreditation Board meetings for the calendar years 2000-2004 and January 1 to March 21, 2005, and the Campus Alberta Quality Council from January 1 to March 21, 2005.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my understanding that during this time the board did approve DeVry to offer academic programs. We also have concerns, as the minister is well aware, about the University of Phoenix and the university of Columbia. These minutes should be basic accountability measures. These meetings impact the public; the schools receive money; the minutes should be made public. Also, it's my understanding that these schools received money from HRE through their skills development programs. Again, we're getting caught in the proliferation of private institutions getting government money. We're trying to get some idea why the government did approve DeVry, for one thing, and what's happening with the other ones.

So I'm interested to see if the minister will accept this motion. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to request that the Assembly reject this motion. I had received advice that we could accept this motion, but then in doing so, we would have to temper our reply with a number of things. As I go through them, it's very clear that this is something which is more appropriately done by way of a FOIP request than here because of the nature of the review that needs to be done to the documentation. Again, as with an earlier motion for a written question I guess it was in that case, I could have just amended it to say: subject to the requirements of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. But I could not accept this question in the manner in which it's written.

The hon. member may well be aware of a FOIP request relating to a matter back in 2000. Maybe he or his colleague even were the people who put that request forward. I don't know. It was with relation to this type of an area, and as a result of that, I'm aware that there was a lengthy consultation and a review of the material, and certain portions of the records had to be excepted from disclosure under freedom of information.

The estimate on this one is that it will take about 30 days to review, and in doing so, portions would run afoul of the FOIP Act and, therefore, wouldn't be able to be released. So rather than having a motion for a return from the Legislature which requires the return of documents which might put us in a position of having to then violate the FOIP Act by releasing information because the Legislature would have ordered it released, it would be preferable to make this request in the FOIP process, and then the appropriate FOIP review could be done.

Now, I can say to the hon. member that the Campus Alberta Quality Council, which in addition to its own functions will be performing the functions that the Private Colleges Accreditation Board previously did, has the intention of posting its minutes on the website. So it'll be clear on a go-forward basis that the activities of the council will be public, that the minutes will be public, except, I suppose, in those situations where they might need to go in camera.

It's for that reason that I would suggest that this question should be rejected. There is an appropriate way for the information to be obtained, and we'd request that the hon. member proceed in that way.

Mr. Martin: I'm saying, I think, to the minister, Mr. Speaker, that then we're creating some policy problems here in how we get the information. It comes back to what I was talking about earlier. We're having a proliferation of private institutions. Some may be good; some may be bad. But we're having more and more of them. There doesn't seem to be a reasonable way that we can make them accountable, and this was just an attempt to see, you know: what's their charter, these sorts of things, and where do we go?

Maybe we can do it through FOIP, but if we're going to have to do everything through FOIP, it's time consuming. It costs a lot of money. Well, it does, but the reality is, Mr. Minister, that if we're going to put public money into these private institutions, there's got to be a better way for the taxpayers and for us in the Legislature to check on what's happening with them because there's government money flowing into them. It shouldn't be through FOIP or all the rest of it.

We get reports from the universities and the others, as the minister is well aware, and there's an accountability mechanism. I guess what I'm saying is: where is the accountability mechanism as we have more and more of these private institutions going in? They don't have the same accountability measures as public institutions. I would think, Mr. Speaker, that that should be a serious concern to the minister. How are we going to deal, if you like, with these hybrids? They're not private; there's public money there. How do we get to the accountability mechanisms? I would hope, then – we could try with FOIP, but as I say, he knows that that process is a very difficult one – that the minister is putting some thought into how we begin to deal with the accountability. If they want to be private, let them be private without public money, but even then we're accountable for certain standards in the province.

I think it's a serious matter, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 38 lost]

Southeast Edmonton Ring Road

M39. Mr. Martin moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all contracts and agreements signed between or on behalf of the government and the P3 consortium selected to construct the southeast Edmonton ring road.

Mr. Martin: Gee, one in my own name here. It's back to the P3 debate, Mr. Speaker. Now, I know we've had just even previously today a debate about P3s. We have the one P3 that we've been told by the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation we had to do, that we're not sure of the costs. It could be \$41 million more or \$3 million less, depending on whose figures you use. But the major reason I get is that they can do it quickly.

I've never understood that. If you want something to move quickly, under the traditional ways of doing contracts and tendering and bidding you can get it done quickly. What has gone from two

years ago \$350 million now is \$449 million because we had to add some bridges and a few other things. Over the 30 years – I mean, they say that it's not a debt, but it's going to be \$32.5 million a year – that's going to be over a billion dollars. We're told that this is the only way they could get it done. So we're asking, because this is a very expensive project, for a return showing what we're into. I think the government should even see that this should be public knowledge.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

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

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the comments from across the way and some of the questions raised and the information exchange and still further questions coming on this particular project, we're going to work extra hard to work with the opposition and get the information across. We probably won't be able to convince them, but we'll provide all that information to them.

So I'm very happy to indicate that the government is prepared to accept Motion for a Return 39.

Mr. Martin: We're back on the winning track here, Mr. Speaker.

Well, we probably will have another debate about P3s, no doubt about that. But I'm pleased that we will get that information in due course. Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 39 carried]

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

Columbia College

M40. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Dr. Pannu that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence, memos, letters, reports, minutes, e-mails, and studies concerning Columbia College for the calendar years 2001-2004 and from January 1 to March 21, 2005.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I think the purpose is self-evident. We're trying to get some accountability for some of the private institutions. So I'll wait and see what the minister has to say about this one.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to ask that the House reject this motion. There's no specific target or intent in this motion, so basically the result of it is to say: publish all the files that you have on, in this case, Columbia College. Well, the next question will be: publish all the files on the next college.

It would involve the release of all files in the department that relate to Columbia College for the period that's referenced, including those held by the private institutions branch with respect to the licensing of the college vocational training programs, those held by the public institutions branch with respect to access funding provided to Columbia College, those held by the former private colleges accreditation branch, those held by student finance with respect to students participating. It would take probably four months at least to go through and complete the documentation. The question isn't specific enough for us to be of any real assistance. Then, of

course, that four months is just for compiling. That doesn't deal with the FOIP questions or the third-party information or protecting the interests under sections 16 or 25 of the FOIP Act.

In general, we have private institutions. At last count there were probably 148 institutions licensed under the Private Vocational Schools Act providing over 600 programs, often programs that are specific to a vocation; for example, hairstyling, acupuncture, commercial truck driving, health care, and information technology, all essential to the economy and to personal and professional needs.

Mr. Speaker, access to higher education is a broad area, and there's a wide spectrum of opportunities and access choices. I don't have any problem at all in making sure that the public has the widest information available to it, becoming informed and engaged citizens and charting the future approach there.

I would say that I have spoken with the hon. member who put forward this motion on the Order Paper and indicated a willingness to co-operate to make sure that he had access to information, that we would arrange an opportunity for him to meet with our director of private institutions to get information with respect to the processes and how it works and even, perhaps, to help narrow down the question so that we could actually find a question that we could legitimately answer in this process. The question is way too broad. In fact, as well, I understand the president of Columbia College has indicated, because it's specifically referenced in this motion, that he would be pleased to meet with the hon. member and provide him with information relating to the institution.

So there's no question that it would be very useful for the hon. member to educate himself about this particular institution and private institutions in general but not through the process of a scattergun, shotgun approach, saying: give us all the information you might have in government files on private institutions. That is just an inappropriate way to pursue information through Written Questions and Motions for Returns. We might as well just bring the files over from government and table them on the floor of the House and have them recatalogued, you know, documented, and put downstairs in the library. Well, that's not a good use of anybody's time or anybody's space, and that, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, is not what written questions and motions for returns are really for.

I want to put on the record that I am willing to co-operate with the hon. member who brought forward the motion. I had this discussion with him. I indicated to him that we would arrange for a meeting with the people in the appropriate branch so that he could raise his questions and they would be answered. As well, we went so far as to contact the institution named in this motion, and they indicated that they would be prepared to invite the member down.

Just while I'm speaking to this motion, I want to address the comments that were made by the hon. member with respect to the other motion because they're applicable to this one too, and that's the question of accountability. The fact of the matter is that the government does not fund private institutions per se. There is some funding that goes to not-for-profit, private institutions that offer accredited courses, that have gone through the course accreditation process.

That accountability framework has in fact been changed and, I think, strengthened so that through the Campus Alberta Quality Council there are two processes that an institution, whether public or private, has to go through if they want to give degrees or have programs that are publicly funded. They are, first of all, the process of having the Campus Alberta Quality Council review and ensure that they are capable of delivering the program, that the institution itself is sound and capable of providing the program that they're proposing to provide, and then, secondly, if that's found to be the case, to go back through and look at the program itself to make sure

that the program is of a quality and nature as to warrant being offered and to provide the accreditation being offered for it. There is an accountability process there.

Of course, there's accountability for all public money that goes into that through our normal processes of government, and we certainly don't have any problem at all being accountable. We do have some problem as government being asked to be accountable for private, for-profit institutions. You know, they have to get permission to come in and offer their services, but when the government is not paying for their services – people in Alberta can look at them. It's a situation of saying: is what they offer what I want? There has to be some role for the individual involved in making an assessment as to whether or not it's an appropriate course for them. Obviously, as the Department of Advanced Education, while we can't protect everybody from everything, we want to make sure that the quality of educational opportunities in the province is of the highest order.

We're not held accountable for the financing of the private institutions except to the extent – and there's only one, I think. I think it's DeVry, actually, which offers an accredited course that qualifies for some modest public funding. There are eight private, not-for-profit university colleges, as we discussed in estimates, where we do provide some funding, albeit a modest amount, I think an additional \$4 million in this year's budget to add the four institutions which weren't previously being funded.

5:00

There's no desire on my part or on the government's part to hold back useful information, but in the context of this question really it's such a broad-based question that it essentially says: go through and haul over all your files. If we complied with this question, then the next question would be with respect to one of the other, as I say, some 148 private institutions in this province. That's just a witch hunt, Mr. Speaker. That's not the appropriate way to go about it.

We're prepared to be co-operative. I have offered to be co-operative and provide access to the people who are involved in reviewing these situations and holding them accountable. Then if there are any specific requests that come out of that with respect to specific information, I'd be more than happy to try and do the best we can to make sure that that information is available.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would remind the minister that we were asking about one institution, not 148. That begs the other point. He says that there are 148 different institutions, and it's growing in this province. The minister sort of, I thought, was saying that there's not really any responsibility here, or at least limited responsibility, by the government in terms of this proliferation of private institutions. I would suggest that he alluded there is because they get student loans. That comes through the taxpayers' money. Some schools, at least, receive money from HRE through skills development programs. That's taxpayers' money.

It seems to me that if they're operating in the province, and they're advertising and saying, "This is the type of program that you're going to get," and you don't get that sort of program, surely there's responsibility on the government side to be monitoring whether there's adequacy of these programs. Even businesses have to do that for the Better Business Bureau and the rest of it. As I say, there's government money flowing to begin with in student loans and the rest of it. If people are setting up shop in Alberta, if they're purporting to offer a certain level of program, surely there has to be some obligation that we're checking that out. I can't believe that it's not.

I guess what I'm saying, then, to the minister is that I know that there has been a meeting with some of the people that he talked about already, and we're looking into that with our research department. We appreciate that, Mr. Minister. I'll take this back to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

I again stress that there is a growing problem – and I think it's going to begin to bite the government somewhat – with the proliferation, at least from what I'm hearing, of private institutions. There is some obligation on this government's part to make them accountable. I honestly believe that has to be the case. Otherwise, you're going to have a lot of fly-by-night outfits – I'm not saying that they're there now – taking government money through loans, leaving kids in disarray and not getting the program that they wanted. It's happening in some cases, and I'm sure it will come forward to the minister in a very short time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 40 lost]

Southeast Edmonton Ring Road

M41. Mr. Martin moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents that compare the cost of constructing the southeast Edmonton ring road using a private/public partnership versus the use of conventional public financing for its construction.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe before I go on about that, the minister seemed to indicate that some of these might be accepted, so I'll wait and hear what he has to say before I conclude debate.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation we accept Motion for a Return 41. We'll be happy to provide the information.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We'll save the debate for another time about how good P3s are or not, but I appreciate getting that information.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 41 carried]

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

Correspondence in WCB Case

M42. Mr. Martin moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence, including letters and e-mails, between the Workers' Compensation Board and the Ministry of Human Resources and Employment pertaining to the case of Ana Gutierrez.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the reason for this, of course, is that the government has brought an amendment to the Workers' Compensation Act that directly is the result of this particular case. If we're asked to pass an amendment to the Workers' Compensation Act, we should have the information before this amendment is passed. So we think this should make eminent good sense to the government if they want this amendment passed.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to Motion for a Return 42. I advise the Assembly that the government will be rejecting this motion for a return due to privacy rules in FOIP and because the matter is before the courts also. I believe the documents mentioned are best requested under FOIP, and government would be happy to respond in that manner.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This particular MR42, I think, is actually quite timely. It's an important issue, this case between the Workers' Compensation Board and the Ministry of Human Resources and Employment and any information they might have pertaining to the case of Ana Gutierrez. This case has seen the board rule in conflict of interest, and the actual justices in this particular case ruled that client solicitor costs to the full level of a hundred per cent, which is quite unheard of, would be awarded in this particular case.

The issue of conflict of interest, the issue of the ability of the board to intervene in these cases I think is something that is of great interest to many people in the community. Indeed, there's a bill before the House, Bill 15. Actually, much of that bill in its section 22 speaks to this issue. Many people in the community and certainly the Alberta Federation of Labour, some other groups, some contractors privately would not like to have their names named because they seem to say that they really do not want to be singled out in any way by the board, and that's disturbing.

The Ana Gutierrez case would be, in effect, if that bill was to go forward, deemed retroactive legislation to, in effect, kill that case, and that's also something that's very disturbing. The actions of the board in this matter seem quite arbitrary, quite willing to move without speaking to the interests of the workers and even the employers in this particular issue. The issue is how insurance claims are dealt with when the board has an interest, how the board can subrogate those claims, and how the worker, the employer, and the insurance company as well act or interact in the dealings with these issues that arise from this particular thing.

5:10

I think the motion is a good motion. I'm disappointed that the minister said that this would have to be FOIPed. I would hope that the member who is proposing this is able to get that information through FOIP without being forced to pay exorbitant costs, and I hope that he will share that information.

I do speak in favour of the motion, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Martin: Yes. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the

minister said that one of the reasons he can't do it is that it's before the courts. Well, if that's the case, why are we dealing with Bill 15 in the Legislature now? What's the hurry with this? It is very dictatorial, very heavy handed, and it's got, as the Member for Edmonton-Manning says, a retroactive part to it. So the minister says that he can't give us this particular amendment because it's before the court, yet we have Bill 15 being foisted upon this Legislature at the same time. If it was that important that we can't talk about it because it's in the courts, why are we dealing with the amendment now that flows directly from this particular court case. The minister said it himself.

I would hope, then, at the very minimum that if the government is not going to give us this information if it's before the courts, this had better not go any further in terms of our debate here in the Legislature. It can't be both ways. It's either before the courts or it's not. If the minister says, "It's before the courts, and I can't give you this information," well, how can we deal with the debate on Bill 15 that flows directly from this particular case? It's one or the other, it seems to me.

So to the minister: I would hope, then, that we put a stop to any more debate on Bill 15 in the Assembly if it's before the courts, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 42 lost]

Labour Relations Practices Review Report

M43. Mr. Martin moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the government MLA, Member of the Legislative Assembly, committee report reviewing labour relations practices in the construction industry, including MERFing and salting, submitted to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment in late 2003 or early 2004.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a major issue with the building trades unions. Certainly, the Merit contractors are the ones that are saying – I believe wrongly, and the building trades deny it – that there should be evidence that there is salting going on. I don't think there's any evidence of it. If there is, I'd sure like to know. It seems just to be a pipe dream by the Merit contractors.

It seems to me MERFing is a legitimate way for the building trades to operate within their own union to build on contracts. It's a free society. It seems to me that this makes absolute sense in terms of bidding, but unfortunately CLAC and Merit contractors don't like an equal playing field. Regardless of that, this was a report done for the government, and I would hope that the minister would see that it should be submitted to the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to Motion for a Return 43. I am rejecting the motion for a return requesting "a copy of the government MLA, Member of the Legislative Assembly, committee report reviewing labour relations practices in the construction industry, including MERFing and salting." The Member of the Legislative Assembly report was submitted to the previous Human Resources and Employment minister I believe in the spring of 2004. I am reviewing the report

and its recommendations. Many stakeholders have provided their input on labour relations practices, and their opinion must also be considered.

I appreciate the hon. member's interest in this matter, and I do intend to make the report and the government response public once I am done with my review.

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

Mr. Backs: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've read the initial report. I haven't seen the review, of course, that might be contemplated by this question. I'm not exactly sure, but I know that the one report is on the ministry website from last year, and it speaks to MERFing and salting. Many people that I've talked to in the industry don't really consider these to be actually a problem and that they, in fact, can be a benefit to the industry in that they provide some continuity, the MERFing certainly, and the salting doesn't really exist.

Where there are cases of salting, I think they should be brought before somebody to see where they're in fact happening. To pass legislation would be very restrictive in a free and democratic society in many ways because I think you would be starting to infringe on the ability of individuals to go to work where they're working, the ability of individuals to get into certain workplaces through the restriction from some perceived salting behaviour.

What we see often in the construction industry is the movement by some contractors to act in an ideological manner to avoid the traditional building trades. Some of them are doing it for the purposes of trying to pay less or pay cheaper or pay no pension. To deal with these types of problems, there was the creation of the Merit shop contractors in the early '80s. It was an organization that was formed with the sole purpose of avoiding the traditional building trades. At the same time, there was a move to create an avenue or a vehicle through an existing rather small unit at the time called the Christian Labour Association, which was used for non-Christian purposes, realistically to avoid certification of some of these building trades organizations in order to not be working under their collective agreement terms and conditions. This has grown and been fostered.

5:20

We now have the Progressive Contractors Association, the PC Association so to speak, with the former Progressive Conservative Member for Edmonton-Calder in the last Legislature, actually, acting as their spokesman. They are, in fact, almost entirely contractors who are utilizing this tool to avoid the building trades organization called CLAC, or the Christian Labour Association of Canada. This particular practice is causing great consternation among many people in the construction industry that have been members of the traditional trades for many, many years and who value their trade, value their ticket, value the history of the organizations that they were involved with to get that and how, in fact, they have gained the benefits of their pension and their overtime and all the other many things that they consider to be part of their working life and, indeed, part of the history of this province.

What we see in these so-called problems of MERFing and salting: I think they're really nonstarters. They'd be very difficult to legislate against. I think you would see challenges against them, and I don't think that they're realistically a problem. Many of the contractors who do participate and are actively involved with the MERFing process are, obviously, in favour of these processes and do work within our economy. It would be, in effect, distorting the way that they deal with the market by trying to pass more laws, more

legislation restricting the traditional building trades than we already have on the books today or the way that the laws and the legislation are interpreted through the way they have been ruled on in certain cases of the labour board.

I believe that this motion is in order, and I speak to it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the time.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, in regard to Motion for a Return 43 I'm disappointed that we cannot receive this information. The government seems to be reluctant to release it. I can't understand why. These labour relations practices of MERFing and salting are in no way harmful. There are very few construction unions using the MERFing technique, but those that do use it successfully. Their members are anxious to see these practices continue. What the government MLA committee report wrote about in regard to these labour relations practices is of enormous interest to construction workers and to construction companies, both union and non-union, in this province.

Certainly, there have been a number of times in the last decade where the heavy hand of government was going to come down against these practices, and to date certainly it hasn't, and I would hope that it never does. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview talked about earlier, these are rights, these are freedoms, and these practices should continue.

Now, specifically with MERFing, there has been the notion put forward that this is unfair, but I believe it to be proven that to suspend the use of a MERF would be a violation of an individual's constitutional rights, as would be the whole idea of salting. Perhaps I could be proven wrong if this report was to be made public at the wish and the request of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. These practices have been well known but, unfortunately, misunderstood by the members opposite.

Ms Blakeman: Deliberately misunderstood?

Mr. MacDonald: I don't think we could go that far and say that it was a deliberate misunderstanding but certainly a misunderstanding. Perhaps it is deliberate, and one way of disproving that would be the release of this report, but that probably won't happen. Maybe I'll go to the library someday and I'll be looking around, and, voila, it will be there.

But there is no need of this, and I think the hon. minister could do a lot to foster and enhance positive labour relations by releasing this

report and ensuring that we have stable, positive labour relations with the construction industry as we continue to build this province. Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister said that he has it and that he's looking at it and that in due course, if I understood him correctly, he will release it along with his recommendations about it. Therein lies the problem because often by the time the government makes some of these practices and recommendations from the practices, it's too late. With this government, if I may say so, that's why the labour movement is concerned. They know the past history of laws that come from this particular government, that usually is not favourable to labour. So that's what the worry is.

We've talked about it before. The weakest labour laws in the country are right here in terms of fairness on the one side, and we're going through the whole division 8, with the labour code and how that relates. We've had that discussion on the foreign workers. We see the possibility of apprenticeship being cut back to 1 to 1 from 3 to 1 in certain trades. We hear more and more about MERFing. All we want to know is: what's in the report? What are the people saying? I mean, Merit contractors are talking about salting like there are hundreds of these labour people that go running into a construction site and do this and then leave again and then run into another site. Most people know it's patently ridiculous, but I hope the minister is not listening to that.

The MERFing, to me, is where an individual worker says, "My union says that to bid on this contract, can we get some movement on benefits that we're going to do?" and they get an agreement with the union. What could be fairer than that? What could be absolutely fairer than that? It's an individual choice by a worker working within a union contract so that they can compete on equal footing. Why are we even into this? Obviously, somebody got to the government before about the report. I hope it's not this minister. Now the minister is saying, "Well, I'll review it," and in due course we'll get the recommendations, but often in due course it's too late. They've already made up their mind, and that's a problem.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 43 lost]

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

