

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 5, 2005**

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 05/05/05

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Speaker, accompanied by the officers of the Assembly and Commodore Doug Learoyd, Squadron Leader Mr. Justice Sam Lieberman, and Captain Stu Lindop, entered the Chamber and took his place in the chair]

[Commodore Learoyd, Squadron Leader Mr. Justice Lieberman, and Captain Lindop took their places at the bar]

head:

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. On this day we give thanks for those who on land, at sea, or in the air served sovereign, country, province, and the cause of freedom 60 and more years ago. We ask for blessings on all here present. Especially we remember our war dead: those for whom there is no known grave, those who lie in fields world-wide, and those whose bodies were committed to oceans deep. We give praise and glory to all who served and for all that they did both in our name and for generations yet unborn. For service and sacrifice, we are eternally grateful. We will never forget. For those who served and did not return, would you please remember them in a minute of silence. Amen.

Please be seated.

### 60th Anniversary of Victory in Europe Day Address to the Assembly on Behalf of Armed Forces

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, 60 years ago yesterday at 11 p.m. a signal from Canadian Army main headquarters in Europe was dispatched. It read: "All operations cancelled forthwith. Cease fire 0800, 5 May 1945. All units stand fast until further orders."

After five long and bloody years the war in Europe was effectively over. The peace was signed three days later, and victory in Europe was officially declared. Unfortunately, the conflict in the Far East was to continue until August 1945.

In the members' and the public galleries today is a representative group of Alberta veterans of the Second World War. The flags above the Speaker's dias – the Red Ensign, the Royal Canadian naval ensign, and the ensign of the Royal Canadian Air Force – are those under which they served.

In the Speaker's gallery are Honorary Colonel Stanley A. Milner of the South Alberta Light Horse Regiment; Honorary Colonel Sandy Mactaggart, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment; Mr. Robert Whitley, president, 700 (Edmonton) Wing of the Air Force Association of Canada; Mrs. Lenore Schwabe, vice-president, Alberta-Northwest Territories Command of the Royal Canadian Legion; Mr. Darryl MacLeod, president, Naval Officers Association; Honorary Colonel Bart West, 408 Helicopter Squadron; Reverend Canon Tom McKnight, past president of the Army, Navy, Air Force Veterans Association. May I ask all of these great Canadians to rise. [standing ovation] Thank you. You may be seated.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, at the Bar in the Chamber are three very distinguished Albertans and Canadians. Each represents their former service. I'll ask them to rise. At my left is Commodore Doug Learoyd of the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve, who saw service in His Majesty's Canadian ship *Poundmaker* on convoy duties in the North Atlantic in 1944 and 1945. In the centre is Captain Stu Lindop, South Alberta Regiment, Canadian Army, who was wounded by a sniper on October 12, 1944, at Bergen op Zoom in the Netherlands. On my right is Squadron

Leader the Honourable Mr. Justice Sam Lieberman, who at age 18, in 1940, joined the Royal Canadian Air Force. He gained his wings in 1941. Subsequently he completed two operational tours, one in England and Gibraltar and the other in Aden in the Middle East with Number 8 Squadron, Royal Air Force.

In inviting these three distinguished gentlemen onto the floor of this Assembly, this House confers its heartfelt gratitude, admiration, and its deepest respect to all who served.

It is the pleasure of this Assembly to now invite Squadron Leader Lieberman, on behalf of all this province's veterans of the Second World War, to give his remarks. Justice Lieberman.

**Mr. Justice Lieberman:** Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta, Commodore Learoyd, Captain Lindop, fellow veterans. Thank you for granting me the privilege of addressing you on the occasion of your commemoration of the 60th anniversary of VE Day. It is indeed fitting that the year 2005, a year that has been designated and declared as the Year of the Veteran, be recognized in this manner.

I come before you as a proud veteran of the Royal Canadian Air Force who today is beset with the mixed emotions of pride, humility, and sorrow combined with a sense of satisfaction in our hard-won victory: pride in having been given the privilege of addressing you on the eve of the 60th anniversary of VE Day on behalf of all those courageous Canadians who voluntarily and unselfishly volunteered to serve in the Allied Forces in World War II, humility in the knowledge of my minuscule contribution to that great victory, and sorrow that so many paid the ultimate sacrifice in achieving that victory.

1:40

Great Britain's declaration of war on September 3, 1939, brought into sharp focus the threat to our way of life posed by the oppressive and tyrannical policies of the fascist European powers. Our freedom-loving nation recognized that threat and, although not obligated by Commonwealth membership to do so, independently declared war on Nazi Germany on September 10, 1939.

We were then a nation of only 11 million, perhaps 12 million people, but in the ensuing five years over 1 million of our citizens, including 45,000 women and 3,000 members of our aboriginal people, volunteered to serve in our armed forces. Tragically, 45,000 of those volunteers were killed and 55,000 were maimed or seriously injured.

Although the majority of the volunteers served in the Royal Canadian Navy, the Royal Canadian Army, or the Royal Canadian Air Force, the navies, armies, and air forces of our allies were replete with members of the Canadian armed services. Our citizen volunteers served in all theatres of the European and Pacific war and following VE Day continued to serve in the Pacific theatre, where victory was achieved on August 14, 1945, VJ Day. I must also mention the Merchant Marine, that often ignored but highly important arm of the Allied Forces in which many Canadians gallantly served.

Those of our citizens who were not in the armed services kept the engines of industry producing those materials necessary to support our war effort. In the broad sense of the term they, too, are veterans and deserving of our thanks.

Mr. Speaker, in my opening remarks I referred to the emotion of sorrow. I shall always have a deep sense of sorrow and regret that so many lives were lost or maimed in achieving victory. I leave you with this sobering thought. It is the Allied victory in World War II, to which our veterans contributed so much, that has made it possible for us to live in freedom under the rule of law in a country governed

by the principles of democracy. Your assembly here today in this magnificent Chamber is proof that our veterans' sacrifices were not in vain. It is this fact that gives me satisfaction in so costly a victory.

Please join with me in paying tribute to all veterans who through the years have served our nation in two world wars, in Korea, and in peacekeeping missions throughout the world. How sad it is that so many of them did not live to see this day. [applause]

**The Speaker:** Squadron Leader Lieberman, thank you very much. Please know that on behalf of all of the men and women of this Assembly and all of the men and women of this province, we are indeed truly eternally grateful for you and your comrades for what you did for us.

**Mr. Hancock:** Victory in Europe. What joy those cries must have raised for the men and women at arms, for the people of Holland and the rest of Europe, and for the families at home: the mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, those waiting and hoping for the safe return of loved ones.

Victory in Europe. I don't believe any of us on the floor as members were there, but we represent over 3 million Albertans who owe their freedom and liberty to those who were. Each and every one of us has our own family chronicle, our own connection, and each and every one of us was affected, touched in some way by the long march to that day. Victory in Europe.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the hon. the Premier, the government, and all members to commemorate one of the most glorious and most solemn events in Canadian history. On Sunday people around the world will join together to remember and celebrate victory in Europe. Victory in Europe came on May 8, 1945, when Allied forces, many of them from Alberta, liberated the Netherlands and helped bring the horrors of the Second World War to an end. It is particularly fitting that we stand today on this day of Yom ha-Shoah to celebrate the defeat of tyranny and genocide. On that day 60 years ago the people of Europe shed tears of joy, hope, and relief as these soldiers did their grim work. They thank these soldiers for their bravery and their sacrifices on their behalf.

Today, six decades later, all of humanity thanks those soldiers, those armed forces, once again. We thank them for their dedication to a cause that stirs us today as much as it stirred them 60 years ago, we thank the spirits of the soldiers who died on that day and on all the other horrible days that the war raged throughout Europe, and we remember the many veterans who returned home from the war but have since passed on.

My father, Richard Hancock, just newly married, left our home in Fort Vermilion in northern Alberta and volunteered for service. He went on to become a navigator in the Canadian armed forces as well as being an instructor before being posted to England. As an instructor he never was required to fly into battle over Europe, but like so many Albertans he stepped forward to answer the call of duty and was one of the truly fortunate who were able to return home, unlike so many young men, and then begin to build a family and a life.

Victory in Europe Day marks the end of a conflict the size and violence of which has no match in history. In World War II approximately 78,000 Albertans served the Allied cause. Of those, over 3,300 did not return from the battlefield. All of these brave soldiers, along with many, many others from Canada, risked everything for the most noble of causes: the right of people to live in peace, dignity, and freedom. I was reminded by Captain Stu Lindop just before coming in that the South Alberta Regiment won the only Victoria Cross won by any of the Canadian armed regi-

ments during the Second World War. Thankfully, there are over 22,500 World War II veterans from Alberta who are still with us. We are truly honoured by those of you who could join us as guests today.

In Canada 2005 is being marked as the Year of the Veteran. It is a year during which Canadians remember the contributions of the country's veterans and extend a hand of friendship and gratitude to veterans in their communities. One opportunity to learn more about the contributions of Albertans is the upcoming Alberta Centennial Tattoo. That tattoo is being held at Rexall Place from July 21 to 24. Members of the Legislature and veterans invited by members will be attending on the afternoon of the 24th. It's a unique production that tells the stories of Alberta's soldiers and veterans as well as police officers. That tattoo, Mr. Speaker, will be a stunning tribute to those who have protected Albertans over the last 100 years and is a most appropriate event in the Year of the Veteran and the 60th anniversary of VE Day.

In Alberta we all owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to our province's veterans. Though 60 years have passed since the end of the Second World War, the drama, the horror, the sacrifice of that global conflict continues to inspire generations of Albertans. In that war and on Victory in Europe Day in 1945 Albertan forces did us proud. They proved with their hearts that freedom is worth fighting for, and many of them proved with their lives that the fight can often only be won at great cost.

Today the fruits of those sacrifices continue to bless us. The freedom that we enjoy to assemble in this House and the freedom our families enjoy to pursue their dreams stem directly from what those soldiers did 60 years ago on the battlefields of Europe. We as members of this Assembly have the privilege to serve, a privilege we are reminded of each day as we enter the rotunda with its memorials, because our fathers and mothers answered that call. To those soldiers, to those armed forces, and to their families we say thank you. Their courage reminds us all that we must never take our freedoms for granted. Those veterans certainly did not.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

**The Speaker:** Thank you, sir.

May I now call on the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition I am honoured to be part of this very special ceremony in the Assembly today to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day. We are proud to remember those Canadians both past and present who were part of the long fight and struggle that finally resulted in the surrender and defeat of the Nazi military forces in Europe.

It was May 8, 1945, when Winston Churchill declared Victory in Europe Day, soon shortened to VE Day. Instrumental in accomplishing this victory was the liberation of the Netherlands, which was completed on May 5, 1945, exactly 60 years ago today, when German forces surrendered to the First Canadian Corps in Holland. More than 7,600 Canadians gave their lives for the liberation of the Netherlands, most of whom are buried in Canadian war cemeteries in Holland.

In 1939, when Canada joined the Allied Forces, our population was about 11 million people. By the end of the war 1.1 million Canadians, a full 10 per cent of our population at the time, enlisted to serve in World War II. Over 42,000 Canadians were killed in World War II, 55,000 were wounded, 9,000 suffered as prisoners of war in conditions that deteriorated as the war dragged on, and

countless thousands, tens of thousands of others, were emotionally and psychologically scarred for life.

Like many of us here, my parents threw themselves into the war effort. My father served in the RCAF, and my mother did civilian service, so I grew up hearing the stories about the war first-hand. For people of my generation, so many of us who grew up with a shadow of the war from our parents' generation, it is our responsibility to pass on these stories and memories. It's very important that subsequent generations know about and remember the sacrifices that were made by so many Canadian men and women during World War II.

So please join me in thanking Justice Sam Lieberman, representing the air force, Captain Stu Lindop, representing the army, and Commodore Douglas Learoyd, representing the navy, for being here today. Also, please join me in honouring all of the veterans here today to represent and commemorate the energy, effort, and sacrifices made by Canadians to achieve the end of the war.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, sir.

May I now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great humility that I rise today on behalf of the New Democrat caucus to pay tribute to the men and women who contributed to the liberation of Europe from Nazi occupation 60 years ago. Canada was there to stand and fight in Europe right from the beginning. By the time peace was finally won, over 1 million Canadians had served in the armed forces or the merchant navy; 47,000 of these brave men and women gave their lives.

As Canadians we can be truly proud of those who put their lives on the line to defend their own country and to liberate others. The wartime efforts of such people, including the honoured guests that are here today, should act as a benchmark for the greatness we seek to achieve in our own lives. I'm constantly amazed at the accomplishments that can be achieved by people placed in extraordinary circumstances. These Canadian men and women who helped to liberate Europe volunteered to give up their regular lives to fight for freedom, for justice, for security, and ultimately for peace. Their efforts are etched as one of the most proud moments in Canadian history.

When the First World War ended, that war to end all wars, the world looked at the devastation that had been wrought and etched the solemn vow of "never again" on cenotaphs across the world. But a firestorm of hatred and greed rose again in Europe and in the Far East, and humanity was compelled to stand and fight again. It is the duty of all of us who live today to ensure that the world will not descend into the chaos and destruction of global conflict. If we could fight half as hard as those who liberated Holland but for peace, equality, and compassion for others, then we might do these veterans proud.

We honour the men and women who stepped forward to liberate Europe from those dark years of World War II. We celebrate their victories, mourn their losses, and express above all our thanks.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, sir.

May I now call on the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, honoured guests, and visitors. It is a humbling honour to be present and to pay tribute to such a heroic group of individuals. With my heart full of gratitude to each of those who sacrificed so much and to those who have sacrificed their lives, we truly owe our remembrance of them. May

we make sure that we always do remember them and those who did give their lives for our freedom and that we may guard it with all our heart, might, mind, and body that we might pass it on to future generations. They gave their lives for us, and may we guard it and always remember them.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** To all of our honourable guests today, our veterans, it's customary in this Assembly when we want to give recognition for the members to remain at their desks and to pound those desks. I will now invite my colleagues to do it one more time. [standing ovation]

I'd invite my colleagues in the Assembly to remain standing, and all of you, ladies and gentlemen, if we would all rise, now I'm going to invite a young lady who is one of our tour guides, Colleen Vogel, to lead us all together in the singing of our national anthem. Please join in 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.

To our honoured guests, we thank you very, very much for participating with us today.

We are now going to begin our daily Routine, which will go until 5:30 this afternoon. That may be more punishment than any of you would want to endure, but please feel free to stay as long as you wish to see the fruits of your efforts some 60 years ago now translated into democracy in this Assembly.

Thank you very much.

head: 2:00

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education.

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you two very special guests in the members' gallery. Sam Farberman is a grade 3 student from Onoway. He is 8 years old, and he's a tremendous worker and a great student. His father, Frank Farberman, is a long-time, very close friend of mine who owns and operates Direct Work Wear, a business in my constituency. They are proud members of a great team. I would ask now if they would please rise in the members' gallery and receive the warm applause from all the members here. They're just behind the line up there. Welcome.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, in addition to the honoured guests that we have here today we do have groups of students from Jean Vanier elementary school, Glenwood school, the Alberta College and Technical Institute Students' Executive Council, Bow Valley College, and representatives from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. I'd ask them all to rise so that the hon. members can recognize them all.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely honoured to

rise today and introduce to you and through you three guests seated in the public gallery: Claudia Villeneuve, her son, Nicholas Villeneuve, and their friend Denise Iskiw.

The two ladies represent two great pregnancy and childbirth support organizations based in our capital city. The first one is the Edmonton VBAC, or Vaginal Birth after Caesarean Support Association, a chapter of the International Cesarean Awareness Network. This organization supports mothers who wish to avoid a Caesarean, mothers who are recovering from a Caesarean, and mothers who wish to now give vaginal birth after their initial Caesarean delivery or deliveries. The second organization is ASAC, the Association for Safe Alternatives in Childbirth. They support informed consent during birth: home birth, water birth, midwifery care, doula care, and breastfeeding. They're both volunteer-run organizations. They work very hard to increase awareness and to offer real choice for expectant mothers.

I want to thank them for helping organize the rally outside by the Legislature steps today, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to stand today and to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a very special lady in my life: my mother, Marlys Hinman. She has been a pillar of strength and determination for me throughout my life. She has taught me to always believe you can achieve your dreams, and the only way you fail is to give up. Her Canada centennial project, she always claimed, was MS, when she was diagnosed with it. There is nothing that would make her happier today than to be able to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly, but I'll ask her just to wave from her wheelchair in the gallery.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three distinguished women who are part of the integration of midwifery services evaluation project. They are Susan Beischel, an assistant professor at Mount Royal College in Calgary; Beverley O'Brien, who is currently a professor of nursing at the University of Alberta; and Susan Sommerfeldt, who is a member of the sessional faculty at the University of Alberta. Their report provides extensive evidence for why midwifery services should be funded in this province. I believe my guests are seated in the public gallery. I would now ask them to please rise and receive the traditional 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 introduce to you and through you to the Assembly four members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees political action committee: Ron Whan, AUPE vice-president; Bonnie Nahornick, committee member from Calgary; Don Westman, city councillor from Fort Saskatchewan; and Brad Smith, who's a member from Edmonton. Could they please all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to acknowledge four members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees.

**The Speaker:** I've already introduced them, hon. member. Sorry. I did a global introduction and included them all.

Proceed.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. With us today, hon. Speaker, are Carol Carbol of Edmonton, Jason Heistad, who is from Olds College and also an Innisfail town councillor; Cherelyn Stefaniszyn, who comes from Blackfalds and is also a town councillor; and David Climenhaga, who is the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees communications director, and he hails from St. Albert.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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. Today, right now, this government is sitting idly by as the Auditor General and the authority of this Legislature are being bullied by the Alberta Securities Commission. My first question is to the Acting Premier. Can this minister explain what actions the government will be taking to support the Auditor General's legislative authority to investigate fully the enforcement complaints threatening the confidence of Alberta's capital markets?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Acting Premier.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General is an officer of the Legislature and operates under the legislative authority granted to him by the Legislature. The Securities Commission is granted authority under its act under the Legislature. The two have differences of viewpoint about the interrelationship between their two acts and their authorities and have applied to the courts to have that difference of viewpoint resolved. That's where people go when they have differences of viewpoint. That's where people go when they need interpretations of law.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. Again to the Acting Premier: given that the longer the delay in getting to the roots of the ASC allegations the more the confidence in the Alberta market suffers, what steps are being taken by this government to ensure that the process is not delayed by long court procedures and petty bickering with ASC commissioners?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Acting Premier.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We anticipate that an interim chairman of the commission will be appointed as early as this afternoon or perhaps tomorrow morning. That interim chair will be fair, will be independent, will be someone who is new to the commission but strong, and will work out with the commissioners and the Auditor General the terms of audit if it's at all possible to do so.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Taft:** Again to the Acting Premier: given that the Finance minister seems to have no interest in getting to the bottom of this investigation, will this minister please inform us as to which minister we should be asking to take the lead on this issue?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Acting Premier.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Finance has been firm and strong on this issue from the very day that it's been brought up in this House. She's been keen to get to the bottom of the issue. She's asked the Auditor General to expedite the audit, and we're going to do everything possible to support the process, including the appointment of an interim chair of the commission to deal with the issues quickly and thoroughly.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has a lot to say about bullying in schools. Unfortunately, it has absolutely nothing to say about the bullying being done by the Alberta Securities Commission. First, they're accused of bullying their employees, and now they are bullying the Auditor General all the way to court. My questions are again to the Acting Premier. Given that the part-time commissioners and the chairman of the Alberta Securities Commission are government appointed, why is the government allowing these individuals to bully them by taking an officer of the Legislature to court?

2:10

**Mr. Hancock:** A strange question coming from the very member who questioned the credibility of the officer of the Legislature only two weeks ago and failed to apologize for that, as he should have.

Mr. Speaker, there are two independent groups involved here. The Auditor General, who operates under the authority granted by the Legislature as an officer of the Legislature, and the Securities Commission, which operates under an act under authority granted by the Legislature.

There are issues with respect to the control of information and documentation. Those issues have to be resolved. It's appropriate to have those issues resolved. It would have been better if they were resolved by negotiation between the parties and understanding between the parties, but it's also appropriate, where there are disputes, where there are questions that need to be resolved, to go to the courts, another independent party, to determine what the right procedure is. That's not bullying. That's a process, and it's a process which can happen expeditiously and appropriately.

**Dr. Taft:** Again to the Acting Premier: given the bullying by the Alberta Securities Commission of the Auditor General, will this Conservative government now admit that the Mack report, which has outlined concerns of enforcement problems, may well in fact be true?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General is engaged to do an audit and do an audit under the appropriate circumstances. Those circumstances, the scope of the audit, will be refined, and if there are concerns about how that's refined, the courts will assist with refining the scope of the audit under the law, determining the appropriate processes, and the new interim chair of the commission will ensure that an independent thorough review is done of what has happened there. It's well in hand, it's proceeding, and it will happen in the interests of Albertans.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. To the same minister: given that the executive director of the ASC oversees enforcement cases at the commission and has the authority to see which enforcement cases are pursued, why does this same person have the power to decide if the Auditor General can investigate enforcement cases?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, the issues that are before the court are exactly that: what the authority of the Auditor General is with respect to the files and information, confidentiality, and other issues. It's appropriately before the court where there are issues of the determination of law, determination of scope of authority, and determination of scope of the audit.

**The Speaker:** Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

### Municipal Grants to Crowsnest Pass

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The municipality of Crowsnest Pass is being shortchanged by this government. This government made a commitment specifically to this region: if they amalgamated, any funding, whether that is for policing or infrastructure, would be delivered in the most cost-advantageous way to the municipality. Now this government is threatening to withhold funding unless a new agreement is signed. My first question is to the Solicitor General. Given that the minister stated in his letter to the mayor of Crowsnest Pass that no policing grant funding will be provided until a grant agreement has been signed, can the minister explain why he is taking this intimidating tactic instead of working with officials from Crowsnest Pass to honour a previous agreement?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned yesterday to the hon. member, the Crowsnest Pass regulation deals only with the calculation of grants and is not applicable to the Police Act, which requires the province to pay for policing costs for certain municipalities. The letter that Crowsnest Pass got is exactly the same letter that the town of Ponoka, the town of Rocky Mountain House, the town of Peace River got. The exact same letter. The amounts are different in the fact that the municipal policing grants are based on a \$200,000 grant and \$8 per capita above 5,000 up to their population. This is an opportunity for the town of Crowsnest Pass to look at the responsibility they have regarding providing policing to their community because of the fact that their population is over 5,000.

**Dr. B. Miller:** To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: with respect to infrastructure grants, will the minister inform us if he will honour the agreement in place to provide infrastructure grants based upon the most cost-advantageous way to the region, or will he follow the Solicitor General's tactic and threaten to withhold funding unless a new agreement is signed?

**Dr. Oberg:** Yes.

**Dr. B. Miller:** Okay. I'll try somebody else. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given what has happened with the Solicitor General, will the minister inform the people of Crowsnest Pass and this House if the tactic of forcing a municipality to sign new grant agreements that are absolutely not in the best interest of the people

is the preferred method of negotiation with municipalities by this government?

**The Speaker:** Well, in about an hour from now we may get to the estimates of the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Very briefly now.

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, I'll try and be brief. Without reiterating what the Solicitor General has already said, I want to explain to the member that the Municipal Government Act and the regulations refer to grants that are provided to municipalities and do not refer to the situation with respect to policing, which is a partnership between the Solicitor General and municipalities. So there are two separate identities.

Where the confusion is coming in is that policing used to be part of unconditional grants that were provided to municipalities that may or may not have been used for policing. A couple of years ago some of the funds were transferred from Municipal Affairs to the Solicitor General, which were then topped up by the Solicitor General to provide conditional grants in the form of offsetting costs for policing, and that's the difference, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker.

### Electricity Exports

**Mr. Eggen:** Mr. Speaker, this government is quietly moving ahead with power exports to the American market even though it appears to have no plan to protect residential, farm, and small business consumers back here at home. Electricity exports threaten to deplete our supply of natural gas, contribute to more coal-generated plants, and could have serious implications under the North American free trade agreement for our own energy reserves. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that there are so many outstanding questions on electricity exports, why is the project going forward without public consultation, which the Alberta Advisory Council on Electricity recommended to do a year and a half ago?

**Mr. Melchin:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to first state that the project at this stage is nowhere near the stage of going forward. There are lots of discussions about that. It's a proposal by a company. They've got a lot of work to do before it ever gets to the stage of coming forward for regulatory approvals. Those are just the what-ifs. The people continue to plan and assess as to projects that truly could benefit consumers here in Alberta also. I do want to state, though, that the export policy does say and clearly has been that Albertans won't pay for export lines in that capacity, so they won't be harmed in any way. It truly would just add another opportunity, potentially, to import power as well.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you. To the same minister: given that Canada is bound by NAFTA to guarantee the Americans an ongoing supply of energy regardless of the state of our own surplus or reserves, how will the minister guarantee that Alberta will have enough surplus to keep prices at home down first and to make sure that we meet our own needs first?

**Mr. Melchin:** Mr. Speaker, those assertions about NAFTA are completely wrong. We're under no obligation. We're under no obligation to export when you don't have the capacity to export. Those are things that, if you are offering and want to trade goods, would be offered on the same basis that we would to Albertans. But, clearly, all jurisdictions, all countries see to the needs of their own citizens, and in this case Albertans would also be protected.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you. To the same minister: will the minister, then, commit to Albertans here and now that we will have a stable and affordable supply of power for our own needs and that he will not sell it all away to the Americans, like they did with the gas?

**Mr. Melchin:** Thanks for outlining our energy policy, our electricity policy. That's exactly what we are doing. In that sense we are very fortunate, and I'm glad that he raised how well consumers are actually benefiting from the deregulation. We actually have prices today for our consumers that are below what you would have on a regulated model in Alberta.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

### 2:20 Postsecondary Education Federal Funding

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a political move against a potential defeat, the minority federal Liberal government in Ottawa made a deal with the NDP to increase the spending of our tax dollars in different areas. For postsecondary education their political promise is to increase federal spending of our tax dollars by \$1.5 billion, but there are conflicting reports about where the money will go and whether there are strings attached to it. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Can the hon. minister tell the House how much of this federal taxpayers' money for postsecondary education is expected to trickle back to Alberta?

#### Speaker's Ruling Questions outside Ministerial Responsibility

**The Speaker:** Well, hon. member, to my knowledge and my understanding these are proposals before the Canadian House of Commons that have not been approved or passed yet. I have no idea how an hon. minister in Alberta could possibly speculate about something that hasn't happened yet. But if the minister wants to take a shot.

### Postsecondary Education Federal Funding (continued)

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reports that we have indicate that the proposal encompasses about \$1.5 billion. As you quite accurately indicate, we have no idea whether it'll be passed or whether the federal government will be defeated before it even gets to that, so we can't plan in any way, shape, or form to spend any of that money. We don't know what strings might be attached, but if we were to get the portion that we would normally be allocated of that sort of thing, we'd get about \$150 million.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this money could be back in Alberta, could the minister tell us if Alberta needs to commit to using it to reduce the tuition for our students?

**The Speaker:** Well, once again, with due respect, the question period is not to deal with questions about speculation.

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, what I can advise the House is that there have been some discussions between officials to try and anticipate how this might trickle forward because it's necessary to be prepared. While we wouldn't want to speculate on whether or not

the budget is passed, we do have to be prepared in the event that the resources come forward. There are reports that it will be tied to tuition. However, there are also conflicting ideas as to how the federal government might implement it, through the tax system or otherwise.

**Mr. Cao:** My question to the same minister: regarding the promise to pay for the tuition increase in Alberta this coming September, could the minister commit to using this money to help in that?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, it should be very clear in this House that we have budgeted – in fact, Committee of Supply has voted on it – \$43 million to pay for the promise that we made to pay the increased cost in tuition at public institutions for students in the province of Alberta. Any federal monies would be used for other purposes.

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

### Electricity Consultant

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about this government's own deals on electricity deregulation. We all know that electricity deregulation has been a rip-off and has cost Alberta consumers billions of dollars. What many Alberta consumers don't know is that the man now responsible for seeing through this policy nightmare is being paid over a million taxpayer dollars for only three years' work. This man, Mr. Kellan Fluckiger, is a former energy adviser to the defeated Governor of California, Gray Davis. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that the Ministry of Energy has over 1,400 public service employees, why is this government giving away at least \$1.1 million to a private consultant, Mr. Kellan Fluckiger, whose only job is to further entrench the \$8 billion electricity deregulation disaster?

**Mr. Melchin:** Mr. Speaker, it is very true that we do employ the individual that he said under a contract basis, and the terms are approximately correct as to what he said. We do make sure that we want to have the best expertise that we can in an industry that requires such expertise. He has been brought under a three-year contract. We are very fortunate. There are very few people with the expertise in the kinds of things that we're dealing with, in the very integrated deregulation of the market, and he has offered tremendous value for this province.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Minister of Energy again. It's certain that there are no PC members with expertise in electricity deregulation, or consumers wouldn't be faced with these enormous bills. How many other employees of Alberta Energy are private consultants, which cost taxpayers more than three times as much as a well-paid public service employee?

**The Speaker:** I figure there are a couple of questions there. Take your choice.

**Mr. Melchin:** Take my choice? Well, maybe I'll emphasize the great things that have happened from deregulation that have saved Albertans millions if not potentially what could add up into billions of dollars all the time. We now get power, as a result, from a tremendous amount of new supply that's been brought on, many of

them green related, very clean coal technology. Some of the best technologies have come forward, that have opened up the field to bring on generation. It's also opened up that Albertans are getting today prices below the replacement cost, really, of that power that's being brought on. As a result of the good things of competition, Albertans benefit.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Energy: why does the government of Alberta have a contractor represent the province's interests at national and international meetings on electricity deregulation? Why not have a member of the province's fine civil service do that? Why hire out when you have good help at home?

**Mr. Melchin:** The individual referenced, again, is under contract to actually work with the government on government policy. He does represent the government in implementing those policies that are determined by this body right here in the Chamber.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

### Graduated Drivers' Licences

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I received an inquiry from a constituent regarding the implementation and success of the graduated licensing system. The graduated licensing system was created to help new drivers develop their driving skills over a period of time while they are under regulations that endeavour to protect them. This constituent felt that there is very little enforcement of the licence rules for new drivers and that some new drivers, hearing and seeing little about enforcement of the rules, are not motivated to follow them. My question is to the Solicitor General. Are there random checks to ensure that graduated licensing is being observed by new drivers, especially in rural areas?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The graduated driver's licence came into this Assembly in the year 2001. In fact, I brought that legislation through, the graduated driver's licence program. The idea behind the legislation was, in fact, to help cut down on traffic collisions and deaths among Albertans but mainly among younger Albertans because of the issues related to the driver training.

Mr. Speaker, the enforcement programs that go on within the law enforcement community throughout Alberta are there. They don't go specifically out after individuals regarding their drivers' licences, but in any normal procedure in stopping a vehicle regarding an infraction, they do check those drivers' licences. Again, the provisions are within the act to in fact penalize them if they don't respond to the proper legislation.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you. To the same minister: will the minister consider implementing random roadside checks such as checkstop?

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Mr. Speaker, roadside checkstops are part of the law enforcement community's STEP program, the selective traffic enforcement program, which they change on a monthly basis

throughout the province. That could be one of the areas that our law enforcement agencies look at in the future.

As well, with any checkstop program, whether it's for drunken driving, whether it's for equipment violations, whether it's for overloads on trucks, or any other issues . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Purple gas.

**Mr. Cernaiko:** . . . purple gas, as my colleague mentioned, obviously a driver's licence is going to be one of the pieces of identification that's going to be required at that check. The police officer will check at the time to determine whether the individual does have a proper driver's licence.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** My final question is to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. What are the penalties for a new driver that is found to be driving outside the designated time frames, and how are these penalties enforced?

**The Speaker:** Well, hon. member, now is about the seventh time I've said that the question period is not the time for interpretation of statutes. Respond to the latter part of the question.

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, it's extremely important to note that the fine is actually \$100 with two demerits. The key to this, though, that people have to remember is that there's a diminished threshold for demerits with graduated drivers' licences. If you receive eight demerits, your licence is actually gone, so that has severe repercussions when it comes to insurance as well as future licences down the road. We attempt to monitor this as closely as we can, and I believe that the Solicitor General has answered very explicitly the things that are being done. It's an excellent program, Mr. Speaker, and working very well.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

### 2:30 Health Care Privatization

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the first ministers' meeting this past fall Premiers agreed upon an action plan for public health care that included as one of the guiding principles access to medically necessary health services based on need, not ability to pay. Along with \$41 billion in provincial health funding the federal health minister extended an invitation to this government to discuss contentious issues around the Canada Health Act but has been rebuffed. Albertans are more than tired of this self-serving and dysfunctional relationship between provincial and federal governments. To the Acting Premier: given that the violation of the Canada Health Act may have serious repercussions for Albertans, why did the government refuse a meeting with the federal Health minister to discuss the consequences of privatization?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, I would take under advisement the question for the minister of health as to what circumstances took place with respect to such a meeting, but I guess it's fair to also ask why the federal minister wouldn't have attended to listen to the international experts at the symposium which was recently held to find out what the best practices around the world might be.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Acting Premier:

how do private MRI clinics meet the equal access criterion of the Canada Health Act?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what kind of interpretation I'm being asked for there, but it's very evident that in this province we have expanded the number of MRIs available through the public system to the point where it's the highest number of scans that happen across this country on a per capita basis and that public access to MRIs is better in this province than anywhere probably in North America, but certainly in Canada.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the federal transfer payments account for about 16 per cent of Alberta's health revenue, is this government willing to risk \$5 billion in federal transfers in order to promote the third way?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, one thing that should be very clear is that we need to have a thorough, unemotional discussion based on facts about the best practices around the world. That's what the minister of health has been conducting in an international symposium this past week, bringing in experts, bringing in people to talk knowledgeably about health care delivery so that Albertans can have access to the best practices in the world delivered in the best way.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

### Truck Driver Certification

**Mr. McFarland:** Thank you. On behalf of all the constituents in the Little Bow riding I extend a simple and sincere thank you and appreciation to all our Canadian veterans and their families on this special day and to you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing this special ceremony to take place in this Assembly.

My question today is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. The government has proposed a new college-based truck drivers' certification program for Alberta truck drivers. My question to you, Minister, is this: does this program apply to current class 1 licence holders, or is it specifically for new drivers?

**Dr. Oberg:** Actually, Mr. Speaker, it's for neither. First of all, if you have a class 1 licence, you certainly are under no obligation at all to take this particular course. Secondly, you still can go out and take a class 1 course if you like.

What we're proposing in this potential course that could be offered in a pilot project at Red Deer College is a way to get enhanced training. It could be things like bills of lading. It could be how to secure your loads. It will be all of the above. What we hope to do is to be able to put out a truck driver that is a true professional that will very easily and very quickly become employed by the trucking industry.

There is one other detail that we're looking at. There's certainly an element of possibility, I guess is the best way I could describe it, and that is that we would like to see a decrease in insurance rates for those kids from 19 to 25. As you know, Mr. Speaker, for a 19 to 25 year old it is almost impossible for them to become a commercial driver due to the high insurance rates. We're presently looking at working with IBC, the Insurance Bureau of Canada, to ensure that these rates come down for these kids.

The short answer to the question is: if you have a class 1, you can continue on and be a commercial driver; you do not need this course to become a commercial driver.



**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. McFarland:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the large carriers probably support this move. I am wondering, through the minister, if this has an adverse effect on the cost for independent and smaller trucking operations in Alberta?

**Dr. Oberg:** No, it doesn't, Mr. Speaker. Again, what we're hoping to put out is a qualified driver, and that qualified driver hopefully will get a preferential treatment from the employers and, indeed, will actually make the employers money because he will be a more skilled driver when it comes to time of employment. So, again, the answer is no. This is purely a voluntary program and hopefully will lead to a better level of education and expertise in Alberta's commercial drivers.

**Mr. McFarland:** Last question, Mr. Speaker. If this came about because of the problems associated with Delta Driving School, why wouldn't you have just pulled their licensing authority rather than perhaps imposing a program on all drivers?

**Dr. Oberg:** Again, Mr. Speaker, we're not imposing this on all drivers. The key thing to note in this is that certainly the Delta Driving School incident was a very unfortunate incident, and we have taken considerable action on that.

This proposal has actually been under way since 2001, so it's been in the works for four years. It's been championed by the driving industry, by the employers, and it's something that we're moving forward on a pilot basis. I hope, and I think there's good evidence to show that it will put out a better class of drivers. It'll put out a class of drivers that the employers are looking for when it comes to driving these huge trucks, that are now going down the road at in excess of a hundred kilometres per hour. Very important program, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Calgary Hospitals

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we have discussed here in question period before, the city of Calgary faces a shortage of acute-care hospital beds that even under the best-case scenario will not be eliminated until 2010. Building the new southeast hospital alone will not solve the bed shortage. Calgary also needs significant expansions or modernizations at its existing hospitals and a new, larger, urgent-care centre in the city core. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: beyond the government's commitment to fully fund construction of the new southeast hospital, what is the minister doing to address the Calgary health region's other capital needs this year?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Included in this last budget, as the hon. member was alluding to, there's very close to \$500 million for a new hospital in southeast Calgary. This is a huge amount of money. That adds on top of approximately \$350 million for the new children's hospital, which is about to open. Those two particular institutions are going to vastly increase the number of beds in hospitals.

The hon. member is right. There still is a potential bed shortage. I think that the health authority has to come up with different ways

to look at it. We're working extremely closely with the health authority at this point in time. Does that mean that they're automatically going to get another \$500 million tomorrow because they've asked for it? The answer is no.

**Mr. Taylor:** To the same minister: could the minister offer a little further clarity, please, on whether there is additional funding to allow the expansion of the Rockyview and Lougheed hospitals and redevelopment of part of the Foothills to go forward to completion, or is this last year's dollars to do the preliminary work?

**Dr. Oberg:** Mr. Speaker, this is last year's dollars that they're looking at doing the preliminary work with. They're scouting out exactly what is needed. There has been no official commitment on the \$500 million project that has been proposed.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One more question for the minister. Is there any money in the budget this year for the Sheldon M. Chumir health centre in Calgary's central core?

**Dr. Oberg:** Mr. Speaker, the budget was tabled roughly two and a half or three weeks ago, and all of the projects that were in the budget are going to be funded. Off the top of my head, through to the hon. member, I do believe that there was, but I certainly will take a look closely at my budget and get back to you with exactly whether or not the Sheldon Chumir was funded with this particular budget.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

2:40

### National Child Care Initiative

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canadians are about to get a meaningful commitment to high-quality early child care and development services after 13 years of broken federal Liberal promises. It obviously takes NDP MPs to keep the Liberals honest. Provincial and federal governments have already agreed that these services will be based on four principles of quality, universality, accessibility, and child development, known as QUAD. Albertan families, however, are waiting with concern to see whether this government is willing to sign an agreement with the federal government so that Alberta's children can enjoy these high-quality services. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Given that Saskatchewan and Manitoba have already signed child care deals that put the QUAD principles of quality, universality, accessibility, and child development at the centre of their child care policies, why hasn't Alberta made a similar commitment to families here in this province?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have, actually. We do have a verbal agreement with Minister Dryden that we reached several weeks ago. I'd like to reiterate that it's a verbal agreement. I have written Minister Dryden on two separate occasions, asking him for a written confirmation on our verbal agreement. He still has not replied. In fact, the last letter I got from one of his bureaucrats really, actually, didn't give us an answer at all. I had a good conversation again with Mr. Dryden last Thursday, I believe, asking him one more time if he would please respond in

writing to our verbal agreement, and we would be prepared to sign the bilateral agreement.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister share with this House what conditions she has put on signing on to this agreement that are keeping the federal minister from replying to her letter? Albertans are wanting to know this.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** That's a good question because there have been no restrictions on the letter to Minister Dryden whatsoever. We had a verbal agreement. Mr. Dryden agreed with what Alberta wanted, and Albertans have clearly said that they want choice in how they raise their children.

I will tell the hon. member that when I brought up to Minister Dryden in the federal/provincial/territorial meeting in February that Albertans would like to see a child tax credit for stay-at-home parents, he said: absolutely not; it's not part of the discussion. All of the issues that we wanted addressed by the minister he agreed to a few weeks ago by verbal confirmation. We're just waiting for a written confirmation, and we'd be pleased, then, to take it to my cabinet to sign on to the bilateral agreement.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary to the same minister: given that it's well within this province's fiscal capacity to both invest in nonprofit child care services with money coming from the national child care plan and provide more support for families who choose to have one caregiver stay at home, like tax incentives, eliminating health care premiums, and the like, will the minister stop dithering and make sure that we get the agreement as soon as possible?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear: this minister isn't dithering. The minister that is dithering is the federal minister. If it's so important for him to have a national child care program across this country, then maybe I can encourage the member of the opposition and members of the Liberal Party to pick up the phone, call the federal minister, and say: please, will you respond to the Minister of Children's Services in this province and commit to their written confirmation?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

#### United States Energy Legislation

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy recently returned from Washington, DC, after attending sessions where he spoke to two key organizations and met with key members of Congress and senior officials of the U.S. government. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Given that the minister's trip took place during a time when there is renewed debate on the U.S. energy bill, can the minister please tell this Assembly: in what way can Alberta influence these discussions?

**Mr. Melchin:** Mr. Speaker, our good friends and neighbours to the south, the United States, have been in discussions for some years, actually, on an energy bill that would really look at their energy security. Alberta figures prominently in that role, given that we are the largest source of both oil and gas to the United States. Some of

the things that have been very important is that they have listened to Alberta and, I would say, other delegations as well. When the gas from the north was coming and those pipelines were proposed from Alaska, there was at one stage a proposal to put a floor price in. It would have been very punitive to Alberta to have had a different marketplace in Alaska, gas coming, which would tie into the Alberta hub, versus the rest of the gas that flows down to those same marketplaces. So those are things that have been very helpful to see from our own involvement, and that's part of why we'll need to continue to be there.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you. Again to the Minister of Energy: could the minister please tell the House how Alberta will benefit from these discussions?

**Mr. Melchin:** Mr. Speaker, it's very important with our largest exports going to the United States, with our industries very much intertwined, many of the companies that are investing billions of dollars in the expansion of our projects here coming from the United States, that we do look towards how we ensure that the policies on both sides of the border help facilitate those things that would be also in the best interest of Alberta. Rather than just being hewers of wood – shipping raw bitumen south, for example – we want to see if we have the opportunity in the formation of that policy to do the upgrading here. We would also look at the refining capabilities of sending finished products to the United States versus just the synthetic crudes.

Another level that's showing great interest is in the oil shales in the United States, a very substantial size of resource in the western states. They're looking toward some of the technology and working with us on sharing technology that we use in the oil sands in Alberta and how that could also benefit them in their research in the south and how that could benefit us both in developing the oils.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

#### School Construction Estimates

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again for allowing me to introduce the guests today.

This government's funding program for new schools is as flawed as its space utilization formula, which forces the school boards to prematurely close inner-city schools before receiving funding for new suburban school construction. My first question to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation comes from urban school board trustees. Why is this ministry continuing to use 2001 construction costs when providing grants for 2005 school building projects?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The estimates on the 2001 costs are a constant that we use. When the tenders come in, we then pick up the extra costs on the tenders.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. To the same minister: when will this government address its multimillion renovation downloaded deficits forced on school boards throughout this province?

**Dr. Oberg:** Mr. Speaker, the interesting thing about that question is that our budget was just debated last week. Included in my budget this year are 109 school projects around the province, including 45 new schools. The interesting point about that is that the number of students in the schools in Alberta is actually on a decline. So we have built 45 new schools for fewer students than we had the year before.

Mr. Speaker, I think this government is doing a good job. Can we do better? Yeah, we can. There are some areas where we have seen growth in the school numbers, we have seen an expansion, and the schools are not there because they may be two or three miles away. We are looking at addressing the situation when it comes to the location of the schools, but we must remember that the number of students in Alberta is going down, and we're building 45 new schools, 109 new schools projects.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: given that the minister has publicly admitted that his new space utilization formula will do nothing to prevent further urban school closures, what hope can he provide for parents that they'll be able to keep their children's community schools open?

**Dr. Oberg:** Mr. Speaker, the thing about closing schools or keeping schools open is that it is a school board decision, and I believe that probably the biggest controversy has been around Edmonton at this particular time. The Edmonton public school board has made some decisions based on learning opportunities. They've looked at putting schools together. To keep schools open when there's a 10 or 15 or 20 per cent occupancy, pay the lights, pay the power, quite simply is a waste of taxpayers' dollars. I think the Edmonton public school board has been a good citizen when it comes to saving taxpayers' dollars.

2:50

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

#### Private Security Legislation Review

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Private Investigators and Security Guards Act currently involves the regulation of private investigators and security guards and has not been amended since 1965, when the legislation was initially developed. Most security guards were simply watchmen, and today they provide a wide variety of services under a broad range of levels in training and licensing. Today the Solicitor General announced a review of this legislation. My questions are to the Solicitor General. What do you hope to accomplish by initiating a review of the private investigators and security guards legislation?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The objective of this review was to ensure that the legislation, which is more than 50 years old, is modernized and outlines clear standards for the public security industry. We need to ensure that the roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and that they're properly trained and held accountable for the work that they provide in the community. The existing legislation no longer meets the needs of the government or the public. With rapid growth in the private security industry, there's a greater need for co-ordination between our police services and, as well, the private security firms.

Private investigators and security guards outnumber the police in Alberta, and security guards and private investigators are paid by private interests to protect private interests. The review will include international as well as interprovincial research during the public consultation.

**Mr. Johnston:** Is the Solicitor General planning to address the inconsistencies in licensing in the private security industry?

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Mr. Speaker, the inconsistency in licensing is an important issue, and I thank my hon. colleague for bringing it up. The review will be comprehensive and include a number of areas such as parameters for licensing, minimum qualification and training standards, and legal authority duties and responsibilities for those individuals.

**Mr. Johnston:** My final question is again to the Solicitor General. You mentioned training. How will you address the inconsistency and lack of training standards in the industry?

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Mr. Speaker, under the current legislation there are no minimum provincial educational or training requirements for private investigators and security guards in Alberta. I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, who is going to be chairing the review and, obviously, will be looking at some of these major issues, training being one, which is key to providing the necessary skills and knowledge required by security practitioners, especially when they're interacting with the public. Training will also help security personnel maintain their own safety, and the proper training of personnel is an essential ingredient to improve the quality and professionalism of the security industry in this province.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

#### Sustainable Resource Management

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is blessed with remarkable natural diversity. Our public lands, a vast array of natural resources such as timber, water, and rangeland, are the home to many species and animals. These are places that deserve protection to ensure their sustainability for future generations. However, the actions of this government do place the natural heritage in jeopardy. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: given that in British Columbia there is widespread support from public, scientists, and from the government to declare a moratorium on the sport hunting of the grizzly bears, which have a population of around 7,000, why is this government still allowing sport hunting and ignoring the scientists and not calling for a moratorium?

**Mr. Coumts:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the whole basis of our policy is that of conservation, and when it comes to grizzly bear, part of the conservation is making sure that you know exactly how many grizzly bear there are out there. You put the science behind the monitoring. The science behind the monitoring is being done through our foothills model forest grizzly bear initiative. We put millions of dollars into making sure that the grizzly bear population is sustainable in this province, and we do that through DNA testing. We have the science behind us.

We took a number of initiatives to have a recovery team look at shortening the hunting season as well. We also restricted areas in the province where grizzly bear can be hunted, mainly from highway

3 down to the Montana border, over to the British Columbia border. We put a number of initiatives in place to make sure that the grizzly bear are protected in this province.

**Mr. Bonko:** To the same minister: given that pine beetles have infested some of our most pristine and protected areas, will this government finally commit more resources to controlling this pest or rely on the cut and burns and the possibility of divine intervention by the weather gods?

**Mr. Coutts:** I've answered this question many times in this House, Mr. Speaker, so I will be brief. Prior to the third quarter of last year we put a million dollars into pine beetle prevention in this province. We have also partnered with the British Columbia government to match dollar for dollar what they're putting into helping stop the pine beetle at the British Columbia-Alberta border. We have a strategy in place in this new budget for 2005-2006 to make sure that the kinds of resources that are needed to stop the pine beetle – and it's strange. I'm going to say it one more time for this hon. member. In getting rid of the pine beetle, you do have to identify the trees that the pine beetle is in, and that's done by aerial surveys. It's done by on-the-ground surveys. It's most important that when you have identified the pine beetle in the tree on the ground, you get rid of that tree and you burn it so that you protect the other trees, the healthy trees that are next to it. It is absolutely necessary to clear-cut and burn those trees.

**The Speaker:** That was the shortest one minute and 30 seconds I've ever heard.

**Mr. Coutts:** Well, it's important.

**Mr. Bonko:** To the same minister: given that the department has stated that it is working on strategies to deal with the demands on our forests from both forestry and the oil and gas sector, will the integrated land management strategy be based on conservation or economic maximization?

**Mr. Coutts:** Oh, no, Mr. Speaker. Quite the opposite. It is a balance between economic, social, and environmental concerns. Our department of Sustainable Resource Development has a long history of making sure that that balance is put in place on everything that we handle, right from forestry through to our fish and wildlife and through to land management, and we will continue to do that in the years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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### Members' Statements

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

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

### Canadian Contribution to Victory in Europe

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At 8 o'clock on the morning of May 5, 1945, exactly 60 years ago today, enemy forces surrendered to the Canadian front in Europe. This Sunday, May 8, will mark the 60th anniversary of Victory in Europe, or VE, Day, the celebration of the end of the terrible conflict in Europe. It was a conflict which affected nearly every nation on earth and which brought about an unprecedented number of casualties.

War is truly an awful thing, but the conduct of war is sometimes both necessary and morally imperative, and World War II was

certainly one of those times. It was a war that was fought by the Allies against an enemy which Churchill called "a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime." Our nation answered the call of that just war from the outset, and we were there in the dark months and years when Britain and its Commonwealth stood virtually alone against an evil enemy. It was a time which Churchill would call our finest hour.

Between 1939 and 1945 more than a million Canadian men and women, or one adult in 12, would don a uniform, and 41 per cent of men aged 18 to 45 served in the Canadian armed forces. Included in the Canadian casualties were 55,000 wounded and maimed and over 45,000 who paid the ultimate price in the service of their country.

Today, 60 years on, the ranks of our Canadian heroes who waged this great war against tyranny and evil are thinning. But today and this Sunday may we pause on the anniversary of what was for many a time of happiness and gratitude but also of sober reflection to remember the deeds of our veterans and those who have gone on, to salute them and to give thanks for what they have done for Canada, for freedom, and for the cause of humanity.

We shall never forget.

3:00

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne has consulted with me, and I am going to allow him to refer to an exhibit.

The hon. member.

### Liberation of the Netherlands

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to commemorate not only the end of fighting in Europe but also the end of foreign occupation and oppression for a nation. Today marks the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands by Allied Forces. More than 7,600 Canadians died during the nine-month campaign waged to liberate the country. Canadian and other allied troops fought a difficult battle across the Netherlands, and the winter conditions made their task even more difficult.

However, it was not only the soldiers who experienced hardship during this winter. The winter of '44-45 was known as the Hunger Winter in western Holland. Food supplies in the cities had been exhausted, fuel supplies were virtually extinct, and transportation was practically nonexistent. Under these conditions thousands of men and women and children perished. My mom told me many stories of when she would sneak under the dark skies into the tulip gardens to gather bulbs to make tulip soup. She spent her complete teenage years under Nazi control.

On April 28, 1944, a truce was arranged, stopping fighting in western Holland. This allowed food supplies to be brought in for the starving population. Mr. Speaker, I have a sample today with me of those rations passed to my family from the Red Cross and the Canadian soldiers. The relief of the hardship experienced by those in west Netherlands came at a vital time, and the Canadian soldiers who were a part of the liberation were greeted with cheers of joy. Again, my mom told me of this day in Rotterdam and how the memory remains clear in her mind today. Not only did it mark the end of German occupation; it marked the day that members of my family were released from Nazi work camps in Germany.

The victory on May 5, 1945, served to cement the ties between Canada and the Netherlands which had been first formed in 1942, when Crown Princess Juliana sought refuge in Canada after being forced to flee both her homeland and Great Britain. These ties were further strengthened on January 19, 1943. On this day in an Ottawa

hospital room decreed to be Dutch territory, Princess Juliana's third daughter, Princess Margriet, was born. This tiny infant was a bright light during a dark time, and Canadians claimed her as their own.

The strength and continuity of the ties between our two countries continues to this day and is best evidenced by the tulips which bloom in Ottawa each spring. These flowers are a bright and vibrant gift from the Dutch, which reminds us of the lives which were freely given and the friendship which was formed during this chapter in history.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, if I understand the exhibit correctly, this is a real tin box that was dropped via the air by Canadian air service people over Holland in 1945. The contents I do not believe are original, but the box is. If the hon. member wants to circulate it as a World War II memento, that would be wonderful.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Yes.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Strathcona.

#### Strathcona Cadet Tattoo

**Mr. Lougheed:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Saturday evening it was my privilege to attend the third annual Strathcona Cadet Tattoo held in Sherwood Park. This year's theme was Bridging the Gap, with the focus on 2005 being the year of the veteran.

In keeping with the tradition of a military tattoo, the event included pipes and drums, military band, precision teams, a variety of dancing, and the finale, which combined the sights and sounds of it all. The unique blend of music, ceremony, and theatre showcased the talents of cadets from all across Alberta.

I would like to recognize the corps who attended and performed for the crowd. They included 238 RCSCC Campbelltown Sea Cadet Corps, 12 Squadron Royal Canadian Air Cadets, NLCC E.W. Cormack Navy League Corps, 2733 Army Cadets, 4 Wing Cold Lake Pipes and Drums, and the pipes, drums, reeds, and dancers of Vimy Ridge Academy.

In addition to recognizing these gifted young people, I would also wish to commend and bring special recognition to those individuals involved in organizing and contributing to this spectacular performance. They're Lieutenant Jason Finkbeiner, Mr. George Arndt, Mr. Michael Chute, Mr. Reid Morris, Mr. Dave Wright, Pipe Major Chris Yeo, Mr. Alistair Briggs, and Mr. Mike Luce.

Congratulations to all of the participants, who successfully bridged the gap. It was an excellent event and celebration of tradition. May the tradition long continue.

Thank you.

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

#### Midwifery Services

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise in recognition of the 15th annual International Day of the Midwife, held every May 5. In celebration of this special day this year the Association for Safe Alternatives in Childbirth, ASAC, collected invoices for midwifery care that Albertans have paid for from their own pockets since 1991. ASAC asked me and my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona if we could submit these to the attention of the minister of health. I quote: we are giving a large stack of invoices to the Alberta health care insurance plan for midwifery care that has been paid for out of pocket by Albertans since the Alberta govern-

ment pledged its support of midwifery and funding in 1991. End of quote.

Similar invoicing in Manitoba helped get midwifery services funded in that province. This profession is relied upon by many families to bring their children into this world. If midwifery services are not publicly funded soon, then Alberta women may have one less option available to them when they deliver their babies.

A decade ago the Alberta Association of Midwives had 150 members, who were hoping that midwifery would become publicly funded. The profession lost some members when official registration of midwives began in 1998 and additional government fees were added to their costs. More midwives have been driven away by the continuing lack of coverage under Alberta health care while some other provinces publicly fund midwifery under their health care plans. Alberta must consider going that way, especially in light of a severe shortage of obstetrical doctors in this province.

The idea of having a day to honour midwives was born in 1987 at the International Confederation of Midwives conference in the Netherlands. The first International Midwives Day was celebrated on May 5, 1991, and now it's observed in more than 50 countries throughout the world. On this International Day of the Midwife many Alberta families hope that this government will support midwifery as the safe childbirth alternative it is.

Thank you.

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

#### Fly for a Cure Charity Fundraiser

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the hon. Member for Strathcona shared with this House his thoughts on May being Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month. I would like to echo his statements as it gives me the opportunity to speak about a sport for which I have a passion and a unique and exciting fundraising initiative about to take place near Rosalind in the constituency of Battle River-Wainwright.

Beginning May 14 and going right through to May 22, hang gliding and paragliding enthusiasts from across western Canada will gather to participate in the second annual Fly for a Cure fundraiser, which will run in conjunction with the Western Canadian Hang Gliding Championships. Pilots collect sponsorship dollars for each mile they fly during the cross-country competitions, with proceeds going to the United Way campaign. Twenty-five per cent of the proceeds are then designated to an MS charity while a further 25 per cent are designated to breast cancer research. In its inaugural year last May this thoughtful combination of sport aviation and community caring raised over \$14,500.

Mr. Speaker, my family has known a number of fine individuals brought down by the ravages of MS, and both my wife and mother-in-law are breast cancer survivors, while the United Way has long been my first choice when choosing a charity to donate to.

I would like to thank the organizers, Rob Clarkson and Ralph Herten, for their efforts, major sponsor PCL Construction Management for their involvement, and Vincene Muller for generously forwarding all donations in honour of the world-renowned hang gliding pilot, Chris Muller, to the Fly for a Cure fundraiser.

Thank you.

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

#### Midwifery Services

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is the International Day of the Midwife, and young mothers with their babies and baby

carriages, their families, accompanied by their supporters and midwives, gathered on the steps of the Legislature to demand the full integration of midwifery services into Alberta's public health care system.

We know that doing so will save our health care system needed dollars. It's a cheaper and more popular choice for many women. It's a common-sense solution that addresses cost sustainability for public health care.

3:10

A report just released by Dr. Beverley O'Brien and her colleagues at the University of Alberta faculty of nursing shows that women who use the services of a midwife save the health care system as much as \$1,100 or more per childbirth. According to the Association for Safe Alternatives in Childbirth, the total savings to the province if integration were done would be as much as \$50 million.

But midwifery, Mr. Speaker, is so much more than dollars and cents. Midwife-attended births have been proven to yield better health outcomes for both mothers and babies. Better birth weights are one outcome. Also there are lower risks for postpartum depression, better education on nutrition and breast-feeding. All of these things are crucial for women's health, and it's time we had a health care system that recognized all of these benefits.

Given all of these positive health outcomes, the fees that women who exercise their choice to use midwifery services in Alberta are forced to pay are an outrage. They amount to a user fee for an important health service. Fees in excess of \$2,000 create uneven access to midwifery services because only women who can afford these services receive them. Fees create uncertainty for service providers. Fees also marginalize the service, when it's clearly a way of doing things that should be brought to the centre of the public health care system.

Mr. Speaker, it's time that we integrated midwifery into the mainstream health care services. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you to all members of the House a group of 25 visitors. They are members of the Alberta College and Technical Institute Students' Executive Council. They are led by Elaine Ho, the newly elected executive director. All of these young guests are gathered in our city to hold an annual meeting. They are sitting in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm thrilled to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Annemarie van Oploo and her two children. Annemarie is the political action co-ordinator for the Association for Safe Alternatives in Childbirth. ASAC is a midwifery consumer association that acts as a resource to parents and parents-to-be on birthing issues as well as lobbying for safe childbirth alternatives. Annemarie organized today's rally for the International Day of the Midwife. At this time I'd ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition signed by 285 Albertans who are eager to see potentially life-saving improvements to highways in northern Alberta, particularly highway 63. With today's tabling the total number of signatures on this petition so far is 3,766.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition from the good Alberta citizens from the fine communities of Spruce Grove, Pickardville, Onoway, the beautiful Stampede city of Calgary, and the city of Lethbridge, the home of the world-famous Japanese gardens.

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are 103 there.

head: **Notices of Motions**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to make the following motion under Standing Order 30:

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the dangerous precedent set by the Alberta Securities Commission, an agent of the Crown, challenging the legitimate authority of the Auditor General, an officer of this Assembly charged to conduct an investigation vital to the public interest.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 32.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday I'll move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In honour of the International Day of the Midwife, which is today, I would like to table a package of information prepared by the Association for Safe Alternatives in Childbirth. The document provides evidence that midwifery is a safe and cost-effective choice for women to make and makes an excellent argument for covering midwifery services in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this chance to also table five copies of a statement released today outlining the NDP opposition's support for midwifery services and the important choices that such services make available to women.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a booklet produced by the Maternity Center Association entitled *What Every Pregnant Woman Needs to Know About Cesarean Section, 2004*. The Maternity Center Association is the oldest national U.S. organization advocating on behalf of mothers and babies. This booklet is available online at no cost at the web address [www.maternitywise.org](http://www.maternitywise.org) and is a good source of information on the pros and cons of both Cesarean sections and natural vaginal births.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the letter that I referred to during question period from the Solicitor General to the mayor of Crownsnest Pass stating that “no police grant funding will be provided . . . until a grant agreement has been signed.”

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings here today and the requisite five copies of each. One is a study from the Alberta Federation of Labour which comes from Alberta Workers’ Compensation Board statistics about the workplace fatalities in the last century, a total of 9,219 in Alberta.

The other is another quick fact sheet which outlines some of the facts regarding worker injury and the fact that deaths from workplace injuries really haven’t fallen in the last 15 years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Projected Government Business**

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 7(5) I would ask the Government House Leader if he would please share with the House the projected government business for the upcoming week of May 9 to May 12.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, May 9, at 9 p.m. in Committee of Supply, day 20 of 24, Innovation and Science estimates; second reading of bills 40, 38; third reading of bills 24, 25; and in Committee of the Whole Bill 36; and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, May 10, in the afternoon under Committee of Supply the estimates for the Department of the Solicitor General, day 21 of 24. On Tuesday, May 10, at 8 p.m. under Committee of Supply Government Services; at 10 p.m. or as soon as we’re finished, under Committee of the Whole bills 36, 38, 15, 26, 35, 40, and 39; and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, May 11, in the afternoon in Committee of Supply the estimates of the Department of Health and Wellness; at 8 p.m. in Committee of Supply the estimates of the Department of Community Development. At that time we would anticipate asking for unanimous consent of the House to revert to Introduction of Bills to introduce the appropriation supply act, main estimates, and thereafter deal in Committee of the Whole with such of the following bills

as remain in committee: bills 36, 38, 15, 35, 26, 40, 39; and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, May 12, in the afternoon introduction of miscellaneous statutes for first reading; second reading of bills Pr. 1, Pr. 2, Pr. 3; Committee of the Whole on Pr. 1, Pr. 2, Pr. 3; and third reading of bills 8, 10, 17, 26, 29, 31, 34; and as per the Order Paper.

head: **3:20 Request for Emergency Debate**

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we have a Standing Order 30 application. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

#### Securities Commission

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to make the following motion:

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the dangerous precedent set by the Alberta Securities Commission, an agent of the Crown, challenging the legitimate authority of the Auditor General, an officer of this Assembly charged to conduct an investigation vital to the public interest.

I have several points I’d like to make. I understand they need to address issues of urgency at this point, and I will do my best to do that.

The case for setting aside today’s ordinary business of the day contains some of the same elements as the Standing Order 30 we’ve called before, but as you indicated, Mr. Speaker, at that time, this is a fluid situation that bears watching and may warrant reconsideration. There have been a number of dramatic events since that last Standing Order 30, events that make a debate of this Assembly more imperative and urgent than ever.

The Alberta Securities Commission has not only continued its active resistance to an unfettered investigation of it by the Auditor General but has ended the supposed negotiations over something that should not in fact be negotiable and has forced the Auditor General, an officer of this Assembly, to go to court to have the office and authority of the Auditor General respected. We need immediate information from this government on how they are dealing with not only this issue but also with the potential threat to other ongoing or future investigations by the Auditor General.

This issue continues to garner the attention of the nation, as evidenced by recent and increasing media coverage. I take full note of the comment by the Speaker last week, but I’m not requiring any minister to comment on the truth or falsity of the reports. I’m referencing the coverage of the media to suggest that many of the leading newspapers of this country, read avidly by the business and investment communities, continue to cover the controversy at the Alberta Securities Commission. The continuing coverage about both lingering and fresh issues raises serious questions about whether this issue really is being dealt with adequately.

It is urgent – it is urgent – that we restore the confidence of the public in the Alberta Securities Commission. There is no other opportunity to debate this. The debate on the estimates for the Ministry of Finance has concluded. The debate on the estimates for Executive Council has also concluded. There are no bills on the Order Paper that would provide an opportunity to raise these issues. Written questions and motions for returns are not adequate nor are they timely for this. Given the legislative schedules at this time, there is simply no other mechanism or procedure to enable discussion. There are no other reasonable opportunities to have the necessary debate, and I believe that this, therefore, satisfies the requirements of *Beauchesne* 387 as well as *Beauchesne* 392.

Further, question period itself is not an appropriate forum to

debate complex issues such as this. The hon. Finance minister previously claimed that the issue had been discussed in question period and therefore, in her view, needed no further discussion. But question period does not provide for the kind of substantive discussion we need on this complex issue; 45-second exchanges simply don't do it.

The Minister of Finance and the hon. Government House Leader claim that there is no problem on the regulatory side and that there is no evidence of a loss of investor confidence. Here we have something particularly, dramatically new. Yet many of the very staff responsible for investor confidence have publicly stated that they cannot do their jobs effectively, that this, quote: will negatively impact the future of the organization and the health of the Alberta capital markets. End quote.

Furthermore, just today – just today – the outgoing chair of the commission said the following, quote: the continual onslaught of anonymous complaints is really beginning to take its toll. End quote. He went on to describe the tarnishing of the reputation of the Vancouver Stock Exchange some years ago by an article in the U.S. business journal *Forbes*. Then he noted, and I quote: the same sort of thing could happen here; I'm becoming very concerned – this is the chairman of the Securities Commission today – that the attacks on the integrity of the Alberta Securities Commission will weaken investor confidence in the Alberta capital market and Alberta-based issuers. This in turn, he said, could have very serious consequences for the Alberta economy. End quote. The Alberta Securities Commission's chairman is substantiating the fact that a genuine crisis in investor confidence exists.

It remains true that every day that passes with questions, uncertainty, and controversy shakes the public's confidence further and makes a speedy, satisfactory resolution more difficult. I have already made points, and I think they all satisfy the requirement of *Beauchesne* 389; namely, that the public interest will suffer if the issue is not given immediate attention.

I would remind the House, all members of this Assembly, that the Auditor General, whose authority is being challenged by the commissioners, is an officer of this Assembly and reports to us. I would also remind the Assembly that where crises continue or fester because of alleged conflicts in legislation passed by this House, we have a special obligation to pay particular and immediate attention.

Mr. Speaker, the motion requesting this debate also satisfies the requirements of *Montpetit* 587, 588 with respect to the matter falling within the administrative competence of the government and within the scope of ministerial action. The Lieutenant Governor in Council appoints the commission, the chairman, and the part-time commissioners, and the statutes in dispute next Wednesday are under the auspices of the Minister of Finance. I believe it also meets all of the other conditions of these sections, both proscriptive and prescriptive.

The Minister of Finance indicated on April 27 that this Assembly should be assured by the fact that the office of the Auditor General will begin its audit "almost immediately." The hon. Government House Leader claimed that the Auditor General's report was ongoing. Those assurances can no longer be made. This Assembly needs additional clarification, additional information immediately.

The so-called negotiations have broken down, and the Alberta Securities Commission has stepped up its stonewalling by going to court. This should undermine any faith the government or this Assembly has in the ability or willingness of the commission, an agent of the Crown, or its employee, the executive director of the commission, to get to the bottom of this. The minister has in the past assured this House of that, but we can no longer have such faith.

The Auditor General, an officer of this Assembly and an official of high official station, is being stonewalled by an agent of the

Crown and its employee. This is an affront to the authority of this Assembly. This kind of affront to an officer of this Assembly requires immediate discussion, immediate attention. We cannot afford to have it appear – and I think this is very important – that other organizations which are currently or which might in the future be subject to audits or investigations by the Auditor General think that they also can stonewall the Auditor General. We cannot allow the crisis of confidence to spread from an agent of the Crown, the Alberta Securities Commission, to an officer of this Assembly.

The commission has requested a court ruling on May 10. We have today and only one additional sitting day before then. The Auditor General is an officer of this Assembly. It is entirely appropriate and indeed, I argue, pressing that this Assembly discuss this matter prior to the Auditor General's office making his representations to the judge. Clearly, if this Assembly is to have any substantial opportunity to discuss this issue before this hearing, we must do so now. It is my submission that this clearly meets the standards for urgency under *Beauchesne* 390.

The Government House Leader also indicated during debate on April 27 that "there will be a new chair appointed to the Securities Commission imminently." This provides additional reasons to have an immediate debate in this Assembly. The commissioner's term, in fact, ends the day after tomorrow, May 7. The hon. Minister of Finance is already receiving recommendations from the Securities Commission board to appoint an existing member, one who is defending the current obstruction, as acting chair. Today is the last day before the vacancy occurs for this Assembly to discuss this matter.

Given the toxic work environment as well as the allegations of enforcement irregularities and the concerns raised today by the outgoing chair about investor confidence, it's absolutely vital that the next step is taken very carefully and with the full knowledge and input of this Assembly.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, in summary, I believe this motion satisfies all of the requirements of the Standing Orders of this Assembly. I also submit that it meets all of the criteria set out in the other authorities of this House. I would note in closing that the ability of this Assembly to promote and defend the public interest by means of a free, open, substantive debate on pressing matters should be our guiding principle.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Astounding. Two weeks ago the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was challenging the credibility of the Auditor General, and now he's bringing a Standing Order 30 motion to so-called assist him. He has yet to apologize for the affront to the integrity of the Auditor General, and I would hope that before the end of the day today he would have the good grace to get up and do that. This notice of motion ought not even to go forward pursuant to Standing Order 23(g), which indicates that we should not refer to "any matter pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination," and it goes on to outline the circumstances.

The fact of the matter is that there are two independent organizations: the Auditor General, an officer of this Legislative Assembly, and the Securities Commission, which operates under the authority of this Legislative Assembly through an act that's been passed. There is a question between the two of them as to the respective authorities under each of their acts. Both of those authorities



originate with us, as do virtually all other authorities under acts, and when there are determinations to be made with respect to differences of viewpoint as to how the acts interrelate, then the court, another independent authority, is the appropriate place to resolve that kind of a determination.

This matter is before the court to be heard, as I understand it and as the hon. Leader of the Opposition indicated, next Wednesday. It would be inappropriate for us, and, in fact, it would violate rule 23(g) under sub judice to actually have a debate on whose authority is stronger or any of those issues that are quite properly before the court.

Now, the hon. Leader of the Opposition goes further, though, than actually is outlined in the notice of motion because the notice of motion is about challenging the authority of the Auditor General. As I say, Mr. Speaker, it's not about challenging the legitimate authority of the Auditor General but defining the rules and the guidance provided by both the Auditor General Act and the Securities Act with respect to defining the scope of the audit. In fact, as I understand it, the application to the court is a reference to assist in defining the scope of the audit. So it's quite appropriately before an independent party.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would go on, though, to say, as I've indicated in the House this afternoon in question period, that an interim chair for the Securities Commission will be appointed as early as tomorrow. I can make this commitment to the House: that independent chair is expected to be independent and fair and will not be a current member of the commission. The person who is very soon to be appointed will provide leadership and direction to the Securities Commission during the transitional period and will be able to work with the Securities Commission and the Auditor General to determine whether the issues with respect to the scope of the audit can be resolved without the necessity of the court application.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, the very question in this notice of motion, although badly worded, is the precedent set by the Securities Commission, an agent of the Crown, challenging the legitimate authority of the Auditor General. Obviously, that refers to a matter which is before the court because that's the challenge that they're referring to. In fact, the hon. Leader of the Opposition specifically mentioned the reference being heard next Wednesday.

The only other thing I would add to this issue, Mr. Speaker – these are important issues and subjudice but not urgent, not urgent. In fact, the only effect that will be had by adjourning the ordinary course of business of this House this afternoon, declaring this emergent and necessitating a debate this afternoon, will be to cause the exact result that the hon. leader opposite is trying to avoid: to create fear in the public. If something is so urgent and important that this Legislature determines it to be so and gets the debate on, it's basically saying that there is an issue that needs to be dealt with that the public and the investment community should fear.

In fact, we're not hearing that from the investment community. I think the investment community and others in the community, although it's an issue certainly in the public – it's an issue that certainly needs to be dealt with and resolved, that the Minister of Finance has indicated she is dealing with and resolving. The Auditor General is in place. The scope of the audit is to be determined. That's before the courts. The issue between what authorities and what confidentialities and how that does will be determined by an independent court, as appropriately so.

We ought not to fear monger, Mr. Speaker. We ought not to raise the specter of fear in the community. We ought to let this process work. The interim chair will be an independent chair appointed from outside the commission to carry out the process, to work with the Auditor General, to get to the bottom of things, not to raise fear and scare investor confidence in this province.

It's not urgent because it's being dealt with, because the appropriate processes are in place, and because the very issue that's being raised in the notice of motion is sub judice.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's attitude and the House Leader's seems to be: see no evil, hear no evil, therefore, there's no evil. To say that to have an emergency debate, we'd lose confidence in the Securities Commission is absolutely ridiculous. That confidence has been long gone, if I may say so, for many years if he's been paying any attention at all.

Speaking to the urgency. I mean, I saw the House leader the other day, and he alluded to going after the Leader of the Opposition. He was very exercised when he thought that an officer of this Legislature was being attacked. I remember the debate. Now we're saying that it's okay for this same officer. This is why I think it's urgent. I believe that the Securities Commission is thumbing their nose at an officer of the Legislature, and I think that should be very serious by all matters here. Certainly, the Minister of Finance should take it seriously. I would suggest that all Members of the Legislative Assembly should take that very seriously.

If we allow this to go on and we say that one of our officers cannot be given the documents that he needs – every Auditor General, right across Canada, has access to everything the government does. For them now to say, "Well, no, you can't have that," and, then, when he says, "No, that's not acceptable," then they say "Well, the heck with you; we're going to court," to me that is just absolutely wrong.

If our Securities Act allows them to do that, the first thing we probably should be doing is changing our Securities Act right away. For the minister to say that there are not problems, that all investors are happy, I don't know who he's listening to because that's certainly not the impression I'm getting. To say that having an emergency debate here would hurt the Securities Commission, come on. The Bre-Xs and the Boyle brothers and the whole works of them down through the years have done that already.

We have some serious problems here. We've got to clean it up. I said yesterday that I think we should get rid of the whole group of them and bring in an interim trustee. That would probably give more confidence to investors right across Canada and Alberta than what we're doing here.

The other reason this is an emergency. He talks about sub judice; it's not in the courts yet. The problem is with the reputation of the Securities Commission. If it gets wrapped up in courts, this could go on forever. One of the things the Minister of Finance said at the time was that she wanted the Auditor General to move on this quickly, and I think he said that at the latest he'd have a report in July. Well, we may still be in court in July while this thing goes on.

So I think we have to send a very serious message here. The urgency to me is how many other boards are there in government that are going to do the same thing to the Auditor General and say to you: well, we don't need to bother with this because we have our own little act here, we have our own little act there, and we're not going to give you the information. I think that the House Leader should be as mad about this as he was at the Leader of the Opposition the other day. They're thumbing their nose at him, and they're thumbing their noses at all of us, Mr. Speaker.

If one of the top officers of this Legislature cannot do his job, we're all in serious difficulty. I think we need that discussion, Mr. Speaker. As it now stands, I mean, to try to hide and say that there hasn't been publicity about this and how, you know, this is going to bring it down and that there will be all sorts of terrible things if this

Legislature has a debate about it, well, it's been in all the national papers. It's been in the American papers. We've had calls from American investors. It's all over now. The biggest way we could deal with it – as I say, I think we should have done it a long time ago – is to have an interim trustee and get rid of it and start again. At the very minimum, we can send a message that this Legislature takes it very seriously when one of our officers cannot do their job. I think the Government House Leader should be the first one up saying that and not opposing this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 30(2) states the following:

The member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave and the Speaker may allow such debate as he considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate and shall then rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order.

So now we've heard three speakers. Are there additional members who would like to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would. Any others? I suspect that would be conditional upon what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar might say, so I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and then be prepared to recognize one additional speaker from the government caucus, and then we'll have to bring this to an end.

The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate an opportunity to participate in this urgent debate this afternoon. I've been listening with interest to the three speakers. I would like to briefly remind the entire House, and in particular the Government House Leader, of *Beauchesne* 505 through to 510.

First, 505 indicates that this is a voluntary restriction, sub judice, imposed by the House itself to protect the interest of parties to a case "in the interest of justice and fair play." Sure, we have the potential of an issue before the courts, but justice and fair play appear to be compromised, and a debate in the House may be of some use in re-establishing these and other public interests here. Also with 506 and 507 it indicates in *Beauchesne* that the convention is consistently invoked only in criminal matters, presumably for reasons that are cited above in *Beauchesne* 505.

Now, it's most important with *Beauchesne* 510, and 510 indicates that "the House has never allowed the sub judice convention to stand in the way of its consideration of a matter vital to the public interest or to the effective operation of the House." It would be my view that both apply here as a result of the arguments that have been made earlier by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was hanging on every word from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar because I want to just point out to the House first and foremost that this is not an urgent debate at this time. This is a debate on Standing Order 30 as to whether or not there should be an urgent debate. I would say, Mr. Speaker, in reviewing Standing Order 30 and in particular Standing Order 30(7), where it says: "A motion under this Standing Order is subject to the following conditions: (a) the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency," and it goes on.

I would argue that there isn't a genuine emergency at this time. We see no impact on the markets so far. The markets are working and responding well. Investments are happening. All systems are functioning. There's no evidence of any lack of consumer confi-

dence going on out there. Yes, there's a lot of interest in what's happening, but there certainly isn't any erosion of consumer confidence or consumer participation, so I don't see any sense of urgency in that respect.

The Government House Leader has quite accurately indicated already that the issue stands before the court – we all know what sub judice is – in order to help define the scope of the audit. That particular point has been covered. An interim chair will be appointed I believe he indicated as early as tomorrow or not later than tomorrow or whatever the words were. It would be a very independent choice and so on. So there is no real emergency other than what might exist in the minds of certain members here.

I would just also remind the hon. members of Standing Order 30(6), where it says, "An emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly." That's so correct because this decision will be rendered for the most part right there in the court, where it belongs.

With that, I would argue strongly that this is not a matter of genuine emergency, which is the first requirement, in fact, of Standing Order 30. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the chair is prepared to rule on whether the request for leave for this motion to proceed is in order under Standing Order 30(2). The chair did let the debate continue on the question of urgency because of what the chair considers to be a serious matter.

First, the chair confirms that the Leader of the Official Opposition has given proper notice of his intention to seek permission to present this motion under Standing Order 30. Notice was received by the Speaker's office today at 11:25, and the requirements under Standing Order 30(1) have been met.

Secondly, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed can be put to the Assembly, the chair must rule whether the motion meets the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that "the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration."

The Leader of the Official Opposition's motion reads as follows, and I think it's important, again.

Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the dangerous precedent set by the Alberta Securities Commission, an agent of the Crown, challenging the legitimate authority of the Auditor General, an officer of this Assembly charged to conduct an investigation vital to the public interest.

The relevant parliamentary authorities: *Beauchesne*'s paragraphs 387 and 390 and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 587 to 589.

Now, there has been great attention provided from the chair to this, and the chair has been studying this matter since 10:25 or 10:35 this morning along with a number of the table officers. There's one thing that also is an unavoidable fact related to this whole matter. The chair has also received from the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, the judicial district of Calgary, the originating notice between the Alberta Securities Commission and Fred Dunn, the Auditor General of Alberta. The document does raise a series of questions, and it asks the Court of Queen's Bench to make certain determinations. That is a fact, and that does exist.

The chair's major concern is that by finding the request to be in order, the chair might be taken to imply that proceeding to court for an interpretation of someone's or some entity's jurisdiction constitutes a genuine emergency. The chair wants it to be very, very clear that the chair is not in any way commenting on the merits of the

arguments that have been raised in this matter. The chair is simply noting that it is difficult to find that an application to court for a determination about jurisdiction can constitute a genuine emergency so as to justify an urgent debate.

It is this Speaker's understanding that reviewing the jurisdiction of a person or a tribunal to whom the Legislature has delegated certain responsibility is the primary basis for administrative law. In other words, what we have here is the Alberta Securities Commission, created by an act of this Legislature, and the Auditor General of Alberta, created by an act of this Legislature, going to another tribunal in the province of Alberta, albeit Court of Queen's Bench, asking for an interpretation between the two of them.

At first I thought, by 10:40 this morning, that this was very unique, and this didn't happen very often in the province of Alberta. I've subsequently been advised that this happens quite frequently in the province of Alberta, where the Ethics Commissioner and the FOIP, freedom of information, commissioner have been challenged in the courts for interpretation of what their mandate has been as well.

3:50

There's also something else that is extremely important that all members have to be apprised of. The Canadian House of Commons does not have a specific standing order on sub judice, so when citations are used from *Marleau and Montpetit* or *Beauchesne* in the Canadian House of Commons dealing with civil law and the interpretation of the Canadian House of Commons, one has to remember that they do not have a standing order with respect to a sub judice rule. We do in this Assembly, and Standing Order 23(g)(ii) deals specifically with matters of a civil nature and reads as follows:

A member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that member . . .

(g) refers to any matter pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination . . .

(ii) of a civil nature that has been set down for a trial or notice of motion filed, as in an injunction proceeding, until judgment or from the date of filing a notice of appeal until judgment by an appellate court . . .

It's also very true within our Standing Orders.

. . . where there is probability of prejudice to any party but where there is any doubt as to prejudice, the rule should be in favour of the debate.

There's nothing in this that I can see would be prejudicial to anyone else, but there is something in here that basically says that this matter has been basically set down, and in fact in the document that I have, the originating notice, there's even a time frame on it, Tuesday the 10th day of May at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, to hear certain arguments.

So I'm bothered most of all by this, hon. members: if I were to rule in favour of this particular application, it would cause great difficulty, I believe, into the future for subsequent Speakers to somehow rule anything out under the cause of sub judice, and I would not want to set that precedent with respect to this matter. That's a very serious one, considering that this Assembly has a sub judice Standing Order rule, and this matter has already been delegated to appear before a court. That's one of the purposes of administrative law: to find a ruling if two pieces of legislation may be in conflict with one another.

At the same time, the sub judice rule should not stifle the Assembly's consideration of a bill should there be one before us, but that isn't the case. This is not what the Assembly is considering at this time. It's considering another matter.

This is one of the most interesting questions that we've had before

our Assembly, certainly since I've had the privilege of sitting in this chair, and it certainly has brought in a lot of thought and debate since 10:25 this morning by the esteemed members that sit at the table along with the Speaker. But the conclusion will be that the chair finds that the request is not in order, and the question will not be put by the chair for the reasons given. [interjections] There's no need. There's no winner or loser in this.

Now, before I call Orders of the Day, we have a Standing Order that we have to deal with, and that's 58(5). Standing Order 58(5) is very, very clear that

on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday afternoon, during the consideration of the main estimates, the Committee of Supply shall be called not later than 3:10 p.m. provided that Orders of the Day have already been called and shall rise and report no later than 5:15 p.m.

We need unanimous consent to proceed with the estimates at this point in time.

I'm going to ask two questions. The first one will be the positive one. Will the Assembly agree to unanimous consent to provide, and obviously it's a redundant question, but I'll ask it anyway. The second one: is anybody opposed to proceeding to estimates? If the answer is no, then I'll call Orders of the Day, and we'll see what happens. Some confusion? It's very clear. We had this application last week.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

### Orders of the Day

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, again, I don't want any challenges. The chair will leave the chair now, but the House leaders must have a discussion over the interpretation of the two-hour rule now for estimates. It's five minutes to 4, so with co-operation the Assembly can choose to go to 5:25 and find that there are no more speakers and can make its decision on the estimates, and that would fulfill everything we wanted to do today.

If it arrives at 5:30 and if there's a challenge under the rule – remember that the Deputy Chair of Committees will be in the chair, so this would have to come back to the Assembly – then the advice from the chair would be the following to fulfill the two-hour requirement. There's one hour and 35 minutes available. It means there would be a shortfall of 25 minutes. Then at 9:05 Monday night next there would still be 25 minutes available to conclude these estimates, but that would be still part of the same day.

Please co-operate. Thank you very much.

head:

### Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

head:

### Main Estimates 2005-06

#### Municipal Affairs

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I begin my brief comments regarding the estimates for the Department of Municipal Affairs, let me just acknowledge my appreciation to the members of the opposition for their co-operation in granting unanimous consent prior to dissolving ourselves into committee. I really do appreciate it. I'll do my best to answer all of the questions that we have. Should we run up into a bit of a time constraint, we certainly can

have the relationship that we've developed continue even informally. So thank you to the opposition, and thank you, Mr. Chair, for facilitating.

I'm pleased to present the estimates for Alberta Municipal Affairs. Before I begin, I'd like to introduce the staff from my department who are seated in the gallery. We've been sending notes back and forth, and I'm particularly pleased that they're still there. We're on, so with my thanks for hanging in there, let me introduce to you, Mr. Chairman, and to members of the House the outstanding executive staff that I have working in Municipal Affairs. I've been the minister now since November, and I have to say that I continue to be impressed with the professionalism and quality of not only the executive but all of the public service within this outstanding department.

I'd like to introduce to all members Mr. Dan Bader, deputy minister; Mr. Brian Quickfall, assistant deputy minister, local government services; Mr. Denis St. Arnaud, assistant deputy minister, public safety division; Tara Trelford, acting senior financial officer; Jay O'Neill, communications director; and Richard Westlund, my executive assistant. I'd ask all members to recognize them. They're doing great work on behalf of municipalities in Alberta.

4:00

Mr. Chairman, our ministry works with a variety of stakeholders to ensure that Albertans live in safe, sustainable communities and are served by open, effective, and accountable governments. In the coming year we will pursue six goals: an effective, responsive, cooperative, and well-managed local government sector; financially sustainable and accountable municipalities; a well-managed and efficient assessment and property tax system in which stakeholders have confidence; a comprehensive safety system that provides an appropriate level of public safety; an emergency management program that enables effective preparation for, response to, and recovery from major emergencies and disasters at provincial and local levels; and an independent system that administers appeals and issues timely and impartial decisions of high quality.

As of January 1 of this year the department supports 356 municipalities and 1,931 elected officials in Alberta. Mr. Chairman, just for the information of members, this represents 15 cities, 110 towns, 102 villages, 64 rural municipalities, 51 summer villages, seven improvement districts, four specialized municipalities, and three special areas. I might add, Mr. Chairman, just on a personal note that while I've only been minister for five months, it seems that I've had an opportunity to meet just about every one of those 1,931 municipal officials, and I'm here to tell you that all of those locally elected officials are dedicated to serving their communities and to working as partners with this government. It's the role of Municipal Affairs to ensure that that partnership blossoms and succeeds.

For 2005-06 the expenses and equipment/inventory purchases to be voted for Municipal Affairs total \$128.4 million. This is an increase of \$4.1 million, about 3 per cent, from the 2004-05 budget of \$124.3 million. Revenues for '05-06 are expected to be approximately \$26.2 million.

I'm going to go through each of the various divisions of the ministry and quickly provide a little bit of background information, the first being the local government services. This division is responsible for \$99.2 million of the ministry's expenses: \$78.1 million is for grants to municipalities and other local government entities, and \$21.1 million is for nongrant initiatives such as programs that promote municipal excellence, linear property assessments, and regular assessment audits. The expense total for this division is increasing from \$95.2 million to \$99.2 million, an

increase of \$4 million, primarily due to the inclusion of the Banff/Jasper special infrastructure program in the amount of \$2.5 million.

Funding for local government services supports such activities as the municipal excellence program and other initiatives to improve the knowledge of municipal administrators and elected officials, providing improved linear property assessment, utilizing the Alberta linear property assessment system, conducting detailed assessment audits of municipalities to help ensure that properties are being assessed fairly and consistently, supporting municipalities through facilitation and encouragement of intermunicipal co-operation and self-directed dispute resolution, administering the municipal internship program to work with Alberta's municipalities and train additional future municipal administrators, and also the Minister's Provincial/Municipal Council on Roles, Responsibilities and Resources in the 21st Century. Local government services also administers the department's major grants to municipalities, accounting for \$78.1 million.

The major grant programs are the unconditional municipal grant program, the grants in place of tax program, the financial support to local authorities program, the municipal sponsorship program, and the municipal debenture interest rebate program. Unconditional grants are provided to municipalities for their general use and to help offset some of the cost of restructuring. This program also provides funding for the regional partnerships initiative. Estimates for '05-06 are \$19.7 million.

The grants in lieu of taxes program provides grants to municipalities on certain property owned by the government of Alberta, and the estimates for this are \$31.6 million.

Financial support to local authorities funds a number of initiatives in support of municipal associations: mediation, internships, and, most importantly, the ME First energy savings program. The estimates in this area, Mr. Chairman, this year are \$9.7 million.

The very popular municipal sponsorship program supports municipal innovation and co-operation as well as projects that improve municipal government practices. Estimates for '05-06 are \$13.5 million.

Finally, the municipal debenture interest rebate program subsidizes the interest paid by municipalities on certain high-interest debentures that were borrowed during the times of high interest. This is a program that will remain in place until the retirement of those debentures in about 2010. The estimates for this year are \$3.6 million.

Now on to the specifics of the public safety division, which accounts for approximately \$14 million of the ministry's estimates. Key initiatives in this division include the implementation of an action plan approved in January of this year at the federal/provincial/territorial meeting of ministers responsible for emergency management. This includes plans to establish a national emergency response system to deliver alternate disaster financial assistance options, including improvement of the disaster financial assistance arrangements, and establish a national critical infrastructure protection strategy.

We partner with fire departments to enhance the fire services training initiative. This initiative gives firefighters from across Alberta access to high-quality, certified training at regional centres located throughout the province. Mr. Chairman, just on Tuesday of this week I had the pleasure of attending the fire chiefs annual convention in Jasper, and I spoke to them after their wrap-up banquet. I can tell you that this particular initiative is extremely well supported and appreciated by the fire chiefs and, more importantly, by the many hundreds of individuals who are either professional, full-time firefighters or, in the case of many of our municipalities,

volunteer firefighters, who are expected to step up to the plate and can only be expected to do so with adequate training, which this program provides.

We provide emergency management training to municipal officials and ground search and rescue training to emergency response personnel to enhance their ability to prepare for and respond to emergency situations.

Support for the MLA Review Committee on Secondary Suites, with the publication of the final report on proposed standards expected later on this year.

We appoint an administrator to act as liaison between the Safety Codes Council and Municipal Affairs on barrier-free design and accessibility issues and initiatives. That comes out of a bill, actually, that was passed by this Assembly last year to create an enhanced awareness of issues related to barrier-free design and accessibility. We also continue to monitor the Safety Codes Council's administration of underground petroleum storage tank remediation program. This \$60 million one-time program was created to help municipalities and small retail operators clean up their contaminated sites.

Before I conclude, there are just two other areas I'd like to touch on briefly. First of all, the Municipal Government Board. This board decides property linear and equalized assessment appeals, limited subdivision appeals, annexations, intermunicipal disputes, and other matters referred to me as minister or by cabinet. It continues to provide an independent appeal system that issues timely and high-quality decisions and is committed to hearing and issuing decisions within the legislated time frames despite increasing volumes and greater complexity in appeals. The MGB estimates for '05-06 are about \$2.8 million.

Finally, ministry support services. Ministry support services provides the local government services and public safety divisions with legal, financial, and information technology, communications, human resources, and business and administrative support. This area's estimates for '05-06 are about \$11.2 million.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman, I believe Municipal Affairs has a strong business plan and a solid budget to achieve our goals and objectives. I look forward to addressing any questions members may have for me at this time, and at this point I will resume my seat and invite members to participate with questions.

#### 4:10

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the comments from the minister, and I appreciate the opportunity to discuss a range of issues back and forth. I think he's off to a very constructive start as the minister in this department.

My first questions are three or four points that are, I think, related generally, and they tend to be big issues rather than going line by line and why so many dollars here and not there and that kind of thing. We all recognize the growing importance of municipalities and the municipal level of government to our province and to our society and, I think, to the future of the province. There are, in fact, people who put forward the argument that we will eventually evolve into city states, in which you get regions dominated by cities and municipalities, and some people suspect that the powers of the provinces may shift gradually to the municipalities.

I've no idea, of course, what the future has, but my first general question to the minister would be this. Are there initiatives under way or staff in his department or projects afoot – in fact, I believe there are – that are looking way down the road at the future role of municipalities? Decisions we make this year and next year have implications in some cases for decades or centuries. I think of this

city and the decision made a hundred years ago to keep development out of the river valley. What an amazing impact that has had on this city, as one example, or the city of Medicine Hat, how the river valley development there, the way it's proceeding, is quite lovely in some areas and has tremendous long-term consequence. So I am wondering what resources, what thinking is going on in the minister's department and perhaps through other agencies, looking at the long-term future role of municipalities: what their mandates ought to be and what powers, perhaps, should be being enhanced by municipalities so that they can proceed.

My second question to the minister – I think he's taking notes, so that's great – relates to the first. Is there any consideration at all being given to an amendment to the Alberta act to recognize and solidify legislative authority of municipalities? The Municipal Government Act is probably one of the most important pieces of legislation that we have in this province, but it's constantly being changed, and there are times – and I know this first-hand from municipal councillors – when local municipalities feel like the ground they're standing on legislatively is not as firm as they would like.

An example from the last session of the Legislature had to do with removing the authority of municipalities to determine the location of intensive livestock operations. That unnerved a lot of municipalities. They wanted to have a direct say and, frankly, direct control over locations of intensive livestock operations. They wanted to be able to address issues of water supply and noise and smell and wear and tear on the roads and property values, and their power to make those decisions was removed by this Legislature. There is a feeling in some circles that if there was a more solid legislative and jurisdictional basis for municipalities in the Alberta act, municipalities would feel more secure in their authority.

So those are linked issues around: is there any consideration, has there been any study given to amending the Alberta act and to solidifying the jurisdictional authority of municipalities?

Finally, a question around regional planning issues, again reflecting on experience in the capital city and the capital region and the loss of the regional planning commissions 10 years ago or so, which in the view of many has aggravated the difficulties of many municipalities in one economic zone working together. I'm sure that the minister is very well aware of the issues. So I am really asking: are there any plans afoot in the business plans to relaunch some equivalent to the regional planning commissions or else to address those issues of regional co-ordination among competing or co-operating municipalities through some other means?

I'll look forward to the minister's comments on those issues, and then I've got some more specific ones. Is that okay? Thanks.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Renner:** Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I think that that is pretty much a good summarization of the biggest issues that we spend our time thinking about, and I'm pleased to provide some insight. As the member indicated even at the outset, these were not necessarily specific to line items in the budget but a little bit more philosophical. I think that they probably deserve some consideration, and this is as good a time as any to deal with them.

First of all, with respect to the governance issues and the reference to city states, I think that we do have to give it some consideration. In fact, we have begun probably a prolonged process of deciding on how this evolution should proceed. Prior to '95, when the last substantive amendments were made, in fact when the rewrite of the MGA, the Municipal Government Act, was done, the relationship between the province and the municipalities was much more restrictive.

When the changes were made to the Municipal Government Act in '95, I, like many others in the House, was here at the time. I remember the discussion that went on, and the issue was that municipalities have to have the ability to determine many more of their own priorities at the local level. One of the biggest changes that was made in that rewrite was that municipalities were given person powers, so municipalities were then recognized as an entity. Believe it or not, prior to that, they were not. They were simply extensions of the provincial government.

So we made a significant change to the way municipalities are recognized in law in those amendments in '95. We've lived with those now for approximately 10 years, and I think it's probably sufficient time for us now to sit back and analyze exactly how well that rewrite has worked. Is it appropriate? Is that the appropriate level of independence? Do we need to take it one step further? I think it comes as no surprise to anyone that in particular the big-city mayors, Calgary and Edmonton, but to some extent other leaders within the municipal community are now beginning to have that look forward and are saying: maybe it's time that we start to think about what is the next step forward.

I'm not in a position to make commitments today, and I've said the same thing when I've met with the mayors, but I am prepared to commit to engaging in some serious discussion. I think the first step is for all of us to get our collective heads around what the vision for that next evolution would look like. In that regard, I have committed to sitting down with the municipal leadership over the next short period of time to do just a little bit of that blue-sky visioning on an informal basis. Where do we see this next evolution of the Municipal Government Act? How would it operate, and what would it look like? Until we can get those big-picture ideas around it and have everyone understand what everyone else is thinking, it's probably premature to start to get into a lot of detail. Needless to say, we do have resources within Municipal Affairs that can and will be allocated to that detail when we get to that point.

#### 4:20

The other issue, I think, on that whole area that constantly has to be impacted is that governance issues can't be determined independent of funding and resources. That's why my predecessor established the three Rs committee: roles, responsibilities, and resources. Much of the work of that committee up to this point has concentrated on the resources side. What we have been contemplating in having discussions within Municipal Affairs is: where should we be taking that? What's the next logical progression? We've even contemplated whether or not it should almost evolve into the four Rs, add a fourth R, and that would be relationships – roles, responsibilities, resources, and relationships – because that is becoming critical to the long-term sustainability of municipalities as well. It's how they interact and how they work among themselves and how the relationship with each other and with the provincial government should evolve. So I see that as being the next progression.

I think that we have to clearly identify whether or not there is a long-term future in municipalities being primarily dependent on property taxes as the sole source of revenue. There are ongoing discussions there. Now, there's some opportunity for the province to hand over a whole lot of tax room if this Assembly and the government can determine what to do with the education property tax. There have been motions passed by this House, there have been motions passed by the municipal organizations requesting that the government move away from its dependence on municipal property tax for the funding of education. I think that there are really two sides to that.

On one side of the equation, there's no doubt that that would

enhance the ability of municipalities to conduct their business and to provide services to their municipalities, but at the same time we have to recognize that that's about \$1.4 billion that the provincial government is going to have to reallocate and find the money somewhere else. I've suggested to municipalities that it would be in everyone's best interest, both the province and the municipalities, if we could have some discussion over the next period of time about whether the roles and responsibilities side of this three-R equation can be adjusted. There may be some things now that municipalities are sharing responsibility for with the province, or there may even be some areas where the province has responsibility at this point in time that would more properly be delivered at the municipal level.

So when the day comes to have some serious discussion on this changeover or the progressive rollover, however it happens to be, if we could have some agreement on how that shifting, if necessary or if reasonable or if responsible, would take place, it maybe doesn't have to be a \$1.4 billion discussion. Maybe it could be a discussion of a smaller magnitude, which would be much easier for me to convince my colleagues is a step forward. So we've had those kinds of discussions.

Regarding the changes to the MGA, I think I've sort of covered that somewhat. There isn't at this point a plan in place to make changes to the MGA, but as I've discussed, I am prepared to sit down with municipalities. I think that we've had now 10 years under the existing legislation. There have been from time to time changes that were made, usually at the request of municipalities, quite frankly, where there is fine-tuning that comes up and needs to be done.

But the member points out that municipalities are looking for, in addition to the long-term sustainable funding, a greater role in the legislative side of things and how they're governed. Again, without making commitments, I have indicated to them that I am prepared to have that discussion as well. I think that 10 years is enough for us, both sides, to have a good feel for where we're going, and it may be time for us to think about that next generation.

The whole issue of regional planning and land planning is something that I've become much attuned to in the short time that I've been minister. When regional planning commissions were in place, things were not all rosy. There were disputes; there were conflicts. The difference was that there was a conflict resolution process that made a decision. Notwithstanding the fact that many people didn't like the decision, at least a decision was made. The substitute, what has replaced regional planning commissions, is an emphasis on mediation, on working together, on consensus building and having municipalities come to agreements on annexations, for example, on land planning, to do it on a voluntary basis, on regional plans that are done, that are negotiated rather than imposed, and for the most part they've worked quite well.

We are now running into some areas where the mediated, negotiated approach is running into some brick walls, so I think that we are going to have to in a relatively short period of time in the future revisit the idea, again not necessarily by reverting to regional planning commissions and all of the inherent problems that were there, but maybe there is something in between where we can continue to have the emphasis on co-operation, consensus building but at the same time have an ultimate dispute resolution process that all parties can agree to that won't be seen to be creating such winners and losers that were inherent in the regional planning commission.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Very good comments from the

minister. Good luck in those considerations. I hope many people have the opportunity to be involved, including the opposition.

My next set of questions are somewhat more specific, and they cover three different areas. The first is around public transit. I represent a constituency which has an intense network of public transit systems in it. In Edmonton-Riverview, which has the University of Alberta in it and a huge transit hub, there's LRT expansion under way. That's an area that I've lived in almost my whole life, and when my family first moved there, when I was a little boy, it was actually the edge of the city. The end of my neighbourhood was countryside, and now it's considered an inner-city neighbourhood.

In the '70s there was great excitement because the LRT was being built in Edmonton, and then, you know, by the early '90s I think it was going to extend for miles and miles to the south. It is only now, I think later this year – I think it might be this December or something like that – that the LRT is going to finally reach the surface at the university, and maybe in some number of years in the future we'll actually begin to realize the dream that was at one time intended to be achieved 20 years ago.

The reason that the citizens have had to wait so long for the LRT extension is, of course, that it's very expensive, especially the way it has been managed in Edmonton, and funding has not been predictable or reliable. Clearly, the federal government has a role in financing this kind of effort, but also the provincial government has a role. So my question, really, to the minister is around plans for predictable, reliable, multiyear financing to the municipalities, especially the really large ones, on public transit, including rail transit.

4:30

My second question is a different kind of question. I can't remember the program name – I think the minister actually alluded to it in his comments – the petroleum tank remediation program. I think that's the right name. I spent a fair bit of time last summer driving around the province, and I was struck by the number of times I'd pull into a small-town gas station and go in and introduce myself and get a real conversation going in a moment with the gas station owner who owned a station where the tank was decades and decades old, and there was concern about leakage, and there were no resources available to clean up the site.

The value of the gas station in terms of reselling it was nil because nobody was going to buy it. I can think of two different cases off the top of my head where the family, who had built this business up and wanted to retire on the sale of the business, couldn't sell it because of the contamination.

I also think of the large site on Whyte Avenue, 105th Street, an old Imperial Oil station, a prime, prime piece of property on one of the province's more famous streets, Whyte Avenue, sitting there. It has sat empty for years, unused because of petroleum contamination. I must say that it makes me very unhappy to look at the record profits being made by Imperial Oil, and then I go by an old Imperial Oil gas station site which is contaminated beyond usage in a prime area of Edmonton, and they are not held accountable to clean that up. I think we're missing out on holding the right people accountable.

My question to the minister really is: what resources are in the budget and what plans are in the business plan to aggressively pursue rehabilitation of these sites?

My third question has to do with the ambulance transfer, which was a very contentious issue, as the minister well knows, earlier this year. It had a real impact on municipalities and on the provincial taxpayer. If he can give us some indication of what's going to

proceed, from his perspective, through this next budget year to sort out the ambulance transfer issue and the role of the municipalities in delivering that service to their citizens.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Renner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to try and shorten my answers. I've been advised by the House leaders that there are discussions ongoing. I will try and shorten my answers, but if I'm not able to answer all of the questions this afternoon, I will make a commitment that we'll have answers in writing that will be provided. But these questions, I think, are relatively straightforward.

The issue of long-term funding, I think, is something that is unquestionably a concern for municipalities. We have in place a couple of things in this area, neither of which, unfortunately or fortunately – I'm not sure which – are within Municipal Affairs' budget. The kind of funding that the member is referring to is infrastructure funding and so actually comes through infrastructure's budget. Nevertheless, there's usually a great deal of input from Municipal Affairs and the minister of infrastructure and the Minister of Municipal Affairs. For example, on this latest round the \$3 billion had a great deal of discussion, and Municipal Affairs was very much part of the decision-making process.

There is a commitment by the province to five years at this point in time. There's also a commitment in place with respect to the larger cities and the gasoline tax, an agreement that we have in place with municipalities. The member also made reference to the federal government, and I have to say that it really is good that the federal government has finally stepped up to the plate, has recognized that there is a role for the federal government.

At lunch today I was just visiting with AUMA, who were holding an excellent mayors' conference in Edmonton for professional development for elected officials at the municipal level. I talked to them about the new deal and the commitment that the province has made that every penny that flows through on the new deal from the federal government will flow through entirely to the municipalities. The province has made a commitment that should the federal government come through with their promise for funding for municipalities, there will be a complete and utter flow through directly to municipalities from the province. There are a couple of things that we can do to assist municipalities, but, as I mentioned, in the long term I think we have to have a look at funding sources and taxation areas, and those are bigger questions than we're going to resolve here this afternoon.

The underground storage tank situation. I mentioned that that was funded out of a one-time expenditure of \$60 million. Unfortunately, there is nothing in this budget to extend that program. There are still some dollars that were left in that fund to finish off some of the projects that were started. That \$60 million was actually in the hands of the Safety Codes Council, so that has been expended over a number of years, and there are some existing files that are being finished off out of the dollars.

It is my hope that we can extend that program at some point in the future with another, perhaps, one-time investment, keeping in mind that the government has committed to review one-time and capital expenditures once the surplus situation becomes much clearer throughout the year. I may just end up back at Treasury Board at some point along the line, but at this point there are no additional dollars for the program.

The program was designed to deal with individual property owners and municipalities that were dealing with contaminated sites. The program never was intended to deal with issues such as the member pointed out with respect to major oil companies, and that is

a concern of mine because it's not just Whyte Avenue in Edmonton. There are towns throughout Alberta that have two or three or sometimes four corners of their major downtown intersections that are dealing with the same situation. I think that's something that, hopefully, we can work with in conjunction with Environment, on dealing with enforcement of standards. The issue is like many other things in that as long as you don't change the use of the land, there isn't a requirement to decontaminate.

So that is a concern, and a number of municipalities have brought it to my attention, and that's something that I would hope that we can work with Environment on to step up the enforcement and perhaps even consider whether there should be some time frames put in place. There are two sides every time you consider something like that because if you're going to affect the large oil companies, you're also going to affect the little guy, that may not have financial resources. It is a good concern, and it's something that we haven't been unaware of.

Finally, on the issue of ambulance transfer. Again, this is something that's not in my budget. We assist the health minister with population figures and those kinds of things. I think it would probably be inappropriate for me to comment on what the future of ambulance service is. I will comment, though, that municipalities certainly made it clear to me that there were inconveniences, to say the least, imposed upon them, and I will be making it as clear to the health minister that before we proceed with another ambulance plan, municipalities have got to be sure that the plan is done right and it is sustainable on a long-term basis. So you have my commitment to work with the minister on that.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Certainly, as a former municipal councillor I'm delighted to hear some of the remarks from the minister, particularly in the area of the blue-sky visioning, because really I do believe that we've hit the point where we have to start seriously looking at what you called the fourth R, the relationships. I think it's very important that municipalities do retain an autonomy because they are, after all, the politicians that are closest to the people and are responsible in certainly a far closer fashion than we that sit in this House.

**4:40**

I will be brief with my comments and my questions if I might. In the annual report of the Auditor General under the heading of Scope it stated that there was a follow-up on the prior-year recommendation that the ministry "not advance funds to other organizations to acquire its own assets." I wonder if you could clarify for me which part of the budget those funds would come from and what, in fact, organizations were being referenced? Are we still doing that practice?

Also, what form of accounting does this ministry use? Is it the Canadian generally accepted accounting principles form?

I've noted that the ministry has contracted out to a private-sector service provider for the operation and maintenance of their IT system. Who is this private firm? If it's not wholly Canadian, would the information shared by municipalities with the ministry be subject to the Home Protection Act of the United States, which in fact would allow FBI and CIA access to this particular information? What other changes have been made since the Auditor General made the recommendations from last year?

Further, one last thing. We spoke about an expanded tax base to give municipalities greater potential to serve the unique needs of their residents. I'm glad that you said that there would be consulta-

tion because I feel that it could be a slippery slope. I'm not sure that it's exactly fair that municipalities would be – and I'm not going to use the word "forced" because it would be collaborative if what you're saying would occur – to raise the taxes for infrastructure or services that are rightly the province's responsibility and that have been downloaded in part over the past number of years.

For instance, the mandate for the municipalities to collect off-site levies for infrastructure from developers, who of course only pass those costs on to the new homeowners, is really just another name for an infrastructure tax. I would suspect that municipalities would entertain the idea of the ability to be able to expand that tax base and certainly increase their revenues if there was an assurance that by collecting those taxes, there would also be a decrease of what the province would take from those taxes when we collected them and that they wouldn't all end up in the provincial coffers.

You've already spoken of consultations with the municipalities. I guess that another question would be: if the tax structure did change and the municipalities were allowed to collect in different fashions, who actually would pay for the extra administration costs to implement that idea? How would this idea really contribute to stable, equitable, and predictable funding for municipalities, who at this point are all struggling to try to stay ahead of their budgets that have gone south on them?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, the first three questions were technical in nature, and I think that they're probably appropriately addressed in writing, so I will commit to get those answers.

The final question was: who would pay for administration? I think that's getting down the technical road a long ways from the theoretical discussion that I was suggesting we have with municipalities. Obviously, the whole issue of costs related to taxation are the responsibility of the authority that collects the taxes. I don't think we want to go down that road until we've had a lot more discussion. I didn't suggest for a moment that I was supporting additional avenues of taxation for municipalities. What I said and what I've consistently said was that I'm prepared to have the discussion, but until I hear what is being proposed, I don't want to make any kinds of commitments, nor do I want to infer that there is any kind of commitment on our part.

The issue of off-site levies and property tax. The discussions that I've had with municipalities and with developers on off-site levies indicate that there is some need for some further clarification on exactly what was intended and what can and cannot be or, more importantly, what should and should not be included under off-site levies. That discussion is ongoing, and hopefully we will come to some kind of a consensus on that soon because there is some confusion on both sides of the issue, quite frankly.

Finally, the area of property tax. When I suggested that municipalities could have a higher share of property tax, that was based on the premise that the province would give tax room, would walk away from the education property tax and then provide some tax room to municipalities. So, again, purely speculative. Food for thought. But there certainly would not be any intent – in fact, I think the taxpayers would make it pretty clear: this was not an idea that the cities would simply pay for infrastructure by raising taxes. The idea was that if the province could find alternate sources for education, there may be some tax room there for municipalities.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have just a general comment, and then I have a number of very specific questions that



I don't expect the minister to necessarily have time to deal with today, but in writing, because they're perhaps too specific.

The only general comment I'd like to make at the start: I'm not sure how you do it, but it seems to me that as long as I've been involved in the political world, there has always been a discussion, for lack of a better term, of revenue sharing; in other words, how best to get money from the provincial government to the municipal governments. I remember a statement by one former, long before this minister's time, where he called the municipal governments the children of the province. That didn't go over very well at the time. You can appreciate that.

I think that it's still a concern. The municipal governments would like to have some way, in terms of revenue sharing, that they know what's coming: less tied-in grants, less yearly fluctuations in terms of how much money is coming in provincially, and the rest of it. I guess the point I'm making is that it's all the same taxpayers, and they as a government are in some ways closer to the public than we are. I think it would be helpful if we could do that.

Now, I know that when you talk about revenue sharing, there are probably a hundred different models of being able to do that. As a general comment, I think if we can move in that direction, everybody's better served. I think those at that level have never believed that because we're elected to the provincial level, somehow we're smarter than the people who are elected at that level. The people at the local level, whether they be in rural Alberta or the city of Edmonton, city of Calgary, Lethbridge, wherever the case may be, are the ones, I think, that can best make those decisions.

I would encourage the minister, and I'm not sure if they're looking at various funding models in terms of the discussions he's having with the municipalities, but as a general concept – and I don't, as I say, have a magic wand here to figure out how to do it – I really do believe that revenue sharing of some sort would be a way to go.

Very quickly, the questions I have, and again the minister can go to whatever he wants, but perhaps in writing.

Page 294 of the government estimates for Municipal Affairs indicates an increase, I believe, of 15 full-time equivalent employment positions. I'm sort of interested in what new positions are being created and which unit they will be employed in and, of that, how many are management and nonmanagement positions. I don't know if this is correct or not, but it's been brought to our attention that this department is experiencing difficulties in filling vacant positions that they currently have. I wonder if that's the case, and if so, how is the minister addressing this issue?

4:50

The AUMA and AAMD and C participated in a preliminary consultation on the restructuring of the Municipal Government Act over the past few years. I think the key point is that other key stakeholders at this time or before were not consulted. I guess questions flowing from that. Are the continuation of restructuring of the Municipal Government Act project costs included in the estimates provided, and if so, is the minister considering a full consultation with all the affected stakeholders, municipalities, and professional associations referenced in the Municipal Government Act? Is it the agenda of this minister to continue to move references currently contained in the act to regulations? We've seen some direction there. What assurances can the minister provide to municipalities and associations that regulatory changes will not be made without their input? Will the minister continue to use the excuse of the restructuring project to hold up other requests for changes in the Municipal Government Act?

Moving along, do the estimates include funding to work on other

legislative and regulatory amendments this year? If so, what acts and regulations are affected, and what commitment will the minister make that all affected stakeholders will be consulted?

Another area. The budget for the Municipal Government Board and the assessment services unit are included in these estimates. Now, Telus has appealed its linear assessment, as the minister is well aware, to the Municipal Government Board for several years, and it's cost taxpayers in this province I believe at a minimum several hundred thousands of dollars to defend the linear assessments prepared by this province. Taxpayers in the province pay for the operation of the Municipal Government Board, who are ruling against the assessments prepared by the same ministry that their operating costs are funding. The question is: is the Municipal Government Board making poor decisions, or is the province preparing inaccurate assessments? What amount has this minister included in these estimates to defend the linear appeals of Telus and other companies appealing their linear assessments? Any information we can get in that whole area of linear assessments.

Next question: how much funding is included in these estimates to research and to update regulated assessment rates? Can farmers who are already affected by BSE and extremely low rates for grain expect increases in their property assessed with regulated rates provided by the province?

I want to just quickly cover the database that was created over the past few years to collect and analyze asset information collected by all the municipalities in this province. How much funding for the continuation of this project is included in these estimates, and how is the confidential information on assets of businesses and individuals who own land and property in this province protected from entering the hands of criminals? Of course, we're coming from what happened in Health, and we're just asking if there are any concerns there, what the protections are. The grant funds to municipalities and private companies were distributed over the past three years in reference to the asset project. How much funding is included in this year's estimates for additional grants?

Finally, funds included on page 288 under Expense, Unconditional Municipal Grants, include funding for more grant funds to be distributed without conditions. How can this government be held accountable when they continually give out grants with no conditions?

Are funds included in these estimates to provide education to the public on how to understand their assessment and education taxes? That, as the minister knows, has become a major issue. We wonder if that information is being communicated to the public, and if so, how?

Are funds included in these estimates for municipalities to cover off the cost of calculating, collecting, and including the education property tax and assessment notices? If not, is it the intention of this minister to force municipalities to perform these duties through legislative requirements when they're already short of resources to adequately maintain their municipalities?

Those are very specific questions to the minister. I don't expect answers now because I know that they're fairly detailed, but I would like to get these sorts of questions, if I could, written when the minister has time because I think there are some very important issues in there.

In conclusion, because I know that there are other members who want to get in, I do want to thank the minister for his commitment from the bill that went through the Legislature on the community revitalization levy. He knows that we have some concerns about that. As I said in the past, I think that can be a good thing or a bad thing depending how it goes forward. The minister has given his commitment, and I thank him for that. At that time we'll bring our

concerns, at the regulations, so I won't bore him here with that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Chairman, there were about three questions there that I would like to answer. I'm also cognizant of the fact that others want to speak. What I would suggest that we do is I'll take notes, we'll let others speak, and then if there's time for me to answer questions, I'll do it at the end. Then anybody who wants to get their questions on the record will have an opportunity to do so.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to participate in this budget debate on the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. Frankly, when I went through the budget and through the business plan, I felt that this is a ministry whose budget has the potential to receive very little debate in this Chamber if certain easy and simple criteria are met. If this ministry runs as the people want it to and if its decisions are reached only after full consultation with the stakeholders – the cities, towns, villages, and communities of this province – then we as the opposition members will only have to give it the nod of approval. I would be the first member in line to congratulate this minister on a job well done. There are two simple rules – consultation and listening to the people – and if met would make this budget pretty undebatable.

I would remind the minister that when we were discussing Bill 28, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2005, we as the Official Opposition indicated our support for it. We threw our weight behind it, and rightly so. The ministry consulted with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, and they, too, agreed with what was proposed. However, I heard from people on boards or the city councils in Edmonton and Calgary, at least, that they were not fully integrated in this consultation process. The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association was involved quite heavily. These individual boards or councils have to be more informed and more involved in the decision-making process. They agreed with the law, by the way. They agreed with the amendment, but they just wanted to be involved at an earlier stage.

I would urge the minister that maybe in the future at least the largest six cities, maybe not every single town and every single village but the largest cities in the province, like Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Red Deer, and Fort McMurray, could be involved parallel to and in conjunction with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association.

My questions today are really simple and straightforward. Number one: why is spending for public safety estimated at only \$14 million for this fiscal year, 2005-06, compared to the actual spending of \$21 million in 2003-04 or the \$37 million or \$38 million in the 2004-05 government forecast? Public safety is definitely a top priority and should be on this government's front burner. I'm talking about things like safety services, fire protection, emergency response training, emergency management, et cetera. It would make sense to allocate the funds initially and then hope that we never have to use it. It's like buying insurance. You buy insurance, you pay the premiums, and you hope that you never have to use the insurance or never have to collect on it.

Again, we want to invest fully and adequately in things like emergency services and training and hope that we never face an emergency or a disaster instead of this government's preferred practice where it underestimates the expenditures to make the budget look cosmetically good and prudent. Then almost all the ministries and the departments would turn around and come back to this Assembly 10 or 11 months later, and they're asking for supplementary supply, which adds up to thousands of millions of dollars every year.

My take on this is: there is one taxpayer, there is one client, and all three levels of government are in place to serve that client. So we have the federal, the provincial, and the municipal bodies. They all have one purpose in existence and that is to serve the voter and the taxpayer.

5:00

So my question is: what is the point, then, of having a budget, approving a budget, if we inject money into it after the fact year in and year out? So I would rather see them budget more, and if we don't have to use it, fine. We can say that the budget was more than what we needed, which is a good thing, rather than lowballing it and using a smaller or a lesser estimate and then having to inject more money into it in supplementary supply.

Furthermore, we as the Official Opposition encourage the government to implement a plan, again in consultation with the municipalities, which would set out what expenditures are needed and when – so it's more of a planning approach – the future cost of maintenance and maintaining capital assets, things that we have to build and things that we have to fix, how the assets will be financed, and how much the municipality needs to spend to meet its ongoing financial obligations.

Delegation of authority is good. Allowing autonomy and flexibility is really good in decision-making, and that's one thing. But the other thing is downloading debt onto municipalities. I would make the comparison to what happened with the school boards, for example, when the government said, "You guys are responsible," but then we don't empower them. We don't furnish them with the tools that they need to carry on their duties, and they look bad. They're the bad guy, when, in fact, the government is undermining them by making them stand there and look responsible, but they're not being empowered enough.

So downloading debt onto the municipalities is definitely unacceptable. This is a province that claims to be debt free, and this is a province and this is a government which made it illegal to be in the red, made it illegal to accumulate any type of debt. However, having said that, why are we asking the municipalities to be responsible for picking up the tab for the \$8 billion infrastructure debt? Maybe the hon. minister would say, "Well, this is a question for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation," which is fine, but I think this government is one body. It's one caucus. So I don't think it's fair to the municipalities to say, "Here you go. You are responsible. You are autonomous. You are fully elected and duly elected. Carry on your duties," but then, "You know what? We'll only fund you this much."

Recently we heard about the \$3 billion announcement over a few years, but, for example, Edmonton is going to only get \$670-some million dollars, when, in fact, they need double that. And this is only one city. So I can extrapolate and talk about the other cities as well and then also the smaller communities, which are in dire need of help.

If we're enjoying the benefits of surpluses and enjoying the benefits of huge oil revenues, I think the Alberta Liberal idea to invest 25 per cent of the surplus in a capital account makes sense, and it's really something that I would urge the hon. minister to consider to empower the municipalities to eliminate their \$8 billion infrastructure debt, you know, within eight or 10 or 12 years, which is a reasonable expectation, rather than spending the surplus money on, you know, the heritage fund, which the government doesn't like too much. So I think a capital account investment would be a superior and a more acceptable approach.

Again, we want to invest fully and adequately in things like emergency services and training and hope that we never face an emergency or a disaster instead of this government's preferred practice where it underestimates the expenditures to make the budget look cosmetically good and prudent. Then almost all the ministries and the departments would turn around and come back to this Assembly 10 or 11 months later, and they're asking for supplementary supply, which adds up to thousands of millions of dollars every year.

With that, I would cede the floor and encourage further debate or listen to the hon. minister. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak to the Municipal Affairs budget. As the elected member for Edmonton-Ellerslie a large part of my riding encompasses Mill Woods. It's no secret that my constituents are concerned about safety, not only my constituents but all Albertans, of course. They want their government to ensure their safety.

Mr. Chairman, today marks VE Day. I'm grateful for the sacrifices made by the veterans. They gave so that we all could enjoy a life of freedom and security. It is security that many people do not enjoy because of the criminal elements that exist. People want guarantees that when they lock their doors at night, families will be safe. Families also want to know that when they go for a walk, they will be safe, and so there needs to be more investment in the form of front-line men and women police officers. Our community at large desires nothing less. With the spending reduction of \$23.7 million for public safety, what will this ministry do to ensure the safety of our community at large and all Albertans?

Women or ladies who may be extra aware of or embarrassed about their shape have low self-esteem and no motivation. Certainly, there are spas or exercise clubs, et cetera, but what can the government do to encourage them to pursue a more active and more integrated lifestyle? There is also the angle with respect to immigrant women who come here, and they are not even made aware of what's available to them, which programs are there for them to lose weight or keep fit or simply to interact with other female members of the community at large, to make them more comfortable, make them feel welcome, and allow them to get fit and be happier and more satisfied.

Mr. Chairman, I have some general questions I want to ask the hon. minister. When you make long-term plans, how do you identify, investigate, or facilitate all options to improve the quality of the projects, any project?

Number two, in my riding there's the Ellerslie Rugby Club. That site is already sold. They are searching for a new suitable site that would have long-term sustainability. Can the minister tell us the latest situation of this rugby club?

Mr. Chairman, municipalities currently have a municipal infrastructure debt estimated at between \$7 billion and \$9 billion. This is a result of decreased provincial transfers to municipalities as well as a downloading of provincial responsibilities onto municipalities. Municipalities need a stable plan that will assess their needs in advance and ensure that there are no funding shortfalls that will lead to massive infrastructure debt. Will this government provide Alberta's municipalities with the tools to raise revenue to deal with their changing and increasing needs?

I want to ask some financial questions. What is the reasoning behind the spending reduction of \$23.7 million for public safety? With continued devastating structural fires throughout Alberta that destroy the homes and businesses of Albertans, why is the budget being reduced by \$116,000 for the fire commissioner? Prevention, advance awareness, and rapid responses to disasters are necessary to protect Albertans throughout the province when disaster occurs. However, there has been a \$395,000 reduction in the budget for branch management under the emergency management.

Mr. Chairman, this budget provides a spending increase of \$364,000 for unconditional municipal grants. How will these grants benefit municipalities, and how will accountability of these grants be monitored? How will the spending increase of \$229,000 in

financial support to local authorities assist municipalities? The budget increased by 50 per cent, an amount of half a million dollars, for municipal sponsorship expenses. What is the reason for such a drastic budgetary increase, and how will this money be allocated?

Thank you.

5:10

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wasn't sure if the minister was going to answer now or later. I have a number of comments and some questions as well for the minister. First of all, I'd like to speak briefly about the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford and the fact that it encompasses the interchange at 23rd Avenue and Calgary Trail, which has obviously been in the news a lot over the last year. Certainly, I recognize that with the \$1 billion infrastructure grant that has finally come forward, Edmonton is benefiting to the tune of about \$670 million, I think, and having spoken to Edmonton's councillors, they're actually quite appreciative of that.

However, I will remind this House that during last year's campaigning, it was certainly an issue at that time that the \$1 billion that had been expected by the city of Edmonton had suddenly morphed into \$750 million, and now that we have the actual formula defined, it's been reduced again to \$670 million. It was certainly a concern for residents of Edmonton-Rutherford and, quite frankly, anybody who drives through the south end of the city that proceeding with that particular project might be delayed if, in fact, the original \$1 billion ended up being somewhat less than that. Thanks to the foresight of city council, they've decided to proceed with that particular project even though the money is somewhat less than most of us had been expecting at some point.

Likewise I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview spoke of the LRT and the fact that it's now finally emerging from underground at the University hospital, and again city council is using the money that has come forward from Municipal Affairs to begin the next phase of bringing the LRT down to the old Heritage Mall site, where the current Century Park development is going to take place. Again, there had been some concern when that development was being contemplated at city council that anything less than the \$1 billion might cause that to be set back, and city council has in their wisdom decided to proceed with that.

Unfortunately, what it means is that a number of other smaller projects, smaller than the interchange at 23rd Avenue and Calgary Trail and smaller than the planned expansion of the LRT, are going to have to now take a back seat. Certainly, when we met with city council recently as an opposition caucus, as I said, they were very appreciative of the money they are getting, but it does mean that other areas are going to have to be held back, and I think that is unfortunate.

Of course, the minister well knows that the city of Edmonton is undertaking a census, I think, as we speak to come up with more current numbers, and I imagine that the minister will be hearing from the city once they have those numbers showing that Edmonton has grown substantially compared to some other centres in recent years and perhaps we should even have received more funding.

I'd like to ask a couple of questions specific to the core business goals on page 367. Goal 1.4 talks about acting as "an advocate for municipalities within the provincial government to improve provincial responsiveness to municipal issues and concerns." I know that when my colleague from Edmonton-McClung spoke a few minutes ago, he complimented you, the ministry that is, on the job that you had done in terms of consultation with the AUMA on Bill

28, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2005. I know, having spoken to a number of members of AUMA myself, in fact, that there was good consultation.

But I was surprised – and I know we’ve relayed this information to you previously, I think – to learn upon speaking to a number of councillors themselves and a number of mayors themselves that they weren’t aware of the fact that that bill was before the House. I’m sure that it could be argued that that’s a breakdown in communications within the AUMA, but I would hope that the ministry would take that to note that, perhaps, we as a government could have done a better job of making sure that all of the various councils knew that there were amendments coming to the MGA, not just simply communicating that to the AUMA and trusting that they would then disseminate that information to everybody who might be affected. If we could have actually communicated directly with the various municipalities, I would think that that might have served us well.

Goal 1.5 under the core business goals talks about “an enhanced review of the Local Authorities Election Act [to] ensure that it is achieving desired results.” Of course, this is a timely goal, and I’m sure that’s why it’s in here, given some of the things that took place in Calgary during the most recent municipal election. But let’s be mindful that there were some serious concerns about irregularities in the Edmonton municipal election as well. I’d ask the minister if he could clarify for us just exactly what that review will entail, what it will look like, and what the timelines are on it so that we would have that information. I know of several people that have been involved in working on municipal elections, and they’re quite anxious to see the results of this particular review. So if you could share with us exactly what that would look like, I would appreciate it.

Now to a few more specific questions. At page 292 of the ministry estimates under Revenue – and you may have answered this already. I’ve been popping in and out a few times this afternoon, and I might have missed it. Transfers from the federal government are down \$12 million. I’m not sure what that is, if it was a specific one-time transfer last year or what. Obviously, that’s a big chunk of money, and if you wouldn’t mind, if you haven’t already, sharing with us the reason for that transfer being down \$12 million.

I notice that the revenue from premiums, fees, and licences is down \$96,000. I would have thought, given that costs seem to go up on everything these days and given that most of the municipalities are booming in this province right now – we talk about that daily in the House and the need for infrastructure in Fort McMurray as an example. So I was surprised, quite frankly, to see that the total revenue from premiums, fees, and licences is going down. Maybe you could provide an explanation for why that is the case.

Then there is a line item, other revenue, and it shows \$1.781 million. That’s an awful lot of money just to classify it as “other.” I’m wondering if you could share with us what makes up \$1.781 million because it’s, as I say, a lot of money. I think I’ve said in the House before that given that we’re supposedly out of the business of being in business, here we’re making almost \$2 million from something, and it just says “other.” I’d like to know what that is coming from.

I guess my last question, if I can just jump back to the business plans for a second. Performance measure 1(a) in the business plan – let’s just see if I can find it here. I’d actually like to read it if I can refer to it again. It talks about the performance measure “level of satisfaction with the Local Government Services Division’s activities.” I won’t read it all. Under that one the last actual number was 88 per cent, and I note that for this year the target is 80 per cent. It just jumped out at me. Eighty-eight per cent is a wonderful figure. I would think that most ministries would be happy to see numbers

like that coming back in terms of satisfaction with work that they’re doing. I’m a little curious why in this particular case it seems like we’re setting our standard or our expectations a little lower, and if the minister might be able to provide for me some explanation as to why it appears as if we’ve dropped our expectation in that particular regard.

So I would hope that the minister might be able to answer some of those questions today, and I will take my seat and wait. Thank you.

5:20

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’ve got a couple of comments with regard to this Ministry of Municipal Affairs. We talk about transportation. Edmonton-Decore is, in fact, a constituency which has spread out. It borders the Yellowhead Trail right to the perimeter of the city, so you can anticipate some of the problems that people would have being able to make their way back with regard to transportation. I think that if we talked about investing in a little bit more public transportation, we would certainly be within our scope with being able to achieve some of the realistic goals that are set out by the Kyoto as well.

We talk about transportation, not only public. I’m not sure if your ministry covers DATS, which in Edmonton is the disabled adult transportation service or system. There is an increasing number of people who are not as mobile as they once were, and that finite number just doesn’t seem to be able to take into account the time that these people have to wait. You have to make an appointment, in fact, for the disabled adult transportation system or service, DATS, to ensure that you do have them be able to come.

I think that’s extremely concerning for people. They may not be able to just pick up and call when they have an emergency or an appointment. They have to make a call well in advance. Well, as you know, our lives just don’t dictate around sometimes predetermined appointments. We need to be able to have that service available to us. I’m wondering if the ministry would be able to address that concern. As I said, there are a number of adults within my constituency who are not as mobile as they once were, given the age that they are now.

Again, it’s a spread-out constituency with new communities developing on an ongoing basis, and I’m not sure how the transportation system is going to be able to address all the needs. Certainly, I realize that it’s one that’s not only debatable within Edmonton but in all the outlying areas such as Fort McMurray, Calgary, Red Deer, and other municipalities.

We talked about a reduction, at least my good Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie did, a spending reduction of \$23.779 million in public safety. Now, you talked about fire, ambulance, and police, that I’m assuming come under that public safety. I’ll talk about fire just for a minute here. We’ve had a number of high-profile fires within Edmonton that have taken out not only apartment buildings but businesses.

It’s no fault of the department itself. I think it’s just a matter of some of the things and the circumstances that they’ve had to deal with. Some have been in the dead of winter, when the temperatures get quite cold and the lines freeze. Unfortunately, lives are at risk. The buildings are lost. Because we are in a winter climate as far as I know, I’m sure that we could come up with some new technologies to be able to equip the men and women who do in fact fight the fires with the ability to be able to fight them year-round.

The ones I’m concerned with: we had ones out in Clareview, we had the chicken plant down on the south side, we had the Chinese

market on 97th Street, all within the dead of winter and all faced the same circumstances. It was almost certain and total loss. That's because of the fact that the lines were freezing during the time that they were needed. So I'm not sure if this ministry is looking into alternative ways to be able to find some sort of, maybe, glycol in the line that wouldn't freeze when the weather gets below the minus 20, minus 30.

**The Deputy Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, but pursuant to unanimous consent granted by the Assembly earlier this afternoon to waive Standing Order 58(5), I would invite the Government House Leader to move that the committee rise and report progress on the estimates of the Department of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Chair, would it be appropriate just to go to a vote at the moment and then rise?

**The Deputy Chair:** If there are no further speakers. Okay.

Are you ready for the vote, then, after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Municipal Affairs for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

Agreed to:  
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases      \$128,417,000

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report the estimates of the Department of Municipal Affairs and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

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

Municipal Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$128,417,000.

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker:** Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; at 5:27 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

