

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 9, 2005**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 05/05/09

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good evening. Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Recruitment of Health Care Professionals

508. Mr. Danyluk moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to institute an aggressive program aimed at hiring and retaining health care professionals throughout the province while targeting areas of need, such as rural Alberta.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise this evening to move debate on Motion 508. As we are all aware, health care is one of the most important issues to Albertans and, indeed, to all Canadians. An accessible, high quality, and sustainable health care system are the goals of many health care providers, and I feel that here in Alberta our health care system provides a high level of care for those who need it. Motion 508 deals with the issue of accessibility to health care in Alberta. Having an adequate number of health professionals in an area is key to ensuring that accessibility is retained.

While Alberta has some of the best health care professionals and medical centres world-wide, there are some areas of the province which have difficulty attracting and retaining health care staff. Smaller communities in our province often face this difficulty. While there exists a strong demand, professionals choose to locate to larger centres. There are a variety of reasons for this decision. Living in a smaller community can make it more difficult for an individual to continue their professional development. Also, while there may be employment for an X-ray technician, a physiotherapist, or a nurse, there may not be job opportunities for the spouse. All of these factors can add up to a health care professional choosing to find employment in another region. This leaves some rural communities wanting for access to primary health care.

Mr. Speaker, in the north there are many small communities where the physician comes in to see patients once a week. This is because the community is unable to attract or retain their own physician. During one period this physician cancelled his trip – and I have two different examples – once, three times in a row and, once, six weeks in a row. I am not imputing the actions of this physician, but I use this case to highlight the situation that some of these communities find themselves in.

The challenge of attracting and retaining health care providers to areas that are in need is one that we need to examine and address now due to the nature of the problem. Training health care workers or designing and implementing a recruitment and retention strategy takes time. The longer we wait, the longer it will be before we witness results.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to give the impression that the government has not addressed this issue, because that would be widely inaccurate. The government has programs in place, some for many years, to address this issue, such as Rural Physician Action Plan. The Rural Physician Action Plan's focus is on bringing more physicians to rural Alberta. They work towards this goal through a variety of means, including scholarships, bursaries, education

programs, and working with government to increase the number of rural residency programs available for medical students.

Since 1999 the government has increased the number of funded seats across all years of health programs by 4,300. This allows for many more Albertans to receive the training necessary to pursue a career in health sciences. Actions such as this work to ensure that shortages in the health care workforce are not due to a lack of trained personnel.

Mr. Speaker, I have brought this motion forward because I believe we need to do more to address this issue. We need to take the programs that are already in place, broaden their scope, and be more creative with them. Many of the current programs specifically target physicians, and this is good because we need doctors in this province. However, I would advocate that we widen the net so that the successes experienced with these programs can be expanded to include other health care professionals. There is no doubt that having enough doctors is the key, giving a high standard of care in our hospitals; however, without enough nurses, speech and physiotherapists, radiologists, and lab technicians our health care system will not function effectively or efficiently.

We need to create stronger incentives for medical professionals to locate to areas of need in our province. This can come in the shape of a variety of programs and a number of solutions to the challenges that are faced. Some of the solutions should include exposing more students in the health-related programs to learning experiences outside of our big cities or offering financial initiatives for students and practitioners in the health sciences to locate in areas of need.

Mr. Speaker, multiple jurisdictions world-wide are currently dealing with the same challenge. Many provinces have instituted programs designated to attract nurses and doctors to their jurisdiction. All of these programs have merit; however, for the sake of time I would like to highlight one which has caught my interest. It is interesting to me because of the flexibility of the program and the emphasis which it places on ensuring that areas in need of medical personnel are assisted in their recruiting efforts.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I realize that most of the time saying the United States with reference to health care is regarded as a dirty word in Canada. However, under the United States Department of Health and Human Services exists an organization which is dedicated to recruiting health care workers to areas which are unserved in terms of health care professionals. The National Health Service Corps offers loan repayment for individuals who work in areas of need that have been identified by the Health Service Corps. These areas are given a score which reflects the level of need. The higher the score, the greater the need. Health professionals who apply to work in these areas of need are eligible to apply for the loan repayment. Loan repayment goes to individuals who have chosen employment in areas with the greatest needs.

The NHSC includes a wide range of professionals which it will offer loan payments to. They include but are not limited to physicians, dentists, nurses, physiotherapists, psychiatrists, and dental hygienists. Mr. Speaker, as I previously stated, this program is but one of the many which other jurisdictions have in place. I'm not suggesting that this program is one which the provincial government should pursue. I am only illustrating the fact that there exist many ways to overcome the challenges of recruiting and retaining health professionals.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a great health care system, and the Department of Health and Wellness has proven to be successful at addressing new challenges as they present themselves. By passing this motion, the House will urge the government to address greater attention to the issue of hiring and retaining medical staff in areas of need in this province.

I would ask all the members to support Motion 508. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, might we revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour tonight to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly Dale and Liz Leuken from the Dunvegan-Central Peace area. Dale is the regional president of the Alberta Alliance, and he wanted to come and see what happens here in the House. He got so close to being in here last time, he thought he'd better check before he tries it again. I'd like the Assembly to give them a warm welcome as we traditionally do.

head: **8: Motions Other than Government Motions**

Recruitment of Health Care Professionals

(continued)

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to stand and on behalf of the Official Opposition speak in response to Motion 508, "to institute an aggressive program aimed at hiring and retaining health care professionals," especially in rural Alberta. I have to say that the member has indeed identified one of the major issues around good service delivery of health care in Alberta today, and that's the issue of health workforce planning. We are behind on this fairly significantly for a couple of reasons.

The government did not do a good job of anticipating workforce flow in the '90s and laid off a significant number of our nurses and health professionals and all but gave them bus tickets to go somewhere else, and many of them did and went to the States and never came back. Others went to the States and were wooed back here with bonus payments to come back when we realized that we now had a workforce shortage. So that was not what I would give a blue ribbon for by way of either workforce planning or good use of funds, seeing as we gave them severances and then we had to give them resigning bonuses. But, you know, if they felt well-appreciated at that point and stayed in the workforce, perhaps that's okay then.

Part of the issue that we have right now, Mr. Speaker, is that we have both the population aging – now, that doesn't mean that they'll be a huge burden on the health care system. That's just simply not true. With the population that we have now, they are much fitter, they are better educated about health, they have access to clean water and good food and lots of it. We're trying to get people to understand that they need to be fit. So, yes, we have the baby boomer generation aging. True. But that doesn't necessarily mean that they are going to be an increased burden on the health care system. Nonetheless, there are a lot of them, so it will have an impact one way or the other, even if it's just in delivering prevention and wellness programs and annual check-ups and tests and things like that.

The second part of it is that the very workforce that provides those health services is also aging and is looking at retiring. There are all

kinds of statistics about how much of our workforce – the last one that I think I looked at was 20 per cent of our rural nursing workforce were looking to or planning to retire in 2007. Well, that's a significant outcome for us.

So I think that there are a couple of things that we need to consider. One is around the concept of the team of health professionals. Part of that, I think, is getting at the idea of doctors as gatekeepers, that everything's got to go through a doctor. You've got to go to a doctor first to get the test. You go off and get the test; you go back to the doctor. The doctor sends you to the specialist; you go from the specialist back to your GP. Always the doctor is the gatekeeper, and it's a lot of coming and going. The idea was that somehow the doctor would be able to manage and send you to the best care.

At this point my question is: shouldn't we be approaching this and saying, "Let the doctor do what only the doctor can do"? We would understand that as politicians, recently having come out of an election, Mr. Speaker, because there are certain things that only the candidate can do. There's a lot of other stuff to do in a campaign that other people can do, but there are certain things that only the candidate can do. If we think about the doctors in the same sort of way, maybe that'll allow us to, that terrible cliché, think outside of the box, take a different approach to this and not be so married to the idea of, oh, it always has to flow through the doctor.

I think we also have to look at how we pay the doctor. Paying by a fee for service, I think, has its place but not nearly the amount of place that we give it currently. We should be definitely looking at a salary model or a per-patient model.

I think that if we move away from doctor-as-gatekeeper and encourage doctors to work as part of a health professional team – this is partly what the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul was suggesting, that we widen that scope and bring in nurse-practitioners and dentists and pharmacists and LPNs and dietitians and occupational therapists and recreational therapists and speech therapists. There are a lot of other health professionals that could be working as a team here and not always just the doctor and the doctor does everything. So that's a second suggestion that I have.

On the plus side, Mr. Speaker, one of the encouraging things is that currently 65 per cent of the students registered as medical students are women. I think that that's going to help us change this workforce probably more than anything else because I believe that women are approaching the medical profession with a different point of view. They may well be more willing to go to rural areas, especially if they have families, for quality of life. They are much more willing to work in a team effort with other health care professionals rather than always being sort of the one gatekeeper standing there letting people go by or not go by. I have some faith that that will also have an effect on what we're trying to do here.

So we've got a recruitment issue; we've got a retention issue. I think what's important is that we start with evidence and evidence-based decision-making. Right now we don't even have that evidence. We haven't tracked our health care workforce. We don't know where doctors and nurses and other health care professionals are being used in the system right now. Therefore, how can we possibly plan for the future when we don't know where we are today? I think the first thing we've got to do is identify what we do know and what we don't, and where we don't, fill in the gaps because you're not going to make good decisions if you don't actually know what you're trying to do here.

I think I can rightly accuse the government of having done that in the past. For example, with a number of the suggestions that the member raised, I have to say to him: "Okay, is this provable? Is what you're saying absolutely provable? What are the probable

outcomes of what you're proposing here? What do you expect to get, and are you going to get it? Can you prove to me that this has happened in some other case or that it's likely to work?" [interjections] Well, there are lots of people heckling tonight, and I'm looking forward to their contribution. Particularly, the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor always has a lot to say, and I'm looking forward to his participation in the debate.

Rev. Abbott: Just have a seat, and I'll stand up.

Ms Blakeman: Good. We'll be looking forward to that then.

So we want to see what are the specific outcomes that are being planned.

The member was particularly interested in something coming out of the U.S. with the health corps loan repayment program. Again, if he's able to bring forward some provable outcomes of a change from before this system was instituted and what they're doing now: have there been improvements over five years? What are the specific outcomes that he can show us for that?

In many ways having as much money as Alberta has is actually a disadvantage in our health care system because we can throw money at whatever, and it doesn't require us to be very careful about the allocation of funds. I don't think that for a very strong health care system we actually need that much more money in our system. Maybe we don't need any more money in the system we've got. What we have to do is try and make acute-care delivery more sustainable. A big part of that is working on wellness and on prevention, and that we can show outcomes on where it's been done in other places, Mr. Speaker.

I guess part of what I'm interested in is that we've had a rural physicians plan for a while. What have been the outcomes of that specifically? The member was saying that it was a good idea, and I'm just wondering if he or perhaps through one of his colleagues can tell us how that's a good idea, or what exactly they've been able to shift, or how many more rural doctors they've been able to get in place since the system was brought online.

A big part of this, again, is identifying the information, closing the gaps where you don't have it so that you can make evidence-based decisions, looking at what you want your outcomes to be, being careful about your recruitment and retention, and going to a system where we don't have the doctor as the gatekeeper but working more as a team.

The last thing we must integrate is e-health. That I think is the most likely possibility for improved health care service delivery in the rural areas: making use of the technology that's available. Supposedly, we're going to have SuperNet in place at some point in time, I hope, and that should be another way of tapping into possibilities with electronic health, or telehealth, delivery for rural areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the motion. I'm interested in what the member has proposed, but I'm certainly looking for a bit more fact than what we had from him. Thank you very much.

8:20

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise this evening and offer my thoughts and comments regarding Motion 508. As a representative of a rural riding I echo some of the comments previously made regarding the challenges that our rural communities face in attracting and retaining qualified health care professionals.

While it is true that the shortage of medical staff is an issue facing the entire province, it is fair to say that the rural communities have had more problems attracting and retaining doctors and nurses than our urban counterparts. Many have pointed out that the lack of social and physical infrastructure, including schools, parks, and hospitals, has discouraged skilled professionals and their families from moving to rural Alberta. While this is true for various rural communities, I would like to point out that in the town of Lacombe and most central Alberta towns and villages we have much of this infrastructure already in place, including schools and a hospital centre. However, despite this we still experience a shortage of qualified medical personnel. We have an O.R. available, but it's currently underused due to a shortage of staff that are qualified.

What I'm trying to say, Mr. Speaker, is that the availability of social services and physical infrastructure is not the only explanation as to why rural Alberta is having more problems attracting medical personnel than urban communities. Some individuals simply prefer the city life as many of them are born and raised here. However, I would argue that the same cannot be said for those who grew up in rural communities as many of them look to remain or move back to their towns and villages as long as opportunities are available. It is this particular group of individuals that we should be focusing on.

In the case of Motion 508 I'm referring to young students who are thinking of pursuing a career in the medical field. I believe we need to not only educate them about the merits of becoming a medical practitioner, but we also need to make it attractive for them to pursue careers in rural medicine. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways. We just heard questions about RPAP, or rural physician action plan, and I'd like to talk about that for a minute.

One way that we can encourage enrolment is by going to rural schools and talking to students about the merits of becoming a physician or a nurse or LPN or other specialist. Mr. Speaker, my son Mark, who is a medical student at the University of Calgary, is a member of an organization called rural physician action plan, also known as RPAP, which works with communities to attract and retain doctors. Over the last while he's been involved in a pilot project which involves visiting high schools throughout rural Alberta in order to provide students with information regarding what they need to do in order to become medical practitioners. Mark and his colleagues felt that the project was necessary as in the past many rural students chose not to pursue studies in the field of medicine due to the lack of information and advice available. So far their efforts have produced very positive results as Mark and his colleagues have been pleasantly surprised with the number of rural students who have shown an interest in studying medicine.

Seeing the potential of this type of approach, I think the province should consider launching a wide-scale program designed to raise awareness among all students, not only those living in rural areas, of the advantages of pursuing a career in medicine. I feel this strategy holds much merit and could go a long way in helping us attract and retain the much-needed health care professionals to rural Alberta.

Apart from recruiting students, we also need to make it more attractive for doctors to remain in rural communities by making sure that they can continue their professional development in a rural setting. I realize that working outside of major medical centres like Edmonton or Calgary can make it hard for some doctors to further develop their skills and knowledge. However, with the technology available – and I'm thinking about the SuperNet, Mr. Speaker – some of these concerns can be remedied. We can ensure that they remain aware of the latest medical developments and breakthroughs by providing them with reliable and affordable access to Internet service and academic and medical journals. We can also make sure that they have the opportunity to attend medical conventions and

symposiums, which is an extremely effective means of exchanging ideas and developments in the field of medical science.

From the recruitment point of view, Mr. Speaker, we can also encourage more rural physicians to take on students who can study and work under their direction and supervision. Such training not only provides these students with invaluable insight into how medicine is practised in rural areas, but it also helps encourage them to consider moving back to their rural communities upon completion of their studies.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, many rural doctors aren't too keen about taking on and supervising medical students because this means that they have less time to spend with their patients and tend to their other responsibilities. Literature shows that you would experience about a 10 per cent decrease in patient loads for doctors having students present in their practices. Although this is a financial concern for doctors as they have to forfeit part of their income, the care has proven to be as good or better with students present.

One way our government can help alleviate this problem is by reimbursing rural physicians for the lost time and income and encouraging them to take on more medical students in these areas. This will not only allow our students to learn more about the specific nature of rural health care delivery but will also help them consider the possibilities of working in a rural setting.

Before I conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I would like to briefly touch upon an issue that for some reason continues to be overlooked within government circles. As I mentioned earlier, there are many medical facilities in rural Alberta, like the O.R. in Lacombe, that are being underused due to staff shortages. I think that if we can address some of our staffing concerns and allow these facilities to operate at their full potential, we will have a real opportunity to alleviate some of our health care woes, especially those relating to waiting lists. Also, rural students are more likely to return to rural areas, and that is why it is important to recruit rural students in the first place.

I believe that if a rural O.R. can specialize in one specific procedure, like hip replacement surgery or possibly doing hernia surgeries, this facility could take on patients from all other parts of the province and in turn help alleviate the pressure on other medical facilities. Allowing rural facilities to focus on different procedures would undoubtedly shorten our waiting lists and help ensure that our rural communities enjoy the necessary medical services they need.

With this in mind, I would like to conclude by saying that our ability to address our health care problems, especially those in rural Alberta, depends upon our ability to be imaginative and to think outside the box. In my remarks tonight I have outlined a few ways we can attract and retain health care professionals to rural areas. It is my hope that our government will keep an open mind to all suggestions that arise out of the current health care debate so that when we do agree upon a solution, we'll have a system that will remain sustainable for generations to come.

With this in mind, I plan to vote in favour of Motion 508, and I encourage my colleagues to join me in doing so. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Health care is an extremely important topic for me as well. I find it a bit difficult, though – and I support your motion, hon. member. I should state that right off the top. What I find very difficult, though, is member after member standing up and saying: it's not the government's fault that these problems exist; we've got to fix them. Let's face it. This government has been in power for the last 34 years, and it has created the problem that the hon. member opposite is attempting to address with this motion, which again I will say that I support.

Basically, you go back to 1992 and adopting the Sir Roger Douglas model of cut, cut, cut in order to pay down the debt. This is a wonderful example of what happens when the chickens come home to roost. It isn't just the urban centres that have suffered. The rural centres have received the same cutbacks, and given their population base, probably their cuts have been as significant, if not more significant, than what we faced in urban municipalities.

Hospital wings have been shut down. Acute-care delivery has been eliminated in a number of the smaller towns. During the bright years of the Lougheed regime a terrific number of hospitals were built, and then in the years that followed, particularly the last 13, many of these facilities have been mothballed. This mothballing has resulted in an exodus not only of city doctors, lab technicians, physiotherapists, and so on, but it's resulted in rural communities not having the staffing that they need. Closing down the local hospital or a wing of that hospital has had the same effect as closing down the grain terminal. It causes rural shrinkage.

8:30

When the infrastructure support, as other hon. government members indicated, is no longer there, neither is there an attraction for a doctor, a nurse, whether it be a registered nurse or an LPN, dental hygienist, dentist, whatever. There is no motivation or incentive left in those rural communities to bring a person out knowing full well that there's no backup. Quite often, I would suggest, the first physicians to burn out are those with rural practices because they don't have, frequently, anyone to back them up.

Obviously, this member's bill approaches part of that solution. We need not only to incent doctors to come out to rural areas, but we have to come up with some kind of a level playing field whereby rural communities don't try and outdo each other or poach doctors. We need to have a government-supported program that will encourage doctors to come to rural areas throughout the province.

Also, one of the problems besides closing facilities, which forced the evacuation of health care professionals, was the lack of seats at universities for health care professional training. This was a conscious decision made in 1992 and thereafter to decrease funding and put that funding towards paying down the debt, which this government created. It wasn't just Don Getty, who was frequently used by this government as the scapegoat; it was government policy. Some of the members who are currently sitting here were a part of that decision-making that caused the current experiences that we're having in rural shortages for health care. One of the solutions is to make those postsecondary seats available. In order to do that, obviously, we have to have the infrastructure. The government has promised 15,000 new seats for 2008. Hopefully, a number of those seats will be designated for health care professional training.

The other problem that exists is the length of time it takes to approve the accreditation of foreign doctors. We have a number of doctors, not just in Third World countries but from the British Isles, from throughout Europe, who would welcome the opportunity to come to Canada to practice. Unfortunately, it takes so long for them to receive accreditation that by the time that accreditation comes, chances are they'll have been picked off by an urban situation because of all the other infrastructure: the schools, entertainment, arts and culture, et cetera. What we need to be doing is almost the equivalent of what we did in the late 1800s, and that is launching an aggressive recruiting campaign, not for temporary foreign workers but for permanent health care professionals.

We need to be providing those health care professionals with rural incentives. We've spent, I think, \$42 million on tourism this year. Possibly some of that money could be directed to recruiting these professionals who have already had the training. We don't,

therefore, have to go through the expense of training these individuals. We need to not only be training our own young people to take on the health care professions; we also need to be incenting the people who've already done their training in vocations throughout the world to come to Alberta.

I've stood up time and time again to say what a wonderful province we have. We have the wealth. We have the resources. We have the opportunities. What we need to have is the vision. The opposite member's Motion 508 is the beginning of that vision, and I thoroughly support his intent and wish him well in his pursuits.

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise tonight to join debate on Motion 508, as proposed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul. I look at this issue not only as a rural MLA but as chair of the rural development strategy implementation task force.

We recognized through the report on rural Alberta, *A Place to Grow*, that certain objectives must be accomplished to improve health care delivery in rural Alberta. Namely, there were four objectives, Mr. Speaker. One, "ensure that people living in rural Alberta have access to quality health services as close as possible" to the communities in which they live. Two, "establish and implement access standards for critically important health services particularly emergency care." Three, "expand the availability of health care providers in rural communities through a variety of actions including expanding training opportunities for health care providers in rural communities." Four, "make the best use of . . . capacity in health facilities in rural communities."

Mr. Speaker, of course, only objective 3 seems to really coincide with this particular motion, but I'd suggest that appearances are deceiving. In reality attracting and retaining health care professionals in rural Alberta is the first step necessary to address rural health issues. In order to ensure that rural Albertans have access to quality health services, objective 1 of the rural development strategy, there must be health professionals in rural Alberta. The shortage must be addressed.

In order to fulfill objective 2, Mr. Speaker, establishing and implementing access standards, you must have health professionals to provide the resources necessary to meet those standards. To use the capacity in rural health facilities, whether it's to ensure that services are provided or it is to relieve strain on urban centres by repatriating smaller services back to rural Alberta to ensure that rural Albertans have proper care, either way, ultimately, it will require adequate health professional staff in rural Alberta.

There are ways to address the shortage of health care staff while improving the delivery of health care services to all Albertans. Considerable work is under way across the province, including in health regions that serve rural communities, to change and improve the way health care services are delivered. New primary health care approaches are being implemented to provide access to teams of health care providers. Technology is being used to improve access to health services. For example, Health Link provides province-wide telephone access to health information and advice. Telehealth is being used to link people and physicians in rural communities with diagnosis and treatment from specialists in urban centres.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, rural communities face many challenges in improving access to health providers and health services. Many communities struggle to attract and keep physicians, nurses, pharmacists, technicians, and other essential health care providers. This has a double impact. Not only does it make access to services more difficult, but it also means rural communities are not able to benefit from the economic potential that a strong health sector can provide.

As plans for health renewal proceed, special attention needs to be

paid to the unique circumstances and opportunities in rural communities. That should include making the maximum use of new and innovative approaches to delivering care, making better use of existing hospital facilities in rural communities, developing centres of expertise in rural communities, and stepping up efforts to attract and retain a variety of health care providers. Regional health authorities, the provincial government, postsecondary institutions, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, health professional organizations, health care providers working in rural communities, and community members should all be actively involved in developing comprehensive plans for rural health care.

Three priority actions recommended in the rural development strategy deal specifically with health professionals. The first was to "adjust current education and training programs for health care providers to ensure that they have experience in rural communities and more is done to encourage them to stay in rural communities." The second suggests that we "continue to work with the Rural Physician Action Plan and expand on that model to attract and retain other health care providers [not just physicians] in rural communities, including nurses, rehabilitation therapists, technicians" and so on. Of course, the third, Mr. Speaker, is to "speed up the process for reviewing credentials of foreign trained health care [professionals] so they are able to work in rural communities" to fulfill their capacity.

We also must consider the economic development potential of health care. It's a critical feature in rural communities. I suggest that all members in this Assembly imagine for one moment when we have challenges in health care: if those challenges in rural communities were expanded to urban centres, and in an urban centre like Edmonton we shut down every single health care facility, every hospital, every clinic, all of it, and laid off every single person associated with the health care system, it would have huge devastating economic consequences to this city. The same happens in a small community. Unless we can find some way to retain and attract services back to rural Alberta in order to expand services to rural communities, in order to relieve strain on urban centres, we're facing greater challenges.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank my hon. colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul for his wisdom, his insight, and his understanding. He's brought forward a motion that doesn't just need approval in this Assembly, it needs action, and it needs it now. I encourage all members to support this motion because it is the first step to solving the health care challenges that all Albertans face.

Thank you.

8:40

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise in support of Motion 508 and its visionary qualities, I must add, I suppose. If a visionary is to be able to see into the future, then we must remember that as an Assembly here we are still in the business of not just managing the economy of this fine province, but also we are engaged in the development of this province. Sometimes development requires some planning and special circumstances, and nothing is more crucial to balanced and adequate human development than a proper health care system which is accessible to everyone in this province, particularly to people in the rural areas.

I think that as we look to the future of this province, we would like to see a diversification of the population not just in the major metropolitan areas but also having people choose the charms and advantages of living in smaller communities. It's good for the long-term economic development of the province. Certainly, the question

of having doctors in smaller centres is crucial to attracting people to choose to move to smaller areas. I think that the challenges we face in regard to attracting health care professionals to rural areas is not unlike the challenges we face to attract other sectors of the population to smaller centres; although with doctors and nurses and health care professionals there are, I guess, special challenges. The main thing that I would suggest is that we look at not just one way by which to do this but a diversity of approaches. This is always the most intelligent way to go.

I think that we had some degree of success in attracting physicians to rural areas with a special immigration policy some years ago. I know that we managed to have South African doctors in a number of smaller centres across Alberta and Saskatchewan. You know, this was simply a question of making a contract with these individuals so that they could immigrate and then stay for quite a number of years in the place that they were chosen to go to. I mean, certainly this does work. Maybe people aren't staying there forever, but I know at least two or three different South African families that did choose to stay in their small centres when their term of contract was completed. So, certainly, this is one way of attracting the people.

Making special student loan arrangements for professionals in exchange for their service in rural areas I think is something that has been successfully executed in places around the world, and certainly we could follow that same example. You know, once a professional does move to a small centre and he or she settles in for a number of years, then the attractions and charms of that place, perhaps getting married to one of the local people, helps to keep people in one spot. I don't know if we can legislate something like that, but having young people move to a place in exchange for preferential student loan payments or with bursaries or scholarships certainly is an intelligent idea. I think it's very important, whatever choices we're making in regard to health care or any planning – and this involves and requires some money to be spent and some attention to be paid to it – for us to keep careful evidence as to tracking the successes or failures of various attempts to attract doctors to rural areas. You know, if we're not making intelligent decisions based on evidence, the best we can gather it, then really we're just sort of hitting and missing or shooting in the dark. Sometimes I think that with this health care ball that we hit back and forth here in this House and across the country, we have certain ideologies or certain preferences when at the end of the day we should make our decisions based on solid evidence as to the best factual information that we can possibly gather.

I'm certainly willing to bow down to that sort of reasonable approach, and I certainly hope that when we make a full-scale effort to attract health care professionals to the rural areas, I would suggest that we head down that same path and base our decisions and our choices on the very best evidence possible. Thank you.

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

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. What a pleasure to get up and confirm with colleagues both on the government side of the House and also from the opposition and the third party support for this motion. One of the things I'm struck with, particularly after the international symposium, is the kind of universal drive there is to try and provide more health care professionals for the populations.

It was noted at the symposium that where other countries may have difficulty in retaining physicians to provide service for health care delivery, if in fact Canada tries to attract these physicians, we will leave them in more of a dearth and difficulty than they had been previously. I remember at the time of the tsunami the president of the Alberta Medical Association going on a mission to Mexico to try

and help out there and worrying whether or not she should in fact choose to go to Indonesia or Sri Lanka because of the greater difficulty surrounding their medical needs.

Ever since I've been in this ministry, I've been struck by a couple of things; number one, the difficulty in retaining and placing attractive circumstances in places where one would hope that physicians would locate. Rural Members of the Legislative Assembly tell me about the difficulty in getting rural physicians. In Calgary, when I was first made health minister, I was told that there were 300 family practitioners that were needed for that city. So I want to just make a couple of observations here about what I think is really important.

I believe this motion is important, but I believe that Albertans, in fact Canadians, in fact people worldwide have to take responsibility first and foremost for their own health, and that means that they have to determine that they are going to look after themselves, practise wellness, and instruct their families to do the same thing. My vision is that at six years of age every child will come to school, and they will know what it means to eat a balanced meal, know what it means to sleep the right amount of time, whether they do it or not, and know that they shouldn't take drugs or bad things offered by someone else. They will know the rules of crossing the street, and they will, in short, have that little cocoon of protection around themselves so that they will know how to behave. In school we're already offering programs – Do Bugs Need Drugs? – and encouraging children to do the right thing so they can maintain their health.

Part of what the problem is that I see, where everyone is looking for a family physician, is that today family physicians earn considerably less than fee-for-service specialists, who can, after slightly more education, whether it's two years, four years, or whatever period of time, in fact earn considerably more dollars. On a fee-for-service basis, when that's how we pay physicians, the opportunity to work in rural Alberta, unless there are some other ways of compensating the physician, means that that person will have to be satisfied with a reduced income for the longer period of time. So we have to be imaginative.

8:50

The other thing is that we have to accept that telehealth or calling a health line may be as good as a visit to a health practitioner. My shock in getting this ministry was that 88 per cent of Albertans accessed the ministry last year. If some of you weren't one of those people that went for a preventive thing but actually went for some kind of health diagnosis, I have to ask this question: did you really have to go to a physician? Could you have spent some time staying home, having the proper rest, drinking the right amount of fluids, and looking after yourself? Was it the easier route?

In some countries, one in particular that spoke at the international symposium, they charged people who had a home visitation by a doctor if they really didn't need that home visitation, and as such they reduced their costs by 25 per cent for home visits. It's an important element to think about. Could we go to a primary care facility, visit a nurse practitioner, have a dressing done, have something else done, and thereby save the time or the effort of a family physician, which could be expended perhaps to the greater advantage of the population's health in some other domain?

There are a few things that we have to remember. Number one, when I spoke to Dominique Polton, who is a French economist, about how we can do better in Alberta's health, she said after considerable thought: you shouldn't waste it. In Alberta we have so much. We were perceived by some of the international speakers to have so much that why didn't we spend? Why do we have a problem? It's like my former job as reeve of Strathcona with all the

refineries. We have so much, but does that mean that we have to spend and waste it? Don't we want to save something for the next generation? Saving something for the next generation, in my view, will be a prudent and wise use of the health care resources that we have. It will involve providing health care resources and services in rural communities that presently don't have them, and it will involve trying to network effective strategies so that there is an incentive for people to locate to rural Alberta.

One of the intriguing things that I've noticed is that in Quebec the ministry of health is also in charge of the social determinants of health. As we know, the dollars for Water for Life or some of the strategies that ensure that Albertans are healthier and better taken care of are spent in other ministries. As we consume the dollars for health, for acute care, frequently we siphon off those dollars, where if they were spent in Community Development, Learning, Advanced Education, Justice, Solicitor General, Children's Services, any myriad of the ministries, we might actually make people healthier and, in making them healthy, put less of a strain on the system.

My view is that we have to be imaginative. We have to look at those social determinants. We have to compare with other systems; for example, systems who've organized themselves to integrate service networks, systems who organize themselves to have people that are in places like our primary care facilities who will I hope ultimately provide for Albertans an integrated approach so that if it's not possible to have a family physician, there will be support for that type of family care that you hope your family can have, and when you do need a specialist or a family physician that can help with more clinical and technical issues surrounding health, it will be there as well.

So I am – and I thank my colleagues – very much challenged to continue to accelerate the progress towards making the rural physician action plan more of a reality tonight, signing my correspondence to the universities, encouraging yet more support for rural physicians, supporting how we provide after-degree nursing programs to rural Alberta, looking at targeting some of the other health science professionals to do better.

Mr. Speaker, in the very work that's being done at the university today, by relocating their department so that nurses and doctors and occupational therapists and nutritionists are all educated in the same physical space, by the very connection of their faculties I think we will start urging and educating people in health care delivery teams. Ultimately my grandchildren might not say: I need a family doctor to go and visit with my children. They will say: I'm looking for that health centre, that community health facility, that primary care centre so that we get the right amount of care when we need it.

Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, we will re-educate ourselves to waste not, want not; help generously distribute our supports for family physicians throughout this province so that there's no place without support; find creative, innovative ways to challenge people to work in rural Alberta, which I consider one of the best places to work and absolute heaven if you can live there and sustain your lifestyle there – I really believe that – and find ways of looking at those social determinants of health as critically important to the whole of the budget so that people in the future don't say, "Yes, Alberta spends 37 per cent, 40 per cent, up to 45 per cent on health; it spends in a way that ensures positive outcomes for all Albertans."

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

Mr. Hinman: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand and debate Motion 508, which I'm very much in favour of. How many minutes do we have left?

An Hon. Member: Three.

Mr. Hinman: Yeah, well, I'll start striking a few things off. Thank you.

I appreciate the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul bringing this forward, and I want to speak in favour of it. I want to bring out a point that he made the other night. I think it's important that we not think outside the box, that we throw the box out and re-evaluate everything.

A few areas that I'm very much in favour of. Possibly looking at giving scholarships, not just loan reductions but scholarships, in different areas where we need students to come in, whichever the health area is, especially linking those scholarships to rural areas and bringing people in there. The shortage of pay for GPs in rural areas and the idea of opening up specialized areas has been brought up and spoken about. If we were to have the funding follow the service, there are other areas in the rural area that could open up, and we could get the doctors in there.

Another area that I'm concerned with and that has been talked a little bit about is the brain drain. Perhaps not only giving scholarships but much like the army, where you sign up for five years' service or 10 years' service and you get your education. We could really attract people in that area.

Perhaps we need to look at the amount of money we're spending on educating a lot of the health care professions and kind of have a debt load there. If they were to leave the country, they would owe a lot more than just walking away and only paying for 20 per cent of their education. That would keep more here, and that would push more people out to the rural areas.

By allowing the services to follow and open up specialized services in the rural area – the cities seem to think there's nothing wrong with rural people coming and being treated here and staying in hotels. What would that do to the rural economy, to have people travelling to a place like Lacombe, Cardston, or Milk River and staying in their hotels and eating in their restaurants and being a real boon to their economy? It works the other way around too, but they don't seem to realize that. So I'd urge them to consider something like that.

It's disappointing, though, that it seems like the best bills and the best motions seem to come up on the private side and come from caucus instead of from cabinet. I hope that those things will move forward and the government will get behind some of these innovative ideas so that we can act now rather than waiting two or three or four years.

For the comments on solid evidence, I mean, let's have common sense. How much more solid evidence do we need? When we close the schools and we close the health care services in these small areas, they die. We need the schools, we need the health care services out there, and it's very possible to have those.

The accountability. Like I say about the education, I think that we need to really seriously look at the amount of people that we are educating and allowing to leave and put some sort of penalty on their increased fee if, in fact, they were to leave the country.

In closing, I just would like to thank the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul for this motion. I hope that it'll go forward and that it will have the desire to revitalize rural Alberta. I know that there are many people on that committee trying to do it, but we need to throw the box out and look at what we can do to build those areas because what we're doing to suck it in; we can turn it around and the economy can go back out. We need to revitalize those areas, and we need those essential services.

9:00

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the time for debate on this

motion has elapsed, and under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of the motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul to close debate on Motion 508.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the support from the members across. I want to address a couple of the comments that were made by some of the members opposite. I want to say that in our research of the different directions that different municipalities and different jurisdictions were trying to find, this is not an isolated problem to Alberta. It is a world-wide problem. I mean, we found it in Australia. We found it in all of the Americas. We found all over that what happens is that health care professionals are attracted to larger centres and for a number of reasons. I mean, in Alberta we're fortunate enough to be able to be in a situation where we're able to spend more, and that does provide some of the best health care service in the world.

I know that we talked with some individuals from Mexico, and we found some interesting findings in Mexico. Mexico handles their problems in a way that – and it's legislated. They legislate that an individual who goes to university gets their university paid, and depending on what faculty you go into, you may get two years or three years or four years of service that you have to provide to the rural part of the country. What happens is they give them a little bit of subsistence, but that is part of the repayment of the education. I had made, you know, a couple of other examples.

I think that it's very important, and I think that we as a province have provided some initiatives. I believe it's not enough. The job is not coming to fruition as we all would wish could happen. I found it very interesting when the Member for Edmonton-Calder mentioned that we need to legislate a solution of maybe keeping somebody in the rural area. Well, you know, what happens is that some of our bursary programs are two-year programs, so we have people come out for one or two years, and those individuals, you know – in one or two years there's enough travelling time in there. They're able to travel back and forth. I think that maybe we should extend it to four years, and then there's more chance of them finding a mate because they'll get tired of travelling after two years.

The Member for Battle River-Wainwright made an excellent, excellent observation, and I want to say an excellent observation because, you know, we do look at rural Alberta, and we do close down facilities. Schools are closed down, and hospitals are closed down, and they basically follow each other. We just don't realize the economic impact. We look at the economic impact, but we don't look at the services that we truly lose. If that were to happen in a larger centre, it is just as devastating. So I thank the Member for Battle River-Wainwright for those comments.

I would just like to close if I can, Mr. Speaker, in a couple of words, and that is that we are not alone in this challenge. I believe that in Alberta we have the opportunity to provide the initiative to do something different to try to address the concerns of rural Alberta and the health professionals going to rural Alberta.

Again, I would like to thank everyone that spoke in favour of the motion, and I appreciate the time and the tolerance. Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 508 carried]

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'll now call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2005-06**

Innovation and Science

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The first thing I'd like to do to members of the Assembly is introduce some members of our staff. I assure you that I told them earlier today that they could stay home and not come, but the fact that a number of them actually decided to come shows you the great support that they give to the minister, the ministry, and, more importantly, to the people of Alberta. They are Ron Dyck, Ray Bassett, Brian Fischer, Anne Douglas, Ian Thomas, and Silvana Cartagena. I hope I got that close to being right. I'd ask them to rise. Since you are intimately acquainted with the business plan, at any time that you wish to leave and actually go home and see your families, you're welcome to do that.

Mr. Chairman, the department's core business is innovation, and our business and financial plans are designed to help us to achieve the government's vision of long-term prosperity for Albertans by unleashing innovation. Innovation and Science provides leadership and makes strategic investments in research, science, and technology initiatives in three priority areas: energy, information and communications technology, and the life sciences, which, of course, include agriculture, biotechnology, forestry, sustainable resource management, and water research. These investments build on Alberta's strengths, and they are helping the province to develop a more globally competitive, knowledge-based economy.

We gather information on jurisdictions where innovation flourishes, and we find that the common elements are highly qualified people, solid infrastructure for facilities and services, access to funding, and, of course, vision. With the strategic advice of the Alberta Science and Research Authority we are working to build this kind of culture to ensure that Alberta remains prosperous for generations to come.

Mr. Chairman, I forgot to do one thing earlier on, just to remind colleagues in the Assembly that are listening to this scintillating description of Innovation and Science that they can actually log on to www.innovation.gov.ab.ca, which is a comprehensive website which describes all of the programs that I'm going to talk about tonight in much more detail than even I can do. So while you're sitting there, please look this up, spend some time, search it. There are some interesting things for you to learn on that website.

An Hon. Member: Which website?

Mr. Doerksen: That would be www.innovation.gov.ab.ca.

Government endowment funds, support for students, universities, and research institutes are helping to ensure that the province develops the right skills in Albertans and also attracts and retains others with the necessary skills to keep us moving forward. This year the government added \$500 million to the endowment fund for the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, and there are plans to expand the ingenuity fund to \$1 billion as future surpluses allow.

Alberta's investments in biomedical and health research through AHFMR have yielded life-changing breakthroughs such as the islet transplants for type 1 diabetes, known around the world as the Edmonton protocol. In the area of engineering and science research the Alberta ingenuity fund has created four important centres of research, in machine learning, water, carbohydrate science, and in situ energy. Now a new ingenuity centre is being established to facilitate research on prions and misfolded proteins that cause BSE.

I'm very pleased to report that since we made this announcement in February, the ingenuity fund has already been contacted by several researchers, including scientists in France, who are eager to collaborate to find scientific solutions to BSE.

9:10

Our commitment to expanding Alberta's research capacity in strategic research and priority areas is significant. Almost \$72 million to be voted is needed to meet our business goals for research capacity and science awareness. This investment will help to ensure that Alberta will always have access to long-term supplies of sustainable energy and clean water, factors that contribute to our superb quality of life. This funding acts as a magnet to attract matching and supplementary funding from the private sector, research organizations, and agencies in other governments.

A good example of this is the EnergyINet, the energy innovation network, which was officially launched from Ottawa and Calgary this past March. The Alberta Energy Research Institute is a catalyst behind this national network of industry partners, researchers, provincial governments, and the federal government. EnergyINet takes an integrated approach to research and innovation in six key areas: oil sands upgrading, clean coal technology, CO₂ management, enhanced oil recovery, water management, and alternative energy development. Alberta's position is that climate change issues are best addressed by investments in technology and innovation in this province and in Canada. Nearly \$17 million is allocated to expanding our research capacity in energy and in climate change.

The board of the Alberta Science and Research Authority has identified development of Alberta's ICT sector as a top priority for our province. Bill 4, which is awaiting royal assent, will allow the establishment of an ICT institute to guide research in this sector. Significant accomplishments are already being realized through the efforts of the Informatics Circle of Research Excellence, commonly known as iCORE. Over the past five years iCORE has invested \$40 million in the creation of 20 research teams, which have attracted over \$144 million in additional research funding from government and industry. These strategic research investments have attracted globally acclaimed scientists to work in Alberta. Equally important, we have been able to keep many of our talented young Albertans here, working in knowledge-intensive fields as diverse as artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, and wireless communications.

For example, pioneering work at the University of Calgary by iCORE chair of wireless location Dr. Gerard Lachapelle has helped make Alberta a world-class centre of excellence in global positioning systems and related geomatics technologies. Many of his innovative technologies have become must-haves for research institutions and commercial GPS developers around the world. His research contributes to commercial applications in a wide range of areas, from natural resource management, agriculture, transportation, and recreation to defence and national security. His innovative advanced signal tracking software will be used in the European Union's Galileo satellite-based navigation system now under development.

iCORE has committed \$500,000 per year for five years to develop this research group. This is about one third of his total \$1.5 million per year budget. Leading researchers like Dr. Lachapelle attract and build world-class teams, and we expect significant breakthroughs from the research. The ability to attract scientists of the highest calibre is a tribute to the Alberta advantage and to the solid reputation that our province has built in the international arena, and we are building our reputation and expertise through collaborations on national and international levels.

Bill 4 also paves the way for the establishment of the life sciences

institute to fulfill the life sciences strategy which was approved by the government in March 2003. More than \$11.6 million is to be voted to continue to build our capacity and expertise in critical areas such as agriculture, forestry, health, biotechnology, and water. The life sciences institute will focus on areas such as bioproducts, health innovations, including BSE and prion science, sustainable production, agrifood and health, and environmental technologies and platform technologies, which include genomics, nanotechnology, and bioinformatics. We have already seen results from the existing institutes, and the new life sciences institute will mirror the operating structure of those organizations and facilitate more collaboration on shared research initiatives like bioenergy and blended fibre R and D that cuts across sectors and engages multiple disciplinary teams in innovative solutions.

The Alberta Research Council has been contributing to research and development in Alberta for 84 years. Like many exemplary Albertans, ARC continues lifelong learning and is making valuable contributions to the province's economy. ARC has been involved in the development of EnergyINet through its work on advanced materials, flow sensors and controls, risk assessment, process integration, systems engineering and modelling, and technology commercialization, and it has refocused some of its technology activities around EnergyINet's six core programs.

ARC is focused on another of our priorities, which is technology commercialization. A current example in the life sciences sector is the expansion of ARC's forest products development plan to fully integrated bioproducts capability. ARC is acting as a catalyst to generate a strong regional bioproducts cluster in the greater Edmonton region by providing a gateway for bioproducts development in Alberta.

The agricultural fibre pilot processing facility will support the growth and development of an agricultural bioproducts industry in Alberta. This new facility has been funded by Alberta and the federal government and by an industry partner. It will be operational by early 2006 with laboratories and pilot scale processing capabilities to support collaborative bioproduct-based research and product development on agrifibre-based products such as paper, fibreboard, and plastic composite materials. The facility is a critical building block in the infrastructure to add value to Alberta's agricultural crops and establish new industrial products in innovative enterprises related to the use and application of industrial fibres. We will support existing and emerging industries as well as the training of new graduate students from the universities and other educational institutions.

Mr. Chairman, a common thread you will note with the Innovation and Science business plan and our fiscal plan is a collaboration with industry, other governments, and research institutions. We provide funding prudently, and because these investments are strategic and worthwhile, other stakeholders are prepared to work with us and join in funding these initiatives.

The agreement we signed with Microsoft during the 2005 California mission is another good example of this. It will establish new centres of excellence at NAIT and SAIT to accelerate efficiency and global competitiveness for small and mid-sized Alberta manufacturers. The educational institutions win, Microsoft wins, Alberta businesses win, and that means that our province wins. All of this works to help us realize the goals of the government's 20-year plan and Alberta's value-added strategy: securing tomorrow's prosperity.

Mr. Chairman, Alberta prospers through innovation. This is the vision of the Department of Innovation and Science, and the estimates before you tonight provide some of the resources that will be necessary to bring this vision to reality. I'll be pleased to respond to questions at this time.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to participate in the budget debate tonight on the Ministry of Innovation and Science, and I thank the hon. minister for his presentation at the beginning. I just wrote down, actually, something that wasn't in my speaking notes.

An Hon. Member: No.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yeah. I'm getting a little creative here now.

The Alberta Research Council. I just wanted to comment on the fact that I actually visited the ARC, and I have to say that I was impressed by what I saw. This is clearly a world-class research facility, and I'm proud to be living in a province that has such a facility.

9:20

Having said that, I also have to comment on what I perceived to be a little hesitation on their part to accept my inviting myself to visit it. I explained to them that I was the Official Opposition critic for Innovation and Science, and they still hesitated, but then after I persevered and I pressured them, they accepted my invitation to invite myself. The first thing they set out to say was how happy they were with the ministry and that they're not interested in picking any fights with the minister, and I said: I'm not here to pick fights; I'm here to learn. I think they warmed up after a bit, and they started to feel more comfortable with my being there.

They also offered me a digital tour, which apparently is available on CD, and after the presentation was over, I requested one of those copies. They were happy that I requested it, and they said that they were going to forward it to me, but it never came. I'm not sure why. Maybe they thought that I would use it for question period. Anyway, I requested it again I think six weeks after, and again it never came. So maybe the minister can send me one.

Now on to my general questions with respect to the estimates we're discussing. I've made this comment before, and I think I'm going to repeat it tonight. It really appears that this government intentionally underestimates, or lowballs, its budget estimates and then injects money into each department through supplementary supply. We discussed this during supplementary supply, and I commented on the record that Innovation and Science was not as bad as some of the other departments when we okayed \$38 million for prion research, which I indicated was needed and warranted. But what else are we not anticipating today?

Back then, when we okayed the \$38 million, it was for emergency research, and I argued that BSE existed for a few years before we had to react and conduct emergency research. So today I would ask: what about pine beetle research? What about chronic wasting disease research? What about the West Nile virus, avian flu, et cetera?

This time around the ministry is asking only for \$134 million for its 2005-06 estimates. Can the minister guarantee that he will not request a supplement next February or March? I would rather see a slightly more realistic budget and then, hopefully, return the unused funds rather than one that is made to look prudent and fiscally responsible yet we all know is useless as it will inevitably be increased and fattened next spring through supplementary supply.

Off-budget spending in general makes a mockery of the budget process. It makes a mockery of this Assembly if we okay a budget and then six weeks later or two months later we start spending off budget. I think this is a practice that has to be stopped. Occasionally and for emergencies spending off budget is one thing, but matter-of-factly and every year is another matter.

My second question is with regard to the move of the SuperNet file from this ministry to the newly founded Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. During question period the hon. minister indicated that the corporate information officer was relocated to Restructuring and Government Efficiency, and he also indicated that with him went his staff members, and they now became the responsibility of the new ministry. One would naturally assume, then, that the full-time equivalent staff levels would have gone down in this ministry. Instead, I was really surprised that the staffing level stayed at 696 full-time equivalent employment. So there was no change there.

This is opposite to the feeling I received or the perception I was given when the minister said that this entire file and this entire department with its employees went to the new ministry. So a clarification here is needed because this definitely does not look efficient. In fact, if I may be so bold as to say that I think this is suspicious in nature because we're increasing the budget for ministry support services by \$122,000 when, in fact, one would think that it would shrink.

I guess that my third point would be that there's a document that this ministry is relying on and basing some of its planning on. It's called Accelerating Innovation in Alberta, and it appears in your Link to Medium-Term Strategies. This is one thing in that some of the information mentioned in your business plan or otherwise is sometimes hard to find. Your ministry website is sure colourful, as you indicated. You gave us the URL web address, I think, twice. It's lively and a good place to browse, but some of the information is a little hard to locate.

Further, during the debate on Bill 4 I asked the hon. minister why the energy research, the forestry research, and the agricultural research institutes have failed to consistently provide publicly accessible annual reports, and the hon. minister indicated that at least one of them was available online. I went and checked that same day, and it's not there. Maybe I'm looking in the wrong place. I would appreciate and I think most of my colleagues in the House would also appreciate receiving the URL links to those records, if possible, for all three of those institutes.

Next, on page 332 of the business plan under Performance Measures there is no specific target set for 2005-06, but there is a hopeful target of 5 per cent by the year 2015, and it also comes back and says: only if affordable. So, first of all, this is a percentage of the budget, not actual dollars, which makes it really hard to interpret. We don't know what the budget will be a year from now, so we definitely don't know what it will look like in 2015, 10 years from now. The jump from 1.31 per cent to 5 per cent represents what I think to be the largest percentage increase in expenditure in any government department.

So while this might be commendable because, yes, innovation is the way of the future, and we all have to support such endeavours, how will the government measure what's going to innovation and what's not? Do you have a way of determining what percentage of this money goes directly or indirectly to private firms?

Also, while as the Official Opposition we may encourage innovation growth and innovative growth, wouldn't the minister agree that it looks like this government is slowly getting back into the business of being in business? How would the minister assure Albertans, average Marthas and Henrys, that these initiatives will actually benefit them in their everyday lives and in their pocket-books?

I think it was also during budget debate previously that we commented on the comparison of the trickle-down plan with the direct-benefit plan. Sometimes the government advocates a model which says: what's good for business is surely good for people. But

I think I would disagree sometimes, and most people in the public would disagree because sometimes what's good for business is not necessarily good for them. When this ministry or this government conducts or finances research in a certain area or discipline, it is in essence the people in my constituency, Edmonton-McClung, and the people in the other 82 constituencies of this province who are ultimately paying for this support. So what can we show them, and what are they getting back in return?

Furthermore, in this plan under the strategies listed, most of these strategies are really not objectionable. We agree with them. I think maybe the rider or the qualifier that they put on it sometimes could potentially have unintended consequences. For example, when it comes to supporting the ability of our public postsecondary institutions to build research capacity, this has to be done in a co-ordinated way. To date it has not. We hear that the Ministry of Innovation and Science has its own ideas, and then we hear that the Ministry of Advanced Education has its own ideas, and then the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment has his own ideas, and the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation has his own.

For example, last fall it became very apparent that the University of Calgary, which is an institution in the riding of my colleague from Calgary-Varsity, was in a rather desperate financial situation. Yet there were certain areas of the university, certain priority areas, that were doing okay. Certain other areas were not as lucky. Labs were out of date and crumbling, and, you know, you get the picture.

9:30

You can't have a shiny new ICT building, for example, or a health science centre, but then next to it or maybe half a block away there is a crumbling biology lab and a crumbling chemistry lab. Support staff were being cut so that professors had to come in on weekends to clean the labs, and I think this is not only unheard of, but it's just shameful. It makes absolutely no sense. It's happening not only at the University of Calgary, but it's happening at almost all of our postsecondary institutions. There are certainly examples of recruiting people to our institutions, but then the fact is that the morale of many of our faculties is terribly low. We need to take a more integrated approach to building this research capacity in our institutions by boosting morale and boosting funding.

Also, in talking to one of my other colleagues, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, who also happens to be the Advanced Education critic, he indicated that part of the problem is the way the province provides only part of the money in those priority areas and chooses to ignore or set aside or put aside the other, less important areas in their opinion. Institutions, of course, want the dollar, the funds, and they want to be innovative, but the funding rules or the budgetary realities are restrictive.

I also heard of the new nanotechnology centre that was being built right here in Edmonton at the University of Alberta, and I have personally heard of situations where those professors were fighting amongst themselves as to who gets a bigger room because the building was built in haste, and they were . . .

An Hon. Member: A new building?

Mr. Elsalhy: Yeah, it's a new building.

They were competing for who gets a better room and who brings down a partition wall so his room appears bigger, so they're sort of annexing the next room and fighting over it. Again, this shouldn't be happening in a province that is, in my opinion, maybe one of the richest pieces of land on earth.

Our public institutions also need support in many other areas. It's important to prioritize, but we also have to accept the fact that these

institutions are probably almost like an insurance policy for the future. Myself, as a person I am really interested in seeing our youth and our young people succeed in college and university and in trades because that's probably the only guarantee I have in thinking that maybe I have a chance of securing some CPP for my retirement. Otherwise, if we're cutting them now and if we're underfunding them now, I think we might as well say: "Okay. Forget that. You're on your own." And we're on our own when we reach retirement age.

There's also the desire to get the most bang for the taxpayer buck. That's why the minister would want to use the money to leverage additional money from other partners – and I understand this, you know – like matching grants or situations where you say, "Okay, here is the carrot, but you have to go and fund raise on your own," and you have to match that. In the case of private or industry partners it is vital that the institutions retain independence and integrity, and especially, I think, when we're reporting the results of research.

I was listening to a report on CBC Radio, I think, and they mentioned that some professors and researchers, because of the pressures they were facing, were faced with some pressure to produce, to deliver. They were faking their own research results to secure those grants for the year after. I think it shouldn't be like this. Performance measurement should be based on actual achievement, and maybe we should have some safeguards in place so that these guys are not pressured as much to forge their own results to continue to receive those grants. It shouldn't be done like this.

Next I would like to talk about the fact that although spending for R and D seems to be increasing – and this is, again, a commendable move – Alberta as a province lags behind most other provinces when it comes to research and development expenditures as a percentage of the GDP. I don't think we can take the R and D expenditure in the abstract. You have to actually compare it to something tangible like the GDP. A StatsCan report, which I have briefly reviewed, released last year indicates that Alberta is ahead of only New Brunswick and roughly sits at about half of the national average in terms of R and D spending.

Given the focus on innovation at the federal level, does the minister believe his department and this government is doing enough or devoting enough resources in order to ensure that this province catches up? I think second from the bottom is not acceptable, especially, again, given our wealth and given our resources, and I think we have to do some more in increasing our R and D expenditure. I understand that energy research is the number one priority because this is an oil- and gas-rich province and we want to maintain our production levels, but could this be the reason, maybe, that not enough attention is being paid to the other areas of research?

Next, maybe by this same angle Alberta is far behind when it comes to scientific activities in the social sciences and humanities area, and we have actually spoken about this briefly before. Given the importance of innovation in the design and delivery of social services and in solving social problems, both acute and chronic, does the minister believe the time has come for his department to invest more in research and development in these areas, the social sciences and humanities? Again, you know, whether this is a priority or not, we have discussed this. This was also part of our Liberal plan that we would hope the minister would maybe consider.

Lastly, under the strategies listed on page 337, in goal 5 with regard to the water research strategy in support of Water for Life – that's section 5.2. We debated Bill 11 earlier in this session, and I know that my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View expressed a real hope that the government would begin to plan so that bulk transfers of water between water basins was not part of an ongoing

water management strategy. Does the minister support this issue being part of the water research strategy? It might be a question for the Minister of Environment, but you know everything is linked, and this is one government, and this is one caucus, and there is one taxpayer and one voter who deserves to get that answer. So I'm really interested in finding out where the minister stands on this.

Also, what other areas of water research does the minister anticipate would be top priorities? Maybe a full inventory of water resources. This could also lead to a bigger discussion on water exports and water sales to other jurisdictions, particularly to the United States. I think it's obvious that water is becoming an important issue on everybody's mind. We've heard of water wars, where countries and nations go to war over water, and I think we have to start planning for conservation and careful assessment of our water resources and water levels so as to avoid troubles in the future.

With that, I know I've asked a few things, and I hope the minister would be kind enough to share his thoughts with us. I know that some other members are eager to participate. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Doerksen: Yeah. Thank you. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-McClung for his comments. Obviously, I'm not going to be able to respond to everything that you mentioned. Some of them are comments; some are questions. I will pick up a couple and respond to the rest in writing.

Thank you for your comments on ARC.

You made some comments about the supplementary estimates of \$38 million for prion research. That came out of, of course, an emergency situation with respect to our beef industry, something that we thought was very important not only from a marketing and solving the border problem but also to begin to look at the science of BSE, find out where our niche was in terms of all the research happening in the world, and contribute because it is an important industry. So that essentially was the decision we made, to go with the supplementary estimates.

The member has asked for a guarantee that I will not request additional funds, and I will not provide that guarantee because, in fact, if there's an opportunity for us particularly to add money into the Alberta ingenuity fund, I will be asking for it. I think it's a very important initiative, one that we have indicated support for if the money was there. So, yes, hon. member, I will be asking for more money as it becomes available. As an endowment fund, Mr. Chairman, it provides ongoing support forever into our future. That is one of the strengths of endowment funds. It's not just there for one year; it's there forever.

9:40

Just to clarify on the move of the CIO's office into the department of restructuring and why the numbers didn't go down. If you actually go to last year's budget and look at our numbers, you will notice that the FTEs we had last year were 808. What happens when we present the figures is that we restate everything as it is right now, so you will actually see in, I believe, the department of restructuring for their budget for last year that the numbers have been transferred. In fact, 112 FTEs did get transferred over to the department of restructuring, so hopefully that explains that. In fact, it's all been transferred. These numbers have been restated. We went from 808 FTEs to 696, and of course you'll notice that we have not asked for any additional FTEs to manage the department.

Performance measures: you raised a question about us moving toward the 5 per cent target. Essentially, what we're trying to do is set a vision for this province. It was based on some international

reviews that we have done. For instance, in South Korea they have a legislated requirement that they have to spend 5 per cent of their budget on R and D. It cannot be touched by other programs. Regardless of what happens in other programs and pressures, they are committed to that 5 per cent because they see that as their way to prosperity and the way of the future. The European Union, for instance, has a 3 per cent target, and other countries have similar-type targets.

We really said that on the innovation file we need to look at incentives we provide, work that we do in the innovations. It's not just research and development. It can also count on incentives we provide toward that target. We clearly need to look into the future for providing more investment in this area.

Frankly, these goals survive political cycles, and they should. This is about my grandkids – and I have two and a half of them – and yours that haven't arrived yet, but someday you'll have them. This is about the future. That's how we established the 5 per cent target.

You talked about the accountability of research, and I agree with your comments on that. It's very important to provide an accountability mechanism. Of course, in this area it's not as easy to measure performance in a short time period because often in the research field, of course, your time horizons are much longer. Just an example: go back to the work we did in AOSTRA in terms of the oil sands research, the 10 years and the \$700 million, \$800 million it took before we actually unlocked the potential of the oil sands. I remember quite clearly – it was before I was even in government – some of the criticisms that were levied at AOSTRA. Nobody is going to criticize it now because of the economic returns that it generates for our province. When you're measuring performance, you have to look at a longer term window, and that does make it hard in terms of showing that performance in an annual report. But I agree with your comment: the accountability is critical.

You made some comments about the R and D spending in Alberta. We've indicated very clearly in our business plan that we do lag behind other jurisdictions. In one sense it's a hard argument. Because we do so well economically, one might argue that, in fact, we get a much bigger bang for our research buck than everybody else, so in effect we're producing much greater. But I tend to agree with your observation, and that also goes back to the 5 per cent target and says that, clearly, we think there's a desire to move ahead.

More importantly, I think, if you look at the measurements on government support, we're actually pretty good. Where we seem to lag is in the business investment in R and D. That could just be a matter of how they report R and D because we don't have R and D tax credits like other provinces do, so the incentive to actually report those is different too. So there might be some of that issue behind the reporting. Again, clearly, I think that it's important.

You made some comments about energy research being number one. Obviously, right now energy does provide our biggest economic gain, and energy research is very important. Whether it's number one or not, I don't know whether I could even make that case. Clearly, we recognize that there are opportunities in ICT. There are opportunities in life sciences that we have to invest some money in. Our business in Alberta understands the energy industry the best because that's what they're invested in, but we have some tremendous success stories in our province in some of these other areas.

Cold-fx, for instance, is one. The Edmonton-based company that sells that product does very well. I think of Smart board technologies out of Calgary in terms of the ICT area and the global market that they project. Most people in Alberta don't even know that this is an Alberta-based company. So we have some tremendous success.

The other thing I would underscore is that there is a lot of platform technology that actually cuts across all of these areas, that actually supports ICT, energy, and life sciences. It's technology that you just can't put into a stovepipe and say that it only applies to this area. In fact, it doesn't. I mean, you look at the impact of global positioning systems, wireless technology, and its application in the energy industry. Here is ICT expertise that actually helps us solve problems in other areas, so that just illustrates what I mean by platform technologies. The National Institute for Nanotechnology is one of those platform technologies which will actually apply to every area.

I noted your comments about social sciences and humanities, and it's something to consider. Clearly, at this point we haven't made it a priority, but it's been discussed, so I appreciate your comments on it. What we've tried to do out of ASRA, because I'm guided by ASRA, is to realize that we're only 3 million plus people in a population in a global environment which is well over 6 billion people. We can't do everything, but we want to have a disproportionate impact on what we choose to do. So we choose to really try to support those areas that we think we're good at.

Lastly, on your comments for Water for Life research, that would be a good question for question period. You can bring that one up tomorrow, and I'll give you more details about it. Clearly, we, in connection with the Water Council, are kind of charged with the responsibility of the research side of Water for Life. Some of the areas, of course, don't fall under our jurisdiction, but questions around the watersheds and the research and inventory are questions that we should be looking at and answering. The Alberta ingenuity fund, of course, has a water research centre of excellence that is starting to look at those areas. Clearly, that's an important priority, so I appreciate your comments on that.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll invite other questions, and we'll get back other answers.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, as well, to the hon. Minister of Innovation and Science for presenting a very straightforward and easy-to-understand budget. I think that we cannot overemphasize the importance of investing with some aggressive sort of moves to ensure that we maintain our place as a province and as a culture here in western Canada, showing leadership in many areas of science and innovation technology that have served us so well thus far in this first century of our province's existence.

9:50

You know, right from 1905 we see the government was showing great foresight in setting up experimental agricultural institutions across this province. Many of those experimental and innovation centres have either remained or have evolved into larger places of learning or have served the various generations of pioneers coming to a new land to learn to make this place the most productive place that it could be.

Now, in 2005 I believe we're doing similar things, and the various areas of research and investment that this government has chosen to pursue, I think, have certainly been relevant and appropriate, from the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, the Alberta Energy Research Institute, the Alberta science and research investment program, ingenuity fund, iCORE, the Alberta Research Council. The list goes on and on. I certainly salute each of these initiatives in their own way. I think that our key here is to make them better, and it's a moving target. So my job, of course, is to make some critique of this budget to ensure that we are in fact spending our money in

the most appropriate way possible and looking at the targets as they change over time.

In regard to the money, I realize that with the switch of the SuperNet over to a different area or ministry it's difficult to compare the numbers over the past year even, not the past five years. So I certainly have not a great difficulty in the current expenditure, down 8 per cent from the previous year. I, in fact, would encourage some flexibility in this budget so that we are able to, as the minister suggested, pursue certain areas of innovation or of research as the opportunity warrants itself or as developments might come to our knowledge.

My focus in terms of criticism centres around choices that we make in regard to where we would fund research. I realize that we have a strong tradition of energy-based innovation and scientific development in this province. Indeed, in many areas we are world leaders, and certainly you go with your strong hand if you're playing cards. I would suggest that at this juncture we might be able to pursue other areas of research, and I know that the minister is spearheading a number of life science initiatives, and I would like to suggest some too.

It's interesting, you know, because last night I was watching television on a rare opportunity to do so, and the Deputy Minister of Innovation and Science was on. He was describing what the ministry's concept of innovation was according to Innovation and Science, and Dr. Fessenden said that innovation is taking an existing product and adding something to it to make it more valuable or more desirable. I won't dispute that in a certain way, but I do find it a little bit narrow in terms of, I suppose, academic integrity and the spirit of pure research.

The vast majority, of course, of marketable or lucrative scientific advances throughout history have come from environments that encouraged knowledge for knowledge's sake. So sometimes, you know, when we pursue a certain product and we want to bring a product on stream to make money, certainly that is a useful thing, and lots of good inventions come from that but also from a larger, let's say, environment of innovation and the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake, as I said. Dr. Fessenden's comments bring to mind to me somehow a little bit these ideas of public/private partnership style of financing for certain projects, that the government puts out public dollars given to private companies to do what, sometimes, I think we can perhaps do ourselves at the same price or even cheaper.

This issue seems to be more relevant to some research institutes over others, certainly. The Alberta Energy Research Institute, for example, is entirely a public/private partnership arrangement, as far as I understand, which, you know, has some merit, but I think we need to always be vigilant. Our Auditor General does give some tentative support to P3s, but he said that we must be ever vigilant, I suppose, to ensure that we're getting the best bang for our buck. On the other hand, the university research and strategic investment program directs public dollars to research in public institutions. So I guess that I'm just pointing out in a general way that we have these two things working together, and sometimes we have to choose where we get the best return.

Who benefits from these grants? Well, of course, many students and researchers do indeed benefit over private companies, but there are issues of academic integrity that I believe should be addressed. From the 2003-2004 Innovation and Science annual report sponsored research reached the number of \$434 million in 2003, which is considerably higher than the '98-99 baseline, some 88 per cent higher, in fact. So although in some respects any funding for research is good funding, I just would like to point out, you know, a sense of measuredness, I suppose, between public funding for research and private.

There is anecdotal evidence that sponsored research affects the outcome of the research in question. For example, Dr. Nancy Oliveri, formerly from the University of Toronto, has noted that over 90 per cent of published drug research shows that drugs, in fact, do well. A 90 per cent success rate in research is just simply not possible or logical, for that matter. So, you know, you do see that when you're looking for a certain solution, you end up getting it. Sometimes, let's say with Cold-fX it's a very highly successful product, which I like to take – not sure if it works or not, but I think it does. But, you know, I think that when we're looking for broader research information, perhaps pursuing without a solution in mind in the first place is a little more reasonable and perhaps a little bit more honest as well.

So just something to keep in mind. You know, these are larger questions rather than specific budget questions, but it does affect how the dollar is directed, so to speak. Our public researchers are very good, and we must not pass them by.

Bill 4 establishes this life sciences institute. According to the ministry's website, fine thing that it is, it says: "involves the science, technology, products and processes related to human health, agriculture, forestry and the environment. Simply put, it is the science of living things." I guess that I'm looking for some specific focus where this life sciences institute is going. When will the funding for the institute be available? To what degree are we going to focus on an environmental research endowment fund specifically?

I think that at this juncture, as the hon. minister pointed out, you know, we look for technology that branches across ministries, information technology, for example, that supports agriculture and, say, life sciences and energy and medical sciences as well. I would suggest that, you know, environmental endowment research would be in this category. It branches across different areas of interest for us, and I think that amongst all things we need it more now than ever.

10:00

Dr. David Schindler, who is the esteemed biological science professor, Killam professor, a fellow of the University of Alberta, has been pushing very, very adamantly for specific environmental research endowments targeting this area. If I may, I can just give you a few words that Dr. David Schindler has said recently on this topic. I think it's worthwhile.

In my view, such institutes can be good, but they should be totally arm's length from the government. They should disseminate reports directly to the taxpayers who sponsor them, not through a political filter. This does not mean that Ministers have to follow the institutes' recommendations but that when they do not, they must have reasons. I think that this sort of transparency is necessary for a democracy to work.

He goes on to say that

one such independent institute that is desperately needed is one on environment and wildlife. This province is starting to look like Dresden after the bombing of the Second World War.

Strong words from a very well-respected scientist and some interesting ideas to reflect on when we are building this life sciences institute and how we might construct it.

The other bill that I'm interested just to make comment on is Bill 37. This talks about placing money into a number of different areas that would overlap into Innovation and Science, including a \$3 billion access to the future fund. Two hundred and fifty million dollars has been placed into this fund already. It's about 8 per cent of the total that's been pledged. I'd just like to ask the minister: when can Alberta students and scientists expect the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research endowment fund and the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research endow-

ment fund to be topped up so that we can see long-term sustainable funding for these areas?

My last comment has to do with Kyoto and carbon dioxide controls. We're having difficulty meeting our commitments to CO₂ in the atmosphere in Alberta, and it's simply a question, I think, of addressing these questions in a fundamental way. Science and technology is one tool by which we can address this issue, this challenge, and I'm hoping that the Innovation and Science budget will reflect specific research and development in regard to reducing our CO₂ output here in this province. For example, a lot of interest has been expressed in pumping CO₂ into existing wells or into coal-bed methane seams under the ground. I would be curious to know if the Ministry of Innovation and Science is pursuing this particular path to reducing our carbon dioxide emissions or to be somehow containing them. I have some grave reservations in regard to pumping CO₂ underground, and I'd like to know, specifically, if we are chasing this path.

Finally, is this ministry funding any specific research that would enable Albertans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to meet the targets of the Kyoto accord, and how is the Ministry of Innovation and Science working with that?

With those comments, Mr. Chairman and hon. minister, I invite your reply either as we are this evening or in writing. That would be great. Thank you.

The Chair: Before I recognize the hon. minister, could I ask your co-operation in keeping the background noise down. Those who feel the need to carry on loud conversations, please do so in the committee room out back.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Chairman, I'm sure the buzz in the room has to do with the great things that we're doing in Alberta Innovation and Science. People are just absolutely astounded, and it's hard to keep the enthusiasm at a low level, but I'm sure they will try, based on your comments.

I just want to maybe start with your last point and move the other way. Again, I'm not going to hit everything, but I'll try and hit some of your points. On the CO₂, just to reinforce the six strategic thrusts that we have in the innovation INet, one of those is CO₂ management, which speaks, I think, to the issue you raised, as well as the alternative energy development, which I think is important from the perspective that you brought.

Quite clearly, the emphasis that we have placed in terms of the Canadian approach to the management of CO₂ is that we ought to let our companies use investment and technology as a credit towards their contribution towards Kyoto. Frankly, we have an industry, we have people and ability that a lot of the world doesn't have, and we can provide solutions to the rest of the world. I would rather we spent the money investing in technology in our province and our country that we could then take to the rest of the world. To me that makes a whole lot more sense than just having to buy credit from some other country.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

CO₂ – we had a lot of discussions about it – is currently being used in research projects engaged in the use of CO₂ to displace or to provide a better recovery of oil and gas. In one of your comments you had some reservations about that, and I appreciate that, but we are investing in that. That is an initiative, and there are a number of other initiatives using CO₂ as a resource that are currently under way and being contemplated. So I appreciate that.

You would also be interested – and I'm not sure if you picked this up or not – in an announcement from one of our innovation programs that we actually had supported a residential solar district heating demonstration project at the town of Okotoks. It was well covered in the media, and I hope that you managed to see that. That's one of the initiatives that has come out of our innovation program that actually also helps speak to this area of looking for alternative sources, and even the research on that is how you store energy. So those are all important things. I knew you were interested in the solar thing because that's something you raised in my office, and I thought you'd be interested in that and probably knew that more than I did.

For some reason I wrote this down, and I can't remember what point it related to. Earlier today I announced some winners from our ASTech awards, which is our leadership in science and technology. There was a very interesting award winner. I think it was last year or the year before; I can't remember. It was a company out of Calgary called Light Up the World Foundation, which actually provides a lighting solution to people around the world, particularly in Third World countries, that don't have access to power, can't read when the sun goes down because they haven't got lights. They provided a very simple, effective solution in a compassionate, caring way that addresses problems in the Third World. I'm very proud of that group, and we recognized them with an award. That's just, again, an example of some of the things that are occurring in our own province that help our world.

The definition of innovation. I didn't listen to the show, so I don't know what was said, but quite clearly innovation is more than just research and development. Research, pure research, basic research is an important element of that, but it's also more than just that. It's also looking for ways to do things better. It also has to speak to the economics. We can do a lot of things, but it costs too much to do them, so part of research and innovation is finding processes that can speak to the economics of what they're working on.

10:10

Your comments with respect to industry participation in research. We alluded to this earlier with the previous question from the Member for Edmonton-McClung on the BIRS and trying to actually increase our business investment side. That's one area where we think we have an opportunity. Many of the research activities that we fund, for instance, come from federal granting councils like the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, which actually requires at least a 20 per cent investment by industry in every research project. So when researchers apply to that, they have to have industry support. It's generally considered 40 per cent from the federal granting council, 40 per cent from the province or the institution itself, and 20 per cent from industry.

On the EnergyINet initiative that we've begun working on, quite clearly, the direction that we gave to industry was that we're not going to do this alone as government. The energy issue is an issue across Canada whether it's in hydro, whether it's in fossil fuel, whether it's in nuclear, whatever. There's a Canadian issue around it. We need industry at the table to provide solutions. Government needs to be at the table both federally and provincially. That's really the thrust behind EnergyINet.

You made some comments about the growth in sponsored research, and I commend you for that. I actually pulled out a chart which goes back to 1995, where the sponsored research out of our universities in Alberta was under \$200 million. This year it's well over \$600 million, which shows the growth in research activities we've had in the province of Alberta, and we're very proud of that particular growth.

Basic comments about environmental endowment. I've made note of those comments and appreciate that. A lot of the work we do in the institutes does speak to the environmental issues although not necessarily characterized as an environmental endowment. I know that your wish and probably the wish of the gentleman you quoted would be to make it more specific to that, and I've made note of that. Some of the life sciences – just to show you how some of this cuts across, I think of the approach to fibre and how that impacts on forestry and agriculture because they both really deal with fibre. The research we're doing on that is: how do we take this fibre and use it in an effective way?

Bill 1, Access to the Future Act. You raised that. Quite clearly, the budget this year and the next two years is committed to bringing the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research up by \$500 million. That's accounted for in the budget. Bill 1 talks about topping up the Alberta ingenuity fund by another \$500 million, but it is clearly as funds are available. I can't give you a specific timeline, although also in reference to the question from Edmonton-McClung I indicated that I will certainly be seeking support for that as the year unfolds and if our revenue base continues to be strong.

For the rest of the questions we'll get you answers in writing, and I appreciate your comments.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Innovation spending is clearly an investment in the future. At this point I'd like to thank the minister and his department for honouring my nephew in their ministerial calendar. He was the grade 8 winner of the national science award in his area for his science project on phosphorus indicators on BSE prions, you know, which shows how our next generation that's coming forward is really interested in some of the things that could bring solutions to certain great problems in agriculture and how they have an interest in these areas. I thank the minister and his department for including him and honouring him in their calendar.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The importance of innovation is clear. It is the next generation that we're looking to. After we have our oil sands gone or our oil industry not so important or if something does happen that all of a sudden that industry doesn't count any more – it happened in other industries. It happened in this province with coal in the 1940s. You know, if we're not looking to innovation, if we're not looking to creating new ways of doing things, new methods and new ideas to enhance and ensure our prosperity for the future, we're looking to lose our track in the world.

I had hoped the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar would speak to this particular debate. It's not just a Liberal idea that we would be looking to spend monies on innovation as an investment in the future. I think it's an important initiative from this government, and I think the member should speak to that and ensure that the spending in this area is indeed a viable and a proper thing.

If, for example, we didn't have the development in wheat in the middle parts of the 19th century that allowed for the development of farming in Manitoba, in western Canada, we wouldn't actually have had settlement because the wheats that were developed at that time were quite innovative and a new way to farm in what became our home. You know, we look at corn. It was just a generation ago that you couldn't get corn much higher than Taber in terms of how far north it could be, and now we're seeing corn farmed in Athabasca. It's innovation. It's development. It's continuously bringing these things forward, and the investments in these things pay off in spades.

I look at some of the applied technology that we're seeing in the oil sands. Not too long ago I was with some people from a geomatics company, which includes what used to be the trade of surveying, but it's become far more technical. They were showing me a program which, with the use of GPS technology, allowed them to survey an entire oil sands pit and determine volumes, determine the various areas, the description of the pit in a 3-D image. They were able to rotate that image, look at it from the bottom, look at it from the side, look at how they could be using it for the access of heavy equipment, heavy haulers, using it for volume determinations and these types of things. It shows very clearly that some of these things can be very, very well used in terms of how we apply it to our economy, how we apply it to efficiencies, how we apply it to the way that we can improve our Alberta.

There are many other areas. Crime detection. You know, some of the early DNA developments actually came out of Alberta, and some of our people in Alberta actually spoke in Asia and Europe on the development of DNA. It was really quite something. Some of the new developments in the tar sands, using different types of heat instead of just steam, which is a great draw on our water resource. Some of these ways are huge in terms of an investment for our future.

The strategies that the government is looking at to support recruitment of scientific personnel at public research institutions. I'd like to see the minister comment on what we could do to encourage new chairs, to encourage new endowments, to encourage new involvement from the private sector in that area to support the infrastructure at research institutions – my colleague from Edmonton-McClung spoke quite a bit on that – to look at how we explore the niches that we want to concentrate on. Certainly we're only 3 million in billions of people, but the niches that we look at must have the right infrastructure in order to expand. Some of that infrastructure is their equipment, and it's constantly changing, constantly needing updating, and sometimes quite expensive.

10:20

The way that we interact with some of the projects in our area; for example, the cyclotron in Saskatoon. I think there are some synergies that can be developed in terms of how we look at some more pure research perhaps but some things that can be applied and have great value in terms of developing our own scientific abilities.

The three priority areas of energy, ICT, and life sciences. Energy, obviously, is a crucial area to look at how we are going. It's so many-faceted. You know, some aspects were talked about by the Member for Edmonton-Calder. Sequestration of CO₂. The use of SO₂ as a potential resource as opposed to a pollutant should be looked at. The use of our sulphur piles and finding ways to get rid of these massive, massive piles of sulphur that we have accumulating in the province I think is important.

The nanotechnology centre surely has been, you know, proving its value and increasingly has shown that research in this sector and using this as an important niche can be of great value to Alberta. If we look at how that developed, it developed basically out of some research, which some people would call pure, for the purpose of exploration in space. Much of the miniaturization that developed into computers and ICT originally started from the space program, what some people would call pure research, which would become very much applied to many areas of our economy.

That gets to pure research. What is innovation? Do we really always have to tie it to something that we haven't seen yet? Innovation in itself and by its definition does not necessarily mean something can be seen to develop from something because you are in fact innovating. You're discovering. You're finding. You're

seeking new ways, and sometimes little bits of brilliance can bring a huge return even though that was not seen in the initial beginnings of the project.

The promotion of science and technology awareness I think is still very important, you know, especially with youth. I appreciate the ministry's work with the teachers, with the science fairs. I think it's crucial to promote that. It does encourage kids. It brings it forward. These are the innovators. These are the people that will discover in the future, and to let them interact nationally, as in some of these fairs and such, and to help them with that I think is crucial and important.

Some specific questions. You know, the performance measures kind of struck me. To have "total sponsored research revenue attracted by Alberta universities" as a performance measure I think is odd. While the total dollars perhaps are a useful measure, it doesn't really speak to Alberta's competitive situation in Canada or around the world, and it doesn't speak to what they are in fact doing. Raw numbers in these areas can be misleading, and I think that some other more effective performance measure should be somehow found. I would ask the minister to comment on that.

To "accelerate innovation in the energy sector," which is goal 3, I think is a very worthwhile endeavour, particularly those that add value to energy-related projects. You know, we have to encourage that any ends and any extra byproducts in gas, anything that we can use to promote, perhaps, cheaper diluents, to find ways to provide work in our many areas of the province, to look at how, say, better ways of using diluent could begin the construction of an upgrader in Medicine Hat or other parts of the province because the use of the pipeline as part of the refining process can actually bring economic value to many parts of the province. Some parts sometimes may think that they are actually getting too much of this, and it affects their environment. Perhaps that can be spread around, and people would be happier. There are ways where innovation can do that, I believe, and the performance measures and the ratio of private and public investments seem to be decreasing. I find that odd.

I've mentioned in some of the debates on the other bills that have been before this House that R and D in Canada has been historically quite low in relation to the economy. The R and D in Alberta and especially in the private sector has often been the lowest in Canada. There are reasons for that. It's the type of industries. It's the types of actions in the economy and perhaps a great deal of foreign control from centres like Houston and New York and Amsterdam and other areas where some of these types of R and D are in fact done. I think that where we could encourage these pools of capital, these multinationals to encourage more research and development in our area, somehow it would only be a great benefit for them and also a great benefit for the people of Alberta. I support any increase in the funding for this department. I think it is something that will only pay off.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to speak.

Mr. Doerksen: I'm just going to make a few quick comments in response, and again we'll respond. You mentioned young people, and I have to tell you a couple stories about young people. It is important for our young people.

At our ASTech awards we've generally had students have their science fair projects there, and these are some of the best science fair projects in Alberta. The people that come to the awards are just blown away by what these young people can do. We had one guy there, Warren Fenton, in grade 10 who did some work using an – I can't even say it – interferometer to determine how the speed of light is changed in the various gases, and he built his own equipment. At that ASTech awards I gave a challenge to the audience to let this

young fellow have some access to some university labs so he could continue his research, and they accommodated him. It was a great response.

We had another fellow by the name of Scott Pedrick, who in a grade 8 project had an artificial wetlands cleansing waste water. Again it was at the ASTech awards. Again I threw out the challenge to the group there to help this young man out, and as a matter of fact I understand that in June of this year they're going to take him to the Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre as a special guest, along with some of our people from the U of A and NOVA.

Those are just two examples of young people that are doing outstanding work in our province, and we want to continue to encourage them. You said as much, and I appreciate that.

10:30

The Member for Edmonton-Calder talked about the past hundred years. Well, if you look on the website, there's a little section that talks about Alberta inventors over the past hundred years. I would invite you to go there and look and see all the great people that we have in Alberta.

I've taken your comments about performance measures, and I would invite your input into this because every year we struggle with this. The performance measures we have are largely input based, and we struggle to find out what the output measures are. If you just look at a strict output measure being our economic success in Alberta, clearly we're at the head of the class, but I think we're trying to find performance measures that relate more to the areas that we're investing in. I admit that it's been a difficult struggle to find out what the output measures are. Quite clearly, the performance measures we have are primarily based on input.

You talked about encouraging new chairs, new endowments. Just so you know, the Alberta Science and Research Authority doesn't just give us advice in terms of strategic research; they also provided a great deal of support to the Minister of Advanced Education and our government with respect to saying that we needed to invest in postsecondary institutions, in the postgraduate level, and in scholarships. You've seen the outcome of some of that in Bill 1, in our throne speech in terms of the support we've given to that segment of advanced education and clearly supporting people. You raised that point, and we agree with it. Building research capacity is building good teams of people who are best in class, best in the world, and that is clearly a focus that we have in our department.

Thank you for your comments, and I'll sit down.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I have prepared a short Albertan wish list for the Department of Innovation and Science.

One, recognize the importance of postsecondary education and ongoing research endowments; invest our resource royalties in addition to general revenue to fund and incent innovative solutions.

Two, recognize that our most precious resources are healthy, supported, and stimulated Alberta minds.

Three, recognize, encourage, fund, and when the investment produces obvious economic returns, subsidize made-in-Alberta diversification projects to replace the government's current addictive dependency on gambling, alcohol, and tobacco taxes.

Four, fund research on renewable energy alternatives, in particular a method of storing solar, wind, and thermal energy in an economic fashion to reduce our current dependency on nonrenewable, polluting fossil fuels.

Five, through research grant funding improve our current system

of scrubbers to eliminate coal-fired emissions so that we can replace our dependency on gas, whether sweet, sour, or in combination from coal-bed methane extraction. We have hundreds of years of cheap coal supply if we can solve this pollution problem.

Six, develop and enforce an alternative to the use and irretrievable loss of potable water in oil well extraction.

Seven, in concert with the Department of Environment research and develop an inexpensive method of desalinating water to the point that it can at least be economically used for irrigational and other agricultural projects.

Eight, stop depleting our gas reserves by using expensive gas to fuel the extraction of expensive oil from the tar sands.

Nine, continue to fund scientific research to eliminate infectious diseases and cancer, diabetes, heart and stroke.

Ten, encourage natural solutions to natural problems; for example, natural fertilizers, supportive insects to fight pests, sound agricultural and wetland conservation practices.

In conclusion, invest our rapidly depleting nonrenewable resource royalties to solve today's problems and tomorrow's challenges. The innovative co-operation demonstrated in this House tonight bodes well for Alberta's future.

Mr. Doerksen: Very briefly, just to thank the member for those comments and those points. We will respond and let you know what we're doing in each one of those areas.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have one question in an area that concerns me very much, and that is the area of the ethics of technology, ethics of science. It's well known that because of the tremendous innovation and the drive towards innovation and technology, ethics lag behind quite often. For example, the new reproductive technologies led to the establishment of a royal commission to look at that or, for example, with the AIDS epidemic a federal centre for AIDS was created or, for example, the whole problem of euthanasia and so on that led to the federal Senate developing a committee to look at that.

That seems to be the way we approach issues around decisions with respect to research and science and technology. If it gets enough press and if there's enough concern, we establish some sort of a commission. It's a kind of ad hoc approach. I know that lots of other countries are moving in the direction of establishing national ethics committees to look at the ethics of science and technology.

I'm particularly impressed here in Alberta with the John Dossetor Health Ethics Centre, which I think is a tremendous, successful venture at the University of Alberta hospital. I have tremendous respect for John Dossetor. What I'm looking for is not that government should do the ethics for scientists and for technologists. Not at all. Scientists can do their own ethics, and that's what the John Dossetor centre illustrates. John Dossetor himself was a surgeon, a highly respected physician who began to raise ethical questions for the work that he was doing. He has been teaching so many people in that field how to do ethics. I think that's extremely important, that somehow there is a disconnect between our values and our going full speed ahead in terms of science and technology.

When I look at your budget and the department, I'm wondering what limits there are in terms of the kind of decisions that are made. I know there are references, for example, to the expression "quality of life." I appreciate that because we're all interested that science and technology would contribute to a great quality of life for us in Alberta. That's one kind of limiting reference. I would like to see

some more funding for ethics committees and more of a universal approach to dealing with ethics in science and technology, not just an ad hoc kind of approach.

So I wonder if you have any comments about that.

Mr. Doerksen: Well, I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Glenora because he raises some very important questions around those issues, and some of them are very dear to my heart. I have thought about them a lot. I'm glad you raised the John Dossetor because I was going to bring that up. When you first got going and you were talking about the ethics of technology and science, I thought, "Well, here's the centre," and you raised it. Obviously, you know about it, which is good.

The regulatory framework is largely set by the federal government in terms of the kind of research that is done, but we'll examine your questions in more detail and provide you some more answers in terms of what we do in Alberta.

Thank you for raising those comments.

10:40

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$135,267,000
---	---------------

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's been an invigorating night of great debate on a great department, Innovation and Science. I want to thank the minister and all the people who participated and enriched our lives with their excellent comments.

That being said, I would move that the Committee of Supply now rise and report the Ministry and Department of Innovation and Science and beg leave to sit again at another time.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

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

Innovation and Science: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$135,267,000.

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

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

Bill 24
Fatality Inquiries Amendment Act, 2005

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

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move Bill 24, the Fatality Inquiries Amendment Act, 2005, for third reading.

We've had a good debate on this bill, and I appreciate the hon. members' input and thank them for their support. The bill addresses a number of areas that were identified during public consultation.

Among other things, it enhances the fatality inquiry process by providing for pre-inquiry conferences to identify in advance the issues to be addressed in the course of the inquiry. This minimizes the possibility of lengthy adjournments after the inquiry has begun. It also clarifies who may participate in public fatality inquiries while continuing the traditional openness of the process in the past. In fact, it gives the Minister of Justice the formal authorization to release the judge's report to the public. It clarifies the role of inquiry counsel as it addresses the collection and disclosure of information by inquiry counsel to balance privacy with access. It will allow the Fatality Review Board to use their considered judgment to determine if the public would be served by a fatality inquiry in cases where there is no meaningful connection between the death and the fact that the deceased was in the custody, care, or guardianship of the government or police.

In summary, the bill will clarify and improve the fatality inquiry process to inspire confidence that public authorities are taking appropriate measures to protect human life.

I would ask the members of the Assembly to support Bill 24, and thank you for your support to date.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The main issue that received the most attention concerning this bill was the role of the media at a fatality inquiry. This is relevant to the issue of the effect of the bill. Will this legislation rationalize the whole process, enabling judges to define the scope and expeditiously deal with the relevant issues, or will this legislation restrict access on the part of concerned parties such as the media?

I appreciate the hon. minister's explanations and the distinctions he has made; namely, that it was never the intention of the bill to exclude the media. They have the right to attend fatality inquiries, but rarely would they be a party with a direct and substantial interest in the subject matter of the inquiry. His words that having the right to attend an inquiry is very different from having the right to participate at an inquiry are, I think, well taken. The bill does not restrict the media's ability to report on the inquiry. The media still has an important role to play, and they can play it.

However, the hon. minister's explanations are one thing, and I appreciate those explanations. The bill and its effects may be quite different. I hope that the minister is right in his explanations. I hope that the bill will ensure that fatality inquiries are efficient – I never objected to that word in my remarks – open, public, transparent, and, of course, helpful to the wider community to ensure greater safety and health and well-being. There are just too many unnecessary deaths to innocent people in Alberta, so let us hope that this bill enables the judicial process, the fatality inquiries to be carried out in such a way that they will instill public confidence, that the public

will be confident that we're making progress in dealing with the issues of safety and the issues of health in our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

Bill 25
Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2005

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

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move for third reading Bill 25, Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2005.

We've had a good discussion with respect to this matter, and I appreciate the support from the opposition parties that has been provided to this bill to date and hope that it will continue. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 36
Police Amendment Act, 2005

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I offered an amendment before, a first amendment. I have a second amendment that I would like to distribute on Bill 36.

Now, this amendment has to do with the time allotted for complaints. In section 18, referring to section 43(11), the period of time that's allowed for complaints reads: "shall dismiss any complaint that is made more than one year after the events on which it is based occurred." I just don't understand. I think the Solicitor General could explain to us why it's one year and why there's a kind of sudden ending after one year without any kind of discretion on the part of the chief of police. It doesn't say "may dismiss" but "shall dismiss any complaint that is made more than one year." My amendment would allow for two years but also give the chief of police more discretion by striking out "shall" and substituting "may."

10:50

It seems to me that there could be lots of factors that take the situation beyond one year. There could be a court case, and at the end of a court case that may last longer than a year, somebody might think: well, I have the grounds for a complaint. I don't understand why we would have just one year.

For example, in terms of the constitutionality of such legislation, it seems to me that there's no limitation for bringing a prosecution against a citizen of Canada in relation to an indictable offence. If a complaint against a police officer constitutes an offence, why does the police officer have this one-year limitation when that's not offered to anybody else? I'm not sure that that's really in line with section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which argues that every citizen is equal before the law. I don't know why we would

favour a police officer more than any other citizen. So I have difficulties with this. I think that by saying that the chief of police "may" hear complaints in terms of the two years, that gives them a lot more flexibility.

The Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, the amendment as circulated by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora will be referred to as amendment A2. I recognize the hon. Solicitor General on the amendment A2.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's an interesting amendment that the hon. member brings forward, but I do have a response with regard to the legislation we're bringing forward. Concerns expressed about complainants being intimidated by having to complain to the police, the very people they are complaining about, have been fully dealt with under the proposed amendments. Under Bill 36 the complainants may file their complaint with the civilian police commission's public complaint director.

Alberta is the last province to include a time limit on complaints about the conduct of a police officer. To be clear, this proposed time frame does not apply to complaints of alleged criminal conduct. In either case, though, people are encouraged to lodge their complaint as quickly as possible to avoid the possibility of potential evidence being lost with the passage of time.

Time limits on complaints of police officer conduct in other provinces are this: Quebec, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and B.C. all have a one-year time frame, which is what we're proposing, Ontario has a six-month time frame, Newfoundland and Labrador have a three-month time frame, and Manitoba and Nova Scotia have 30-day time frames. Prince Edward Island doesn't have any legislation governing complaints against the police at all. So, clearly, Alberta's proposed limit is in line with the majority of the other provinces.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on amendment A2.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. While I understand, if I were a police officer and I was waiting for the potential of a complaint to be brought against me, I would probably be rather anxious to have that complaint drawn out sooner than later. However, with court cases going on and on and class action complications, the notion that things can be resolved within a year may be somewhat premature.

The other concern that the hon. member brought up was maintaining the security of the evidence. I think that's partly a court and police responsibility to make sure that the evidence is protected and relevant. We don't want to go through what happened in the States with the glove and the knife and the pursuit in the white Bronco. We want to have a more secure system.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have one more amendment to try, and this is much more substantial than the first two. It deals with, on page 16, the heart of this Bill 36, and that is the proposal on how to handle serious incidents and complaints, under 23 but referring to 46.1, serious complaints. The model suggested by this bill does not in my estimation fulfill the requirement of providing a public oversight mechanism.

The Chair: Could we just interrupt you, hon. member, until we get the . . .

Dr. B. Miller: I haven't introduced the amendment yet, but I have it here.

The Chair: Okay.

Dr. B. Miller: I'm using up probably one minute of my five minutes left, but anyway.

This amendment is going to be directed to changing 46.2.

An Hon. Member: You killed another tree.

Dr. B. Miller: Another tree, right. It's one of the birch trees that already died.

The Chair: We'll refer to this amendment as amendment A3.

Dr. B. Miller: If I may proceed.

The Chair: Please do.

Dr. B. Miller: This amendment says that it strikes out the words "may do any one or more of the following" in the middle of page 16 under (2). Instead of "may do," we're suggesting "shall do." In other words, it shouldn't be left up to the discretion of the minister whether or not there is an investigation. But there ought to be an investigation if there is a serious offence.

Then instead of the outline in the bill, the "request . . . that another police service provide a police officer to assist," this amendment is suggesting that the investigation be carried out by a committee. So (a) to (c) is struck out and substituted with the following:

- (a) request or direct another police service to conduct an investigation into the incident or complaint, and
- (b) to ensure the integrity of the process of the investigation, appoint an oversight committee comprised of
 - (i) a retired judge,
 - (ii) a retired or former Crown prosecutor,
 - (iii) a retired or former police officer, and
 - (iv) not less than 2 members of the public.

11:00

Now, the rest of the amendment is housekeeping matters to comply with the idea of this committee. Actually, this suggestion should be familiar because this comes right out of the MLA committee on policing, which the Solicitor General was a member of, so he should recognize this proposal as quite a valid proposal.

It fulfills, in my estimation, the need to have public/civilian oversight. Instead of just having one person oversee the process as suggested by the bill, here you would have "not less than 2 members of the public." It's very important to ensure that there's actual independence and impartiality on the part of such a committee and also that there be the appearance of impartiality. Public perception is really important. When investigation of a serious offence is carried out, the public has to be assured that there is the appearance and the actual fact of impartiality and independence. This kind of committee would provide that.

It also provides the possibility of a committee that is able to perform its own investigation. The Solicitor General in question period, in response to a question of mine, suggested that the public doesn't have the ability or the skills to engage in investigations. I thought that was a statement that kind of has disrespect for the ability of the public. Of course, if you have someone who is a

retired judge or a retired Crown prosecutor or a retired or former police officer, then the ability to carry out an investigation is there on the committee.

I think this kind of proposal would go much, much further in satisfying the public in the need for civilian/public oversight of our police services. I think this would instill confidence in our police services, if we had this kind of investigative committee. So this is the amendment that we would like to propose.

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General on A3.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. With regard to the amendment that's brought forward, I want to thank the hon. member for bringing up the fact that a part of his amendment comes from the MLA Policing Review that was chaired by Her Worship Judy Gordon of the town of Lacombe.

What we looked at then was the fact that could these individuals – a retired judge, possibly a retired prosecutor, and a retired investigator – in fact be members of a committee that could oversee and investigate? The overwhelming stakeholder input with regard to that was that they are too close to the police, that they all work with police officers: as a retired investigator, obviously contacts within the police service; as a retired prosecutor, possibly contacts with those same police officers; and as a retired judge, as well those contacts would be there.

What we did then, what we're bringing forward, Mr. Chairman, is the fact that our legislation is stating that we would be appointing members of the public which could include a retired judge, a retired prosecutor or police officer. We're not stating that that's all. We're going to open the realm of individuals from the public in a true public oversight forum so that any member of the public could in fact be selected. So it's not listed as one of the individuals listed in (i), (ii), (iii), and (iv).

The other thing I wanted to mention, Mr. Chairman, was when we talk about the police investigating the police. I think we want to make it clear, though, that there are numerous, numerous professions out there that investigate themselves. Doctors investigate themselves. You know, church pastors and church ministers investigate themselves. Teachers investigate themselves. Lawyers investigate themselves. Judges investigate themselves. The list goes on and on and on.

Again, obviously, in a policing profession they have to investigate themselves because of the fact that they also have those investigative skills with regard to criminal allegations. Now, if it's a breach of conduct, those are simpler to deal with because, in fact, the regulations are very specific with regard to what offence did they in fact breach under the regulations.

I would advise the hon. member that, as well, we're going to be looking at the regulations and a review of the regulations once this act goes through. We can possibly look at a part of his suggestion here in the regulations, but of course that time will come down the road.

No, I can't accept any of the amendment as put forward, Mr. Chairman, as I believe our legislation deals with this issue regarding public oversight. Civilian oversight, the ability to monitor the process of investigation, to ensure that the integrity of the investigation is there, to ensure a clear and transparent process I think is what we want to ensure is in the process. Leaving it open to any member of the public to have the ability and/or the opportunity to oversee an investigation I think would be more critical than listing individual professions.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I would appreciate clarification from the hon. member that there would be at least two members of the public appointed – and again I hate the word “appointed,” but I can’t think of a better word; I love the word “elected,” but I’m not sure how well it works here – independent members of the public appointed, selected, elected to this oversight committee. Hopefully, you can provide me with clarification.

I was a teacher, as everyone has heard several times, for 34 years. While the Alberta Teachers’ Association did have internal professional policing – and you mentioned doctors and lawyers – there’s still a public kind of incredulity about members being able to police themselves. It always comes into question as to what extent. When it’s police, it’s the highest level of sort of professional activity or public safety that comes into account. Unless there is an impartial third party to oversee the investigation, then there’s always the possibility of personal interest or partisanship and a tainted process.

We’ve seen inquiries of late and we’ve brought them up: the ongoing battle with the Alberta Securities Commission and the ward 10 business, where people have been appointed and they appear to have the potential of partisanship. Unless we free ourselves from that perceived if not real notion of partisanship through having independent members of the public, this stigma that we’re basically guarding our own treasure comes into play.

I believe that a retired judge, a retired or former Crown prosecutor, any of these individuals are that far removed from the police officer or the police department themselves doing their own investigation that with every further removal from sort of the police being the judge and potential executioner – I don’t think all those roles can be sufficiently summed up by one person. It’s kind of like we have a system where people can elect to be tried by judge or jury. In most circumstances I would rather trust the wisdom of a number of individuals than any one individual.

Lastly, if the hon. member could clarify that there will be at least two nonpartisan members of the public as a part of that committee, I’d be more understanding of the intent.

11:10

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’m pleased to speak to this amendment, and I speak in favour of this amendment very clearly. The wording in the act needs this amendment because an overseer, as seen by the wording in the legislation, without investigative power does not actually, I think, you know, speak to the real need that this act really is looking for.

The respect for the rule of law, the respect for the police, and respect for our system of justice and law enforcement is key to the operation of our society. Policing has a very special role in our society and a special place. It’s important that it be beyond reproach. Investigating any allegations against particular police officers and all the foofaraw that goes around this sort of thing makes it necessary that there be a real independence by those who are dealing with this. Independence does not mean that they can’t be former police officers, that they can’t be investigators of another sort. They might be somebody from the corrections branch, somebody from any of a number of areas in law enforcement, or somebody from another province or whatever, but the key is independence.

This sort of system works very well in Ontario. It works very well in other jurisdictions. It need not have a high staffing component. The training and staffing component for this type of thing need not be – in fact, it probably in the long run could be a saving, as it takes away the need for spending in these areas by all of the very different police organizations and departments in our province.

I believe that this amendment is a very beneficial addition and should be passed by this Legislature and would lead to a better support in the long run for our police. I’ve talked to a number of individual people in the law enforcement community. Although they would not support this publicly, they say that, you know, in reality this type of independence would give greater strength to any decision that comes from any inquiry of these matters because it creates suspicion in the public if the police are judging themselves.

I would urge this Assembly to vote for this amendment.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A3? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Strictly a clarification, and possibly my question was lost: is it the hon. member’s and mover’s intention that there will be two members of the public on the oversight committee in addition to the police officer doing the judgment?

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Chairman, as per the legislation it’s “appoint one or more members of the public.”

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A3?

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, have some interest in Bill 36. While I think the intention of the bill shows some promise, I think that we’re hearing from quite a number of people across the city and across the province that have some concerns as to the strength of this bill, whether or not it’s going far enough to restore the public’s confidence in the ability for us to have independent oversight over the police force under certain circumstances.

So I have an amendment to section 20 of this bill. It’s on page 13, and I would like to distribute it now, please.

The Chair: We’ll refer to this amendment as amendment A4.

Hon. member, would you like to proceed?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you. So as my amendment is being distributed, this amendment has proposed to set a timeline for police to investigate complaints. After six months if the matter has not been, quote, unquote, disposed of, then it is referred to the police commission for a committee to review. Now, this is designed specifically to deal with complaints in a timely manner. Again, with that question of confidence, if something is serious enough to warrant a complaint – and we don’t usually see these things taken lightly – then, in fact, the public will know that the complaint will be dealt with within a reasonable timeline, and if not, it’s going to the police commission for review.

I think that on a number of occasions people have at least the perception – and perception has a lot to do, Mr. Chairman, with the integrity of any public body that we have. Sometimes there is the perception that people are having their complaint sort of swept away and lost in the mists of time. So we’re hoping that this amendment might address that concern and give Bill 36 some more of the teeth that it requires.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I believe this is going to be A4.

Mr. Chairman, the police commission through the public complaint director will have the authority to review any complaint under investigation at any time. In the event that the length of an investigation becomes a concern, the mechanism I just mentioned is already in place to review the reasons for the delay. The police commission has that ability now to investigate any matter that may come before them, so we're not in agreement with the amendment.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. We seem to be at odds here. In one sense we want speedy justice for police officers who have potentially been accused of some nonprofessional act, yet on the other side we don't seem to want to provide that same speed and efficiency for a person who has lodged the accusation. I don't see one individual's worth or desire for speedy justice being higher than the other's. I respect the role of police officers, but I don't believe that they are above the law or above a timely process any more so than any member of the public. If we want to have any kind of public faith in the system, we need to know that within a certain time limit these complaints will be dealt with and not at the discretion, again, of the police force but within a regulated and expected six-month period. You can't have it both ways and say that the police deserve speedy justice but the public doesn't.

I speak in favour of the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

11:20

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Sorry; I was just being diverted there for a moment.

I have another amendment to Bill 36, and I will distribute it now. It's in reference to section 18, page 11 of the bill. If I might distribute those for you.

The Chair: We'll refer to this amendment as amendment A5.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. As you might see, this amendment is referring to section 18 of Bill 36. It's focusing on: will the extension of the length of time that a complaint . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, if I may interject, the wording of your amendment is already part of a previous amendment. Therefore, it would be ruled out of order.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Well, I think that amendments are a bit like fishing. If you just keep your hook in long enough, eventually you'll catch something.

I do in fact have another one. This third amendment has to do with section 23 on pages 15 and 16 of the proposed bill in front of us. I will distribute that to you.

The Chair: We'll call this one A6.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. The last amendment that I have for you is to strengthen the clause in the act in general to force the minister to take action on complaints rather than just empowering the minister to do so. Again, this is in the spirit of strengthening this overall act to provide the public with the confidence to know that there is a degree of independence in oversight with the various police departments around the province and that the minister, in fact, carries a fair amount of clout to allow intervention when necessary.

I think that, you know, in looking back, all of the calls for a reform of the Police Act were looking to fundamentally redirect the way by which we investigate our police departments when necessary.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hate to interject again, but your amendment A6 is the same wording as the previous amendment A2, so I have to rule it out of order as well.

Mr. Eggen: I'm sorry. Are you referring to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora's amendment? Okay. So it's out of order as well?

The Chair: That's correct. It's out of order.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Thank you. Those are all of the amendments I have for this Bill 36.

Mr. Cenaiko: I think, Mr. Chairman, there's some issue with the handing out of the amendments because A6 actually came on this side of the House as A5. I think there was maybe a mix-up in handing them out. A6 is actually this last amendment: Dr. Pannu to move that Bill 36, Police Amendment Act, 2005, be amended in section 23 in the proposed section 46.1(2) by striking out "may do" and substituting "shall do." That should be A6.

The Chair: By striking out "one year" and substituting "two years" is amendment A6.

Mr. Cenaiko: That was A5. That was the same as A2.

The Chair: They're both out of order. The table received both amendments at the same time, so there could be a mix-up in the ones you received. Nevertheless, both of them are ruled out of order because the wording is the same as other subsequent amendments.

Are there any other amendments?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Just a parting remark for the sake of *Hansard* if I may. The intention of the amendments from this side of the House was just to have equal treatment for both the police and the public, and the cliché that best expresses that is: what's good for the goose is good for the gander.

Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 36 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 36.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Webber: The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 36. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the Assembly stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 11:29 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

