

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 18, 2005** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 05/05/18
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a special group of Alberta's postsecondary students touring the Legislature today. The members of the group are students from NAIT, Mount Royal College, and Grant MacEwan College. They are currently getting some short-term work experience in the Alberta public service in order to complete the practicum portion of their studies. I would ask them to stand as I introduce them: Sherri Bishop, Robin Boschman, Leung Lee, Jody Lucius, Marlene Moreira, Darcy Whiteside, Lisa Nisbet, Trevor Gemmell, and Jenna Stuckey. I would ask all of the members of the Assembly to give these students a very warm welcome to our Legislature.

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

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a true artist, Mr. Jeremy Chugg. Mr. Chugg along with his co-writers at Brainstorm, a Calgary-based company, have just won a prestigious award for creating an awareness video for Alberta SuperNet. The *Supernet* video was recognized by the Alberta Motion Picture Industries Association with a 2005 Alberta film and television award for best scriptwriter. The video was also nominated for best motivational video and for best host. Mr. Chugg co-wrote the script with Barry Chugg and Kerrie Penney. Congratulations, Jeremy, for winning the recognition of your industry peers and of this House. I would ask you now to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if my guests have made it here yet, but if they have – and they have indeed. I'd very much like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Roger Pullishy and Mrs. Sonia Pullishy, very good friends of mine for many years. Along with them are Mrs. Rika Bok, Mrs. Murkje Davidson, Mrs. Heather Gordon, Jordan Labossiere, age nine, Joshua Labossiere, age six, as well as their special guest from Meppel, Holland, Mrs. Ellen Ijben. I would ask them to please rise and receive the very, very warm welcome of this House. Thank you so much for joining us today.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't see my guests in the gallery that's visible to me, so I'm assuming that they're in the members' gallery: two constituents, Tom and Carrie Courtney, from

Linden, Alberta. They are accompanied today by their grandson Richard Westlund, who is the executive assistant of the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, and he's also accompanied by his wife, Jamie, and their latest addition to the family, Aaron Westlund. So if they're available, would they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of very experienced teenagers. They are, in fact, a seniors group from the Devon Alliance Church. Although the Alliance Church is located in my constituency, a lot of these members are also representatives of the members for Drayton Valley-Calmar as well as Stony Plain. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you a good friend and colleague of mine from the department of political science at the University of Calgary, Dr. Keith Archer. Dr. Archer is one of Canada's leading experts on political parties and elections and has written on Alberta political parties as well as national political parties. He's accompanied by his son Justin, who once had the misfortune to take a course from me. I'd like them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two new additions to the caucus staff. They've been with us a couple of weeks to a couple of months.

First, I'd like to introduce Carmen Remenda. She has joined our team as an administrative assistant. It's her voice you hear when you first call in to the Liberal caucus office. She moved to Alberta – making the right choice, of course – in 1997 from Saskatchewan and now lives in Sherwood Park. Before joining our team, Carmen worked closely assisting academics and students in an administrative capacity at the University of Regina and more recently at the University of Alberta. We are most honoured to have her join the Liberal caucus. I would ask her to rise.

I would also ask Thomas Lore to rise. Thomas is a lifelong Edmontonian who has an English degree from the University of Alberta and is about to receive his public relations diploma from Grant MacEwan College. He has joined the Liberal caucus as a communications intern and is with us until the end of June.

Would you please both rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a single introduction today. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two women who have taken a strong position on the need for healing and reconciliation in Canada between families and communities. These two women, Maggie Hodgson and Yi Yi Datar, have pioneered in Canada the National Day of Healing and Reconciliation, in Edmonton as the first location – this is the

second annual – on May 26 at Winston Churchill Square between 11:30 and 1:00 p.m. This will happen each year in Edmonton and, hopefully, spread across the country. They're here to highlight the need to reach across the divide of race, colour, religion, and ethnicity. I would ask them both to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature two classes from NorQuest College west, which is in my constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. These two classes are studying English as a Second Language. Their teachers are Thu Vu and Debbie Weimann. Just to give you an idea of the variety of people in this class, they're from countries like China, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kurdistan, Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Colombia. We welcome them to Canada and to this great province of Alberta. I'd invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly five guests seated in the public gallery. They are Joan and Doug Miller, Samantha Stasiuk, Katie Hayes, and Lenora Murphy, all of whom reside in my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Lenora Murphy and Katie Hayes will be representing Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood at the Royal dinner and reception. Ms Murphy has retired from her job as secretary at Glenrose hospital and now enjoys spending time with her two grandchildren. Katie Hayes is the graduating class president at Eastglen high school.

1:40

I'm honoured that Doug Miller and Samantha Stasiuk will be my guests for the Royal Address to the Chamber. Doug, who is accompanied by his wife, Joan, is retired from the navy. On May 26 the Millers will be celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary. They're active members of the Highlands United Church and are extremely proud of their six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Samantha Stasiuk also attends Eastglen high school, where she is the valedictorian for her graduating class.

I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've got two introductions today. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly Karen Stone and Faye L'Hirondelle. Karen and Faye have been here since this morning to meet with the press to express their serious concerns about private vocational colleges. Faye currently works for Planet Organic, and Karen is employed by Stencil Systems, a decorative concrete company. Karen is also a proud mother of three children and is visiting the Legislature for the first time. These guests are seated in the public gallery. I will now ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction. I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to introduce to you and through you to the House Samantha Leung, an honours student at Concordia high school.

Samantha will be applying for the page program in this Assembly next year. Samantha is seated in the public gallery, right in the front row. I'll ask her to please rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very delighted today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two young people seated in the public gallery. They are Teresa Voss and Stephen Taylor. They're here today to express their concerns about private vocational colleges. Stephen is studying to complete his general education diploma, and Teresa will begin her mechanics apprenticeship in the next two weeks. Both Stephen and Teresa are visiting for the very first time. I would ask that they now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. My first is with reference to Special Olympics Edmonton. Special Olympics Edmonton is a local nonprofit organization that provides sport and recreation opportunities to Albertans with intellectual disabilities. Currently there are more than 300 volunteers supporting 500 local athletes participating in a variety of sports such as bowling, track and field, floor hockey, figure skating, and skiing, to mention a few. On April 23 this organization with the support of the good folks at Capital City Savings held its annual Bowl for Special Olympics fundraiser at the Bonnie Doon Bowling Lanes. More than 400 bowlers threw strikes, including our very own Education minister. The event was successful, raising over \$85,000.

Mr. Speaker, these events don't just happen. They require organizers. We have with us today four very hard-working, dedicated volunteers and organizers with this very special project. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the four individuals who were instrumental in the success of this year's Capital City Savings Bowl for Special Olympics.

Mr. David Armstrong, president of River City Financial Services, has been involved with Special Olympics Edmonton for many years, has served virtually in every capacity they have. This year he served as a member of the organizing committee, and his company was a silver sponsor for the event.

Ms Jacqueline Broverman, community investment manager for Capital City Savings, also served as a member of the organizing committee and was instrumental in ensuring that the event had everything it needed to succeed, including promotional material, a call centre, and 24 bowling teams from Capital City Savings outlets.

Ms Louise Suru, general manager for Special Olympics Edmonton, has been with the organization for 25 years now, mostly serving in a volunteer capacity, and she's truly the heart and soul of this wonderful organization.

Last but not least, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Lenny Andrichuk, who was both the chairman and the driving force behind this year's highly successful event. He's a dedicated and committed individual who, in addition to his role as chair, finds time to volunteer in a number of other capacities, including as a full-time track and field coach with Special Olympics.

I'd ask these four to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome and special thanks of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two very important people in my life this

summer from my Edmonton-Whitemud constituency office: Cindy Ho, who runs the constituency office year-round and has been doing so since 1997, and Bryan Lo, who is working in the office this summer as a STEP student. Bryan has just completed his second year at The King's University College. Together Cindy and Bryan look after the many wonderful constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're here today in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Securities Commission

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Finance minister has now been sent a host of information from a wide range of credible sources raising concerns about enforcement irregularities at the Alberta Securities Commission. Two companies have filed legal action that ASC enforcement practices were biased, and more are almost certain to come. My questions are to the Finance minister. Given all the evidence, can the minister explain her position that there is no evidence of enforcement problems at the ASC?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, we've discussed this issue a number of times over the last weeks in this Legislature, but I will recount again for the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that, indeed, when this was raised with me initially, I took immediate action. I wrote to the commission on January 12 and told them that I'd had some concerns raised and asked them to investigate.

They promptly set that in motion and, in fact, had an outside person by the name of Perry Mack do a thorough investigation, which included two reports: one, a report from the people who had complaints, and the second report, the response from the people who had some allegations made. Mr. Speaker, that is the basis on which I have said in this Legislature that the finding of that report was that the enforcement and regulatory portion of ASC was being handled consistently, even-handedly, and fairly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that government MLAs can nominate candidates to be ASC commissioners and at the same time can be officers in companies trading under the ASC, will the minister admit that this puts government MLAs in a conflict of interest?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, let me make one thing very clear. Nominations can be received, yes, from MLAs of this Legislature.

Mr. MacDonald: What about me?

Mrs. McClellan: Absolutely, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. If you have a person that you wish to nominate, at an appropriate time we would most welcome that nomination.

Secondly, we receive nominations, Mr. Speaker, from the commission themselves. Thirdly, we receive nominations from the financial community and interested parties. If there is any concern on conflict of interest, the Ethics Commissioner will promptly review that and make his determination.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've actually consulted the Ethics Commissioner's office.

To the same minister: will the minister do the right thing and immediately and decisively end the practice of government MLAs nominating candidates to serve as ASC commissioners?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there are 83 persons in this Legislature that are elected by the citizens of this province. I have the deepest respect for their knowledge of people and possible applicants for many areas. I will not do that. I will not refuse a nomination from any opposition party in this Legislature or from the government. What the hon. member should really be more interested in is how all of those nominations are vetted and approved by external and internal persons. What we want is the best people with the best credentials. I believe that we are achieving that.

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

1:50

Wild Rose Foundation Grants

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've stated before in this House, the Wild Rose Foundation is an important asset to Alberta, and we need to safeguard its integrity. The Auditor General's investigation into the Applewood community association and how it used its Wild Rose grant is, in fact, a good first start, but it may not answer all the questions that this issue has raised. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. Can that minister tell us if any other international projects supported by the Wild Rose Foundation operate without CIDA's assurance of accountability?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, on previous occasions the Leader of the Opposition has suggested that there has been some disconnect or somehow an inconsistency with respect to what I've said as it relates to the involvement of CIDA, the national foreign aid agency. I've indicated to him and for the record that there have been occasions where we've asked CIDA, but as a matter of policy we do not ask CIDA to review every single project that we do in foreign jurisdictions. They are involved from time to time but not invariably so, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. My questions are to the same minister. In the case of the Applewood community association will the minister ask the Auditor General to examine whether political interference played any role in this case?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I've requested that the Auditor General examine these matters for two occasions. One is a grant that was given to Applewood in the year 2001 and, secondly, with respect to a grant that was given in 2004. I further asked CIDA to look into the project in Vietnam to be assured that, in fact, the work was done. The Auditor General has not indicated to me exactly what the scope of his review is, but I'm certain that, as is his practice, it will be complete. So I've not given him directions specifically on this point, but as we know, the Auditor General does complete his work in a complete manner.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the same minister: in order to end any questions of political interference and to protect the integrity of the Wild Rose Foundation, will the minister take steps to establish

a genuinely arm's-length relationship between MLAs and the Wild Rose Foundation?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is asking for something that seems to be somewhat unreasonable because, of course, he acknowledges himself that there is good work that is being done by the Wild Rose Foundation and that it is a valuable asset to the province of Alberta. In fact, members of the opposition have from time to time come forward and said: look, we think that there is a project that is meritorious of consideration by Wild Rose. There is nothing wrong with this, whether members of the government side or the opposition side suggest that there are meritorious projects that should be considered. I think the important part is that there be a transparent process for decision-making after those meritorious projects have been brought to the attention of Wild Rose by members of the opposition or members of government.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Child and Youth Advocate

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Receiving reports from this Legislature in a timely fashion is important not only to the opposition so they can hold the government to account but to all Albertans so they can be informed of the actions of government. It is not acceptable that Children's Services delivered the report from the children's advocate two years late. To the Minister of Children's Services. Given that staff and funding to the children's advocate's office have been cut, is this the reason the report was so late?

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you very much for that question. I can tell you that, yes, I received the advocate's report late, and the reason from the advocate is a number of factors. One of the contributing factors is the advocate's priorities. The advocate's priorities were the youth and children in this province and not so much writing a report. I can tell you that though I tabled the report yesterday, which is two years old, we have moved on every recommendation through that report.

In regard to the budget I think the hon. member should go to the budget this year. We've increased the budget from \$3.8 million to \$5.3 million this year, and over the next two years it will be increased by \$7.7 million, which is a hundred per cent increase in his budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the children's advocate admits, "We are not able to undertake the work that would be necessary to say conclusively that all young people receiving services have the same experience," will this ministry fund the children's advocate for the protection of Alberta's children now so that it can ensure that all children under child welfare services are receiving the same level of care?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the previous question I just said that the budget was \$3.8 million, that now it's \$5.3 million and over the next two years an increase of a hundred per cent to the advocate's budget.

I can tell the hon. member from across the way, though, that what we have done in this particular ministry under youth in transition is phenomenal. The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, who is the chair of the Youth Secretariat, and I have spent the last two days at

the Children's Forum. I think we have to be exceptionally proud of the children and youth in this province that we are helping under that program. It is incredible what they have been doing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it has been 15 years since the children's advocate first recommended better plans for permanency planning and we still have children falling through the system cracks, when will the ministry get the people and funding needed to protect and give a future to Alberta's most needy children?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, in a real world everything would be perfect. The unfortunate thing is that we are going to have children in this province that fall through the cracks. I can tell you, though, that the number one priority of the social workers that work in this province is the children and youth in this province. This government has worked very hard on trying to deal with the children that, as the hon. member says, have been falling through the cracks.

We have the Children's Forum still going on at Edmonton Northlands. I would love for her to take a hike over there and meet some of the children that we have helped. We were at a function last night, the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul and I, with probably about 200 high-needs youth that have come into the youth in transition program. These children have done wonderful things in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Government Accountability

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Following the last provincial election and the loss of a dozen seats this Tory government tried to appear humble, promising to be more accountable and more transparent. Instead, the government has quickly reverted to its old ways, refusing to be accountable for the long-term care mess or even answering legitimate questions about a questionable land deal. It's the same old arrogant and secretive government we saw before the election. My first question is to the Deputy Premier. Why is the government failing to be accountable by its refusal to release any details of a real estate deal involving hundreds of acres of prime real estate in Fort McMurray sold in a cozy, private deal to a Tory-friendly developer?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, this government has put into process under the Premier's leadership the most open and accountable governing body that you will find in this country, whether it's through completely transparent, consolidated financial accounts or through providing information. However, the minister very clearly said yesterday that upon reviewing this matter, under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act there are certain things that she cannot release.

I know that the hon. member opposite believes very much in that act, and I believe his caucus supported having a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. An act that was passed in this Legislature is not an act of convenience. It is an act that protects the privacy of every person in every situation under that legislation.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, why is the government failing to be accountable to whistle-blowers like the former director of administrative services at the Alberta Securities Commission, who got fired when he came forward and exposed wrongdoing and corruption?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I cannot discuss the particular incident that the member is talking about, but as I have said consistently in this Legislature and believe wholeheartedly, if any employee has a concern on a dismissal, there are steps that that employee has available to them. It's most appropriate that any employee, whether it is of the public service or the Alberta Securities Commission in this case, has the opportunity to take those steps.

2:00

Mr. Mason: There's a pattern emerging, Mr. Speaker.

Why is the government failing to be accountable to citizens like Marie Geddes, who was forced to go on a hunger strike to draw attention to the government's appalling neglect of seniors in long-term care?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I think, first of all, I find the question a bit distasteful in using an unfortunate passing of a person in this manner.

The budget that we have just concluded debate on in this Legislature included increased staffing for long-term care. The ministers that are responsible for long-term care, both the minister of health and the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, have indicated that they take all of the Auditor General's recommendations very seriously and intend to act on them. I don't think that that's lack of accountability. In fact, I would say quite the opposite.

I do want to make this point, Mr. Speaker, though. We want to ensure that everybody understands that when we have this discussion, it is about caring about long-term care members and not a criticism of the wonderful staff who do work in those facilities. I've had the opportunity to visit five of those in the last two weeks. Without question and without exception every family member that was there when I presented centenarian medals talked about the wonderful care and caring that exists in our long-term care facilities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Government Efficiency

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are independent, fiscal conservatives who know that the best government is local government and that smaller government is more efficient. In 1992 our Premier said: this government is going to live within its means; that means streamlining our operations, rationalizing and consolidating our government services. Given this government's budget plan to hire 1,023 more bureaucrats this year alone, we have to ask what has happened to this government's fiscal prudence of streamlining and amalgamation of government operations. To the deputy minister: will this government put a freeze on the expansion of hiring 1,023 more bureaucrats and, if it is compelled to hire anyone, hire 1,023 seniors' caregivers?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that was addressed to me. As I just indicated, we had 24 days of budget debate, I think very good debate, some of the best budget debate that I have experienced in this House. The questions were good. I think the attempts to answer were as complete and clear as they could be. I do know that in the estimates of the Ministry of Finance questions were asked on the additional human resource people that we had hired, and I think that the member opposite had that opportunity in every debate.

The province of Alberta is a growing, vibrant province. The population is growing. The services required by that population are growing. Mr. Speaker, we do have a streamlined government

offering services. It's a matter of pride to us that when persons do require government services, they don't stand in a long waiting line.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Deputy Premier: are the hon. ministers and their deputies incapable of streamlining and restructuring their own departments?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, we have an incredible talent pool in this caucus and certainly in the ministers that lead these departments. I can assure the hon. member that they are very capable. The most thorough review of all government programs has occurred in this government, and a number of changes have been made. However, I've also said that in the next business planning process, ministers will again be examining all of their departments. If there are things they are doing that they feel could be better done by someone else, that will be raised. If there are areas of their portfolio that they feel would better respond to Albertans by being in another ministry, they will make that recommendation, and indeed the Minister of Restructuring and Government Services will review that.

Mr. Hinman: Albertans will thank you for doing that.

To the Deputy Premier again: will this government act now, as it did with the botched ambulance service, and save millions of Albertans' tax dollars by scrapping the Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, an odd line of questioning. It must be late in the session. The first two questions were about streamlining government, efficiency in government, and examining government departments to ensure that they are most efficient. Then to ask to have the very ministry that has charge of doing that job to be scrapped is a bit odd.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Tracking and Tracing System for Alberta Beef

Ms. Haley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As many members in the Assembly know, this Friday will mark the second anniversary of the discovery of BSE in North America, an event that has caused unparalleled and unforeseen changes to our cattle industry. Alberta led the country in developing innovative solutions to that crisis, solutions developed in conjunction with industry that have meant we still have a viable cattle industry. However, we still have a ways to go. Markets that were once very lucrative, such as Japan, remain closed. I continue to hear from my constituents that there is an easy answer to this problem: if we test everything for BSE, previously closed markets will open immediately. All my questions are to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. If the solutions are so simple, Minister, why haven't we begun to test everything for BSE to regain market access?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, the solution isn't that simple. I have yet to see any foreign trade agreements that would tell me that if we tested all of our beef for BSE, we would be allowed to export products into that country. The reason for that is very, very straightforward. Testing for BSE isn't about food safety, and it never has been.

The safety of our beef is really determined by the removal of the specified risk materials, which we are doing, not by testing all slaughter cattle. In fact, other jurisdictions, like Japan, as the hon. member mentioned, are moving away from testing all of their slaughter cattle, even within their own countries. The Japanese are moving towards allowing beef from cattle of an age less than 21 months without testing. In the end, Mr. Speaker, testing every steer or heifer slaughtered in Alberta does little to reassure our international trading partners that our beef is safe, but perhaps it does provide good coffee shop talk.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Haley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If we don't support testing all animals, could the minister inform the Assembly what we are doing to help our industry access other markets?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are continuing to work with our industry on a number of fronts, all with the aim of re-establishing our presence in those international marketplaces. In fact, today we are announcing that Alberta will be moving forward with age verification of all young cattle slaughtered in Alberta.

With the Speaker's leniency, I'd like to table a press release which I'll be quoting from. The move will mean that Alberta producers will have a definitive competitive advantage over other jurisdictions. By improving our traceability and having a slaughter herd with a verifiable age, we can have the possibility of re-establishing a presence in some very exciting markets, Mr. Speaker, like Japan. We'll be working with the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency, and we are "targeting mandatory age verification for all young cattle slaughtered in Alberta . . . as of April 1, 2007." That is going to have significant benefits to our producers because we will be the first.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Haley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Producers will be spending a considerable amount of time to compile this information, Minister. Are they going to get anything in return for that?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a very good question because we don't want to add more costs to our producers without adding value. This program is going to have some significant benefits to our producers no matter what happens with the U.S. border. Not only will they have the potential for re-entry into those markets which I talked about, but we're also working with the industry to develop a potential carcass quality feedback program. That would allow the feedlot owners, backgrounders, cow-calf producers to gain a better understanding of what kind of production methods are going to be beneficial to them, which results in the best quality of beef. That improves the bottom lines of those producers and the cattle industry as a whole, Mr. Speaker.

We're also going to be working alongside the industry on an information and awareness campaign so that producers will know exactly what will be required of them and what they will be getting in return.

The Speaker: And the hon. minister will table the appropriate document at the appropriate time.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

2:10 Lubicon Band Land Claim

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unresolved land claims affect all Albertans. Companies can't rely on leases and permits issued by the provincial government as disputed territory is not owned by the province. Blockades, unrest, and the loss of important cultures are unavoidable due to this government's unwillingness to tackle tough issues, particularly the continuing tragedy of the Lubicon nation. My question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Given that this government has had over 50 years to help negotiate a land claim settlement with the Lubicons and that the government's own consultation process is little more than window dressing, why has this government not been more vocal in publicly urging the federal government to negotiate a settlement with the Lubicon nation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The matter of the Lubicon is within my ministry, so I will address this question. As you know, the federal government is principally responsible for the negotiations with respect to First Nation land claims, and in this particular case that is true also. The federal government last had negotiations in this matter some 18 months ago. The provincial government has always indicated that we are prepared to be at the table if asked. We were at the table at that time. The fact of the matter is that the negotiations reached an impasse, and that is why there has not been any negotiation for some time.

Mr. Tougas: Well, back to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: given that once Lubicon land is transferred back to the federal government at the resolution of the outstanding land claim, what is being done to ensure that royalties collected by this government from subsurface extraction are available to the Lubicon nation?

Mr. Stevens: What I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, with respect to this matter is that there have been certain parameters with respect to the negotiations that have been established subject to confirmation; for example, the claim of the Lubicon is for a band of some 400 and some odd persons, and as such a potential land claim based on the claim of the Lubicon has been tentatively set aside. That land has been identified. With respect to that particular land, as I understand it, there have been no transactions of any nature whatsoever for some period of time. That particular land that is potentially part of a settlement, based on discussions to this point in time, has been set aside and has been recognized as the potential land for the purposes.

Mr. Tougas: My final supplementary is definitely to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Will the minister explain to the Lubicon nation why her department failed to consult the band about development occurring at Sawm Lake?

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

Mr. Stevens: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I think that the opposition have to understand that I will be standing and addressing Lubicon matters because of a very clear potential conflict. That very clear potential conflict, as I understand it, is that the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is a potential claimant

in this claim; in other words, she may well be qualified as a Lubicon claimant. Now, whether that is true or not, I don't know, but I know it is a potential. As such, I am going to be addressing this matter because she cannot.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Cornea Transplants

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A Whitecourt constituent contacted me last weekend, and he's very frustrated by Alberta's procedure for cornea donations, and you can't blame him. The Mayerthorpe man is awaiting his fourth cornea transplant. The wait for cornea transplants seems to be long and growing in this province. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister please tell us what this government is doing to address this issue of long wait times?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you. In the first instance, Mr. Speaker, sometimes it's particularly difficult to get the right match, so there always is a dependency by the ophthalmologist on the right match. There's a particularly concentrated effort in Calgary and Edmonton because these are the places where some six ophthalmologists perform about 250 cornea transplants every year. So while we're working with all authorities, we primarily urge organ donors to make sure that they inform their family physicians, that they inform their family, that they sign their cards, and that we get the network out through the physicians' offices, through the regional health authorities at this time.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister. The minister just talked about the registry process. Can she tell us if other provinces have a registry for transplants?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the only province to this date that's had a registry is British Columbia. Interestingly enough, they found that when they put this registry in place for organ donations, the numbers of people that offered their organs for transplant actually decreased because they were concerned about having, I gather, the paperwork or the bureaucracy of a registry. At this time the most efficient way is to make sure that everybody signs their donor card and lets people in their family as well as their physician know that that's what their preference is.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: will the electronic health record help reduce wait times, and will this electronic system work as a new registry for donors?

Ms Evans: We believe it will on both counts. We believe it will help us streamline the capacity of people to receive transplants as well as to alert people that there is an organ available for transplant. Sometimes those organ donors are not caught. The electronic record, once every person in Alberta has that record, will help. For those people out there who are seeking transplants, I think we just have to step up our efforts to make sure that those transplants and those organ donation opportunities are given every opportunity to make that happen.

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

Parks and Protected Areas

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This long weekend thousands of Alberta families will be heading out on substandard highways in search of safe recreational opportunities. This government has stated that it wants to keep our provincial parks and protected areas, which account for only 4 per cent of Alberta's land usage, safe and enjoyable for visitors. However, recently the Ghost-Waiparous access management plan was released, which offers little protection for families but almost unlimited access for high-intensity off-highway vehicles. My questions are all to the Minister of Community Development. When will more conservation officers be hired and offices reopened to enforce rules in our provincial parks and protected areas?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that we have significantly increased our budget for parks in the province of Alberta and that we are restoring these areas to the kind of condition that they ought to be in.

With respect to enforcement, Mr. Speaker, by and large in our provincial parks and recreational areas – and there are some 500 of them throughout the province of Alberta – there is an outstanding family experience for people who travel to those areas.

Now, there are issues with respect to Ghost-Waiparous, Mr. Speaker. We've taken measures in the past to ensure that there are appropriate usages because these parks belong to all Albertans, not just those that would choose to use the areas, really, in an inappropriate way. We are stepping up on enforcement. We are enforcing, in some examples, liquor bans for use, and this has dramatically reduced the number of offences that have taken place in some areas, but Ghost-Waiparous continues to be an issue.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second follow-up: given that high-intensity recreational activities and noisy parties have the effect of driving families from our parks, how will this minister make these areas safer for everyone's benefit throughout the year?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to the hon. member, there are great family memories that are grown in our provincial parks, and that's just the reality. The people who use our parks, by and large, are law-abiding people looking for family recreation, looking to get away from the city environment and enjoy nature as it was intended to be enjoyed. I wouldn't want the hon. member to suggest to Albertans that all of our parks throughout the province are places where families can't go. The reality is that there need to be places for people to use off-highway vehicles, as an example. What we need to do is continue to work with local law enforcement officials like the RCMP, like our own conservation officers to ensure that people are staying on trails and not cutting new trails and that there is respect for the park and the other people who are using it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit to stronger protection of the environmental integrity of our provincial parks and protected areas from the incursion of oil and gas development, timber clear-cutting, and high-intensity recreational activities? Protect our 4 per cent wilderness heritage, please.

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I didn't realize that you could speak while seated.

Those are the values that the Department of Community Development stands for. There can be good reasons why there may be clear-cutting activities in certain areas. For example, with respect to things like mountain pine beetle, we work very, very closely with the department of sustainable resources to ensure that we try and stop mountain pine beetle where we can. So the result may be that within a park or other protected area we may in fact take a clear-cut in order to stop that kind of incursion of mountain pine beetles from occurring.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Police Recruitment and Training Centre

Mr. McFarland: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Lethbridge Community College and the criminal justice program in my opinion are two shining examples of a good educational program in Alberta. One of the recommendations of the government MLA policing committee was to call for a centre of excellence for police and peace officer training. I understand that the Solicitor General will soon be seeking proposals for, among other things, siting for this particular training facility. My question is to the Solicitor General. Will Lethbridge be considered for the provincial single-site police and peace officer training facility?

The Speaker: The Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we are moving forward on the policing review's recommendation to establish a centralized police and peace officer training facility in the province of Alberta. Yes, Lethbridge will be considered as a possible site along with all other communities that have an interest and the capacity to provide the services that will be needed to support such a facility. This centre will provide training and professional development for police and peace officers as well as civilian members of police commissions as well as provide professional development and leadership, management, and executive development. In June our department will be releasing a public call for expressions of interest, or EOIs, and I encourage Lethbridge to come forward with a formal indication of their interest at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then considering the answer, are you, Minister, considering a single-site training college model that anticipates the elimination of, for instance, the RCMP, thereby going to a single police service in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No. We already have a provincial police service for Alberta. The RCMP provide that service to us under an agreement until the year 2012. As any responsible government would do, we are preparing a cost and service benefit review for 2007 to see that we are indeed getting the best value for our money. This review is built in to the present agreement.

We support our contract with the RCMP. The RCMP has a long and proud history in Alberta. However, we do support the concept of regional policing and, as well, looking at other models. So we do support and encourage a model of integrated services in which all police agencies share the resources and services with one another

throughout the province, especially those of a critical and specialized nature that services provide.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Mr. McFarland: Thank you.

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

Private Vocational Schools

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today four courageous former students of a government-licensed, private, for-profit vocational school here in Edmonton met with the press to express their concerns based on their personal experiences in that institution. One hundred and forty-seven such government-licensed private vocational schools operate in Alberta and indirectly receive tens of millions of public dollars every year, yet the government allows these schools to operate even if they don't meet performance standards. No wonder default rates and student loans at these institutions exceed 30 per cent, six times higher than those for students in the university sector. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education. Given that these institutions are allowed to stay open whether they have a class A or class B licence, whether they have performance standards which are satisfactory or not, why does the government not pull the licences of private vocational schools that fail to achieve satisfactory instructional standards and satisfactory graduation rates? Why not?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that when I was a member of the Students Finance Board in this province, we actually initiated a policy which indicated that we would delist institutions that had high default rates and particularly private institutions. In fact, I recall one particular institution that was closed as a result of that. It wasn't closed as a result of that, but their ability for their students to get student loans was removed, and as a result the institution closed. That policy is still in place as far as I know. I'd be happy to look into the specific default rates in the institutions that were raised in the hon. member's press release, but we're very concerned about default rates and about students being attracted to institutions to get certifications or types of certification for which there is no market and no ability to earn enough money to pay it back, so that's a very high degree of concern.

Mr. Speaker, if I may, I'll just add one other thing. Companies can do business in this province and every other place, and it is very incumbent on students, when they make a choice, that they look into the choice that they're making, that they understand what they're getting into. That's very important. Not all vocational schools are registered, and not all those that are registered are appropriate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Charter rights are contravened when government-licensed, private, for-profit vocational institutions in this province expel students accused of trying to form student associations, what action will the minister take to safeguard the rights of students to free assembly and free speech?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding with respect to private institutions that we don't actually license private institutions. What we do is look at programs that are offering certification and we review the programs to ensure that the programs are appropriate.

Now, again, I'm very concerned about students in this province getting a good education and getting value for their money in terms of moving forward with an education, particularly through the private process. Ninety-five per cent of students in Alberta go into public institutions, but there is a place and an appropriate place for the private delivery of education models in this province. Students need to be careful when they're going forward that they're getting the program they want and that the program they're going into has been appropriately certified. We do not tell businesses whether they can or cannot do business in this province. What we do is take a look at programs for which they're offering certification and make sure that those programs are of a quality level.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This model does not work.

Given that the private institutions branch does next to nothing when students make legitimate complaints about these institutions, when will the government set up an effective student complaints resolution process?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's always unfortunate when members of this House denigrate the good work that's done by civil servants in this province. We have a very strong civil service in this province, and I can tell you that the people who work in the private institutions branch do a good job. The public service in this province does an excellent job. The people in the private institutions branch do an excellent job.

2:30

When there are complaints, we look into those complaints, but there's also an appropriate role for individuals in this province because we do believe in self-reliance in this province. Individuals making choices need to do their homework and make appropriate choices. I will commit to you, Mr. Speaker, that we also will do our homework, and where appropriate, we will check into the institutions. If there are allegations that they haven't done their work appropriately or that somehow they are not meeting the certification standards that we set, we will shut down those that don't meet the standards.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Government Appointments

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government, and the Premier in particular, have repeatedly criticized the federal government's Senate appointments, saying that they're a slap in the face of Albertans and that they occur contrary to democratic process. Well, this very government continues to deliver Albertans one slap after another in the form of patronage appointments. When it comes to top government jobs, board memberships, and committee positions, this Tory government appoints party loyalists and their own friends rather than the best candidates for these jobs. My questions are all to the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. Given that following the last election, Albertans were promised that top government jobs would only be filled after fair and open competitions – and this obviously did not happen – will the minister tell this House if sole sourcing for jobs to Tory friends is the most efficient way to recruit staff?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I've never ever believed this govern-

ment to go out sole sourcing for jobs strictly for their government friends or whatever he was talking about. I will have the hon. Deputy Premier actually get up and speak on this one.

Thank you.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the generalization that was made by this hon. member is, one, quite impossible to answer. If the hon. member has a specific concern about how appointments were made – and it was raised in a question earlier – I think one should raise those directly. For various boards, commissions, and agencies there are processes that are followed. I explained the processes followed in one of those commissions today. For jobs there is a very good publication called *The Bulletin*. Jobs that are government, civil service jobs are advertised in that *Bulletin*. There is a vetting process, and they are hired through that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So given that for a brief democratic moment regional health authorities were elected rather than appointed, will the hon. minister please justify his government's practice for hand-picking RHA board members?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, that would be a very good question if it was going to the proper minister that looks after our health regions.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I am so delighted to answer this because I take huge offence to what you're saying, absolutely huge. The entire time that I've been in this government I've made it a practice to appoint people to supervise the processes of adjudication so that this government cannot be accused of just what you're saying. I take offence to that because with health authorities or any other authority in Children's Services – if the Children's Services minister were here right now, she would stand up and complain about this kind of damnation.

Mr. Elsalhy: So given that the chief internal auditor's resignation is not effective until June 1, will the Minister of RAGE advise the Premier and the Executive Council that this position should now be filled through a transparent and fully accountable job competition rather than being appointed? We have to start somewhere.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the position that the member refers to will be filled appropriately, and when the time is appropriate, the hon. member will know who was appointed and how he or she was recruited.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Second-language Instruction

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the many recommendations from the Alberta Commission on Learning that is still awaiting implementation is the second-language initiative. The commission strongly advocated in support of second-language learning because of the obvious benefits this would provide for Alberta students. My first question is for the Minister of Education. Since the minister undertook a readiness survey concerning this initiative two months ago, could he now tell us the results of that survey?

Mr. Zwodzdesky: Mr. Speaker, when I met with all 62 school boards

and a number of teachers, it became very clear very quickly that the second-languages initiative, if it were to be mandated, would not have been successful for an implementation date of September 2006, so we're going to be phasing it in. Prior to that, I had to do this readiness survey. I want to tell you that we had about a 92, 93 per cent response rate to that survey, and overwhelmingly we heard many concerns. However, on the positive side I'd say that about 60 per cent plus of the grade 4 classes would be ready to go with this initiative. When we do it, we're going to phase it in, and we'll phase it in right across the system. So the results of the survey are really quite encouraging, but they also tell us that we aren't quite there yet.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move to the next part of the Routine, I just want to give you an update with respect to Oral Question Period. As we began this session, I indicated that one of the things that the chair would try to do is basically encourage . . .

Mr. Goudreau: I just had the one question.

The Speaker: You still wanted to go with another one? Okay. Sorry. I'll sit down.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You're probably as anxious as we are to get out of here.

Mr. Speaker, I have two extra questions. The first of my two questions is again to the same minister. I've heard that many school boards may have to hire additional second- and third-language teachers. What is being done to encourage more teachers into this area of instruction?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, second-language learning is extremely important, and obviously it can't happen without second-language teachers. So we're doing a lot to generate a lot more interest and awareness around second-language importance and around the need to encourage more teachers into the field. Secondly, we're enhancing some projects, such as video conferencing, to make more second-language learning available throughout the province. Thirdly, we're also handing out bursaries and scholarships to second-language teachers. In fact, yesterday I announced 10 more, \$5,000 each, that will help encourage people, teachers specifically, who are already in the second-language field to continue and upgrade their studies in that area, should they wish. So those \$5,000 scholarships times 10 teachers will help a great deal in that respect.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. What is your ministry doing to support postsecondary students who are studying to become second-language teachers?

Mr. Martin: Everything.

Mr. Hancock: Absolutely everything, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important question because under our strategic plan, of course, one of the pillars is competing in a global marketplace. Competing in a global marketplace means that we must develop on the rich heritage that we have of different cultures, languages, and traditions. It's increasingly important to enhance that and to pass on to young people knowledge of a second language, and that does require teachers. So in addition to the 10 bursaries to enhance the abilities of teachers in the system, there were also 12 postsecondary students with a second-language scholarship of

\$2,500 studying to teach, and of course postsecondary students can also apply for many other scholarships that are available.

The idea that we need to enhance, as the Minister of Education indicated, second-language learning in this province so that we can enhance our ability to compete out into a global marketplace: our postsecondary system has got to enhance that with adding value to bringing in international students, making sure that we have international education opportunities, and absolutely making sure that there are educational opportunities available for second-language instruction and instructors in this province.

The Speaker: Hon. members will note the acute attention to decorum that the Speaker presented to himself when he found that he was out of order and quickly sat down. This is a model for all members.

head: 2:40

Statement by the Speaker

Brevity in Oral Question Period

The Speaker: At the beginning of this session I had requested members to deal with the question of brevity with respect to questions and answers so as to afford an opportunity for an increased number of members to participate in the question period. This is now day 41, and these are the results and comparison this year to last year.

Last session, the session of 2004, we had approximately 11 to 11 and a half questions per day on average. Our average this year is well above 15. Now, last year in only one Oral Question Period were there over 14 sets of questions. Only one, same number of days. This year on 14 days we had 15 or more sets of questions, on 10 days we had 16 or more sets of questions, on another eight we had 17 or more sets of questions, and on one we had 18 sets of questions. So by comparison we had 33 days out of the 41 this year when we had 15 or more sets of questions whereas compared to last year we had only one. So there was a dramatic improvement with respect to members' participation, and I appreciate that.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, did you count the number of answers that were given?

The Speaker: Unfortunately, hon. member, this is one of the truisms of the democratic system that we have and that we follow here: this is not answer period; it's question period.

The Clerk: Members' Statements.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before calling on the first of six to participate, I'm going to call upon the Deputy Speaker for a very special presentation.

Page Recognition

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Deputy Chair and myself would like to draw to the attention of all hon. members that we're going to lose five of our wonderful pages when this spring session ends: Vanessa Pillay, Leslie Day, Whitney Haynes, Christina Molzan, and Justin Laverty-Harrigan. These fine young people will be leaving their duties in this Assembly following the close of the spring session.

I would ask you to join me in recognizing the great efforts of our pages, who daily show patience and understanding of our many demands. They carry out their tasks with attention to duty and in good humour.

On behalf of all members I ask our head page, Vanessa Pillay, to give each retiring page our gift and, with it, our best wishes to each and every one. We are honoured to have had all of you work with us in Alberta's Legislature. [applause]

The Speaker: Hon. members, these are exceptional young people. I received this letter from them, addressed to me but to all the Members of the Legislative Assembly, and I would like to put it in the record. The subject is Retiring Pages.

[Dear] Mr. Speaker,

We are truly privileged to have had the opportunity to serve this house and we take great pride in being able to say, without it sounding cliché, that we have held one of the 'best' jobs. We have never come to work thinking of it as 'work' and for that we thank you, Mr. Speaker, the Sergeant-at-Arms, the current and former members, the officers, the Legislative Assembly Security Staff, and the many others who have made our experience more enjoyable.

Before working here, we were, admittedly, prey to the public's stereotypical view of a politician, but we learned nothing could be further from the truth. The members of the assembly were revealed to be real people trying to do their best in a very difficult position. And indeed, to our surprise, many had managed to retain a great sense of humor while doing so. In addition to recognizing the members as real people, we have also been privileged to be on the floor to hear many inspiring speeches, intense debates, and even a couple of limericks and songs. Despite the excitement, however, we could still tell you that there are 620 light bulbs up there; a little known fact that we are sure every page before us could verify.

We started this job as teenagers and have grown to become young adults. We have gained not only new perspectives on politics and the legislative process, but a sense of maturity and confidence that we would not have otherwise gained. We promise to forever remember our experiences here and to defend the inner workings of our parliamentary system that we have become so familiar with.

With the great honour of serving the province of Alberta, in this centennial year, we would simply like to say, thank you.

Yours Sincerely,

Vanessa Pillay, Leslie Day, Leah Halliday, Whitney Haynes,
Justin Laverty-Harrigan, and Christina Molzan.

Some of them are going to meet Her Majesty on Tuesday next, so that will be another great honour for them. [standing ovation]

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Endangered Species Conservation Committee

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to call the members' attention to the efforts of a committee that exemplifies Alberta's commitment to protecting wild species throughout the province. The Endangered Species Conservation Committee works to identify vulnerable species and makes recommendations on their recovery and conservation to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. It has been my pleasure to chair the committee since it was established in 1997.

Members represent 19 stakeholder organizations and include scientists, conservationists, landowners, aboriginal groups, and resource managers. Committee members are dedicated volunteers who know about the land and who are committed to helping conserve Alberta's wild species. They have put in a lot of work and time and energy over the years.

I also want to mention a separate scientific subcommittee working closely with the committee, and its members provide us with expert advice. Working together we have made recommendations on the status of 46 wild species.

I think it is important for all hon. members to acknowledge the valuable contribution of the Endangered Species Conservation Committee and its scientific subcommittee and the benefits they provide to Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Alberta Centennial

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the occasion of Alberta's centenary anniversary I can't help but project my imagination back into the history of this great land, our province of Alberta and our country of Canada. As I have said before, Canada and Alberta are blessed with an abundance of natural resources and splendours, but it's our human resources that realize these natural resources into prosperity and a high quality of life for our residents.

Prior to the 1400s this vast land was populated by only the people of the First Nations. They lived on the provisions of the land and enjoyed a unique culture. In the early 1500s people from Europe came to this land. This first wave of people arrived with the intention to find wealth and take it back to where they came from. As the first wave died down, a new wave of people came who wanted to build a new nation for themselves and a social system different and better than the one they departed from. They are known as the founders, as pioneers, and homesteaders. Like many of us today and our ancestors in the near past they belong to the waves of immigrants who share this land with the people who were here before them.

For the recent 100 years Alberta has been blessed with waves of immigrants who departed from their lands of birth. They left behind bad practices and learned new, good ones from others. They came here to build a better way of life for themselves and their family. Most importantly, they wanted to continue building and protecting a better society, better than where they departed from.

Mr. Speaker, my family and myself are proud to be among them. We want to express our sincere appreciation for this land and the people who have come here before us. We are what we can be today because they let us stand on their strong shoulders. As we are celebrating Alberta's hundred years of history, I'm thankful that my family shares 30 of those hundred. "Alberta is calling me. Home sweet home, it's where I'm proud to be."

Thank you.

2:50 First Session of the First Alberta Legislature

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, my statement today reflects upon a moment in time in our history: the day when our first session of the Alberta Legislature met. The content of this statement is summarized from Frank Dolphin's book *The Alberta Legislature*. It was a cold, windy day on March 15, 1906, and Albertans from every corner of the province converged along 102nd Street at the Thistle Curling Rink north of Jasper Avenue. All the hotels and boarding houses were booked in and around Edmonton. In a horse-driven carriage our first Lieutenant Governor, George Bulyea, arrived to deliver the province's first Speech from the Throne.

Tremendous effort had gone into converting the rink into a meeting place. Flags and banners hung around the rink, and the curling ice was covered with sawdust, and pews were borrowed from churches for sitting. There were 4,000 seats available to Albertans to witness that historic day.

Our first Premier, Alexander Rutherford, apart from being the Premier, took on portfolios of Provincial Treasurer and Minister of Education. Mr. Charles Fisher, MLA for Cochrane, was elected as our first Speaker of this Assembly.

The most important piece of business, that of capital city location, was on everyone's mind but wasn't mentioned in the throne speech. The House of Commons had designated Edmonton to be the capital, and while the Alberta Legislature could have revised or reversed the decision, it did not do so.

Frank Dolphin notes that the members of our Legislative Assembly were relatively young, with an average age of 45. "Although a few were pioneers, none of them were born in Alberta. Most had headed west from Ontario." It is noted that "one of the real characters was Arlie Brick," the MLA for Peace River, who "travelled to one session by sleigh with a small cabin on the back, pulled by two moose."

Mr. Speaker, every day in this Chamber we make history. My hope is that in a hundred years when people read what we have accomplished, they'll look upon it with awe, perhaps with a little bit of humour, and of course they'll see how proud we were to be a part of history in this great place called Alberta.

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

Governing in the Public Interest

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to reflect in this message on the meaning of the public interest. It's a truism to say that elected officials have a formal obligation to speak and act in the public interest. The problem in Alberta is a government that believes it knows the public interest and after 33 years has stopped listening and stopped asking. The public interest is not served solely through economic development and jobs, yet this is the mantra communicated by this government when asked on a decision, especially in the area of resource development in the province.

The public interest is fundamentally about balance, and there are at least four elements. First, public interest has to do with long-term thinking and planning that considers, as First Nations have said, the next seven generations. Second, the public interest is served by honest discussion about resource limits, options, sustainable management, fairness, and trust in our society. Third, public interest places the economy at the service of people and the environment rather than the reverse. Fourth, the public interest is served by transparent decision-making that encourages citizen involvement and vitality in our democracy.

People know, even if they cannot express it, when governments are not acting in the public interest and not connecting with their deeper values. In my experience and in my constituency the result has been increasing fear-based reactions: cynicism, anxiety, anger, or, alternatively, silence and withdrawal from duties as citizens. Citizens of Alberta are hungry for transparent leadership decisions, especially affecting their future, and participation in those decisions. If we care to listen, there are different ways Albertans are telling us that we as politicians are failing to act in the public interest to balance economics and social values with the environment, the long-term view, transparency, and accountability. The test of an authentic government is its willingness to listen and to change in the public interest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Arts Awards

Mrs. Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the recipients of the inaugural Lieutenant Governor of Alberta arts awards presented recently at a very exciting gala hosted at the Banff Centre. These awards were established in 2002 under the patronage of the late Lois Hole to celebrate excellence in and underline the importance of the arts in Alberta. The government of Alberta contributed

\$1 million towards a \$3 million endowment fund to help generate the funding for up to three awards of \$30,000 to be given every other year.

This year 85 nominations were received from around the province in the areas of performing arts, visual arts, cinematic arts, design, architecture, and literary arts. The many achievements are impressive and clearly indicate the strength and depth of artistic talent in this province. This year the adjudication panel selected two individuals as winners, Mr. Douglas Cardinal and Mr. John Murrell.

Douglas Cardinal has been designing buildings for decades. His unique style of organic architecture marked by curvilinear lines has made him internationally renowned. He is probably best known locally for his architectural design at the Edmonton Space and Science Centre, the Grande Prairie Regional College, and the St. Albert cultural centre and internationally for his design of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec.

John Murrell is an internationally renowned playwright and artistic director whose plays have been translated into 15 different languages and performed in more than 30 countries around the world. His play *Waiting for the Parade* earned John his first Chalmers best Canadian play award, and he has earned that honour twice again since then. He also created the lyrics for the very popular, very well received opera *Filumena*, which I know some of our members recently had the opportunity to see performed at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, which was showcasing Alberta talent.

Please join me in congratulating all those who were nominated for the Lieutenant Governor arts awards and particularly Mr. Douglas Cardinal and Mr. John Murrell for being selected as this year's winners.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Respect for Women in Politics

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have commented several times in this House about the great work that the Alberta Legislature does in educating today's young people about politics and the very important work that we do in this building. The School at the Legislature program is one I particularly appreciate, and it seems that not a day goes by where we do not have at least one school group in the galleries watching the proceedings. Whenever I have the opportunity to speak to schools and children, I always stress the need for young people, particularly young women, to become involved in or at least more aware of the political process and how they can help to create their own futures.

Mr. Speaker, with this in mind, yesterday's comments from a member of this Legislature in the national media regarding the new federal Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development are especially disappointing. It seems that when a man decides he can no longer reconcile his conscience with a political party and chooses to cross the floor, he is described as principled and wise, yet when a woman makes a similar decision, the comments become personal, belittling, and in this case sexual in nature.

As I drove to work today, Mr. Speaker, I thought about those young ladies that I've spoken to. I also thought about all of the bright women that I've met over the years in my business career, women who would make absolutely excellent legislators. I regret to say that I lamented for all those promising women this morning. I'm not sure what I will say to them now when they suggest to me that politics really is an old boys' club after all.

I can attest, Mr. Speaker, that there is no greater calling than to be

elected by your fellow citizens to represent them. When a member of this House publicly degrades, humiliates, and demoralizes female politicians in such a manner, I can only imagine the impact that this has in discouraging women from pursuing such a noble calling. The sexual nature of the remarks is even more distasteful in light of the fact that local sex trade workers appear to be the target of one or more serial murderers.

Mr. Speaker, I can only hope that the women of this country, young and old, will believe me when I sincerely say that we are in desperate need of more female representation in our Legislatures and our parliaments, and I hope that these comments will not further dissuade them from joining their male counterparts in seeking to make our communities, our province, and our country the best that they can be.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar on a point of order.

Rev. Abbott: Yes. Mr. Speaker, if it's possible, I'd like to call a point of order on that member's statement. Is that allowed within our rules?

Speaker's Ruling Members' Statements

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, here's the dilemma and the difficulty. When we brought in this whole concept of statements in 1993, there was a definitive negotiation between the then Government House Leader, which happened to me, and the then Official Opposition House Leader. One of the agreed principles we had was that we would ask all members in the Assembly to deal with the highest degree of civility with respect to these statements, to not bring into question any other member, and to deal essentially with thoughts that they had. Now, in replacement or evenness for that, no member would rise on a point of order or on a point of privilege.

In this case, hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, it's pretty apparent to the chair who the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was talking about, but he didn't mention it specifically.

To me there's a greater principle involved in this. This Assembly is one of the unique ones that you're going to find anywhere. As an example, in this session we've just now had 169 members' statements. It's an opportunity for members to stand up and air something. The previous recognitions were one minute. In negotiations among the House leaders we said that we'd now go to two minutes per day for these statements, but there had to be some understanding principles.

The member in question is also the Official Opposition whip. I'm going to ask him to just really rethink and try to understand the principles and the rules of this House. I'm not going to censor anybody because that was the agreed principle that we had in here, that we would not, but over the years, then, one also has to have some element of civility because if we don't, then we will definitely go to points of order and points of privilege, and that will just throw out the whole reason for having this whole concept known as statements. That was the principle agreed to, and only on about three occasions in the last 12 years has there ever had to be an intervention. That's a pretty good record, but three are too many. Period.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Martin: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition signed by 213 Albertans who are seeking potentially life-saving improvements to highways in northern Alberta, particularly highway 63. With today's tabling the total of signatures on this petition so far is 4,912.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise with a petition from some hard-working Albertans from the great Alberta communities of Alberta Beach, New Sarepta, Lamont, Gibbons, and the mining capital of Canada, Fort McMurray, as well as various camps in that area. It reads:

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? That was the 82nd petition presented during this session.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table today the appropriate number of copies of a press release that I alluded to earlier today on this the eve of the second anniversary of BSE being discovered in our province and also some background information on that press release as well as what the government of Alberta is doing with regard to the six-point BSE recovery program.

Just a note, Mr. Speaker. We are extremely proud of the partnership we have with the cattle industry, which has enabled it to survive when many thought in May of 2003 that we would not have a cattle industry today.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today the appropriate number of copies of answers to the questions raised during Committee of Supply on May 10, 2005.

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

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, I also rise to table the appropriate number of copies of replies to questions that were raised in Committee of Supply, and the originals have gone out to the respective members today as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. One of them is answers to Written Question 29, which was posed by members opposite regarding full-day kindergarten.

The other one is responses to Written Question 14, regarding school-raised fees for book rentals, transportation, and other such items.

Thank you.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, today I'm pleased to table copies of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development's answers to Committee of Supply questions.

I'm also pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of the 2003-2004 annual report of the Northern Alberta Development Council.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today: one, a report from the *St. Albert Gazette* discussing parents' struggle with addiction treatment, and the other a recognition of the National Day of Healing and Reconciliation.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies each of five letters from hard-working Albertans asking the government to deal with the issue of temporary foreign workers, apprenticeship ratios, and deskilling of the workplace.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling this afternoon, and it is a copy of a petition from the Strathearn neighbourhood. There are over 700 signatures on this petition. This petition is vigorously opposed to the forced closure of Strathearn elementary and junior high school by this government's utilization and education policies.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the Alberta Registries land title certificate relating to the sale of land in the Fort McMurray area. Included in the tabling is a map of the relevant land.

I would also like to table a petition signed by 200 Albertans who "demand and require that Alberta forthwith grant equal status to Farmworkers" in accordance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's five copies of a letter that was sent to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview from the St. Arnaud, McAllister, and Bowie law firm, who are solicitors for Alberta Career Computer Center in Edmonton. The language of the letter is anticipatory in that it advises the hon. member's office that it shouldn't help publicize unfounded allegations and offered us a briefing. We contacted the office and are still waiting for word to be briefed. So I'm tabling this so that it's on record and is available for members to look at.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I'm going to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. He will become tabling number 510 in this session, and he's asked me for permission to just speak a little longer than normal, just a little though.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It won't really be much longer than normal. It's my pleasure to table a document recognizing the dedication and talent of Marilyn Hooper. Marilyn is our director of outreach and is leaving us after eight years of excellent service. Marilyn has many friends among the people that work in the Legislature Building and the Annex. She will be greatly missed by our caucus and by all those who have come to know her in the past few years. On behalf of the NDP opposition I would like to offer Marilyn our heartfelt thanks and best wishes in her future endeavours.

head: 3:10

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Dr. Oberg, Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation return to order of the Assembly MR 32, asked for by Mr. MacDonald on behalf of Mr. Chase on May 2, 2005; return to order of the Assembly MR 33, requested by Mr. MacDonald on behalf of Mr. Chase on May 2, 2005; return to order of the Assembly MR 39, requested by Mr. Martin on May 2, 2005; return to order of the Assembly MR 41, requested by Mr. Martin on May 2, 2005.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Ouellette, Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency return to order of the Assembly MR 29, requested by Mr. Elsalhy on May 2, 2005.

On behalf of Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness responses to questions raised by Ms Blakeman, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, on March 16, 2005, during the 2004-2005 supplementary estimates debate.

Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, a historical vignette today. On this day in 1905 the northern Alberta town of Athabasca was established as the village of Athabasca Landing. Athabasca derives from the Cree word meaning where there are reeds. Athabasca Landing developed as an important shipping centre. It was incorporated as a village in 1905, as a town in 1911, and in 1913 the town's name was officially shortened to Athabasca.

House leaders might appreciate the following bits of information with respect to this session as well. When the House rises on Tuesday next, it will have sat for 42 days, including 28 evening sittings. In the spring of 2004 the House sat for 43 days, with 29 evening sittings, essentially the same length of time. However, there are some differences. By the time this House rises on Tuesday, it will have sat for approximately 13,450 minutes in 2005. In the spring sitting of 2004 it sat for 12,246 minutes. There are almost 1,200 more minutes this year, in 2005, than one year ago, and that translated into the number of hours – this year we will have sat so far for about 224 hours, compared to 204 hours in the spring sitting of 2004.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 42

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005

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

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move for third reading Bill 42, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005.

[Motion carried; Bill 42 read a third time]

Bill 41
Appropriation Act, 2005

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

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance it's my pleasure to move for third reading Bill 41, Appropriation Act, 2005.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak on Bill 41. I'll just make a few brief comments about the entire budgeting process, if I may. I think one of the most interesting and challenging aspects of being a rookie MLA has been this entire process. In fact, as I recall, one of the first things we did as MLAs was approve the supplementary estimates, going back to March I think it was, which was like two and a half lifetimes ago.

As I found out, supplementary means exactly what it says. It was money over and above what was budgeted in the previous year's budget. So one of the very first things we did as MLAs here was to approve the spending of money that already had been spent. So it was an interesting start to the session.

Regarding the budgeting process this time around, I wonder if next March we're going to be looking at more supplementary figures, Mr. Speaker. How many millions or perhaps billions of unbudgeted spending can we expect to supposedly vote on next year? The government's track record in this regard indicates that there is no doubt that we'll be going through this process again. I sometimes wonder if the government thinks its budgets are written on Etch A Sketches. When they get tired of it, they just flip it over, shake it clear, and start all over again.

There were times during the budget debate – I sat through more than my share, I'm afraid – when the debate was excellent. It was genuine, civil, intelligent give-and-take between the minister and the questioners on this side and on the other side. Good questions were asked, and sometimes very good answers were supplied. I guess when you have a total of nearly two full days of debate, something useful has to come of it. There were other times when the minister used what I would call the talking tactic, where you would answer a one-minute question with a 20-minute diatribe regarding nothing in particular.

My biggest concern about the entire process, Mr. Speaker, was the lack of information in some of the budgeting documents, particularly in Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. There was one line in particular which was simply Aboriginal Affairs, and I believe it was somewhere in the budget of \$17 million. A one-line mention doesn't give you much to go on, nothing to chew on. You can't debate a mention of \$17 million unless you know what they're for.

The minister was kind enough, after I asked, to send a detailed outline of what that \$17 million was for. If I could, I'd just like to go over it very briefly so that it is, at least, on the record. We have aboriginal initiatives, \$5.7 million; strategic services, \$1.7 million; aboriginal land and legal issues, \$2.5 million; aboriginal consultation, \$6.8 million; Métis settlements ombudsman, \$450,000; Métis settlements land registry, \$222,000.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't know why this information wouldn't have been included in the budget in the first place. There are quite a few instances where there just wasn't adequate information for us to properly debate the budget. I appreciate getting the information afterward, but it's much more important to get it during the actual debate.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, it's been a very interesting experience. I can't say that I look forward to doing it again next year, but I guess that's our job.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak briefly about the appropriations bill. This is the first budget that I actually had the opportunity to see being made. I would like to thank the Minister of Finance for the inclusive way that she made the budget possible this year. As she kept reminding us, this was not her budget, rather it was a budget for Albertans, reflecting the debt paydown and dealing with what Albertans told us they wanted when the debt was paid off.

I have been an MLA for almost 12 years now, and this is only the second time that I have been able to feel like a participant in the planning process for the budget. The first time was in 1993 when we started down the road to the 20 per cent cutbacks. Many of the Conservative MLAs were on subcommittees, looking at various departments, with the goal of cutting overall government spending by 20 per cent while at the same time trying to refocus government back onto its core business.

This time we were able to create a budget after having paid off the debt that we were struggling so hard with in 1993. This year instead of dealing with cutbacks as we were then, we were dealing with an ask list that was simply too big to handle.

I'm not sure which way is more difficult, Mr. Speaker: cutting spending or increasing spending. One thing I can tell you for sure is that in either scenario there are people who are happy and there are people who aren't.

I have really appreciated the opportunity to be on Treasury Board this year and to be able to see first-hand the ministers making their requests for increases in their respective department budgets. I have great respect for the ministers and what they try to achieve. None of them wants an increase just to say that they got one. They all came in and fought very hard on behalf of their departments, the people, and the programs that they serve. I would like to congratulate them on basically never backing down but in the end accepting their increases or not and going back over again to write and rewrite and find new ways to make things work.

It's a real honour for me to be able to work with the Minister of Finance on this committee. The last time I had an opportunity to work closely with her was when she was minister of health and I was the SPC chair. I believe she's an incredible asset not only to my government, Mr. Speaker, but also to our province as a whole.

Creating a budget like this with this kind of an increase is not something that comes easily to a fiscal conservative, but on the other hand the budget reflects what Albertans have been telling us are their priorities. The growth in our economy and the surplus created by high oil and gas prices have allowed us this year to increase funding to health and education, advanced education, and seniors as well as to AISH, parks, infrastructure, and transportation, all things that Albertans told us were their priorities.

Years ago, Mr. Speaker, when I was taking economics at the postsecondary level, the very first graph that we were asked to work with was entitled the guns or butter scenario. The point of the exercise was to assume that you were a government and that you had to make a decision on whether to arm your people to help protect them from a coming invasion or to feed them. You could do one or the other or a combination of the two, but there was limited supply, lots of demand, and limited money. I never thought at the time that it would prove to be a useful graph until I was faced with making choices about where to put resources this year.

3:20

While I know it is not about guns or butter, the truth is that the lesson holds true for the choices that you have to make. There was money for health care, and even with a sizable increase in their budget it is nowhere near what the demand was calling for. Money for education, trying to fulfill the recommendations from the Learning Commission, which is hugely expensive and is not just about smaller classroom numbers; it is also about building enough schools to supply those classrooms. It was about money for hospitals or overpasses, roads and schools, portables, seniors' housing, social housing, and municipalities. It is about setting aside future surpluses, if we are lucky enough to have them, for inflation-proofing the heritage savings trust fund, topping up the sustainability fund, putting money into the scholarship fund or access to the future fund, not to mention the medical foundation or the ingenuity fund or billions for municipalities. It seems that there is never a shortage of good ideas or places where money can go.

The common theme in the media and from the special interest groups is that in a province with so much money there is no reason to not do pretty much anything anyone wants you to do. But we all know better. In the late '70s and early '80s it was a common theme as well: we will have the very best of everything for everyone all the time. While oil went up, it was easy to create expensive programs for pretty much everyone. I can tell you from first-hand experience that it was not so much fun cutting 20 per cent out of overall government spending. It was not so much fun when there were protesters out in front of the building day in and out all through '93, '94, '95, '96, and pretty much on from there.

So I want to throw a note of caution into the discussion about the budget. I'm glad that we were able to do these things this year, but I also hope that we will be able to tailor our budget growth to more accurately reflect the growth in our gross domestic product so that we do not find ourselves in a position where we once again have to cut programs.

I am not unlike other Albertans. I want the best health care I can get, I want the best education for our children, and I don't want to be sitting still on Deerfoot Trail because of gridlock. But at the same time, the more we build, the higher the inflationary rate comes in on construction costs. The more we spend on health care, the less there is for other departments. So caution and careful analysis are required even in a province as fortunate as Alberta.

From an MLA perspective I want many things for my constituency. I want, first and foremost, portables for the high-growth needs of my school divisions. I want 24-hour urgent care for the health needs of a city of almost 30,000 people whose patience has run out waiting for the Calgary regional health authority to notice us or listen to our needs. I want the interchange at the south end of Airdrie to be included in the planning so that people can get into and out of Airdrie during rush hour. I want the overpass built on highway 1 where it meets highway 9. It is dangerous, and it is getting worse. I want to address the problems with water and waste water that Rocky View municipal district is facing on a daily basis as growth is overtaking their ability to cope with demand.

My whole constituency is facing between 10 and 20 per cent growth annually. We don't have old infrastructure for anyone to use. We need roads, we need water, we need sewage services, and we need schools just to try and cope with the growth that we have. I need more schools than I even want to talk about anymore. I swear that people think I make it up when I tell them that I need two more schools this year – well, every year. The Premier was right when he said that it was great that people move here. We want them to come here, we need them to come here, but they don't bring their own schools, and they don't bring their own roads. We have to plan

better, if not to try to get ahead of the demand, at least to try to keep up with it.

This is just my riding, Mr. Speaker, and many of the MLAs in this room are dealing with exactly the same issues. It is a challenge, but it's also an opportunity. Of all the places in the world where we could be living, we are so lucky to live here. The issues we are dealing with are about what to build and where and how to improve the quality of life for all Albertans. It is not about war or genocide. It's not about starvation or huge refugee camps, where just getting a glass of water is the most pressing issue of the day. We are truly blessed to live here.

I look forward to the future with hope and optimism. I look forward to a year of our centennial celebrations, and I'm even looking forward to starting work on the next budget. But mostly, Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to session ending so that we can once again find out what daylight looks like at the end of the workday.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Then I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some interest to perhaps sum up the weeks of budget estimates that I've been sitting through. It's been a very educational process and illuminating as well. I was watching with interest previously the machinations of government, and indeed the budget strikes at the very heart of how things function around here.

I believe that there are some signs of hope from this budget that we have been working through these past weeks. Those signs of hope, in my mind, stem from, you know, some good interaction in regard to ministers and critics looking at various ways to solve problems for Albertans because, really, at the end of the day we are spending this money to best serve the most people, most of the time. I think that all members do recognize that, and we do see some positive movement with this current budget.

However, I still have a number of issues that I would like to bring forward, perhaps for further illumination or edification, whatever the case may be, both on the spending and the revenue side of this budget in general. I would just like to point out a number of these specific issues that have come to my mind, and perhaps they have come to others as well.

On the spending side of this budget it appears as if the government is getting used to yearly surpluses, certainly, fuelled by the province's rich natural resource revenues. Total spending will jump to \$25.8 billion, \$3.2 billion more than last year's budget and \$1.4 billion more than the most recent third-quarter update. Budget 2005 shows a surplus of \$1.52 billion compared to the so-called \$300 million budget surplus of 2004, which of course was entirely superseded by a much larger number. The 2005 budget was based on a \$42 U.S. barrel of oil, and of course the current price is at \$48 and has reached even higher than that. With Bill 37, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2005, the government has raised the ceiling to \$4.75 billion from \$4 billion in terms of nonrenewable resource revenue that can be used for program spending.

The government went way over budget last year by spending nearly \$2 billion over and above the last year's approved budget. It's, I think, rather sad and ironic that last year's budget was entitled *On Route, On Course*. With the government breaking its own budget by nearly \$2 billion, I would have to question just how on course this action really has been. Half a billion going toward BSE relief. The rest of the spending, I don't know. That certainly was a justified circumstance, but otherwise my question is mainly just

underestimating how much it takes to run these various ministries that we are responsible for. The Children's Services ministry went nearly \$27 million over budget last year; Ministry of Education, \$64 million; Gaming, \$40 million; Health, \$363 million over budget, just to name a few.

This budget certainly will pass this year, but I'm just wondering if we will be asked to rubber stamp another supplementary budget in the range of billions of dollars ahead. Excuse my perhaps ignorance in this matter, but, you know, it would seem more logical that we would budget more realistically before and avoid this requirement to add such massive supplementary injections of money.

On the revenue side the government has consistently underestimated its expected revenue. Albertans may be forgiven if they're sort of tuning out when the government trumpets each quarterly update because we're so used to this process by now, and we know that the resource revenues are underestimated. It's a bad habit that I would like to see broken.

Revenues are estimated at \$27.3 billion, \$4.3 billion more than the \$23 billion from 2004 but still \$1.5 billion less than the revenues estimated in the third-quarter update for 2004-2005. The government is still lowballing revenues but not as low as in previous years. Perhaps this is part of the encouraging trend that I had suggested in my introduction. Budget 2005 is based on \$42 a barrel, and certainly we know that it will stay much higher than that.

3:30

Given the trend towards high energy prices, the Alberta health premium payment, I believe, is an issue that time has come to eliminate. Health care premiums hit the average family for \$1,056 a year but pay less than \$1 billion of the now nearly \$9 billion health department tab. I would suggest that this is not only an unfair tax, but it's also an extremely inefficient tax that we could afford to rescind immediately here in Alberta.

Furthermore, school property taxes. While there will be a 5 per cent reduction in the mill rate, this will be more than offset by the growth in the assessment base. Therefore, school property tax revenues will increase, in fact, by at least 3 per cent. The government school property tax will increase to \$1.45 billion, or 20 per cent above the \$1.2 billion tax freeze promised in Budget 2001.

There are some concerns about this. I'm looking to make the most efficient use of our money but also provide the most efficient advantage to the majority of our working families here in Alberta. Both of these, the mill rate and the Alberta health care tax premium, I think would be a wonderful place to start to put money back into the pockets of working people here in this province in the most direct way.

In regard to the various ministries, just quickly. Advanced Education: my biggest concern is that there is a 40 per cent dropout rate for university students in this province. While this may not appear to be a budgeting issue at first glance, the high dropout rate does cost this province dearly. Every student that doesn't finish their education represents a loss of future potential in both economics and in overall developmental growth for this province. Furthermore, the taxpayers invest in students through public funding of their institutions. In every real way the province loses out on this investment. I think, quite frankly, that a 40 per cent dropout rate is unacceptable. We believe as the New Democrat caucus that a postsecondary learning commission is desperately needed in this province to address this dropout rate problem and other issues as well. I think that we are moving forward in a positive way towards advanced education, but we must look at this bottom line of a success rate as a primary indicator of how functional our advanced education system really is.

In regard to Agriculture, Food and Rural Development the budget trimmed \$622 million from last year. That's mostly the BSE relief issue. You know, this crisis has not abated, yet we considered it a one-time disaster funding. Many farmers received very little money for relief in regard to BSE, or the amounts that they received were completely out of keeping with the losses that they sustained. This government's plans to solve this issue seem confusing at best. I think that many of our rural colleagues and I know that my own family in the rural area are finding this to be more than frustrating. In fact, it could lead to both financial and political crisis in this province.

Last week the Premier said that it might be two years before the border reopens to live cattle exports. You know, this doesn't mesh with other reports that we've been getting. There's confusion. Placing false hopes on what the Americans might do is not good public policy, Mr. Speaker. We need to solve this issue right here in Alberta. As many people here in this House like to say, a made-in-Alberta solution. Thank you very much.

In regard to Children's Services, the hon. Minister of Children's Services has told the House repeatedly that they're waiting on this federal government to get them back this transfer of funds to a national daycare program. Other provinces seem to be lining up for these funds already, but, you know, I'm just wondering what and where this money is for Alberta families. More to the point, the people who need this service now in this province are wondering and waiting for it as well.

As anybody who's brought up a family in this province knows, you need to have two income earners to make ends meet in this province, so this whole question of choice has been spurious at best as an argument. People can make the choice, yes, if they can afford to do so. I would respectfully suggest that most families do not have that capacity and have to have two family members working. I think it's our responsibility in conjunction with the federal government to put in a program that's affordable, reliable, and secure for all working families to look after our most precious resource, which is our children.

In regard to health, the health care symposiums that we have seen over the last few weeks – in fact, the one run by the provincial government here in Calgary was a pleasant surprise. It was nice to hear a mixed group of presenters and not just the privatization lobby. However, after the symposium the hon. minister said that there were no immediate plans to pursue more privatization in Alberta's health care system. That should be applauded, certainly, but it begs the question: what are the plans for the Alberta health care system in the future? What are we going to do not just next week but over the next 20 years? The people need to know. This uncertainty hanging over our heads in regard to our public health care system is not necessary. The public doesn't have to endure that. We deserve better.

We've been hearing for years about the government's intention to privatize and for the last four months this so-called third way, but Albertans are starting to question if there is even a plan at all. Given that the budget for the ministry of health is in the range of \$9 billion, one could hope that the government has a plan how to spend those vast sums of money.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

In regard to Sustainable Resource Development, I find that the ministry consistently underestimates the funds that are required to fight wildfires in this province. From 2003-2004 the ministry was almost 90 per cent over budget in fighting wildfires; 2004, 65 per cent over. The budget devotes \$14.6 million to wildfire operations,

while last year the actual cost was \$185 million. I know that this is a difficult thing to predict. Certainly, fire seasons come and go with the relative dryness of the northern boreal forest, particularly, but I think that more prudent budgeting could be employed in regard to this because, you know, going from 90 per cent more than you might have budgeted for would suggest confusion as to what the realistic expectations and needs are for fighting wildfires here in this province.

In regard to the Solicitor General, the government claims that the budget is going to deliver 200 more police officers, a \$6 million increase for municipal policing grants, with Edmonton and Calgary really getting nothing more and medium-sized communities down to 5,000 people getting the increases. We certainly applaud this change for the smaller centres around the province, but I think that most Edmontonians and Calgarians and other larger centres are perceiving an increase in crime. We don't have to go any further than our television sets and the newspapers to see the litany of quite outrageous criminal activity going on on our streets. I think that the people in Edmonton and Calgary certainly deserve an appropriate increase to their police budgets as well.

We know for a fact – and I know that our own Solicitor General understands – the importance and the effectiveness of community policing in our urban areas. Quite frankly, the only way to effectively have this community policing functioning is to have more police per capita than what we have now. It's simply impossible to get to know your neighbourhoods and to have people in each individual neighbourhood without increasing the bodies on the streets.

I'm very happy to have provided some outline and analysis of what our own New Democrat caucus feels about this budget. I can say that I've quite enjoyed the interaction that has gone along with this budget debate, and I expect better and bigger things for the future.

Thank you very much.

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

3:40

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In any government fiscal responsibility and fiscal prudence require proper budgets that governments stick to. It is essential to be comprehensive about the priorities of government and not to govern on an ad hoc, day-by-day basis.

In rising to speak to the effect of this bill, I will first note that in its fiscal plan, in its budget, this government has essentially said that it has no comprehensive plan. This Progressive Conservative government has said that it will not be held to its own budget. The government has said that anything goes in a month or two. It will buy into anything if the government feels like it maybe is necessary then. This government has essentially said that it will govern, as usual, by the seat of its pants and as the whim of any particular day strikes it. That said, there remain many people areas that urgently do still require funding, and given this government's day-by-day attitude, it is incumbent on members of the opposition to continue to seek change, to seek proper funding for the disadvantaged and those who through no fault of their own cannot access the fruits of living in Alberta.

You know, I think it's important to look at the government's vision. If we look to some of the budget documents and look to Alberta in 2025 and see what the government would like to see then and how this budget and how the appropriations that we're looking at today will realize those things, I wonder. One of the first is: "Its people are free to realize their full potential, and personal choice is

the only limit to opportunity." But so many things are, in reality, outside of the limits of choice for many, many individuals in Alberta. The prosperity is not there for everyone.

As I've said earlier, the problems of people on AISH looking for security in their retirement. It's not there in any way. The needs of our citizenry to have access and opportunity to learning to do teamwork, to many of the recreational opportunities that kids want to get into. Minor hockey is getting harder and harder for many families. I've been to many, many schools here in this short while I've been an MLA, and whenever I'm there, I ask them what's important to them. They say: my mom won't let me into hockey because she can't afford it. Well, there are places that families can go to, but often they're not able to.

I look at this budget, and I see nothing really that will address those needs, that will address those things that could help our problems with gang violence, that could help our problems with vandalism, that could help our problems with the idleness of hands of many of our youth, that I think is leading to great difficulties on our streets and also to the reality that these children just are not able to do those things that would keep them busy, to learn teamwork and, in fact, learn how to work better in the workplace.

An issue in the same group of vision statements is that the government would be "a responsible steward of the province's abundance of natural resources." I look to this budget, and I wonder if it's just to get as much as we can as quick as we can as opposed to really trying to steward these resources over the long term and to ensure that there is indeed a future for our children.

The next point: the issue of safety "in their homes, on their streets, at work, and in their communities." Safety in people's homes is so crucial to many of our seniors, yet they're having trouble being confident to go into the streets, especially with all the many acts of violence we're seeing. There is not, I think, a real sense in this budget to look to providing facilities for rehabilitating, for really giving the proper emphasis on doing this quickly and providing the proper amount of facilities for rehabilitating people on types of drugs like crystal meth and even other drugs that are very, very serious. The need to look to safety is crucial in our society if we are to move forward. People must feel safe in their homes if they're 10 or 12 or 15 or 60 or 70 or 80 or 90. Many people really don't feel that anymore in Alberta, and I think we have to look to stronger policing. That is not looked at in this budget. The policing budget seems to look to minimizing and still not bringing the level of the per capita numbers of police to at least – you know, it should be the highest in the country, I believe.

I think it's important. We have so many challenges in a booming economy, so many new people coming in, so much happening that we must and should have that proper funding for that incredibly important task in our society. In reality, by not doing so, we do put our officers and people in the police forces at a higher level of risk.

Another point: "The economic fundamentals of the province are strong, and the tax system is designed to promote individual entrepreneurship and the transformation to a knowledge-based economy." There have been some moves, certainly, in this, but I wonder if, really, we seem to be moving more to a branch plant economy, to an economy that's willing to be exploited in its resources, bringing in people from lands unbeknownst for temporary periods of time and taking the true fruit of our land quickly away in the form of temporary foreign workers. Many, many people in this province have expressed to me . . .

Mr. MacDonald: How many of these temporary foreign workers are we talking about?

Mr. Backs: I know of over a thousand in Fort McMurray alone from two companies only, and there are many, many others that many people are looking to bring in.

We've seen, of course, some of this division 8 application, and there's an agreement I've seen for a so-called union which has numerous provisions in it to bring in temporary foreign workers. I really, really am surprised and even disgusted at that, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, through the chair, please.

Mr. Backs: The need to deal with investment in our economy, the need to deal with venture capital, the need to deal with R and D I don't think is in any way adequately dealt with in this budget. For many, many years other provinces in this land have looked at providing venture capital through labour-sponsored venture capital funds, and for some reason this government is afraid to provide a tax break and provide venture capital in a way that works so well.

I was speaking the other day with an investor who had a very, very successful product. He's a product developer. He came out of Alberta, came out of Edmonton. He had to go outside of Alberta, outside of this province to find investors, and because of that, he had to site his production outside of this province.

We seem to be looking all the time to just working on energy production and doing everything we can to suck up to the great, huge companies in agriculture, for example, like Tyson and Cargill and other of the huge investor outfits while not really dealing with the important priorities of Albertans to ensure that there is something in the future for our Alberta and our Alberta children and grandchildren, for all that will follow.

The leading in learning. You know, I again see the lowest R and D of any province, and I find that incredible in a province with so many resources and such an ability to probably have the freest budgeting process in the land.

These are a number of, I think, important issues to look at in this budget. I mean, there are many, many, many specifics that I find very difficult. You know, some of the things in education where we're looking actually – in our greatest arts high school in Edmonton, indeed in northern Alberta, Victoria comp, not restoring the promises of this government to actually expand that facility that has been in place for a number of years. We spoke at length in this House, for a whole night, about increasing the hours of instruction for fine arts, yet we're not looking to improve this incredibly excellent facility in Edmonton. That's not in the budget.

3:50

The responsible stewarding of our environment. You know, when I look to places like our pristine eastern slopes, we see that, for example, near Rocky Mountain House you have a worse air quality than in downtown Vancouver because of flaring and not dealing with that issue. We have some problems here that really, really must be dealt with in Alberta and are not dealt with by this budget.

I think, though, clearly one of the great problems is that this is not a budget; it's just a snapshot of a particular place and time. We will not have a comprehensive plan until this government says that it will some time in the future ensure that it will not be dealing with most of its spending through supplementaries and whatever on an ad hoc basis, on a day-to-day basis, and to truly plan so that there can be fiscal prudence and fiscal responsibility by putting everything on the table.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get an opportunity to participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 41, the Appropriation Act, 2005. We have been basically going through the budget process for this entire session. We now have our 2005-06 budget ready to go, and it has been quite a process, to say the least. I appreciate the time to get to discuss the budget even further because the whole process, in my view, is inadequate.

I am surprised. Regardless of which department we look at, the amounts we are voting are staggering. They're huge. Yet we spend so little time examining these expenditures, and in reality this budget is so large that I think we should spend considerable time. Even before the budget comes to the House, there should be a form of all-party committees to examine these budgets department by department.

Last night we had one of the first steps – mind you, it was a baby step, but it was a very good step – in British Columbia toward significant legislative reform, and I would like to think that this province is also going to initiate some electoral reforms. I'm sure the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View would share my views on parliamentary reform. I don't think change is necessarily a bad thing. I think we need to look at changing our budget process here.

I look at Bill 41, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we start with the Legislative Assembly, and we look at the total budget of over \$70 million for the Legislative Assembly Office and the support to the Legislative Assembly. I'm curious. What are the plans, if any, for the Legislative Assembly grounds in this budget? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the Leader of the Official Opposition, was compelled to ask a question in the Assembly the other day in regard to these initiatives. What exactly are the redevelopment plans, if any, for this Legislative Assembly and the grounds? Is it included in this \$70 million figure?

I think it's a very important gesture towards this city by the government. There are those that say that this city has been neglected by this government, and I would certainly agree with them on certain matters that they present. This centennial year would be an ideal time for the government to make a commitment to the capital city. What is in this budget for the Legislature Grounds? I would be very curious to know.

Now, when we look at Bill 41 and we go through it department by department, certainly education comes to mind, and public education. We see the amounts here of \$2.7 billion, and we've got another nonbudgetary disbursement of \$1 million. But we look at the size of the budget, we look at the size of government, even the RAGE minister, the increase in the size of government – and it was noted in this Assembly that the SuperNet was being hooked up to schools that were on the hit list to be closed.

Now, hon. members are going to wonder: well, what's he talking about, the hit list? Well, on October 14, 2004, the ministry of learning and the ministry of infrastructure sent a letter to the Edmonton public school board, and stated: you have a lot of unutilized space; you have to get rid of it; you have to close schools before we're going to give you any construction dollars to build new schools. I think that is just bad public policy. These community schools have been an investment by previous governments.

When we look at these schools and the importance they are to their respective communities, we've got to look at it this way. The parents in those respective communities where the forced closures are occurring felt strong enough about their community schools that they were willing to take the Edmonton public school board to court. It's unusual for parents in the public school system to take the board officials to court, but this occurred. The parents are very passionate about seeing that their schools continue to operate.

Now, when we look at this massive budget and the money that we're spending in education and the amount that we would save by closing these schools, it doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense that we are hooking them up to the SuperNet unless we have some sort of other motive, if there is a tenant-in-waiting that's going to find that SuperNet connection already installed and already paid for to their financial advantage.

When a school board is forced by this government to implement this closure process – and they implemented the closure process, I must say, in a great hurry, to the point where they forgot to talk about some of the latest changes that this government made to the school closures regulation. In fact, 4(2)(b.1) of the school closure regulation indicates that the long-term capital plan of the respective school division must be made available to the parents when there is a notice of a meeting to close a school. That, in my view, certainly was not done by the school board.

When we look at the money that the school board is spending to close these schools and the money that is estimated to be saved – it's in the range of \$90,000 for one school and \$140,000 for another school – it's not that much money that we are saving. Mr. Speaker, when we're looking at Bill 41 and we're going through this bill line by line and we see the money that is being spent, perhaps we can spare those community schools.

4:00

Perhaps we should look at less money being spent, for instance, on the horse-racing renewal. Maybe we should really put children and community schools first. We could spend a lot less on travel and on communications and spend more on schools.

Now, there are those that say to me at the Capilano Mall, at the coffee shop: "What is this government doing? Where is their vision? They're so anxious to force the closure of public schools, yet they want to open more casinos. They want to facilitate more liquor stores that are open until midnight. Why are we so anxious to close schools, yet we seem to be so anxious to open more casinos?" It just doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense to this hon. member, Mr. Speaker, and it doesn't make sense to people at the Capilano coffee shop. They're scratching their heads on this one.

I think we can afford to invest in schools in other parts of the city, in other parts of the province without having to sacrifice central Edmonton neighbourhoods and their schools that were a public investment sometimes as much as a half a century ago. I don't think, again, it is good public policy. I think we have the money for this.

Certainly, in the past in other school districts this government has seen fit to invest millions of dollars in funding for schools that have very low enrolments, and there is a very small number of schools in a selected area. Going back six years, the government has made this commitment to other districts, so I'm asking now: why can't they do it for the city of Edmonton? Why can't they do it for central Edmonton neighbourhoods? We don't want to have this doughnut effect for the city, where there are no children in the centre of the city because there are not enough schools.

Now, getting to another point about the importance of schools, I had the opportunity of having a quick look at the children's advocate report, the one that was late in coming. I was surprised that that annual report was so long in the making before it got to this Assembly, but I did notice in there that there were many children who rely on community schools, smaller schools, because it's the only stability they have in their lives. That is why it is so important to have small community schools. I thought that was very interesting. How interesting is that? While this government is forcing the closure of public schools within this city, those children, some of whom are in need, rely on that school, that small school, to deliver

specific programs for them because it's the only stable factor in their lives.

I'm disappointed that we are contemplating closing even more public schools. The dropout rate among those children is significant. I was disappointed again, and I'm disappointed to say that in the city of Edmonton and the Edmonton public school district if we average three years, the completion rate for high school is 57 per cent.

Now, when we look at that high dropout rate . . . [interjection] Hon. Minister of Advanced Education, I'm sorry?

Mr. Hancock: It's trending up rapidly. There have been significant improvements.

Mr. MacDonald: There's a lot of work to be done there. If it is trending up rapidly, I'm very pleased to hear that, but the statistics at the moment don't back that up.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the high dropout rate and we look at the high utilization rate of our city of Edmonton high schools, some of whom have utilization rates well in excess of a hundred per cent, that tells me there are high school students who are falling through the cracks. With the closure of some elementary and junior highs we're now looking at similar utilization rates in some junior highs across the city. I'm afraid that for some junior high students, because of the lack of attention and the overcrowded classrooms and the huge student bodies, in some cases 400 students, in some cases 500 students, in some cases 600 students, these schools are too big. Some students who need individual help will not get it, and as a result they will become alienated and they will quit school, and then we will run into a lot more problems. I would ask the hon. members across the way to have a good look at the children's advocate report and think about the consequences of larger junior highs. I don't think, again, it is good public policy.

Now, when we look at the education budget here and we look at the money that is proposed to be spent here in Bill 41, Mr. Speaker, we have to look at some of the funding that is supposedly coming from Infrastructure for the Victoria school project, as it's called, the Victoria school of arts. I don't know what the government's policy is on this, but I'm told Strathearn school can't have a K through 9 because we don't want any more of these schools. We can't have a combination of an elementary and a junior high, but it seems to fit the model at Victoria school.

I'm sorry; I've run out of time. I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker.

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

Notice of Privilege

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to give notice of a possible question of privilege. Under Standing Order 15(5) on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford I'd like to be able to advise the House of the possibility that I would bring forward the privilege motion on the next regular sitting day of this Assembly.

There needs to be additional information sought and additional research done, but at this point I can advise the Speaker that this is being considered because of an altercation that took place immediately outside of the Assembly between the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar and the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. Although it is outside of the Chamber, I believe that there are sufficient citations to address a matter that takes place within the precincts of the Assembly and under the purview and control of the Speaker, particularly where the action which occurred involves a physical assault or molestation.

So, with those words, I will hope that that acts as sufficient notice,

and when I have been able to do sufficient research to be confident that I would not be abusing the time of the Assembly, as I say, I've given notice and that allows me to bring forward the point of privilege motion on the next regular sitting day of the Assembly. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has given notice that she will bring forward a motion of privilege. As you know, the next sitting that we will have will not be a regular one. That will be the one at which the Queen will visit the Assembly. So probably this matter may not be dealt with until the fall when we reconvene. So it shall be dealt with at that point in time. Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

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

Debate Continued

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and discuss briefly some of the issues raised by the Appropriation Act, 2005, and like the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark want to both commend and encourage some reformation of the budgeting discussions and process and encourage more open disclosure of the facts relating to each budget from each department so that it's more constructive discussion, more constructive debate. It's clear that the role of government is to provide a budget that honestly reflects their commitment to the people of Alberta in how they will distribute and invest in the resources and people of the province. I, too, would like to see a more in-depth capacity to do this, less adversarial and more honest, working together for the benefit of all. So I wasn't entirely satisfied with the process, and I, too, would like to see some reform there.

4:10

I wanted to talk briefly, then, about some of the issues relating to what we mean by developing the province and how this budget reflects our commitment to sustainable development and the policy that has been explicated in the government on sustainable development, which fundamentally means using nonrenewable and renewable resources without compromising the future. Those are great words, but what we need to see, in my estimation, and reflected in the budget is a stronger commitment to the future and to the capacity to measure what it is we have in order to decide how much we use each year and allow some confidence for all of us that there will be resources there for our children and, indeed, seven generations, as the First Nations have challenged us to think about.

Without that vision and without the measurements of what we are dealing with, I don't see the commitment to sustainability translated into a meaningful plan for the future. So it strikes me that with this commitment the government has made, each department needs to look at what sustainable development might look like in the context particularly of our resources, both renewable and nonrenewable, but also as that would relate to the human services and the protection of the environment.

The Alberta advantage is for many Albertans increasingly becoming an Alberta liability, both economically and environmentally, and there is an increasing call that I'm hearing for a reflection of these concerns about our future and the way we are measuring our capacity to continue with a growing population and depleting resources, how we are going to guarantee that our children will have some quality of life and some capacity to continue to work and play and to recreate in our communities.

We need them to do at least three things to move this budget and planning to a different level. We need, one, to establish the value of natural capital as it exists without developing it and perhaps postponing development to a certain point of time so that we're actually looking into the future and not only looking at what the market is driving us to do today. The second thing it seems to me that we need to do to think about more sustainable development is to measure the inventory we have so that we know how much we can afford to develop in a given year. The third thing is to take the proper role in setting limits on growth, which is the fundamental trust given to us by the people of Alberta. I would add a fourth, that the public needs to be more actively involved in that planning and that decision-making in order to in an ongoing way reflect the interests of the public and to indeed stimulate, encourage, and revitalize the democracy that we say we believe in here.

All the bills, committees, policies, and regulations will not be translated into genuine progress – that is, healthy people, a good quality of life, social cohesion, and vital democracy – if we do not include these parameters in our planning and in our budgeting.

In relation to the Environment budget, then, it was disturbing for me and disappointing for many Albertans that we remain at less than 0.5 per cent of the budget for something as vital as environmental protection. For many of us there is a need for recommitting ourselves to environmental protection and redressing the drastic reductions that occurred in our capacity to monitor and enforce our good environmental laws with more staff since the early '90s, when approximately 25 per cent of the staff in Alberta Environment were cut.

Water protection is clearly a vital interest to all Albertans, and fair allocation of water is an increasing concern across the province, particularly in southern Alberta. Water for Life is a tremendous vision, but without adequate resources allocated in the budget, it's impossible to think that this will become a reality in the very near future, which is needed. We're estimating that more like \$100 million, almost the entire Alberta Environment budget, would be needed to adequately implement the Water for Life strategy for the next three years.

Deregulation in this province and self-monitoring by industry have also raised levels of anxiety, and the public interest is not necessarily being served for many in these approvals and decommissioning and remediation of particularly oil and gas sites. There is increasing anxiety that we're not capable of monitoring and certifying that these sites are properly decommissioned and remediated, especially with the fivefold increase in this activity in the last decade and without commensurate staffing increases.

We also need to develop the capacity to measure cumulative impacts. New measures are needed for that. It's clear that we need to invest in both some of the science and some of the staffing that would be needed to look at the tremendous demands that are now on the landscape, not only oil and gas but forestry, agriculture, and other industries. How are they all going to fit together, and how do they link with the plan for that particular region?

People have to have some input into how their region is being developed. It cannot simply be determined by industry and the free market and expect that Albertans will be happy with development as it goes in that direction. People have to have a more meaningful involvement in how their region is being developed, and that, again, reflects back on how well we contribute to a stronger democracy and how well we actually plan for the values that Albertans have articulated as in their interest.

I just want to say before closing a few more comments about energy as it reflects so strongly in this province on our priorities, what our income will be, and what our future environmental and

social costs might look like. It's not clear how we will meet the needs of Albertans with declining royalties from conventional oil and gas. As we look to the oil sands to sustain our fossil fuel dependency in Alberta, Albertans are anxious to know whether they're receiving a fair return for their resource, and I think, rightly, that this needs to be addressed clearly and publicly. For example, how long can industry postpone full royalty payments in the oil sands in terms of capital cost recovery? Secondly, should the royalties relate in some way to the price of oil? Since the agreements on royalties were set almost a decade ago, how do they relate now to \$55 U.S. a barrel of oil, and are they fairly representing what Albertans deserve?

The Energy and Utilities Board is the gatekeeper for approval, monitoring, and enforcement, and it has essentially lost public confidence. The Energy and Utilities Board does not appear to be serving the public interest, and there's increasing anxiety in the stakeholders that I talk to and the public in many jurisdictions in Alberta, that is going to be expressed in increasing contention and conflict.

I would hope that the budget would reflect a greater commitment to communicating with the public and including the public in some of the decision-making. I've indicated three areas where I think this would be important: one, a vision and a plan for the different regions of the province; that is, priority zoning needs to happen which would identify one or more compatible industries that could be conceived in that area. Number two, substantial public involvement has to be

involved in this process. Number three, the capacity to address cumulative impacts of the various activities existing and planned is essential.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will thank you for the opportunity to discuss this vital matter that needs also to be reassessed in terms of how we deal with these issues next year. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Acting Government House Leader.
4:20

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Government House Leader I'd like to move to adjourn pursuant to Government Motion 16, agreed to on April 6, 2005.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 16, agreed to on April 6, 2005, the House stands adjourned until Tuesday, May 24, at noon. Members are expected to be seated in this Assembly before that.

I would also like to take this opportunity to wish each and every one of you a very safe long weekend.

[Pursuant to Government Motion 16 the Assembly adjourned at 4:21 p.m. to Tuesday, May 24, at 12 p.m.]