

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title:** Thursday, November 17, 2005 **1:30 p.m.**  
**Date:** 05/11/17  
**[The Speaker in the chair]**

head: **Prayers**

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon and 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.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sitting in your Speaker's gallery today are two very special guests, Mr. Rocky Hanson and his wife, Cathy Hanson, from Edmonton-Mill Creek. They are both very well known for their enormous volunteer contributions at Jackson Heights school, on the Burnewood community league executive, and for their work with several other benevolent groups.

Today, however, I'm particularly proud to salute Mr. Rocky Hanson for his very heroic efforts in assisting several seniors to escape to safety as a life-threatening fire ripped through the Veterans Villa seniors complex only a few days ago. Mr. Speaker, one person died in that fire. Many others were injured. But I shudder to think what might have happened if Rocky Hanson and fellow hero, Brad Smith, hadn't been there to rescue so many vulnerable seniors.

In this international Year of the Veteran, as we look back at the many sacrifices of all of our veterans, I'm humbled to salute a contemporary hero, Mr. Rocky Hanson. Rocky and Cathy and their family have since gone so far as to even open up their home for the victims of the fire. Please join me as I ask them to rise, and let's salute Rocky Hanson and his wife, Cathy.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

**Mr. Cardinal:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a number of visitors from the CFB Edmonton official language group. I believe they are seated in the members' gallery. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Ms Evans:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to introduce two incredibly vibrant and intelligent classes from Woodbridge Farms school. The 50 students are accompanied today by two teachers, a teacher assistant, and seven parent helpers. I am going to welcome on your behalf teachers Sheila Busch and Sheryl Ackerman, teacher aide Sushila Nakhwa, parent helpers Wanda Westwood, Pat Turner, Sarah Gaymer, Julie Porter-Anderson, Vanore Voaklander, Mr. Fraser Gerrie, Tara Barnes, and all the students. If they would please rise, we would give them a thunderous welcome to the Legislature.

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

**Mr. Lougheed:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise to introduce to you and to the members assembled a grade 6 class from Fultonvale school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Karin Bittner, and also parents and helpers Ms Sylvia Flannigan, Mrs. Shelley Chalifoux, Mr. Bruce Paterson, Mrs. Carolyn Levey, Mrs. Georgina Dreger, and Mrs. Sue Perry. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the new executive director of the Northern Alberta Development Council, Mr. Dan Dibbelt. Dan has a long and varied background in municipal and provincial governments as well as economic development that includes work with cities, towns, and rural municipalities throughout the Peace region. His experience in marketing, communities, and freelance journalism will be greatly beneficial to the valuable work that the NADC undertakes. As chair of the NADC I look forward to the energy that Mr. Dibbelt brings with him to his new office. Dan Dibbelt is seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly nine students from the Faculty of Law at the University of Alberta who are enrolled in a course on legislative process and legislative planning taught by Mr. Rob Reynolds, our Senior Parliamentary Counsel, and Mr. Peter Pagano, our Chief Legislative Counsel. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly visitors from the Paul Band First Nation school, a school in a very progressive aboriginal community. I believe they are in the members' gallery. There are eight students, two teachers, Mr. Paul Jespersen and Mr. Reg Kastelan, and their bus driver, Mr. Billy Adams. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a special guest in the public gallery. He's a young man who just graduated from Strathcona high school, a high school I attended just a few years ago. He's recently returned from a Rotary exchange in Finland. He's a good athlete, an all-round great kid. He also happens to be the son of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. His name is Chris Miller, and I'd ask him to stand and receive our warm welcome.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Ireen Slater, the acting president of

SUN, very active in helping the constituency of St. Albert in a recent Visions workshop on seniors and health. She's just arrived, and I wish her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the newly minted president of my constituency association, Jennifer Krauskopf. Jennifer is one of the thousands of Albertans who volunteer their time to advance the political process, and it's safe to say that none of us would be here today without their help. I would ask Jennifer to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My introduction today is Ron and Lynda Jonson, and I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly both of them. Lynda and Ron are tireless advocates for seniors' issues and improving conditions in Alberta's long-term care facilities. Lynda is a former registered nurse and Ron a retired engineer, both living in Hinton. Together they helped form the group Seniors I Care. Last year they visited over 100 long-term care facilities in this province and collected nearly 5,000 signatures from Albertans seeking better long-term care. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House eight student leaders from the University of Alberta Students' Union. They are here today to remind the government of its commitment to an affordable and quality postsecondary education system that's accessible to all Albertans.

**1:40**

Mr. Speaker, some of the guests are seated in the public gallery and some may be on the other side in the members' gallery. I would now ask them to rise as I call their names and ask members to hold their applause until all of them are on their feet: Sam Power, vice-president external; Graham Lettner, president; Mat Johnson, vice-president academic; Jason Tobias, vice-president operations and finance; Justin Kehoe, vice-president student life; Catrin Berghoff, arts councillor; Kyle Kawanami, law councillor; and Prem Erubetina, engineering councillor. Please give them a warm welcome.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is Richard Hopkinson. Richard is a first-year student in the social work program at Grant MacEwan College. He has been assisting with casework in our Edmonton-Strathcona constituency since September. He has been of great assistance to us, and we appreciate his hard work for my constituents in Edmonton-Strathcona. I now ask Richard to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

### Oral Question Period

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

### Health Care Utilization

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Premier drew the ire of Albertans when he claimed that there was a major problem with undeserving recipients getting AISH payments. Now, just yesterday in this Assembly the Premier stated to the leader of the third party that he was feigning sickness and then said, "That is precisely what puts pressure on the health care system." To the Premier: can the Premier tell this Assembly the basis for his position that Albertans feigning sickness are putting pressure on the health care system? Does he have examples?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, I find it strange, to say the least, that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition would allude to what the leader of the third party said to try to make a point. This is like Pinocchio. The point is being stretched beyond all reasonable limits.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. Again to the Premier: does the Premier hold the position that Albertans feigning sickness are putting pressure on Alberta's health care system?

**Mr. Klein:** No. Mr. Speaker, I would like to have the Blues in front of me because what I said was that, first of all, the hon. leader of the third party opposition said that he is sick.

**Mr. Mason:** Of your answers.

**Mr. Klein:** He is sick of our answers.

I said that if he is really sick, then we'll call an ambulance for him, and he will be treated under the public health system, but if he is feigning sickness, then that is one of the problems that we face with our health care system, people who are not sick attending emergency wards. If he is truly sick, we'll call an ambulance for him.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. Well, given that the Premier just said that he thinks one of the problems in Alberta's health care system is people feigning sickness, does he have examples? Can he tell us the basis for that position?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, again he is stretching, stretching, stretching, and it indicates to me that they have nothing else to criticize.

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

### Continuing Care Funding

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again my question is to the Premier. Given that people across this province are sitting right now in short-staffed, substandard long-term care facilities, how did this government decide that everything from a zoo to a movie is worth funding this fall but not extra staff in long-term care facilities?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, it's too bad that the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition didn't stay around at the AAMD and C conference today, where we made an announcement relative to \$140 million, that hopefully they'll support, being spent for seniors and affordable housing around the province, primarily in the rural areas.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the Premier can tell us how much of that \$140 million is going to extra staff now to support people in long-term care facilities.

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, the question is specific to the departments of health and seniors, so I'll have the appropriate ministers respond.

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, the recommendations from the task force came forward, were collaborated on, and they did in fact identify staffing as an issue. Presently through the standing policy committee the report that's been finalized by our members for Lacombe-Ponoka and Calgary-Foothills – we also had input from the Member for Lethbridge-East, who served on the committee. We have taken that report and taken a very serious look at what any interim implementation costs would be for staff. I think, if the hon. member listens for a few more days, in a very few weeks, hopefully before Christmas, we'll have some very good news about the staffing and some of the other recommendations that were, in fact, part of that report.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These are urgent, urgent human issues.

To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why did this government choose in its recent spending spree not to allocate funding for front-line staff in continuing care given that the Auditor General and the MLA task force and friends and family and staff and industry all recommended it? Why are they waiting?

**Ms Evans:** Relative to the unbudgeted surplus, as the hon. member opposite knows, there are definite rules surrounding how we expend that. In terms of getting this report . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, maybe they're not interested in the answer. Maybe they're not interested. The answer, in fact, is that we have to take a look at it. It's very responsible to come forward. We asked for what the regional health authorities currently have in staffing. We upped the staffing from 3.1 hourly support for long-term care to 3.4 hourly support for long-term care this year. In many facilities where that was not available, we have been looking at accelerating our training for staffing. If the hon. members opposite will be patient for a few more days, I'm sure that we'll be able to illustrate to Albertans that our number one priority is looking after the long-term care and following through with the great work that was done in assessing needs.

One more point, Mr. Speaker. The Broda report talked about the shift to keeping people in their homes. We also are looking very seriously at how we support home care to make sure that that is compliant with the more recent trend to keeping people in their homes.

**The Speaker:** Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and certainly along the same lines. As has been mentioned, I was a member of that task force. This summer I heard from the people in continuing care and their families about the loss of care, dignity, and respect in our continuing care facilities. The Auditor General pointed out those same deficiencies. As has been mentioned by the Minister of Health and Wellness, there were hours changed. Since last spring I think it's

been 1.9 to 3.4, which were being put forward in stages. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness would be: what stage are we at right now, and has there been an evaluation on those hours?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, in most of the regional health authorities they have been able to comply with a move to 3.4 hours per patient. There are, however, some places where that staffing was not available or some other reason that the organization of the facility, in the view of the regional health authority, had not met that requirement. They've all assured me that by January 1, 2006, they will in the current budget year with the current budget dollars meet and comply with that.

Relative to further additions for staffing that might be implicit with the long-term continuing care report done by the MLAs, as I say: more news to come.

**1:50**

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you for that answer. It pretty much covers my second question. I really do need to know when we are going to get those dollars because we need them now.

I'll jump to my third question. What is the timeline for that short-term strategy and the long-term strategy given the division between housing and care?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, I think the questions are very good because it does profile what has to be done and it does profile the work that we have been doing in government. When a report was done by the MLAs, when it went out for more consultation in September, we had yet to put it through the process of standing policy committee, also to cabinet, caucus, and Treasury Board. Recognizing the need to improve on the hourly supports for staff and also to try and work to make sure that we've got the proper staff trained, when we make an announcement, I think it will be very clear that we have an interim strategy, and the new budget year will see yet more progress being made to fulfill the obligations of all 45 recommendations.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the third party.

### Securities Commission

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On March 10, 2004, the Alberta Securities Commission's director of enforcement signed an order directing his staff to investigate insider trading allegations against an unnamed public company. On the same day the director of enforcement bought shares in the very same company. Three and a half months later, on June 21, 2004, the director of enforcement sold all of his shares, realizing a significant gain. Martha Stewart went to jail for less. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Given the Auditor General's finding that the director of enforcement was in a conflict of interest in transacting shares in a company that he was responsible for investigating, why is the Minister of Finance allowing the ASC to cover up this corruption?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, to suggest that there is a cover-up is quite a stretch because the Auditor General on pages 29, 30, and 31 covers all of this issue and lays it out very clearly. That's why, probably, the hon. member knows about it.

What I can tell you is that the Alberta Securities Commission, upon learning of this, had a complete investigation of it. It was determined that it was inadvertent, that the shares were bought through a broker. What the Auditor General has done in his report is put in recommendations that will ensure as much as possible that this doesn't happen again.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you have to understand that under investigations of this type you don't put a list on the wall and say: these companies are under investigation. You rely on a process, that when the case comes in, these are handled very confidentially because they are investigations, and you don't harm a company through an investigative process. You deal with it if you find that there is an issue with that company. So I ask the hon. member to understand that.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the minister: what did the director of enforcement know about this company when he bought shares in it, and has she bothered to ask that question?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, frankly, it's outlined here very clearly what happened. The director of enforcement through his broker bought and sold shares in a company. It was found that this company was under investigation. The Auditor General clearly lays out in the report all of the process that happened. What the Auditor General is saying is: improve that process to ensure that when any person in ASC purchases shares, there is a methodology that as much as possible ensures that the shares purchased, which must be disclosed within 10 days of purchase, are not in a company that is under investigation. You cannot expect a person to know that unless you have that process tightened up. That's what the Auditor General recommended, and that's what the Alberta Securities Commission is doing.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In refusing to take action to enforce the Auditor General's recommendations to take action against the ASC and force them to deal with the director of enforcement in this matter, what is the minister covering up, and who is she protecting?

**Mrs. McClellan:** First of all, Mr. Speaker, I'm protecting no one. Let me point out to you that the Auditor General found this breach because it was well documented in the Alberta Security Commission's files, which he had complete access to. That does not suggest to me any cover-up. Then the chairman of the commission met with the Auditor General. They discussed timelines and how to put processes in place as recommended by the Auditor General, and it was agreed on what those would be. I asked if the chairman of the Alberta Securities Commission had requested a meeting with the Auditor General. The answer to that was no. The chairman of the commission phoned the Auditor General and asked him if he had an issue, and he said that he was simply responding to calls that he was getting, because he was away when the report was released.

You know, I'm struggling with this. The Auditor General put out a report, in three pages clearly outlined all of this, outlined the procedure. The Alberta Securities Commission have agreed with the recommendations of the Auditor General, have investigated it thoroughly. Mr. Speaker, this is the way this should be dealt with.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

### Flood Disaster Relief

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across the province and in

my constituency people are still drying out after the worst flooding in recent memory. People's lives and homes were severely affected by this flooding, and some are still trying to recover from the damage that their homes and businesses suffered in June. My question is to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. How much longer will these people have to wait to receive some badly needed dollars for their badly needed repairs?

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the outset let me say that nothing that I could possibly say would diminish in any way the tremendous loss, both financial and personal, that literally thousands of Albertans experienced during the flooding that we had this spring.

That being said, I have to note that this disaster recovery program is the largest such program that this province has ever experienced. In fact, at 11,000 applications, it exceeds the total sum of all previous programs in the last 10 years, so it has been a huge undertaking to administer and deal with all of the claims from this program.

Mr. Speaker, at this point nearly 90 per cent of all files have been completed and cheques issued. There are some 10 per cent that have not been completed, most of those due to a need for some further information, either information from insurance companies or invoices. I can assure the hon. member that for anyone who has all of the necessary paperwork in place on those files, we will be doing the very, very best that we can to have those cheques issued immediately.

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

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what am I supposed to tell the person who calls me up and tells me that they only received a few thousand dollars from the program when their damage totals in the tens of thousands of dollars? Is it just a case of tough luck?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, it's very important that Albertans and members of this House understand that the disaster recovery program is not an insurance program. It's a program that is designed to assist Albertans who have suffered significant loss to restore their lives as best as possible to pre-flood conditions. The program, however, is a regulated program that deals with compensation to individuals based upon what is deemed to be reasonable. It doesn't cover losses for items that would be deemed either unnecessary for day-to-day living or considered luxury items.

What I can tell members, Mr. Speaker, is that our staff is working diligently to ensure that every applicant to this program receives 100 per cent of the compensation that they're entitled to under this program.

2:00

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

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since this flooding has occurred twice in the last 10 years, what is the government doing to help Albertans avoid this type of flooding damage in the future?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's the key to this entire situation. We have programs in place both provincially and federally to deal with floods and such events after the fact. We don't have programs in place to deal with the mitigation to prevent them from happening in the first place. I'm very pleased to say that

Municipal Affairs is participating in a Flood Risk Management Committee, which is examining ways of preventing future large-scale flood damage in the province. I understand the committee will be looking at a number of things such as flood forecasting and adopting measures that curtail development in flood-prone areas. The Member for Highwood is leading the committee, and we look forward to seeing his report early next year.

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

### Legal Aid

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Access to justice is a fundamental right for all people, including the poor. It is the province's responsibility to properly administer and fund a legal aid system for poor defendants. This involves allowing a person with low income or no income to choose a lawyer who they feel would best represent their interests, not who the government chooses for them. My question is for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Would the minister explain why the government is moving toward an in-house system in which the government has complete and full control over both sides, the prosecution and the defence, thus undermining the independence of the legal profession?

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

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I became Minister of Justice and Attorney General about a year ago, I had occasion to meet with the chair of the Legal Aid Society, and the first words out of his mouth were: Mr. Minister, I want to tell you how excellent things are. The legal aid system in Alberta, if not the best in Canada, is certainly among the best. It is, admittedly, like all legal aid systems across Canada in the last year of funding relating to the federal government, and we're working with them to ensure that it is ongoing and that the term is for five years and that the amount of coverage is expanded.

Mr. Speaker, we have nothing to be ashamed about. In fact, we should be very proud of the legal aid system that we have because it provides the best access for the people in need to legal services in Canada.

**Dr. B. Miller:** To the same minister: is this government changing the rules to exclude lawyers in private practice, even those who would serve pro bono for poor people?

**Mr. Stevens:** The concept of pro bono, Mr. Speaker, is an individual obligation on the part of any lawyer. It simply means that what you do is provide services to people who have need of legal services without charging for them, and of course that's an individual obligation. It has nothing to do with the government. It's something that lawyers do. It is something that the Law Society of Alberta encourages their members to do, and it is something that this minister encourages lawyers to do.

**Dr. B. Miller:** Given that an in-house public defender system, that we see elsewhere, especially south of the border, limits access to justice for the poor, what assurances do we have that difficult, hard-to-handle cases will not be simply just swept aside?

**Mr. Stevens:** Mr. Speaker, there are in-house legal aid systems in Canada, particularly in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, two of our sister prairie provinces. I can tell this hon. member that if you go to

those particular provinces and ask the justice minister, as I have, in those particular provinces, "Do those particular programs work well?" the answer will be, "Yes, they work very well."

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

### Contaminated Sites Cleanup in Calgary

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our Calgary-Fort constituency covers the largest industrial area in Calgary and that our living environment – the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the ground we live on – is of critical importance to our daily living, my questions today are to the Minister of Environment. Given that the cleanup in Lynnview Ridge in my constituency has not been started, dragging on too long, missing too many construction seasons, can the minister update us on his action for this speedy cleanup?

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First and foremost, as the hon. member has mentioned on behalf of his citizens, this has been quite a long process, but I am very pleased to report to this Assembly that there has been an agreement that has been reached, in place in terms of the cleanup for Lynnview Ridge and all of its residents, who are going to benefit from this.

Since day one our primary concern as Ministry of Environment is, of course, the safety and protection of residents but also with the protection of the environment because it is the resident's home that we have to assure based on laws that we approved in this very Assembly, that members have approved.

I want to say that the work is going on, and I also want to say that the work is commencing, and I will report back to the House on the good work that is being done to restore the communities back to the way it should be based on what it was before this terrible event took place.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that another situation in the southeast corner of the community of Ogden, where a seepage of cleaning fluid from the big rail yard shop flowed into underground water, can the minister update us on the cleanup there?

**Mr. Boutilier:** The hon. member lives in an area where, of course, environmental protection has clearly impacted many of the constituents that he represents. My ministry is working closely with the Calgary health region and also ensuring that CP Rail protects the health of its residents.

We are taking concrete action, to the hon. member, relative to this cleanup. They are upgrading a barrier to prevent any further contamination, Mr. Speaker. Also, the indoor air quality of all the homes and other potentially affected buildings is continuously being tested by the ministry officials. I can assure the members of this Assembly that those responsible are being held to account for a complete and full cleanup of the contamination that took place and due to the very strong laws that this very Assembly and its members have approved in the past in protecting the environment here and the citizens we represent.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is also to the same minister. Given that yet another situation in the northeast corner of my riding, where an oil recycling plant was completely demolished by a tragic and devastating fire, can the minister update us on this site cleanup?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Once again to the member, I can assure him and members of this Assembly that Hub Oil, under the strong laws that we have in place, has been required in terms of a plan and executing that plan to the standards that we have of course set up in this very Assembly – that is being carried out. I can assure the member and the members of this Assembly that we will, again, hold to account to remediate and get back to the full order of what citizens enjoyed well before this, again, ecological disaster took place as well.

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

### Restructuring and Government Efficiency

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Order in Council 506, dated November 2, 2005, and referencing the Government Organization Act, removed the cross-ministry responsibility for the human resources services program from the Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency and transferred it back to 19 out of the other 22 ministries. So it would appear that RAGE has even less work to do now. My questions are all to the hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. Can the minister explain why this particular responsibility was taken away from his department?

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

**Mr. Ouellette:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, we have human resource people right across government within all the ministries. We had done a review of how they were all looked after. There were managers in each one of those ministries, and we also had people in those ministries that were answering to us, and we felt that it was just a lot more efficient to leave those people in the ministries answering to the managers that were there.

2:10

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So can the minister tell us, then, if RAGE is still responsible for these same services in the three remaining ministries: Aboriginal Affairs, Gaming, and International and Intergovernmental Relations?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, we do still have some HR people, and we still do help any ministries we need and allow these people to work in any ministries.

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Okay. Given that even the Auditor General is unsure of what RAGE actually does anymore, can the minister explain to this House and to all Albertans exactly what programs or deliverables RAGE is engaged in right now to make this government more efficient? I'm assuming that this is his mandate.

**Mr. R. Miller:** SuperNet is gone.

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I keep hearing things about SuperNet, and whenever I hear that word, I have to say: that's one of the best initiatives this government ever brought in to help in rural development.

We have 1,300 employees in our ministry, and we do a number of cross-government initiatives throughout this government. It's not a flashy, sexy, fancy ministry. We do everything behind the scenes to make sure that all the mail is delivered, that all the computers are working. We have 27,000 desktop computers that we have to look after, and that's just one of a number of things. We do have initiatives that we're working very hard on today. We've got an ICT initiative that's coming out that will form one system right across government, that will save this government all kinds of efficiencies, and we also have a regulatory review process that's going to be coming forward shortly.

Thank you.

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

### Waste Management Strategy

**Mr. McFarland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For many years, over 20 to be precise, Vulcan county council has looked at, investigated, and continues to explore the concept of incinerating our garbage to cogenerate power, and I have a couple of questions that I'd like to ask the Minister of Environment. The first one to the minister is this. After a recent trip by our colleague from Whitecourt-Ste. Anne to investigate different methods of disposing garbage, would the minister be able to inform us how your provincial waste management strategy is progressing after this recent tour?

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say to the members of this Assembly that I look forward, with the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, to reporting back to this House.

Alberta has been and remains a leader when it comes to recycling programs, be it in terms of recycling tires, regarding bottles, used oil, and electronic waste, but we can do better because I believe that's an attitude that all Albertans and members of this Assembly have when it comes to protecting the environment. I was very pleased, though, that the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and a delegation of officials travelled to Scandinavia and to parts of Europe to learn what things are working well that we can incorporate into our strategy here pertaining to incineration as well as other things.

Let me conclude by simply saying this. Relative to the issue of garbage and waste, I believe that Albertans clearly have a view regarding this important resource, that it's simply too good to waste.

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

**Mr. McFarland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A semipuffball to the minister: will our progressive county councils who wish to consider alternate methods possibly be able to incinerate our garbage in the future rather than burying it under prime real estate and good, agriculturally productive land?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, I believe that North Americans, if you look at the issue of incinerating garbage – first of all, it is a terrible admission in terms of North Americans that North Americans I believe are the most wasteful people on this planet. Part of that, if you examine the situation, is this: what is being done regarding landfill is that it's simply buried. That's not good enough for Albertans. We, of course, are formulating regional landfills in terms of less landfills. It is my hope and prayer that someday there will no longer be any landfills in this province.

I want to say that incineration is just one of a variety of efforts that we need to seriously look at from a technological perspective for ensuring and protecting our environment today and well into the future. Let me assure you, to many of us in here whose our garbage ends up in a landfill, hold onto your hat because ultimately each and every one of us is going to have to have a greater responsibility in terms of having less waste, number one, recycling more, and at the end of the day no landfills because of the fact that other options will be available for protecting Alberta's environment.

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

**Mr. McFarland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From a rural development point of view, Mr. Minister, is it feasible that smaller, more numerous cogeneration incineration sites will be more advantageous than large central ones?

**Mr. Boutilier:** As the technology continues to develop, I think that is so critical. The opportunities both economic and environmental, I think, are absolutely at the cusp in terms of what we will be able to achieve. Not only will this province be the energy capital of Canada. I am convinced that with the initiatives this government is taking, we can be the environmental capital of this country as well.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

#### Water Quality in Ellerslie Elementary School

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. School water quality is not something parents should have to worry about when they send their children off to school. In my constituency Ellerslie elementary school has had its water trucked in for decades. When the water truck is late, there is no water for the children. My question is to the Minister of Education. Why is the minister allowing some Alberta children to have to wait for water in their school?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, I must say, Mr. Speaker, that I haven't been made aware of this particular issue, but it sounds like the member does have something that is worthy of pursuing. I'd be happy to learn more about it. We do require school boards under section 45(8) to provide a safe and caring environment for their students, and I think this issue would fit right within that. So we should find out from the school board if they're aware of it and what they are doing as well.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** I think I already discussed that with them.

My question to you again: will this minister investigate the situation in that school to ensure that clean water, clean tap water, is available as a Christmas present for them?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it's been a long time since I played Santa, but I will tell you this: I will have someone look into this immediately. I can assure the member of that.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you. To the same minister: given that the government funds water wells for schools overseas, when will this minister get city water to this Edmonton school?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** I think the process would require the principal to

inform the superintendent and the superintendent to inform the board, if necessary, and then ensure that some process is put in place. Quite frankly, I'm surprised that this hasn't already happened, but if it hasn't, I will certainly find out why not, and then we'll get some action moving.

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

#### First-contract Labour Arbitration

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This fall Albertans witnessed a bitter and unnecessary strike at Lakeside Packers. The Lakeside strike was settled in spite of – and I stress: in spite of – Alberta's weak labour laws and only because of the resolve of the union and the fact that it was becoming a public relations disaster for Tyson Foods. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. It should be self-evident that first-contract arbitration is a necessity. My question is simply this: why are we not bringing in first-contract arbitration in this fall sitting?

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

**Mr. Cardinal:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, before I answer the question, I'd like to table five copies of a report on collective agreements settled in Alberta.

**The Speaker:** There's an appropriate time in the Routine to do that, so just answer the question.

2:20

**Mr. Cardinal:** Okay. In relation to the question itself, Mr. Speaker, yes.

**An Hon. Member:** It's his first day.

**Mr. Cardinal:** Just the other day, in fact, two days . . .

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

**Mr. Martin:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this is one of the more interesting question periods I've had. I'd like to continue because the minister has said in the past that he needs time to study this. It's a lot of time to study first-contract arbitration. I have in front of me copies from eight different jurisdictions about first-contract arbitration. My question to the minister is simply this: why is the minister still claiming that he doesn't have enough information to act on first-contract arbitration? I will table it, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Cardinal:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to indicate that in relation to labour relations in Alberta – and this is very, very important – with the very hot economy out there, thousands of jobs, labour relations in Alberta are probably the best in North America – the best labour relations – and we have proof of that. Ninety-nine point nine per cent of the last two fiscal years the collective agreements were settled in Alberta without any labour interruption.

**Mr. Martin:** Mr. Speaker, tell that to the people that were on the picket line at Lakeside/Tyson. Tell it to the Finning people and all the other people that are on strike in this province. My question is simply this to the minister: when there are eight jurisdictions that have first-contract arbitration, why is this minister not moving so we

do not have another Tyson? It should be done immediately, in this session.

**Mr. Cardinal:** Mr. Speaker, to start with, the labour dispute was not with our government. The labour dispute was with private industry and a union. There are over 1,300 collective agreements; 750 of them are private company/labour agreements, and most of them have been settled.

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

#### Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking of collective agreements, many teachers in my constituency continue to raise concerns about the unfunded liability in the teachers' pension plan. While this liability is of concern to all currently active teachers, it is particularly a concern to those teachers who began their careers after '92-93. My question is to the Minister of Education. What are you doing to address the teachers' unfunded pension liability, that has grown to over \$6 billion?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I think the short answer is that we as a government are honouring our commitment to an agreement that was signed in 1992 whereby the government of Alberta assumed two-thirds of the unfunded liability and teachers, the other partner, assumed the other third. Prior to 1992 that particular pension fund that's being referred to, unfortunately, was underfunded by both sponsors. It was underfunded by the teachers; it was underfunded by the government. I have heard about this issue, and I hope that within the next several months I'll be able to visit it again and see if there is any room to reopen some chats or negotiations or whatever it might be.

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

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that about a year or two ago we almost had a 10-year contract signed with the ATA if we took over the debt, have there been any new discussions around government assuming responsibility for the entire amount of this unfunded liability?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, it's true that an offer, albeit a verbal one, had been made in 2004 by my predecessor to both the Alberta Teachers' Association, the ATA, and to the Alberta School Boards Association, ASBA. Now, that did call for a 10-year labour peace framework, but unfortunately neither ASBA or ATA or the minister of the day were able to consummate, if you will, that offer into an actual deal. However, it's important also to note that in the '02-03 year, hon. member, this government did pay the entire amount of the teachers' portion, which was about \$60 million. That was done on a one-time basis.

It's unfortunate, I think, that the '04 agreement wasn't offered to all the teachers to actually vote on because what teachers out there are telling me is that they may well have gone for it. Now, I understand that there were some downsides to it – those have been expressed – but, still, overall it was a pretty generous offer by this government because it amounted to about \$1.9 billion.

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

**Rev. Abbott:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess, again, given

that Alberta's Commission on Learning has recommended provincial bargaining, will the minister consider either buying down the unfunded portion that the teachers are responsible for or perhaps buying out one of more years to try to keep things moving along here?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there are probably three options that would need to be considered should this come back onto the government's radar screen. One would be to do nothing and leave it the way it sits because there is an agreement in place. The second would be to either take over the teachers' portion totally, which would impact us in a very significant way, to the tune of almost \$2 billion dollars, and the third might be to look at some creative option in the middle of that, which might well be a possible – and I stress the word "possible" – consideration of a partial buy-down or a partial buyout or perhaps a one-time buy-in.

It's a very sensitive issue out there, Mr. Speaker, and I want to just say that this is beginning to impact young people wanting to come into the teaching profession, so we have to deal with this sensitively. We will open up some discussions at the appropriate time. Unfortunately, I can't do that right now.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

#### Casino Construction

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the provincial government lifted the moratorium on casinos in 2002, there's been a building boom in casino construction that rivals anything going on in Fort McMurray. Alberta's 17th casino opens in Calgary next week, and if all of the casinos that have been approved or are close to being approved are built, Alberta will shortly have 26 casinos, one of the highest number of any jurisdiction in North America. In keeping with this government's endemic lack of foresight, this explosion of legalized gambling is going ahead without planning or thought to the future. My question is for the Minister of Gaming. Does the minister have any limit in mind on the number of casinos that will be allowed in Alberta?

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

**Mr. Graydon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's true; there is a wonderful new casino opening in Calgary next week and others that are under construction. The board of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission has an eight-step process. It's a very detailed process. When they open up a region for applications, people interested in building a new casino survey the neighbourhood and the region, if you will. They consult with existing casino operators in the area to see that they're not stealing from one casino, basically, to fund another one. They check with the charities. There's no point in having too many casinos and having a charity work twice as hard and make half as much money. So it's a very detailed process, and when approval is given, you can rest assured that the board feels that there is a market there and that it's not going to influence the existing casinos.

**Mr. Tougas:** I'll ask the same question, Mr. Speaker. Is there any maximum number of casinos that you have in mind for Alberta?

**Mr. Graydon:** There's no number, Mr. Speaker, but I would anticipate that the board will be moving cautiously along now with any new applications. I'm not sure that there are any in the process



at the moment, but they will wait and see the influence that the ones that are already approved have on the market, if you will. If they deem that there's no room for any more, there won't be any more.

**Mr. Tougas:** Will the minister consider reinstating the moratorium on casino construction and expansion in Alberta?

**Mr. Graydon:** No. It's market driven, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we survey the market and the municipality very carefully to make sure that it's market driven. We do maintain our cap of 6,000 video lottery terminals in the province, and we've reduced the number of locations where those VLTs are available by 14 per cent in the last year.

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

### Anthony Henday Ring Road

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased to see that a new portion of Edmonton's ring road was opened recently on the south side of Edmonton. However, my constituents in northwest Edmonton are wondering when they will be given the same consideration. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Mr. Minister, when will we see the north section of the Anthony Henday ring road?

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

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We recently opened six kilometres of the southwest portion of the Anthony Henday, which is an absolute excellent bonus to the citizens of Edmonton.

2:30

Mr. Speaker, we are also presently working on a very small section of the northwest leg of the ring road, and the rationale behind that is that it will connect up with the St. Albert bypass, which will help the citizens of St. Albert as well as the citizens of Edmonton. We anticipate that this will be done in the fall of 2006.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the whole Edmonton ring road, we're currently on schedule and are anticipating that it will be done by 2011, all things being equal. We are certainly optimistic that we will be able to meet that target.

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you. My first supplemental to the same minister: in completing the north section of the Anthony Henday freeway, is the minister considering a P3 modality of financing?

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The very short answer to this is yes. When you take a look at the ring road and the extensive amount of dollars that are available for it and that are to be used for the funding of that road, you're probably looking at somewhere in the \$500 million to \$700 million range. For us to essentially sterilize those dollars within one or two years would be very, very difficult.

Mr. Speaker, as a P3 we would be able to extend out the payments over a period of time as we have done on the southeast portion of the Anthony Henday. Obviously, every P3 goes through an extensive business case. It goes through an extensive assessment to ensure that taxpayers are getting the best benefit of the dollars. Each P3, regardless of the project, still has to go through that particular process.

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you. My last supplemental to the same minister: can Edmontonians, then, be assured that this process will be faster and cheaper?

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

**Dr. Oberg:** Yeah. Mr. Speaker, one of the great things about a P3 is that we're able to guarantee when it will be done. On the southeast portion of the Anthony Henday, for example, I can tell the Assembly and the people of Edmonton that it will be finished in October of 2007. The reason I can say that is because on November 1 of 2007 the contractors will be fined a million dollars. On December 1 of 2007 it will be another million dollars and will continue on with a million dollar fine per month until it is done. So it's an excellent way to get projects done on time, on budget, and hopefully as quickly as possible.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, today in a 50-minute question period we had 84 questions and answers, which was quite good.

I will call on the first member to participate today, but might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

**Mr. Magnus:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly three gentlemen in our members' gallery. The first gentleman is from Winnipeg and is, in fact, the president of the Winnipeg firefighters' association. The second gentleman, from Edmonton, is the president of the Edmonton firefighters' association, and the third gentleman is the VP of the Edmonton firefighters' association. These three gentlemen have been instrumental and tireless advocates on behalf of firefighters' issues not just this year but over the last number of years and not only in Alberta but, in fact, because a representative from Manitoba is here, right across the country.

It's my pleasure to introduce Alex Forrest, Ken Block, and Greg Holubowich, who are in our gallery. I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe my guests are here, students from Windsor Park school accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Maureen Irvine, and parents Mrs. Lynn Parish and Ms Cathy McPhalen. Windsor Park is a long-established school in my constituency which routinely achieves remarkable academic results. It's absolutely one of the top schools in the province. If they are here, if that's the school from Windsor Park, please rise and receive the warm welcome from all members.

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

**Mrs. McClellan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour on behalf of the Premier to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of grade 10 students who are here from the Clear Water Academy in Calgary. Clear Water Academy

is an independent Catholic school located in the Premier's riding and is one of the province's top private schools. We have students visiting us; we have chaperones and teachers. They're here to learn about our legislative process and to tour our beautiful winter Legislature Grounds. I would like them to stand and would ask all members to give them a very warm welcome to our Legislature.

**The Speaker:** I mentioned that we had a 50-minute question period in this Assembly. Next year a certain member in this Assembly will surround herself with that number, but it's not at that point. It is her birthday today, and she advises me that she would never, ever reach that number which I can't mention. But happy birthday to the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

head: **Members' Statements**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

#### Centennial Celebrations in Bonnyville

**Mr. Ducharme:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on an immensely positive note to commend the many volunteers, participants, and particularly the municipal governments in my constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. Over the summer and indeed throughout this entire year the many activities celebrating Alberta's 100 years were well received. These celebrations culminated on September 1 with the Party of the Century, where Albertans joined together across the province to celebrate our centennial. The town of Bonnyville in my constituency was one of the 10 host locations, and we stopped at no means to truly make this the biggest 100th birthday party ever.

I would like to take a moment, Mr. Speaker, to share with you and all others the unparalleled co-operation demonstrated by the hosts of the Bonnyville party, who are the town of Bonnyville, the municipal district of Bonnyville, the city of Cold Lake, and the village of Glendon. This party was such a success because of this outstanding display of regional co-operation.

Constituents and visitors alike enjoyed a celebration that included superb local talent, cultural performers, free food and refreshments, and ended with a dazzling display of fireworks. My thanks also go to the many volunteers and community organizations who willingly became involved in this presentation. I know that many worked tirelessly in preparing the grounds, cooking, serving food, performing, or cleaning up.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to extend my personal congratulations to the people of my constituency for this most impressive presentation of Alberta pride.

Thank you.

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

#### Federal/Provincial Relations

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October we observed the 25th anniversary of the national energy program. Once again in some parts of our country the pressure is on to redistribute our resource revenue and wealth. They are promoting it as protection for our environment, and the acronym is Kyoto, which stands for "keep you oppressed through overtaxation."

Albertans believe it is time for this province to stand up against Ottawa's intrusions in many areas before they strike again. Many say that it is time we put forth a resolution to amend our Constitution to protect many areas from the dictatorship of the federal government. An example of how this should have worked recently is if this

government had the leadership to push for a constitutional amendment tied to a referendum on marriage last fall. Alberta could have set an example for other provinces by forcing it onto the federal agenda. We should have fought the tide, but this government did not take all legal means within its powers, as it indicated it would. This can and should be done.

Albertans can protect all Canadians by stopping federal intrusions, by opting out of federal government social programs which are provincial responsibilities. Just looking at two federally mandated programs, daycare and the CAIS programs, shows just how bad the management of the federal government is when it intrudes in provincial matters.

The time has come for Alberta to take a leadership role – to act, not talk – to protect the family's rights in all the provinces and territories in Confederation. It is time to show Ottawa that we are serious in a democratic process, unlike Paul Martin's talk, and pass a resolution that in conjunction with the next federal election we have a referendum on the definition of marriage here in Alberta.

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

#### National Child Day

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and recognize that November 20 is National Child Day. November 20 was designated National Child Day by the government of Canada to commemorate Canada's signing of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. This day celebrates children and all things that make them special to us. It's a day to realize how precious youth are and to recognize their importance and contributions. It is a day to celebrate the promise of their future.

2:40

Albertans take the health and safety of children very seriously. It's important that children are given every opportunity to grow up healthy and secure, especially during their developing years from zero to six. This government actively supports families and communities, enabling them to provide nurturing, safe environments for their children. We work with families and communities to break the cycles of family violence, abuse, and poverty. Across this province communities and all levels of government work together to ensure that Alberta's children are safe from harm, are given every opportunity to grow up in safety and to realize their full potential.

I encourage all of you to use National Child Day as an opportunity to make this day special for children in your life.

Thank you.

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

#### Minable Oil Sands Strategy

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three weeks ago the government quietly announced a new strategy for northern Alberta. It's called the minable oil sands strategy, and its goal is simple. MOSS, as the government refers to it, places oil sands mining above all other environmental or social considerations in the Wood Buffalo region. It takes 2,600 square kilometres of boreal forest, wildlife habitat, lakes, and rivers and declares them essentially free of environmental regulation. MOSS relieves oil sands companies of the duty to conduct environmental assessments or to protect wildlife. In their own words, they are shifting from considering the environment and development on equal footing to placing a higher priority onto oil sands exploitation.

MOSS is a dangerous precedent. It allows companies to disturb navigable waters and even allows them to reroute tributaries of the Athabasca River. MOSS would sacrifice decades of environmental regulation and responsibilities for the convenience of several oil sands megaprojects. This gold rush mentality that underlies oil sands development should not give us a licence to make poor choices. With this MOSS proposal the provincial government is absolving its responsibility to steward a huge section of northern Alberta. They seem perfectly willing to sacrifice the environment for energy practices that are clearly destructive and unsustainable.

Oil sands are the single most greenhouse gas intensive form of oil extraction in the world. Three barrels of river water are required for every barrel of bitumen in a time when water shortages are a reality in Alberta. Oil sands use massive amounts of natural gas for their extraction and refinement, the same resources that are now in steady decline. As the president and CEO for Dow Canada said earlier this year about our reserves of natural gas, we're lighting the candles at the dinner table with hundred dollar bills.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

### Prevention of Bullying

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week communities across the province are recognizing Bullying Awareness Week. Bullying happens every seven minutes on the playground and every 25 minutes in the classroom. Bullying leaves scars that last a lifetime, making prevention an important government priority.

Last June the government launched a three-year province-wide bullying prevention program. I encourage children to learn how to handle bullying by playing an interactive game at [teamheroes.ca](http://teamheroes.ca). The game teaches children to find their own hero within by introducing them to the S-Team heroes. These heroes are a team of bully-proofing champions that help kids protect themselves and others from bullying. Parents need to learn about bullying, too, and I encourage them to sit down and play this game with their kids.

Parents can also learn more about bullying prevention through a web resource called [bullyfreealberta.ca](http://bullyfreealberta.ca). This website provides useful tips on what to do if your child is a victim of bullying, if your child is the one being the bully, or if your child is a witness to a bullying situation. Schools play an integral role in bullying prevention and are making a difference. This is one of the many reasons Alberta is recognized internationally for its outstanding and caring education system.

However, making bullying history also requires the combined efforts of government, school boards, teachers, students, and communities. Last June more than 6,000 key community partners including schools, libraries, parent link centres, and sports associations received a starter kit to help eliminate or reduce bullying in their community. These kits contain a series of posters, fact sheets, and a comic book based on the online S-Team heroes game for communities with limited Internet access. These materials are also available online at [bullyfreealberta.ca](http://bullyfreealberta.ca).

Mr. Speaker, everybody has a role to play in bullying prevention, and anybody can make a difference.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

### Foster Parents

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Foster parents are an

under-recognized treasure. Theirs is one of the longest-standing parts of Alberta social services. Their service is one reason we have more kids that make it and fewer tragedies, failures, and young offenders. They are not highly paid, and they receive less attention and recognition than many newer and smaller sectors of our social infrastructure.

In the past 20 years we have accredited many kinds of mentors and caregivers: midwives, special-needs assistants, many kinds of therapists and counsellors, paramedics, and practitioners. Some, like midwives, are long-standing professions. Others are relative newcomers. All are receiving a higher profile.

Foster parents bring together the skills of a counsellor, private nurse, tutor, massage therapist, mentor, and corrections officer. It is time they be recognized and paid as the homemakers they are. It is significant that a government that talks so much about traditional families and values has not done more to support foster parents.

Foster parents have shared their own homes and provided a long tradition of care for those children who through no fault of their own lack the kind of family experience so many others enjoy or take for granted. Foster parents should be recognized for their contribution to our society and our province. This means fair remuneration and adequate sources for support.

As we hear of tragedy throughout the world and needs around the globe, we understand that we are called to support our global family. I believe this must begin at home, and I salute our foster parents. They are champions of compassion.

head:

### Presenting Petitions

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am submitting a petition which, again, was initiated by a constituent from Edmonton-McClung and signed by a group of concerned Alberta parents from all over the province, in this one in particular from Edmonton and Camrose, asking the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to eliminate school fees charged for textbooks, locker rentals, field trips, physical fitness programs, and music lessons.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition that says:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation declaring a moratorium on any future expansion of Confined Feeding Operations, with a view to phasing out existing operations within the next three years.

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from 100 Alberta tradesmen and women, and it reads:

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

They're from Fort McMurray, Athabasca, Edmonton, Calgary, Devon, Leduc, and Ardrossan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on a Standing Order 30 application.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise, after having provided your office with the required written notice earlier this morning, to give the full Assembly notice of my intent to move the following motion under Standing Order 30: be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the failure of the government to provide additional resources required to reduce the grave and immediate risks to the health and physical security of seniors living in Alberta's long-term care facilities as identified in the May 2005 Report of the Auditor General on Seniors Care and Programs.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader and Minister of Education.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, and 42.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday I will move that motions for returns 44, 45, 46, 47, and 48 be dealt with that day. There being no additional motions, Mr. Speaker, no motions for returns other than those, there are none to stand and retain.

head: 2:50 **Introduction of Bills**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

**Bill 50**

**Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)**

**Mr. Magnus:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2).

The purpose of Bill 50 is to provide workmen's compensation benefits to firefighters who suffer a myocardial infarction, which in laymen's terms is a heart attack or heart event, within 24 hours after attendance at an emergency response. The myocardial infarction will be presumed to have arisen out of and occurred during the course of employment as a firefighter unless the contrary is proven. The bill also changes the reporting of the medical panel's commissioner, making the panel's independence of the WCB very clear.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 50 read a first time]

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, I'd move that Bill 50 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

**Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one that I'd like to table is another letter, this time from Dale and Anne Watson of Westrose, Alberta, that's part of a growing chorus of Albertans who demand that the Minister of Health

and Wellness cancel her ministry's contract with Aon Consulting and stop wasting time and money on dangerous health care privatization.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is another letter, this time from Rod McConnell, which was sent to the Premier and all MLAs. Mr. McConnell expresses frustration that the health minister's office would provide no information on public consultation on health care privatization.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**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's a letter that I received dated November 7, 2005. It's from Shirley R. Howe, the public service commissioner. This letter is in regard to Mr. Murray Smith and his activities at TUSK Energy Corporation.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three documents to table today, two fax sheets prepared by PollutionWatch. One highlights national pollution facts. The other provides pollution facts specific to Alberta. PollutionWatch has found that Alberta produces the most air pollution of any province in Canada, including one billion kilograms of pollutants released from industrial facilities in 2003.

I would also like to table copies of a news release from the Pembina Institute dated October 26 of this year. The release warns that the proposed minable oil sands strategy would have serious and negative environmental impacts on 2,800 square kilometres of boreal forest.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from one of my constituents, a teacher with 16 years of experience who is extremely upset about the issue of unfunded liability; also, a letter from one of my constituents about the prosperity cheques. She argues that there should be three other checks before the prosperity cheques come out, namely a democracy check, a societal check, and a human resources check.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table today. First, I would like to table a memo from Angus McBeath, a former superintendent of schools for the Edmonton public school board. The memo draws attention to the dramatic reduction in learning resource personnel and counsellors that the school board has suffered over the last 10 years.

I'd also like to table for the hon. minister of human resources copies of labour code provisions from across Canada. These provisions will provide the Minister of Human Resources and Employment a template for developing long-overdue first-contract legislation for Alberta.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table this e-mail letter on behalf of my constituent whose son is drug addicted and

needs immediate help. She's concerned about AADAC here in Edmonton. Edmonton treatment centres, according to her, are full and useless and need to look at changing this. We have a huge addiction problem in Alberta. I believe our government must face this issue. We should have a separate ministry for mental health and addictions like B.C. She had to take her son to B.C. for treatment . . .

**The Speaker:** With all due respect, hon. member, please. This is tablings, not reading of tablings. We'll accept that it's tabled.

head: **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. Minister of Health and Wellness: pursuant to the Mental Health Act the Alberta Mental Health Patient Advocate office 2003-2004 annual report; pursuant to the Nursing Profession Act Alberta Association of Registered Nurses 2003-2004 annual report with attached financial statements for the year ended September 30, 2004; pursuant to the Opticians Act the Alberta Opticians Association annual report 2004; pursuant to the Dental Disciplines Act Alberta Dental Hygienists' Association 2004 annual report; pursuant to the Pharmaceutical Profession Act the Alberta College of Pharmacists annual report 2004-2005; pursuant to the Health Professions Act College of Alberta Denturists annual report 2004, the Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists 2004 annual report, the Alberta College of Optometrists annual report 2004; pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act the Alberta Mental Health Board 2004-05 annual report, Aspen regional health 2004-05 annual report, Peace Country health annual report 2004-2005, Calgary health region 2004-05 annual report, Capital health annual report 2004-05, East Central health region annual report 2004-2005, Palliser health region annual report 2004-2005, Northern Lights health region annual report 2004-05, David Thompson health region annual report 2004-05, and the Chinook health region annual report 2004-05; as well, the Alberta Cancer Board annual report 2004-05 and response to Written Question 5 asked by Mr. MacDonald on behalf of Dr. Taft on April 11, 2005, and return to order of the Assembly MR4 asked for by Dr. Pannu on behalf of Mr. Mason on April 4, 2005.

head: **Projected Government Business**

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would the Government House Leader please share with the Assembly the projected government business next week?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's pretty clear from the agenda that next week we will be discussing supply. On Monday, the 21st, in the afternoon we would advise that we anticipate the introduction of Bill 53, the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2005. In the evening at 9 o'clock under Government Bills and Orders for second reading we would proceed on Bill 49, the Police Amendment Act, 2005 (No.2); Bill 45, the Maternal Tort Liability Act; Bill 43, the Alberta Resource Rebate Statutes Amendment Act, 2005; and as per the Order Paper.

On November 22, Tuesday, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply, supplementary supply, day 2 of three days: Advanced Education, Gaming, Infrastructure and

Transportation, Seniors and Community Supports, and Municipal Affairs estimates in Committee of Supply. Time permitting, second reading on Bill 44, the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, 2005 (No.2), and third reading on Bill 9, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005. In the evening at 8 o'clock under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 50, the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2005 (No.2), and Bill 43, the Alberta Resource Rebate Statutes Amendment Act, 2005; for third reading Bill 9 and Bill 15; and in the Committee of the Whole Bill 48, Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2005, Bill 47, the Alberta Association of Former MLAs Act, Bill 43, and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, November 23, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply, the departments of Health and Wellness, Sustainable Resource Development, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Community Development, and Environment. For second reading, time permitting, bills 46 and 43. In anticipation of completion of Committee of Supply, there may be a request to revert to Introduction of Bills for the introduction of Bill 51, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2005 (No. 2). At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading bills 46 and 43, committee anticipated on bills 50 and 43, third reading on bills 48, 47, and 43, and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, November 24, under Introduction of Bills, Bill 52, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2), Committee of the Whole on bills 49, 45, and 46, and as per the Order Paper.

head: 3:00 **Request for Emergency Debate**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on a Standing Order 30 application.

#### **Continuing Care Funding**

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise at this time to move the following motion: be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the failure of the government to provide the additional resources required to reduce the grave and immediate risks to the health and physical security of seniors living in long-term care facilities as identified in the May '05 Report of the Auditor General on Seniors Care and Programs and further explored by the MLA task force this summer.

I understand that the case I am required to make respecting this motion revolves around urgency. I'll do my best in the next few minutes to explain why this matter is so urgent and merits this Assembly taking some time today before we move on to other business. The case for urgency, however, is not, in my view, a strictly technical one since it's hard to imagine an issue requiring urgent attention that doesn't in itself have intrinsic importance. Significant things can wait. The dignity and lives of our seniors cannot.

It is worth recalling that just over six months ago the Auditor General released his report on the state of long-term care in Alberta. It was a damning report and exposed real risks to the health and well-being of Alberta's senior citizens; for example, the inappropriate use of medications, as documented in a study done by both the U of L and the U of C. Shortly thereafter the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood moved a motion for an emergency debate. On this, the Speaker ruled that there was, indeed, a case for urgency. Six months after that report and three months after the report of the task force and my own adjunct report all of the underlying conditions that gave rise to the ruling on that day I believe continue.

Today, however, we face a new challenge: what to do here in this

sitting when the government has failed to solve the problems. The introduction of the government's supplemental estimates yesterday revealed that despite the introduction of previous legislation enabling resource rebates and the creation of associations for former MLAs, this government has not, at least not so far, taken the opportunity of this sitting and the abundance of resources available to devote any additional dollars to respond to the most pressing problems in long-term care. This inaction represents real risks to the lives and dignity of Albertans.

I've seen the crisis first-hand, and it's hard to overestimate my astonishment that there was no response in these estimates. We must have an urgent discussion around how we mitigate these risks in the short term and before this spring. This Assembly does not know when the next opportunity for supply is, but it could well be as late as next March. Seniors in care cannot wait, nor can we wait until these estimates are debated in Committee of Supply next week. This, I submit, is to misunderstand the nature of the crisis and the reason for my motion. The reason to have this debate is not simply to listen to each other talk nor is it merely to be seen talking. It is to ensure that the government is advised by this Assembly of the urgency of this matter so that they can take immediate action.

Further, *Beauchesne*, section 950, for example, sets limits on the ability of these estimates to be increased in Committee of Supply. They can only be reduced. Clearly, there is no opportunity for any kind of effective action stemming from the committee debates themselves. To be sure, not every problem identified and not every piece of the solution involves additional funding. There are important measures to be taken about openness, accountability, monitoring, and other policy issues, yet here, too, there was nothing on the Order Paper to indicate that the government is introducing legislation to deal with these important matters.

The conversations between the minister responsible and myself and my colleagues regarding any other forthcoming legislation has led me to believe that no legislation is planned for this fall. My own private member's bill, 213, seeks to establish some independent oversight and accountability for the system, but this side of the House is not in control of the government's agenda, and we have been led to believe that there are only a few days remaining in this session. Given the meagre opportunities afforded us for private members' business, this bill will almost certainly not be coming up for debate this fall. Given that there are only a few days left in this sitting, it is my contention that the government still has a chance, if they direct their departments to begin working on it today, to introduce an additional supplementary supply bill for long-term care that could begin to mitigate the identified risks to seniors and provide real relief to the overburdened families and health professionals who care for them.

While I certainly respect the importance of the legislative schedule and even respect the prerogative of a duly elected government to govern, surely nothing on the agenda today supercedes the importance of this Assembly discussing this urgent matter. While I'm aware that a motion under this standing order does not entail any action by this Assembly, I am moving this motion with the hope that a renewed consideration of the risks identified to seniors' well-being and the recognition that we are literally running out of time to take meaningful measures in a timely fashion will prompt the government to take some action now. Mr. Speaker, I truly believe that this is the right thing to do.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** I'm going to allow very, very brief comments on this, but the hon. member in pushing this thing has failed to tell me why this does not violate 30(7)(d), which is the most important rule that

we have in the Standing Orders with respect to dealing with this. There's no debate on this matter whatsoever. [interjection] Sorry, but the hon. member has already talked. Somebody's going to have to convince the chair that this does not violate 30(7)(d).

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to attempt to convince you that it doesn't violate that. I think it does violate that.

The nub of the motion is the failure of the government to provide additional resources. This afternoon in Committee of Supply we'll be talking about resources. Tuesday in Committee of Supply we'll be talking about resources. Wednesday in Committee of Supply we'll be talking about resources. In fact, Health and Wellness will be up on Wednesday, Seniors and Community Supports is up on Tuesday, and then we will have on Thursday the introduction of the appropriation bill, where we will be talking about supply of resources. I think that under Projected Government Business I indicated that the bill would be introduced either Wednesday or Thursday. It will be debated the following week in two stages in committee, so the foreseeable future in this House is all about the supply of financial resources.

I don't want to make light of the issue. I think we're all concerned about seniors who need care and the ability of our mothers and fathers to live in dignity. Those are all very important issues, but with respect to the nub of this motion, the failure of the government to provide the additional resources necessary, that is the substance of every discussion in the House every day for the next six days at least. Therefore, the urgency to move off the Orders of the Day to have an urgent debate on the very subject that we're moving into in Committee of Supply is beyond me.

**The Speaker:** Again, hon. members, we clearly have Standing Order 30(7)(d). On May 10 during this First Session of the 26th Legislature the House provided the opportunity for debate on this same issue. Standing Order 30(7)(d) prohibits this happening twice in the same session, so I don't know what compelling argument there is. We're into a basic filibuster.

Who wants to participate then? I'm sorry, hon. member, you've already made your statement.

Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, you're deferring to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning?

**Dr. Taft:** Proceed.

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The requirement of Standing Order 30(7)(d), which precludes reviving discussion "on a matter which has been discussed in the same session" pursuant to this Standing Order, as you've said, could be looked at in this particular matter. But the matter on which my colleague from Lethbridge-East rose today, while touching on the care of Alberta's seniors . . .

3:10

**The Speaker:** That's not the issue, hon. member, please. This is a question for urgency. Once there is an agenda for the session, the Standing Orders provide that there's an opportunity to have an urgent matter come before the Assembly if it's urgent and there's been no opportunity for members to discuss anything. Then the rules provide that if it has been discussed once and we waive the whole Routine for the afternoon to deal with a particular matter once during a session, we do not do it twice on that subject. That's 30(7)(d). We've already done it once. We've had this. We did this on May 10, which was during the First Session of the 26th Legisla-

ture. So that's the pertinent point for the urgency: how would this not be the same? I haven't heard any additional arguments with respect to this. I'm sorry. I'm not putting the question. We're going to move on.

### **Privilege Contempt of the Assembly**

**The Speaker:** I'm now prepared to rule on the purported questions of privilege raised on Tuesday by the Official Opposition House Leader and the leader of the New Democrats. Although there are some distinguishing factors between the two matters that have been raised, the general subject of early release of reports of officers of the Legislature is the same. Therefore, the chair will be addressing the matter in one ruling.

To be clear, the matter raised by the Official Opposition House Leader deals with the early release of the Auditor General's report on the Alberta Securities Commission, and the one by the leader of the third party in the House deals with the premature disclosure of the Auditor General's report on the Alberta Social Housing Corporation and the disclosure of the results of the Ethics Commissioner's report on the Minister of Environment. These are the allegations that we'll deal with together.

As a preliminary matter the chair confirms that both parties fulfilled the two hours' notice requirement under Standing Order 15(2). The chair received written notice of the Official Opposition House Leader's purported question of privilege last Thursday, November 10. The leader of the third party provided his written notice this week on Monday, November 14. Given that Tuesday was the first day of the fall sitting, both parties have raised their respective questions of privilege at the earliest possible opportunity. The key argument underlying both purported questions of privilege is that there has been a contempt of the Assembly. As members are well aware, breaches of privilege and contempt of the Assembly are treated in the same manner, and therefore the procedure outlined in Standing Order 15 applies.

At the outset the chair would like to note for all members that the leak of a report from an officer of this Legislature has never before been raised in this Assembly as a matter of privilege. In fact, over the course of the past few days the chair and the table officers have undertaken a broad review, consulting with parliaments from across Canada as well as the United Kingdom. To the best of the chair's knowledge it is unprecedented for this type of matter to come before the Assembly as a purported question of privilege. So we are in uncharted territory.

The chair has listened attentively to the arguments raised, and it appears that the material facts are as follows. The contents of three reports from two officers of the Legislature were disclosed to members of the media prior to the reports being distributed to Members of the Assembly and being made available to the public. The reports in question are: one, the Report of the Auditor General on the Alberta Securities Commission's Enforcement System dated October 2005; two, the Report of the Auditor General on the Alberta Social Housing Corporation – Land Sales Systems dated October 2005; three, a report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta on the investigation by the Ethics Commissioner into allegations involving the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo dated October 20, 2005.

Although it is clear that the contents of all three reports were disclosed prematurely, it is not clear who is responsible for prematurely disclosing the two reports from the Auditor General. With respect to the third report, the one prepared by the Ethics Commissioner, the Minister of Environment indicated in the House yesterday that he referred to the contents of that report in a radio program prior

to it being made available to other members and the public. As he indicated at page 1676 of yesterday's *Hansard*, he was unaware of anything that prohibited him from doing so.

As the chair indicated on Tuesday when these matters were raised, it is a very serious matter when reports of officers of the Legislature are released or the contents are prematurely disclosed. While these disclosures may be contemptuous behaviour, the chair's view is that they do not amount to contempts of the Assembly.

Accordingly, the chair does not find that there are prima facie questions of privilege. The lack of both parliamentary and statutory authority concerning early disclosure of officers' reports leads the chair to this view. This conclusion does not diminish the fact that the leaks of these reports should be taken very seriously and that this type of conduct shows disrespect to the Assembly and demonstrates a blatant disregard for the statutory provisions that entitle members of the Assembly to view such a report before it is made public.

Because this is a matter that has never been raised before, the chair wants to provide some explanation for this finding. First, it is important to note that the two officers whose reports are in question operate under specific statutory regimes, as do the Chief Electoral Officer, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and the Ombudsman. Both members raising purported questions of privilege want the chair to find that the statutes do not form complete codes and that certain elements of parliamentary privilege must be, and I quote, read in, end quote, to them.

The chair wants to be very clear that this ruling is on the issue of whether an early or unauthorized release of an officer's report constitutes a prima facie question of privilege. This ruling should not be taken to address the broader issue of whether and to what extent the activities of officers of the Legislature are cloaked in privilege.

As the distribution of the reports is fundamental to the arguments of both members' questions of privilege, the chair wants to address the requirements. As was noted in the arguments, the procedure for distribution of a report from the Auditor General when the House is not sitting is outlined in section 20.1 of the Auditor General Act. This section provides that the report must be made available to the members of the Assembly upon three days' notice being given to the Speaker who shall forthwith distribute copies to the office of each member. The report is available to the public after the distribution has occurred. To the chair's knowledge the only parties that are authorized under the statute to have advanced copies of the reports are members of the Audit Committee, pursuant to section 24.

The Conflicts of Interest Act has a slightly different procedure for the distribution of reports from the Ethics Commissioner as outlined in sections 25 and 28 of that act. These reports are provided directly to the Speaker, who in turn lays the report before the Assembly or if the Assembly is not sitting distributes the report to members and then makes it available to the public. The act authorizes certain persons to receive advanced copies of a report; namely, the member against whom an allegation has been made and the leader of that member's caucus, section 25(8), and it is pursuant to this authority that the hon. Minister of Environment received the Ethics Commissioner's report prior to its release to other members.

There are provisions in the Auditor General Act that require both the Auditor General and his staff to maintain confidentiality in fulfilling their duties. The Conflicts of Interest Act has similar requirements, and this statute also provides for a fine up to \$20,000, section 40, for a commissioner, former commissioner, or person employed or engaged by the office who releases confidential information. However, neither of these acts specifically addresses whether the premature release of a report from the officer or discussion of their contents is an offence or contempt of the

Assembly. The Legislative Assembly Act provides provisions dealing with the Assembly's jurisdiction and expressly deals with the matter of breaches of privilege and contempt. There is nothing in this act that would suggest that a leak of a report from an officer amounts to a contempt.

Finally, in comparing the leak of a report from an officer to the leak of the other types of documents cited in the hon. members' arguments, there are a number of distinguishing factors. Clearly, all three types of documents referred to in the arguments of the Official Opposition House Leader – bills, committee reports, and the budget – are more directly tied to a proceeding of this Assembly. The matter of a budget leak, which has been cited in the arguments, is not typically considered a matter of privilege, and the chair cites *Beauchesne* 31(5) for this point. The premature disclosure of bills has been held by the chair to be a prima facie case of contempt, as was held on March 15, 2003, at pages 57 to 60 of the *Journals*, as belonging properly to members once they appear on the Order Paper.

3:20

On the subject of leaked committee reports the authorities are very clear that questions of privilege will not be considered unless a specific charge has been made. The chair would like to quote from Marleau and Montpetit's *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* on this point.

Speakers have ruled that questions of privilege concerning leaked reports will not be considered unless a specific charge is made against an individual, organization or group, and that the charge must be levelled not only against those outside the House who have made in camera material public, but must also identify the source of the leak within the House itself.

Found at pages 884 and 885. *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice* also supports this position in its 23rd edition at pages 140 and 141.

So even if the chair were to treat the leak of an officer's report the same as the leak of a committee report, this still would not meet the test for a prima facie case of contempt with respect to 2 out of the 3 reports because the source of the leak has not been identified.

With respect to the Ethics Commissioner's report the hon. minister indicated that he was not aware of any prohibition on the premature disclosure of the contents of the report on the basis that he not only requested the investigation but was the subject of that investigation. In the absence of a specific statutory provision or a recognized parliamentary precedent the chair cannot find a prima facie question of privilege. Furthermore, if the chair were to find a case of contempt, this could cast a cloud of suspicion on those persons who have legislated right to receive advanced copies of these reports prior to the distribution to members, and that is definitely something that this chair does not want to do. The chair might have a different view if there was a clear indication in the legislation how a premature disclosure of a report was to be treated.

Finally, the chair would like to emphasize that when a report is destined for members of the Assembly, prior to it being made available to the public, the utmost care must be taken in the printing and the preparation for distribution. The Auditor General has undertaken investigation of the office's practices, and the chair is confident that this matter will be given serious attention and that due care and attention will be given prior to the release of subsequent reports from that office.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

**The Chair:** I'd call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: **Supplementary Estimates 2005-06  
General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund**

**Education**

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm indeed pleased to rise to request some supplementary estimates for the extremely important ministry and departments working within Alberta Education. The request is specifically for \$75.1 million. These funds are very necessary in order to support a number of important initiatives that will benefit our students and enhance their learning environments.

Mr. Chairman, of the \$75.1 million some \$42.1 million is needed this fiscal year, '05-06, in order to help facilitate delivery of new modular classrooms and the relocation of portables during this year, which, in turn, will allow us to begin planning for the construction of 21 new or modernized school projects in 14 different communities so far across the province. Those are in keeping with the announcements I made earlier this fall.

The second largest component of this request today is for a \$24 million increase to the plant operation and maintenance funding scenario to school boards for schools in their jurisdictions. The annual school year increase will actually be \$43 million once it is annualized, and that will cover the period of September 1, '05, through to the end of August 31, '06. However, the \$24 million, which was part of the \$43 million that I am requesting today, represents the amount required to take us through to the end of the government's fiscal year, which, as we all know, ends on March 31, 2006, but of course the school year goes on until the end of August.

Mr. Chairman, the increased plant operation and maintenance funding utilizes a new formula now that is based on the number of students, also on the number of students with severe special needs, and, finally, on the need to keep several small schools open because of distance and necessity. It is a formula that has improved the funding scenario for almost every school board, and we are pleased with that. However, during my recent tour of the province when I met with all 62 school boards for the second time this year, I know that there are some issues with this scenario, so I did undertake to look at it more closely in preparation for the next year's budget.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, today's supplementary estimate includes a request for \$9 million in additional funding which school boards need in order to offset the sudden higher costs of transportation that have resulted from very sharp increases in the price of fuel. The current student transportation budget of \$210 million annually includes \$23 million for fuel costs based on an average pump price for diesel fuel, for example, of 60 cents per litre. Now, I cite diesel fuel prices in particular because they are the ones used for this calculation since approximately 80 per cent of Alberta's school buses operate on diesel fuel. That being said, I wish to remind all members that the price for diesel fuel has been as high as \$1 per litre in recent weeks, which is an increase of 67 per cent from the base budget price of 60 cents that I referred to earlier.

Mr. Chairman, almost 45 per cent of our Alberta students, which, by the way, represents about 250,000 children and youth, use school bus transportation to get to and from school every day. They ride over 70 million kilometres every year. So this additional money, \$23 million in this category, will ensure that school boards don't have to dip into money that would otherwise be intended for classrooms in order to pay the extra costs for transporting students to schools throughout Alberta.

The supplementary estimates, in conclusion, Mr. Chairman, are required because they are ministry specific, and they give that



particular ministry, in this case Alberta Education, legislative authorization to increase their spending above amounts approved by the Alberta Legislature as part of Budget 2005. I look forward to answering any questions that anyone may have, but mostly I look forward to everyone's support for these very necessary additional supplementary dollars for K to 12 education in the province of Alberta.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. These increases are generally to cover important capital and operating costs, and I think that's significant. Dealing with the actual learning of a student, I was a little disappointed that we didn't see some indication for support services such as counsellors, speech pathologists, educational psychologists, et cetera. The support services for our students are lacking. I think that the issue of the family and schools is becoming very important. I think that when we lack these services, schools are being burdened with trying to deal with them.

Let me be very specific on some of the issues in the estimates that I see. Portable classrooms referred to in the document as modular classrooms. This government continues to spend \$22 million in buying new portables and moving existing portables.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** What year is that?

**Mr. Flaherty:** This year, 2005, I guess. In many cases this shows a lack of planning and avoids a commitment to what we really need, which is stable, sufficient, and predictable funding to meet the school districts' long-term capital plans.

3:30

If there isn't enough money for permanent schools, did the minister create a plan for building schools before providing emergency funding? Were school district capital plans and enrolment projections consulted before paying for the new portables that he's bought? Is enrolment predicted to decline in the areas where portables were built? If not, why aren't actual brick-and-mortar schools planned, e.g. not more emergency portables? Has he got a long-range plan for schools in Alberta with set criteria so that school districts can get an idea of what he's expecting from them?

In many cases emergency portables last well beyond their intent and lifespan. We have an example of that at Alexander Forbes in Grande Prairie, where the portable is 25 years old and suffering from mould and is causing health hazards. This district is still asking for more emergency portables to handle enrolment growth. Also, the question with portables is a lack of proper bathroom facilities, which we have at Father Jan in St. Albert. Very sad.

Plant operation and maintenance: let me just comment on that, Mr. Chair. The plant operation and maintenance plan of this government, specifically the Department of Education, in my opinion is a mess. The Minister of Education moved to per-student funding in '04, and our response to this has been that this has been a recipe for school closures. As such, they regularly need to add supplemental dollars to this program in order to deal with funding shortfalls.

Funding for schools should keep a school in the community, which means paying for the operating costs of the school. Why was budgeted plant maintenance and operation funding not sufficient, Mr. Minister? Is there a special development that justified the additional \$24 million? Is this a sign that the new funding formula is not working? [interjection] Well, answer it, please. Will we evaluate the system in light of providing \$24 million in additional emergency funding?

Let me move to transportation. I'm glad you're smiling, Mr. Minister; it makes me feel good. Transportation: school districts across this province were taking money from other program areas to pay for this, so the government was forced to respond. What was the basis for this increase; e.g., how did they arrive at this figure of \$9 million? Nine million dollars: that is a 67 per cent increase from the budget estimate amount by his own numbers. Why did the press release announce \$15.5 million increased funding? Has something changed? How did the minister decide how to distribute the money to the districts? Can he be sure that extra money for transportation was not a result of a backlog of capital projects? Did the minister evaluate the business case for spending more on the busing of students versus building or maintaining local community schools?

My final comment is on capital facilities. What new capital facilities are there, and how are they being chosen?

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to speak to this.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Chair, if the hon. critic would just address the issues and take all of that rhetoric and garbage out of it, it might be actually helpful to listen to it. Nonetheless, I've got the gist of what it is that he's trying to say, albeit there are a lot of incorrect comments there that I would take some exception to and I'm sure the school boards will as well.

Nonetheless, here it is. With respect to portable classrooms, the additional monies that are required here are not only for some portables or modulars, actually, which are the new ones that we're putting out there, that are required on a permanent basis, but in many cases, Mr. Chair, several of them are required on a temporary basis. I think where the hon. previous speaker misses the boat completely is not understanding that we have fluctuating enrolments throughout the province, and these are changing. If he had done some homework, which clearly he hasn't, he would have noticed, for example, that some parts of the province are expanding very rapidly, and they need a sudden bit of help. That can be accomplished with some portables. Now, in other parts of the province we have declining enrolments. As those enrolments decline, we will perhaps move some of the portables.

With respect to this fluctuation, generally speaking, let us recognize that the new modulars are being built as fast as they possibly can be, and we're getting them out to the schools as fast as we can possibly get them, Mr. Chair. The new ones have a far longer lifespan, they are built in a more durable fashion, and they are much more easily transported. They can be done virtually overnight once the mechanisms are in place.

What we're asking for here is for some help this year to deal with some of the emergencies that are out there. I would remind the hon. member again that I just came off a tour, the second tour where I've met with every school board in the province now twice, and I think I've got a pretty good feel for what their needs really are. We don't have all the money to address all the needs. I mean, education is becoming just like health care: there will never be enough money. But we must find enough money to accommodate some of the serious situations that we have with respect to some overcrowding, and that's what this money is needed for.

With respect to the other comments that he made, Mr. Chair, and respecting the time of day, I will review them and, if necessary, I'll see if I can find some semblance of sense in some of those questions and try and provide him with some answers where they might be appropriate.

With respect to the transportation questions, please understand that these particular sudden jumps in diesel fuel prices were not understood to be happening back in the time that the budgets were being developed, hon. member. You should know that. These

prices jumped up very suddenly in about June, July, August, September. We responded very quickly. Every single school board I met with thanked us for doing a proactive thing in this regard. I'd ask you to please consider that as you speak for or against these estimates.

I'm frankly surprised that you're not supporting them, because we know that we need these monies out there. This is your opportunity to provide some help in that respect.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's not these particular estimates that I'm particularly worried about, but I'd like to take the opportunity just to perhaps look briefly at the future for these estimates and whatever ones come forward.

The minister, I think, would indicate to the public that with the extra money coming in, all the problems in education are basically solved. But it's just not washing with the public. As the minister is well aware, back in September Ipsos-Reid did a poll and 72 per cent of Albertans still believe the education system is not adequately funded. Now, if that's the perception, it's more important what they say and, especially, what parents say.

I want to just throw out to the minister four different areas that I think require some urgent attention. The first one: nobody is questioning the new schools that were announced, that we need new schools. Obviously we do, Mr. Chairman. I don't think the minister or any of us can decide the priorities of a particular school board. They have to make those decisions about where the new schools should go.

But we do have a serious problem. If I may use my experience of being a trustee with the Edmonton public school board, it's not only the new schools; it's the ones that are there. I think I'd be pretty close saying at this time that almost 50 per cent of the schools in Edmonton public – I expect it's similar throughout the province – are 50 years of age or over. So there are some serious problems there in terms of maintenance and operation. While it's important to get new schools in some of the suburbs, it's also equally important because some of the schools – I'm sure the minister has been aware going through some of the schools. One of his, of course, Victoria comp, he would know a lot about. That's another story. There are some serious problems there, and there's absolutely no doubt that we're going to have to put money in there in the future.

3:40

That ties in again to the process. I honestly believe that this minister does care about education. I know that he has to deal with the caucus, but I don't want him to be caught as a new Mr. Dithers because of some of the problems that are occurring. I'm thinking about the school closure process. The minister, I believe – correct me if I'm wrong – said that they would be looking at the utilization and whether a school closure process was the right way to go in the province. I haven't heard anything about that. I'd be interested to know what's happening because there are two problems.

I've alluded to one school that's been closed down, North Edmonton school. I know the minister is aware of this: the variations of construction just didn't make any sense for old schools. In Edmonton public I'm talking about schools built before 1950. The province's rate of what could be in that class is a lot different than what the school board thought because, you know, the halls and bathrooms and everything else were included. I take it that they'd be looking at that. North Edmonton, for example, they said the current formula generated a capacity of 448 – I'm just using that as an example to add the figures – and the 14 classrooms rated at 25

students would generate only 350. So that's a serious problem dealing with those schools that I'm talking about, and I would like an update on that.

I would also like an update on the school closure process. We went through a very unfortunate situation, Mr. Chair, in the Edmonton public, which ended up in the courts, about the whole school closure process. Last spring I brought forward, and others did, about maybe we should be looking at province-wide how we do school closures. It's a very divisive process, especially the way the Edmonton public did it with the school cluster group. It played off one group against another, one principal against another, parents, and the whole thing. It was ugly, and I think the minister would agree with that. It ended up in court. We don't want that to happen.

Again, he said – I brought it up at the time – that Ontario went through this process and changed their school closure process. I would remind the minister, not that he was the minister at the time, that this was put forward by the government, that they should close schools down to get new schools. Remember, I sent this over to the minister at the time. He asked for it, minutes from a trustee retreat where it was pretty clear. It said:

The Edmonton School District is currently not eligible for new school projects due to sector utilization below 85%. Approval to proceed beyond schematic design on the three projects will require your board to submit a comprehensive plan to address surplus space and utilizations.

It's clear. They're saying: close schools down, or you're not going to get new ones. Then you're again playing off one part of the city against the other. I would remind the minister – and I know that he's probably looked into it – that Ontario went through that process and said: we can't do that. So they've got that you can't close schools to be eligible for new replacement schools. You have to consider a school valuation first of all: its value to the student, its value to the community, its value to the school system, its value to the local economy. I'm interested to know from the minister where that process is in review and when we might look forward to something in that area.

Secondly, counsellors and librarians. The school board, as I'm sure the minister is well aware, saw that the counsellors in Edmonton public – and I expect it's true in other areas – have dramatically decreased over the last 10 years, I think down to in total in Edmonton 48 counsellors and less library techs. That came from a memo from the school board just a month or so ago. That was Angus McBeath's memo.

I know that the minister has alluded to the high dropout rates. I hope I'm not putting words in his mouth that maybe he said that we need more counsellors, for example. He probably meant also library techs. So what's been happening is that it's going the other way in the province, and I wonder what the minister is doing there in the future. I know that it's not going to come as these estimates, but we'll be dealing with some other estimates very quickly, Mr. Chairman.

The third thing is the Learning Commission, and this is an important one for me because I've represented high-needs schools. The two recommendations that we haven't dealt with that we're studying – the Learning Commission is over two years old now and we're still studying, especially in high-needs areas. I'm not saying that we have to do it all across the province, but in high-needs areas it's absolutely crucial that we have full-day kindergarten and we have junior kindergarten. The evidence is clear from the costs of studies, and I know that the minister of health knows something about this, too, from the city centre project. It absolutely works. It's necessary for those kids, and I would hope that the time for studying that would be over and we'd do it. Edmonton public, again because

I know the situation there, actually has 18 high-needs schools where they put in full-day kindergarten and took from other areas of the budget, and I think that's unfair. So I'd like some idea of when we might look forward to progress in that area.

I have the counsellors. I should go back to that. In 1990-91 we had 99 counsellors in Edmonton public; in '96-97, 60; and now there are 43.8, only 3.4 in all the elementary schools in Edmonton. Learning resources FTEs: 81.7 in '91; in '96-97, 38.7 and now 12.1, only 3.5 in elementary schools. Those are significant figures. That's a significant decline. Again, I had those figures and I wanted to give them to the minister.

The final thing that I just wanted to bring up, Mr. Chairman – and I know that the minister has been talking about it. I wonder when there might be some action on school fees. Clearly, when you have a couple of kids in school and you're paying over \$700, that's unacceptable. We can argue whose fault it is or whatever, but having been a trustee, I just think that the school boards need the money, and that's part of the funding. I'm suggesting that we have to maybe start with elementary. I'll just throw this out to the minister. It costs money, yes, but I think we can look at education as an investment rather than as just a cost, and I think the minister would agree with me on that.

We need that stable, predictable funding for boards on a three-year cycle. I think we have to cap class sizes, not average them. I think that with the school fees one of the things we could start with is perhaps eliminate school fees at the elementary level and then conduct a province-wide review of compulsory fees. I think that would give us a better handle. It seems to me that at elementary school we should not be having fees at all. Maybe there's some need for some extracurricular activities, you know, which could be part of a fee – I'm not sure – but we should review that and take a look, especially for junior high and senior high.

I think that if we could move in the next budget year – because that's a lot of money for parents that are struggling to make ends meet. If they have two kids, it could be over \$700. If you have three or four kids, it's almost insurmountable, and some of those schools can't even collect those fees because the parents don't have the money.

Mr. Chairman, I'll conclude there by saying that I have no major problem with the estimates that we're bringing forward here, but I really want the minister to look at those four areas and give us some idea of when we might look forward to dealing with those areas.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you and thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for providing a very good critique. I will read it through more carefully. I had some interruptions, as you probably saw.

I'll make a few brief comments to your observations. First of all, I do agree with the comments in general about aging infrastructure. Having spoken with all the school boards, as I indicated earlier, I know that we have schools that are not only 40, 50, 60 years old, but we also have schools that were never built with computerization in mind or with SuperNet or video conferencing suites in mind. So that's another issue that's very large on my radar screen, and as we see more of the infrastructure piece coming over to Education from the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, hopefully then when we sit down to chat with school boards, we'll be able to talk about the whole nine yards of education. Right now, as you would know given your former role as a trustee, you'd be speaking with one minister about the K to 12 programming needs for educating the

kids, and you'd be talking with another minister about the facilities that are required and so on.

3:50

I'll just give you one quick example. When we brought in the small class size initiative, a good initiative, recommended by the Learning Commission – and we'll be funding it to the tune of about 160 million new dollars over the three-year span, and we're just finishing the second year now, as you know. But when you talk about class size reduction, and you're talking about hiring 2,250 brand new teachers, you have to talk about the impact on the facilities. There was some discussion, I know, but I think we can have better and more deep discussions on that now moving forward, and that's part of what the \$207 million is in fact starting to do.

The issue about the school closure process. I don't think I'll take up the House's time today, but I am looking at how that is working. It was never intended that the utilization rate of old would wind up being the culprit, if you will, that forced school closures in order to get new school funding monies for new construction projects. That was never intended. In fact, the old formula was based on area of the school space, as you know, the utilization rate, which divides the educational capacity of the school by the number of students taught. Sparsity and distance was part of that for the remote boards especially and travel time.

The new funding formula that we've talked about, the per-pupil funding formula, may not be one hundred per cent exactly bang on just yet either, but it's an improvement to the other one. When I spoke with school boards about this, they clearly indicated something that we had already concluded, and that was that if you have a lot of students, then clearly per-pupil funding helps you, but if you have a dwindling student population, which reflects the majority of locations in Alberta, then per-pupil funding isn't going to help you at all. So we do have the stabilization thing, as you know, the extra money in the renewed funding framework. So that's an interesting point to consider, and I am aware of some other jurisdictions, as you mentioned.

The final couple of things quickly, Mr. Chair. With respect to counsellors and teacher-librarians and the Alberta Commission on Learning recommendations in general, I don't know if the hon. member has had a chance yet to read in great detail the update I provided about a month ago, but there's some information in there, and there will be more, and there will be clarity of our position, perhaps even some final decisions by December 31 of this year insofar as I'm able to make them.

Now, clearly, that's going to be a decision that I will lead one way or the other, be it on the possibility of junior K or not, be it on the possibility of mandated full-day kindergarten or not, some of those kinds of decisions. We will have a clearer position or a final decision by December 31, and if we get pushed back a little bit, then it'll be as soon as possible after that, but I'm anxious to have decisions one way or the other on those remaining ones.

The school fees is my final point that I'll just comment on briefly. That, in fact, hon. member, was the first item that I put on the agenda for this last round of meetings. I had about eight specific items, and then the school boards had some for me. But the first item that I had on there was about school fees. It was about fundraising, the question of basics versus extras, or what we might call essentials for education versus nonessentials – I know that you know this area very well, hon. member – and also on whether or not they thought a provincial policy would be needed with respect to both fundraising and school fees in general.

I'll make this observation, and then I'll take my chair. Almost every single school board said and acknowledged how difficult it

might be to come up with a one-size-fits-all model in either of the school fees applications or the fundraising policy, what can be fundraised for, what cannot be fundraised for, and so on. They also said: if you're going to come forward with a policy like that, then please don't penalize us as a school board by taking away a potential revenue stream unless you as a province are prepared to step in there and make it up. I understand that very well. In fact, I was one of the first to mention it to them because I'm cognizant of that. You can appreciate that that would impact our budget to the tune of millions and millions of dollars, because I asked them all how much they receive from those kinds of revenues.

The last thing is simply this. These are the words of the school boards in a general sense. The parents tell them that they don't mind doing some fundraising. They really don't. Most parents don't mind being involved in the school system that way provided that there's not too much fundraising demanded of them and provided that it's not for so-called basics in education. I know that you know what I mean by that.

I think that we need to try and tighten up the definition of exactly what is now meant by basics. One example is computers. I would think, unarguably, that we can look at computers as becoming more and more an essential in the schools. Then the next question is: if they are essential, well, how many should it be? One computer for every three kids, or should it be one computer for one kid? So there's a lot of that ongoing discussion, and I'm looking at all of those issues right now as we strive to arrive at more stable, more predictable funding for a variety of these purposes. All I can do, hon. member, is try my best to address those issues, and that's what we're doing today.

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my great honour to rise again and respond to the supplementary budget estimate for education. I'm really glad that gross amounts have been increased, but these increases were generally to cover important capital and operating costs. I hope the government will keep this promise this time. Hiring new teachers is good news. My question to the hon. minister is: why was this not budgeted for during the budget process? I hope it's not a recipe for school closures in Edmonton and somewhere else.

How this money is going to be allocated is not so clear to me because of the time frame. I mean, I got this budget estimate just a couple of hours ago, and it's not a reasonable amount of time to go through these papers. I'm not prepared to ask you questions. Maybe I will ask you questions some other time. Just to make a note, the time is not enough for us to respond on the budget estimate.

I asked you in question period about one school in my constituency. The infrastructure, the condition of that elementary school, Ellerslie school, is so poor. I visited that school a couple of months ago. I had mentioned to you, I think in the last session, that the carpet inside the library may be 20 years old. At the elementary school – and I don't know what you call the other school – the conditions are really bad. Some students are disabled. They have special needs, and they are spending money from their own pockets. They are always complaining. I am going to see them. They have a parents' meeting tonight. That's the reason why I keep on requesting you to please come there and listen to their complaints. They need help.

That school is a very important part of the riding. It covers a big area. I know that it's already in the plan. I have that capital program. There's a new elementary school coming maybe in three years' time, but I don't know whether that old school should be

demolished or if it needs some renovations. I know that in two years' time the government is planning to spend a million dollars on infrastructure. I think somebody should look at it, whether we should spend a million dollars on repairing that building or they should demolish the whole building and make a new school there.

4:00

City water I have already discussed. The kids have to wait for the truck, and sometimes that truck doesn't come there, and they have to wait for a long time, especially when they are in the school field and they are thirsty and they're waiting for the truck. I mean, this is not a good thing. When we are donating lots of money overseas, when we have some projects outside this country, it is a shame that our own children here in Alberta have to wait for tap water. This is a very serious issue. I discussed this with their parents, and they are not happy, so please consider this as urgency, as I requested of you many times. Please make a note, and somebody should go there and investigate the problem they have.

Another question I wanted to ask you because we are still going through the centennial year. I was surprised that during the centennial year the children from the schools were not bused to, you know, the big celebrations like we had outside the Legislature Building. I think it's a very good idea that whenever we celebrate something, we should involve children because children always remember. You know, when they grow up, they remember that during the centennial time they were there. They really enjoy the parties, especially for the centennial year. That was special. So just to make a note – I mean, I'm not criticizing the centennial. Lots of things were done really well. I appreciate, to you and the Minister of Community Development, that lots of things were done really nicely. I commend both of you because you were the minister before him.

I'm glad and commend your efforts on Punjabi language introduction in the public schools. I urge you once again to make sure that they get enough funding, and I'm really glad. I know you understand that it was badly needed.

Please keep in touch with all schools in Alberta. I'm not asking for one particular school, but you should contact other schools, in the south or maybe in Calgary. They might need some repair, maybe, on the school's condition.

I'm really happy that the government is planning to hire some new teachers, which is good news. We all know that the future of our children is the future of Alberta and the future of us.

Thank you very much.

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. There are some excellent comments in there that I want to comment on, but first I want to clarify the first question that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie asked, and that's with respect to why these supplementary estimates amounts weren't anticipated and part of the regular budget process back in April. The simple answer is because in the case of the bus fuel costs, for example, nobody expected the bus fuel costs to jump as much as they did and to stay at that level. You know, sometimes you'll get spikes in prices and they come right back down. But as you know from the truckers' strike that was held down there – you remember that – we didn't know back in December, January, February, when we were putting the budget together, that diesel prices would jump and stay there as long as they did. So I hope that satisfies that part.

With respect to the additional monies that I'm looking for for the plant operation and maintenance, the new amount of money that we're asking for, as you know, is going straight out to school boards

to help them, primarily because of the new funding formula that we have. This is money they will appreciate having, but it's precipitated largely by this new funding formula that we have, the per-pupil funding formula, hon. member, and also because we do recognize that there are increased costs for operating and maintaining our schools.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

On that point I should also advise the member that the natural gas rebate program, which we have now as a government extended to cover even the month of October, that particular program will be rolled out for the benefit of schools for their operations budgets, that are impacted by natural gas prices. We'll have that process be similar to what was done in 2003, which is when we provided the last major round of natural gas cost increases to offset their impact at the local level.

With respect to your general point, though, on the final point, which is the school infrastructure money, the construction monies for in this case portables or, as we call them now, modulars, please understand that that amount of money for that sector of the estimates as well as the first two that I've talked about is coming, rather, entirely from unanticipated surplus dollars. So rather than pass up the opportunity to address some of the pressures that I know I have and, in turn, school boards have, I asked Treasury Board and cabinet and caucus and so on for support so that I could get some additional monies out to our school boards for those purposes. They all came out of unanticipated surplus dollars.

Again, back when the budgeting process occurred in January, February, March, and so on, nobody expected oil prices to jump up over 60 bucks a barrel and stay there for as long as they did. They're still hovering in that area. No one expected natural gas prices to jump to \$10, \$11, \$12 a gigajoule, such as they have just done, and to stay there for as long as they have. You can't anticipate those things when you do the normal budgeting process, and that's one of the beautiful things about the system of parliament that we have. We're allowed as a government to bring in these supplementary estimates from time to time and address certain cost pressures.

I want to just indicate quickly, Mr. Chair, with respect to the elementary school that you have alluded to now, that I'm not sure if you're talking about the very same one that you asked about in question period, but I want to say this to the hon. member: I apologize if I didn't recognize that as the same school you talked to me about. I'm sorry; it didn't twig on me just immediately. However, one of the reasons that we have locally elected school boards is so that they can deal with local issues, and that's really where this issue needs to go first and foremost.

Now, I'm sure that some of our staff and friends are listening to this discussion today and that they will immediately find out something for you on this. I don't know if it will be possible before your meeting tonight. I've helped a lot of MLAs, both opposition and government MLAs, over the year that I've been here and addressed as quickly as I could some of the issues that their constituents brought to my attention. We'll try and do the same thing here, but it has to be done through the process established, hon. member, and in this case it's the Edmonton public school board.

I should tell you, regarding specifically the water issue, that I was thinking about that a little bit, and I was in fact chatting with some former mayors and reeves in our caucus just since question period. It was mentioned to me that perhaps there's an issue of annexation that has gone on or is being contemplated. I don't know, but I do know that the school board working with the city of Edmonton, if that's the jurisdiction within which it actually lies – and I suspect

that it is – might have some sort of an issue with the annexation difficulty or where the boundary is drawn. But, again, we'll try and find that out a little more clearly for you.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Should schools that are in disrepair, such as you've described, be repaired or be demolished? That is also a local school board decision. I honestly don't know, hon. member, if they are contemplating something like that for – is it Ellerslie school? Yes? You're nodding your head yes? Okay. I'm sure they'll be reading *Hansard* and looking at your comments.

The last two things, Mr. Chair, quickly. With respect to the centennial year I think you asked something about: why weren't all the children bused to the Legislature or wherever during the day? I want to tell you that some school boards likely did something like that or some individual schools might have done that, but the decision is entirely at the local level. The reason for that, hon. member, is because different parts of the province and the school boards who represent those different parts have different start times for the school year.

4:10

Now, for some it may have been more convenient to do; for others it may not have been. You see, here's the deal though. You know how you need parents to sign slips? Now, a lot of parents may have been away in the last two weeks of August and couldn't get it done, so you couldn't take half the school and not the other half, and those were the reasons that they gave me. It had nothing to do with me, hon. member. It had to do with local school boards. Those who were contemplating it likely got permission slips signed by students back in June just to make sure that when September 1 came around and they only had one or two days – and you know how confusing things can sometimes get around the start-up of school – they wouldn't be caught short footed.

As you may recall, I tried to make September 1 a big holiday, and I had some support for that and so on, but the business community and others thought that if we moved some of those celebrations to the evening, we could accommodate everybody. So most communities had large celebrations after the school adjournment hour of 3:30. In fact, we encouraged them to do that, and they did. Here we ran all day and all night because of the significance of the Legislature Building and the capital city and so on.

The Punjabi language comment that you made: thank you for that. In fact, there is going to be a full language and culture program developed for Punjabi. We have nine of these programs already. This morning I did speak with the curriculum director from one of the school boards, who indicated to me that they are feeling very good and very strong about this, and it will be a very large enrolment that takes up the Punjabi language. As you know [remarks in Punjabi], which translates, hon. *Hansard* folks, as: I am learning Punjabi.

So that having been said, we're very proud of all of the languages in this province. If a school board wishes to undertake the development of a language and culture program course other than one of the nine – or now we'll have the 10th, being Punjabi – they are certainly welcome to do this, and we will help them where we can.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Mather:** I'm really supportive of this request for supplementary money, but I do have some concerns I'd like to mention, and I'm going to try not to repeat what's already been said.

I think the best legacy we can leave behind is the best trained

workforce in the world, and that only happens with education. We need all kinds of education, and it costs money to tool up to the 21st century. The minister and I heard this morning at a wonderful event that's forward-thinking, a partnership with Edmonton public schools and the Canadian Space Agency, about the need for us to make sure that we are competitive in the future.

Unfortunately, insistence on results has forced an emphasis, I think, on support for students who will not pull the average down, with the result being that more kids are dropping out of high school because we no longer provide a broad range of learning opportunities. I've witnessed wonderful results with students in beauty culture, building construction, and automotives. Where would these people be now without those programs? We seem to have it upside down. We measure the wrong things. How do we measure self-esteem, and how do we measure what it means to be a useful member of society? How do we measure happiness with one's work?

We have to spend money to change the system, I believe, and make Albertans competitive. We live with a global market and economy now, and only the best trained workforce will be able to compete. It costs money to train people, but the benefits far outweigh the cost. Working people pay taxes; they don't get sick as often. The cost of ignorance is higher than what we need to do to prevent it.

Of the concerns that I have, some have been mentioned. Of course, school fees and fundraising are major concerns in my constituency also.

Taking a look at the need for early intervention, where it should be most effective, of course, is in the elementary schools, yet elementary schools get the least amount of money. That's the place where I think we can make the most difference. With the latest recommendations for class sizes it's become even tighter. When you're told to have 17 and 22 students in division 1 and 2, it's tough to give the extras.

The extras I'm talking about are counselling. There was a time when we could be proud about the number of counsellors that we had. Edmonton public school district, actually, had elementary counselling and offered wonderful preventative programs that I know made a difference because I see adults now who were in those programs who tell me that they still remember those sessions.

Reading recovery is a Cadillac reading rescue program. At \$3,000 just to train the teacher, who would be working with eight to 10 students a half-hour a day every day, it is a program that can make a difference for children without the support systems at home. I think that this is a program that in the end can make a huge difference because of the trickle-up effect to high schools. We get students coming in with a better sense of esteem. Because they can read and they understand what they're reading, high school is going to be a much more successful experience.

I also want to mention libraries. Most of the libraries that I'm aware of are in a state where they need money to bring them up to par because of the cuts over the last five years. With curriculum changes going on in all the sciences, for example – and the socials are just starting, I think – the support for these curriculums cost dollars. That money needs to be there for texts and for the library supports that the curriculum demands so that students can do the research and so forth. Science books change almost every three years. It's a huge cost to schools.

Then, of course, there are vandalism costs that have to come out of plant operation and maintenance, and often there just isn't enough money there for the unexpected spray-painting and so forth.

With high school funding it seems like there's been another change in the operations and maintenance grant funding that I don't

really quite understand, but I'd like to learn more. It doesn't seem that it's sufficient to operate schools. Modernization money is desperately needed.

In high schools course completion funding continues to be an issue. We don't get paid for students who have poor attendance, yet many, many hours of hard work by professionals will go into trying to make those students want to be in school.

Another area of concern is the lack of funding for career planning and apprenticeship programming. I think we need to expand those. Those need to be augmented in our schools, going back to the need for more trained workers. There are not enough staff in these areas, and we just need the support there.

Transportation has already been mentioned, so I won't go there.

I am disappointed that there's no apparent plan for dealing with the unfunded liability for teachers' pensions, which I believe is at about \$2 million, the minister mentioned earlier today.

Finally, a personal question in terms of portables. I think the word "portable" is misleading. At least, it was in the past. You know the problems in Mill Woods, where we had tremendous overcrowding. I can recall being at Grace Martin school, where we had 19 portables to cope with the crowding. So this has to do with planning. You know, how can we say that that would have been unexpected, that there would have been that need to accommodate so many students?

Then a few years later at J. Percy Page high school we were in the same situation of overcrowding, but we couldn't get portables because, Mr. Minister, apparently it's too costly to move the portables. You were talking about an improvement in that. That would make a whole bunch of sense to me. The reality is that you talked about fluctuations in population throughout the province. That happens in the cities too. If there was some way whereby we could avoid the unanticipated overcrowding problems by moving portables or by planning better, that would be good.

Thank you.

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

4:20

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Clearly some well-spoken and well-researched comments within the hon. member's statements. Having been a former teacher, I know that she speaks from the heart, and I'm delighted that she started by saying how supportive she is of these additional monies because I am too. In fact, we were together this morning at the J. Percy Page high school, where I believe the hon. member once taught, and we witnessed the signing of an agreement between J. Percy Page on behalf of Edmonton public schools and the Canadian Space Agency to bring that form of learning into that classroom and to others. So it was a great, great day.

I agree with you, hon. member, that there are some wonderful results that are coming out from our students and that we need to pay a little more attention to the CTS area, be it beauty culture or be it automotives or be it woodworking or electricity or welding or whatever it is. I think that if we were able to do that – and I don't have the money right now to do it – we would also help address the skilled labour shortage that we have in this province. So there are some tremendous benefits to that.

I also think that if we structured it properly, hon. member, we would also see an increase in high school completion rates, and we would see a decrease in the dropout rates because not everyone as a student is destined for academia land. Some are destined for tradesville and some are destined for other locations, but the point is to keep them at least through to grade 12 so that all of those doors might be open to them later on. So I'll read through your comments more carefully in that respect.

With respect to what we're measuring and if we're measuring the wrong things or not – I was trying to keep up with you and take some notes – suffice it to say that we put a lot of effort into designing our own performance measurements as a government, in this case in education, and we put a lot of thought and emphasis and best practice type of research work into designing performance measurements or benchmarks or targets or whatever you want to call them for school boards to consider in their local jurisdiction. It's true: we are moving into more and more of a global market economy, and we need to be ever cognizant of that, which I think you alluded to.

On the fees and fundraising piece and the comments that you made, I understand that there are difficulties in this area. That's why I engaged all the school boards in a very one-on-one frank discussion about it. I just haven't yet got the final analysis of it all because the final tour day was just last Thursday, but I will be making some comments on that at the appropriate time. I wish I could give you a date, and right now I just can't.

The early intervention comment with respect to elementary schools. I agree and think that if we could do earlier early intervention, we would be benefiting a lot of the children. The comment with respect to elementary students being the lowest funded, I think, or something to that effect, you said: in fact, the new formula under PO and M elevates them to the top of the class. They will be the highest funded. Now, that's just for that one area, PO and M. That's a good thing. In fact, it'll be the highest rate in the K to 12, and perhaps we can take that lead and look at other issues that you've referenced.

On the comment about class sizes still being too large. You know, when the Learning Commission made its recommendations, it said: address class sizes over a five-year period. Now, we in our wisdom as a government said: no, we should try and do it in three years. So we have been trying to do it in the three-year window, and we've got one more year to go. So far, from September of '04 through to the end of September of '05, I believe we have hired about 1,600 brand new full-time equivalent teachers. By this time next year we will have helped school boards hire 2,250 brand new full-time equivalent teachers, and that will at that point make a dramatic difference to class sizes. It's the final shoe to fall or to drop. That will allow us to hire 500 more teachers next year.

That having been said, we're very cognizant of the pressures it's putting here on infrastructure because some parts of this province are just absolutely booming along, and we're having some trouble keeping up, in fact. No one could have planned for what's going on in some parts of the province.

The issue with respect to counselling and librarian teachers and so on I commented on in response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, so I won't repeat other than to say that I am aware of the ever-growing needs for libraries that are needed, which I think was a fresh point you mentioned, and also how curriculum changes and technological changes in our schools are driving some of those needs. So we're looking at a lot of this.

In fact, I appointed a ministerial advisory committee probably two or three weeks ago to review the renewed funding framework. The new one that came in last year was a living model, and the new one that just came out in September is also a living model. It's improved and it's clearer. I just knew before we even went out on the tour with the school boards that there would already be issues because I've received letters from some of the chairs and so on. So I immediately said: look, let's get out in front of this; let's get a ministerial advisory committee going. So we have. My deputy minister is chairing it, and I think there are about 12 Albertans from across the province who are working on that with him. A lot of the issues that you talked about, and some of them that came out of the

ACOL, the Alberta Commission on Learning, report are going to be covered in that review.

The plant operation and maintenance funding changes. I think I've talked to those already, but suffice it to say that the new formula will in fact look at per-pupil funding for the K to 6 group as one level, for the grades 7 to 9 group at another level, and the grades 10 to 12 group at yet another level. The second major component of the new funding formula will deal specifically with the area of severe special needs, recognizing that there are some students who have severe special needs that simply physically require more space. The third part of the new formula will be somewhat of a repeat of the old utilization formula, and that's with respect to sparsity, distance, and travel for school boards, which is still a major concern. Finally, the issue of small schools by necessity will also be factored into the new funding formula.

We've got a lot of work to do there. For example, the 25-kilometre rule, as you're well aware, is one that needs some review. Perhaps the 290-student rule within the small schools by necessity formula needs review. Perhaps even the 2.4 kilometre walk rule needs some review. In rural Alberta in particular, not that urban Alberta is that much different, there are some children who are having to cross some dangerous intersections, and parents made that very clear to me in some of the receptions I hosted for them and for teachers just over the last six weeks. There is a lot in that review, hon. member, and I hope we'll be able to address everything to the satisfaction of the majority, at least.

The final two points, Mr. Chair. One, the vandalism costs. Obviously, those are unexpected costs, and I know that most school boards do carry a contingency to deal with that. But occasionally there are severer things that happen either by deliberate acts of vandalism or sometimes by so-called acts of God, such as the explosion in Redwater just a week or two ago. Maybe it was a little longer than that but nonetheless within the last month. I've just seen the pictures from that recently, and who would ever have anticipated that at 5 in the morning on a certain day that CTS lab would blow up? Well, it just happens that it did, and there was a fire, so how does that get paid for? We're looking at that right now.

The 19 portables at one school site caught my attention. I want to just make this closing comment in that respect, Mr. Chair, for the hon. member. First, thank you for raising the issue. I know exactly the school you're talking about. But I want to indicate to you that one of the reasons we're looking at a new design for schools is so that they would in fact be constructed in what I hope will be a very clever and esthetically pleasing yet efficient and effective way that will accommodate them not only looking good and functioning well, but it would also allow the new style of modular units to be added to or taken away from without impacting the overall functionality of the school. They wouldn't look like an add-on or a take-away. They wouldn't be 14 different colours and all of those practical kinds of things.

The single largest thing about this is the fact that the new modulars, formerly known as portables, will be so strongly built, steel fabricated with improved ventilation and approved attachability to the core of the school, that we're really hoping that they are going to catch on in future designs because I think that is one way that we can deal with the issue that I think you wanted to bring to my attention. Costs of moving them are expensive. Typically we spend probably a quarter of a million dollars on building and moving and site preparation and so on. I don't remember the transportation costs exactly. It's probably in the \$30,000 to \$50,000 range, and it is expensive, but at least the new ones can be moved without danger of them falling apart en route.

Thank you for those comments, and I hope that I've been helpful in addressing some of them with answers.

4:30

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make some brief comments on the supplementary estimates for Education. I, too, would like to express I guess some sense of hope that there is, in fact, a moving in the right direction in terms of education here in this province. There are some promising signs of that. I do thank the minister for probably assisting in that endeavour.

There are a number of issues, though, that have come across my path, both in my constituency and then travelling across the province. I think that categorically you do have some of these on your supplementary budget list, but I just want to emphasize the importance of dealing with some of these things. So in no particular order, but perhaps something you were just speaking about previously is the use of portables as a way to build the schools in the future and incorporating portables from the beginning in the design of a structure. I certainly do applaud the possibility of doing this, but I can't emphasize the importance of changing the essential design and how this goes about.

One school in Grande Prairie that I visited not so long ago comes to my mind. Portables were part of the structure of the school from the beginning, but this was a temporary measure, I think is the way they were looking at it. Now, 25 years later these eight or 10 portables, incorporated into the hallway and the rest of the school, are still there. I would say that the essential problem was one of drainage. The rest of the permanent structure was sloping away, and these other structures I think for 25 years had moisture passing under them. So, you know, being brave enough to stick my head down there was enough to tell me that there has to be a limit on how long portables are in place. If we are in fact going to this new model, as you suggested, which does sound promising, then the management site development has to be very clearly defined.

This particular school in Grande Prairie – and I'll talk to you about it; I'll send you a note on it – certainly is among the sort of, I guess, emergency situations that I've seen for structures in various places, as I say, in my constituency and around the province. I'm very happy to see that Infrastructure dealing with the infrastructure for education has indeed moved back to Education. I think this is where people can make the most intelligent decisions about the needs of individual schools: in school boards, you know, the people who are using these structures every day. So that certainly is something to applaud as well.

Again, speaking about structures, I know that you are reviewing and revisiting the utilization rate. My colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview did mention, I think, the importance of recognizing the different ages of structures. How that does factor into how the utilization rate will affect the school, older schools with larger hallways and different storage spaces and what have you, has really been an unfair disadvantage to these older schools because, of course, the utilization rates would make it so that you could never really appear to be full when you have hallways and unusable space factored into the formula.

As well, we are seeing always a dynamic of population change and different neighbourhoods moving up and down in terms of the amount of children going to school in an area. I think that it's very important for us to be more flexible in how we're using our neighbourhood schools so that we can perhaps incorporate extracurricular activity or, in fact, community activity into the utilization rates for those structures. The city planners and school board people who put

community schools into our older neighbourhoods many years ago did so to meet a need for higher student populations in the past, but that does not preclude the possibility that we will see those utilization rates in the future as well.

In the interim the existence of a school in a neighbourhood, particularly in an established neighbourhood, is absolutely crucial to the viability of that neighbourhood to come back and revitalize itself and attract new young families to continue the cycle of using the school and having a vibrant community and otherwise keeping the community from sliding into less desirable sorts of utilization. So community schools are something we have to fight for, I think, in the most strenuous possible way and be creative and work together on both sides of this House to find ways in which we can use the structures that we already have that were built and are there and use them as centres of communities in the future and not just giving a shelf life to a school of 30 or 40 years. I find it a bit disconcerting to see a school being shut down when it only is, perhaps, as old as myself. You know, I think that we have to have a more permanent sense of what a structure it is and what sort of future are we building for that community much longer past, say, a 40-year period.

I know that the student-teacher ratio initiative is a three-year plan, but I think that it would be nice to review the success of that next year in as extensive a way as possible with input from all levels of schools, each division of schools, as well as input from people on the ground to see how it has in fact affected the teaching quality and the actual student-teacher ratio in classrooms. Sometimes I know that teachers in classrooms fail to see these changes immediately. When we did endeavour to reduce the student-teacher ratio in this province a year and a half ago or almost two years ago, I think that teachers were hopeful and parents were hopeful and administrators and school boards too. But often they're not necessarily seeing that ratio decreasing on an individual basis. So I think that a collaborative review of the success of the student-teacher ratio initiative in this province after next year would be very much appreciated by all of the stakeholders involved.

I would like to put in a plug for full-day kindergarten. I think that we're seeing in general that education is an investment. Early intervention, reading recovery programs, and just a focus on children at their very youngest stages of formal learning in a public school environment are absolutely crucial. We confront those results and the success of those results all of the time from jurisdictions across North America, even right here in Edmonton with our inner-city school initiative. We can see that the results were quite astounding, and I believe that what's good for one area must be good for everywhere in Alberta. I think that with a full-day kindergarten program we would be rewarded with increased results on all levels of schooling. I believe it would be perhaps the most important lasting legacy that we could provide the next generation here at this juncture.

4:40

I just want to make sure that I'm covering all of my bases here. I would like to bring up one last point, and this is something that was brought to my attention from some administrative colleagues that I know. This was a proposal perhaps or it's actually happening now; I'm not sure. It was the provincial government charging a fee for assessment of students when students move from one school to another. Now, I've been approached with this as a concern in regard to it costing a lot of money for school boards. I was given the figure of \$2.5 million to \$3 million for Edmonton public to basically pay back – it's like a clawback – to the provincial government to provide this assessment fee.

Now, the details of it I'm not entirely sure about, but it sounds



problematic. I think we do want to have a clear indication of what a student's level of achievement is at each stage along the way, and we want to have some unification in those numbers to know that, let's say, a student's performance can be equally measured in all parts of the province. That being said, I think that the professionalism of individual schools and teachers to be able to execute something like this and to meet standards that would be applicable across the province certainly is there already, and to have, say, a separate agency doing this or charging an administrative fee might seem onerous or, as I say, something that resembles a clawback from the school boards to the provincial government.

Just in conclusion, I'm very pleased with some indications that our public education system is moving in the right direction. Let's make sure we can work together to ensure that that will continue in the future. Thank you.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. Once again some very insightful and measured comments, and I'm grateful for that. It's actually a pleasure to listen to speakers who aren't here to lecture other members, and I think the last three speakers in particular have done that very well. So thank you. It's just nice to have a pleasant discourse on this. The sky is not totally falling, as you know. In fact, I don't think that it's falling at all in most areas. There might be some improvements we need to make, and I've indicated already that I'm willing to do whatever I can to address those.

There is a sense of hope, which I think was your opening comment here, and it's a greater sense of hope. It's all about our students, and as long as we continue to make decisions surrounding what is best for the education of our children, I think that we will always make the right decision. So thank you for the kudos that you expressed in that regard.

Now, the issue that you raised with respect to portables. You know, it's not the intention to use portables – the new word for them is modulars because they're a different type of portable – to build schools. It's a modular design concept to build a core school around which modulars can be injected. It sort of reminds me of that trivia game, you know, where you have those little wedges. Now, that may not be exactly how they all look. There will be different designs to choose from. If you have that concept in mind of something being added and then being brought together so that it looks like it's still part of the whole or expanded so that it still looks like part of the whole but the core concept around which it's built essentially stays the same, that would be a bit of a mental picture that I hope you can conjure up as to what is being discussed in some circles.

With respect to the comment about changing the essential design and how it might impact future decisions, I want to tell you, hon. member, that in my discussions with the school boards just over the last few weeks one of the issues that was brought up to me in the context of aging infrastructure and the need for rightsizing or modernizing or upgrading or evergreening or whatever term you want to put to it was this: the older schools were built with entrances and exits that didn't necessarily require visitors to go past the central office. So they have concerns about safety and security and monitoring and that kind of thing. That's where we need to put some attention as well, and the new designs do in fact do that far more effectively, hon. member, than some of the older designs did.

The other point you mentioned is something about moisture passing underneath some of the old portables, and I know exactly what you're talking about because I've studied a couple of these issues.

I want to just tell members of the House that one of the things that

I don't think we'll ever do again is what was necessitated to be done perhaps 30, 40, 50, 60 years ago – I'm not sure of the date but long ago – when concrete foundations were poured directly onto the clay ground. That has caused some moving and shifting and slipping and sliding of some of our aging infrastructure, for example. That may not pertain specifically to the portables because they're settled in different ways. Still, some poor schools were built on slabbing, I think they call it, or something along that line.

The Grande Prairie urgency. If there's a way that you can remember the name of the school that you have in mind and let me know about it, chances are that it's the same one I'm looking at. I'm well aware that there are some significant pressures at Alexander Forbes, and we hope to be addressing those very, very quickly and soon.

On the old utilization rate that you referred to, my comment in that respect would be this. The utilization rate, such as it was, which looked at a couple of the factors that I've already put on record, may have worked back when it was first brought in, but it has certainly not functioned as well as one would hope in the modern-day sense, and that's why we brought in this new per-pupil funding rate, but I think I've already indicated, hon. member, that that isn't the total answer yet either. It's an improvement in the right direction, and it's brought in with the right intentions – please, believe me – but I'm acutely aware that there's still a little bit of other relooking that has to be done.

I'll put it this way. Perhaps there's an opportunity for us to look at some per-program funding. Now, we're not quite there yet, and I say that because whether you have five children in a classroom or you have 15, the heating cost is going to be the same, the lighting costs are going to be the same, and the teacher costs are going to be the same. So when you fund on only a per-pupil basis, you're really somewhat penalizing some of the smaller classrooms across the province, and that takes me to your point about community schools.

We have community schools in the cities, and we have them out in the country spots and so on, as we all know. Community schools are a critical concept to remember because community schools tend to work with community agencies and with our student health initiative partnership, for example, where we work with health authorities, with child and family services authorities, and the school board. Now, I shouldn't say we as a government so much as those three entities working amongst themselves. But you get the point, I'm sure.

That takes me to the issue of community schools and community agencies working to tackle the Premier's recent initiative to combat crystal meth, which is another issue that I discussed with virtually every board back in January, when I first met with all 62 of them, and again just now in October and November when I met with all 62 again. So the concept of community schooling is one that I do support, but I do know that in some cases school boards have some very difficult decisions to make when your school is down to a handful of children.

It's particularly acute in two areas: one, some of the smaller areas of our province in the rural sector and, secondly, in some of our cities where the population is aging and staying. The kids have grown up and left, so the community school, which was once bustling and bubbling with bright young minds, virtually has a very small group of young people that are still in the age range that they're able to attend. So the community school has sort of outgrown its use in that area, and closing it is one of the most divisive things, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview pointed out, that a school board has to do.

The final couple of comments are on the class size initiative and the teacher-student ratio that you referred to. I appreciate your

comments on what you were saying. Can we review its success next year? Hon. member, we review this on an ongoing basis, I mean, literally almost every day, and if not, then every week because I'm particularly interested in how the Learning Commission's recommendation to address class size on a jurisdictional basis differs from addressing it on a per-class basis.

4:50

Now, we're not going to go down the path of capping class size, such as I think B.C. did. The reason for that is simply because if you mandate, for example, that the largest class in kindergarten to grade 3 should be not more than 17 children, well, okay. So what do you do when the 18th and the 19th child arrive and you've got a class of 19? See, you have no flexibility to bring in an aide to address the added teaching requirements. You automatically have to hire another teacher and get another classroom for the two students. Now, obviously, they would split into a nine and an eight or whatever, but that's not the answer.

We're trying to work with this jurisdictional average thing. But I know that even in my own constituency I have some challenges and problems. Oddly enough, they seem to be more at the K to 6 level, which baffles me because that was the first area that class size initiative funding, the \$110 million, for example, that's in that portfolio this '05-06 year – it's at that level that we thought we would be addressing the needs first. Yet I'm finding that all the others have been addressed, and in some cases K to 3 in particular has not been yet sufficiently addressed. I do know that the school boards are trying their best with the funds they've been given to do that, and I think you'll see more movement than ever as we complete it with the funding next year. In fact, Edmonton public schools, I think, hired something in the neighbourhood of around 180 new teachers. That's a pretty significant group of new hires.

The full-day kindergarten. I've noted your comments and the assessment fees comment. I'm puzzled by this one a little bit. I think I heard you say that assessment fees are being charged by the government of Alberta whenever children transfer from one jurisdiction to another or something to that effect. Whatever it is, hon. member, I'll look at it; I'll read it more closely. I appreciate your bringing it to my attention because maybe that is one area that we do need to review.

So thank you for those calm and measured comments.

**Ms Blakeman:** Mr. Chairman, I was hoping that we could move on to Children's Services if that's at all possible.

**The Chair:** After considering the 2005-2006 supplementary estimates for the general revenue fund and the lottery fund for the Department of Education for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, are you ready for the question?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

Agreed to:  
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$75,133,000

**The Chair:** Shall the vote be reported?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Opposed? Carried.

**Children's Services**

**The Chair:** The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to present the 2005-06 supplementary estimates of the Ministry of Children's Services. In total, Alberta Children's Services 2005-06 supplementary estimate is \$38.4 million: \$35.9 million in operating expenses, which included 19 new full-time positions, and \$2.5 million in capital investments.

Part of these supplementary funds will support the implementation of Alberta's new, innovative early childhood development and child care plan. The plan was developed through consultation to ensure that it met the needs of Albertans. Our plan increases child care, family day homes, and kin child care subsidies for low- and middle-income families.

We have also raised income eligibility thresholds, so families can earn up to 25 per cent more and still be eligible for maximum subsidy. We estimate that the number of families receiving this subsidy will increase by 45 per cent. To successfully implement this part of the plan, we require an additional \$13.9 million.

We've created a new subsidy of up to \$100 per month to assist stay-at-home parents with their early childhood development fees. This will support the early childhood development of over 16,000 preschool children across Alberta. We've included an additional \$10.8 million in our supplementary estimates to help with this part of the plan.

We've doubled funding support for children with disabilities. This means more spaces, improved staff training, and enhanced quality care for these children. To achieve this, the supplementary estimate includes an additional \$2.1 million.

We're providing funding to improve the quality of child care services by increasing staff wages and training opportunities. This means that the average salary for child care professionals with two-year early childhood development diplomas who work in an accredited program will increase from \$11.50 to \$14.46 per hour. We've also increased professional development funding for eligible centres to a thousand dollars per staff member to support additional training. To successfully implement this part of the plan, we require an additional \$7.2 million.

We've given families easier access to early childhood development screening and assessment services and supports to ensure that children are reaching their developmental milestones. We've also started a toll-free parent information line. By calling 1-866-714-KIDS, parents now have easy access to the information they need. We'll require an additional \$1.9 million to implement this part of the plan.

In order to effectively implement our new five-point plan, we'll need to improve our information systems. To do this, we require an additional \$1.3 million.

The \$37.2 million we require to successfully implement the early childhood development and child care plan will be fully offset by federal revenue transfers. In addition, we need \$1.2 million for system enhancements to support two important pieces of legislation: the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act. This funding will allow us to continue to provide Alberta families with quality programs and services. It will enable us to implement our plan and continue to lead the way in early childhood and development and child care programs.

**Mrs. Mather:** I've got a number of comments. I guess I'd like to start with, first of all, the recognition that as we look at the 21st century, we need to revisit the idea of child care. If we really want to succeed, our children must succeed. The science of child development tells us that there are many things that we can do to invest in early childhood learning experiences and developmental

experiences that will pay off many times over by having children do well. When children succeed in school, they become more productive, they become higher income earners, and they become more contributing members of society.

When parents want to go to work and want to choose to send their children to facilities, we must make sure that these facilities are of good quality and of the best quality possible. So I'm really pleased that we've got the good news that we finally have an agreement with the federal government.

As I look at what the \$37,200,000 is going to do in that regard, it's encouraging. We're going to increase the maximum child care subsidy and boost the income threshold to allow more families to be eligible effective November 1. We're introducing a new benefit of up to a hundred dollars per month to help eligible stay-at-home parents pay fees for licensed nursery schools and other approved early childhood development programs. That's effective January 2006. We'll increase funding to improve access to specialized child care for children with disabilities. We're increasing funding for wages and training opportunities for individuals working in accredited daycare and approved family day-home programs. Of course, we're providing parents with more information about parenting and available programs through the new parent information line. These are wonderful things.

It's essential that daycare staff receive financial support and professional development grants. It's good to see that the ministry has provided funding to support programs and staff working together with children. However, income in the child care sector is about half the national average for all occupations and less than half as much as elementary school and kindergarten teachers. We need to recognize that well-paid, trained child care workers are at the heart of building a quality system and a healthy community. The federal funding is a start, but this government needs to do more.

One of my questions is: why aren't any supports provided for out-of-school care services that aren't eligible for accreditation? I'm hearing from out-of-school care services that they can't keep their staff because daycare workers are now making more than out-of-school care workers with the same qualifications, training, and experience. I'm wondering: why wasn't any of the surplus allocated for out-of-school care services to assist centres in recruiting and keeping staff?

5:00

The \$13,900,000 of the Alberta early learning and child care investment plan, put towards supporting "low and middle-income families through increased day care, family day home, and kin child care subsidies," is good, but I'm wondering. As we look back to 2002, the department received a report supporting daycare professionals' issues and options with the exact same recommendation. Why did parents have to wait for funding from the federal government for subsidy supports to increase? What has taken so long? Would parents still be suffering to make ends meet if the federal government hadn't given this money to the province at this time?

There's a request of \$1.2 million for equipment/inventory purchases for information systems enhancements to support program delivery under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act. I'm wondering why this was not budgeted for during the budget process in the spring. More importantly, how is this extra money actually going to be allocated? Can you give us some details there?

I notice also that equipment/inventory purchases for early learning and child care initiatives cost an extra \$1,300,000 on top of the \$68,577,000 for child care already budgeted for. Again, why was this not budgeted for initially? Can you tell us in some detail how

that extra money is going to be allocated? What are those dollars going to do for us?

My other priority concerns. I don't see any increase for youth shelters. This is specifically harmful to the agencies that provide these services because there's no guarantee of funding past one year. The ministry needs to look at better ways of contracting so that we have sustained, predictable, and stable funding for shelters.

Another question: why hasn't any of the surplus been allocated to inspect daycare facilities and family day homes, especially since nothing was allocated during the spring budget?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, Mr. Chairman, the hon. member has asked many, many questions. I think that first of all she needs to understand that the agreement we negotiated with the federal government was for the ages zero to six. So when she starts talking about the support for out-of-school care, that wasn't part of the negotiated agreement or any part of the discussion that the hon. Minister Dryden wanted to even discuss. It was brought up at the negotiation tables about: while we're getting this agreement between zero to six, what about six to 12? We had lengthy discussion with him also on a particular discussion about tax relief for stay-at-home parents. The support for the out-of-school care comes under the auspices of FCSS, and that's delivered by the municipalities. I think we're giving the municipalities about \$62.9 million. They make that decision on how to distribute the money for the out-of-school care.

We talked about the income of child care workers and some of the other things that we brought into the agreement. I think the hon. member has to understand that all of the things that we negotiated in the agreement were all things that Albertans wanted. We took a huge consultation process on this. The parents and daycare workers/providers that responded to our online consultation – their letter writing, their phone calls, accessing our website – all indicated all of the points and the plans that she currently sees, that we negotiated. That would have been some of the things that she's already alluded to, in fact: the raising of the subsidies, the accreditation program, the regulated childcare to low- and middle-income, more support for stay-at-home parents, all of the things.

I must tell her that with the \$100 per month, or the \$1,200 per year, that we're providing for stay-at-home parents, we're the only province that put that, and we were pushing our envelope on that when we were negotiating with the federal government. The access to child care for children with disabilities: all part of the consultation as well as the quality child care and the wages to the workers.

I can only tell her that what I'm receiving in my office are kudos right across the province and from all over. Daycare workers are very excited about the wages, and we're getting e-mails, we're getting faxes, we're getting letters from people within the child care industry that are honestly very, very pleased with what's happening in Alberta.

The \$1.2 million that she talked about: why wasn't it originally in our budget? This was money that we needed because of all of the work that we have to do to put this child care program into place. Youth shelters weren't part of this negotiated agreement. Again I want to emphasize that this was an agreement that we made with the federal government and included only zero to six, so youth shelters weren't part of the negotiations. I can let the hon. member know in regard to youth shelters – I know that it's one of her passions – that we are reviewing youth shelters at this time. I spent the entire summer travelling right across the province meeting with all the regions and visited many, many youth shelters and spoke to the directors at the youth shelters. They were very, very pleased with, one, our taking the time to stop in and, two, that we're looking at a

review about the bed capacities and the dollars and if we can help them at all.

The inspection of the day homes. She also should know that we're reviewing the social care facility act, which is being done by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. It hasn't been reviewed in 26 years. We've determined that the child care inspections and that will stay under the ministry. The seniors part of it will move over to the ministry of seniors, and we will bring in a new act in regard to recognizing this.

I think I have answered most of your questions. If I haven't – and I know we haven't got a lot of time – I will give the commitment to the member, as I have in the past, that for any questions I haven't been able to answer for you, we will, like we have previously, provide it to you in writing. I've got some of my staff taking notes, and we will continue to provide you some information.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm so impressed in recent years by so much research going into the issue of child care in Canada. I assume that the hon. minister was at the November 20, 2004, gathering of ministers from federal, provincial, and territorial governments when you adopted the four principles for a new national system of early learning and child care, important principles known under the acronym QUAD: quality, universally inclusive, accessible, and child care with a developmental focus.

Now, I'm not going to talk about all of those aspects because I want to relate my question to the actual funding that has come from the federal government, \$37.2 million, increasing, I understand, to \$85 million next year and to \$100 million in years to come. My question is around the universality aspect. I know there are differences in viewpoint between the approach to daycare that the government is taking and the approach of the opposition. I realize that, but I am just concerned. For example, statistically in Canada in terms of regulated child care spaces the average is no more than 12 to 15 per cent of children under the age of six, so Canada lags way behind other developed countries. I mean, if you look at other countries, like Belgium and Sweden, it's closer to 100 per cent and 60 per cent in terms of three year olds in Norway and Denmark and so on.

My concern is that child care is, for me, a basic human right, so we ought to be increasing the number of spaces and the amount of money that's providing for spaces in daycare. I want to ask the minister: how many regulated spaces does this amount of money represent? What can we say in Alberta about what percentage of regulated spaces we have for daycare given the \$37.2 million that's coming from the federal government to the province? Will those spaces increase in the future? What kind of development are we on? What kind of route are we on?

5:10

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, I think what's interesting about this province, Mr. Chair, is that Alberta seems to always be uniquely different. It's about parents' choice, and if parents choose to put their child in daycare, they'll make that choice. What is different about this province and a first in Canada is that we're the only province in Canada that has an accredited daycare program. In fact, Minister Dryden came to visit us several months ago and did a tour of the accreditation. We've got 97 per cent of the daycares in this province that have applied to be an accredited daycare, which is an incredible – incredible – amount of daycares applying. That means that with all of the daycares in this province, once they get through the preaccreditation and the accreditation, we will have the top daycares

in the country because of the process that they have to go through to get to that particular process.

I think it's a matter of supply and demand always, and if daycare spaces are needed, then businesses will have to determine if they want to increase. I can tell the hon. member that in the farm areas we're the first province in Canada to provide kin child care. For the farm people that live in this area that are in a financial situation where they have to go back to work and there's no daycare around there, we will pay a caregiver within the family so that their daughter or son can go back to work. That has been accepted within the rural communities. They are quite appreciative of the fact that this government has recognized that sometimes farm people get into a situation where they have to go back to work. We've recognized that, and if grandma and grandpa or an auntie and uncle have to babysit, then we'll recognize that and pay them.

To the member, I think that more important is that this whole agreement was signed on what Albertans asked for, not what the government wanted, not what I wanted. It was truly put together by what Albertans wanted, and they were very, very clear when they were calling us, writing us, and on all those things they chose to get hold of us on. They wanted parents' choice. That's exactly what this agreement was brought forward on.

You referenced the November 20 meeting, I believe. The former minister was at that particular meeting. I can tell you that in the meetings after the election we also accepted the QUAD principle. We think it's important. Alberta's agreement was negotiated in good faith. It was negotiated on behalf of – again, I keep repeating this: it was Albertans and what Albertans wanted. It took us some time to get our points across, obviously, to the federal minister. I can tell you that what we're hearing now is that other provinces are wanting the same agreement as Alberta has. You know, parents in this province are very, very pleased.

When you're negotiating an agreement of \$489 million over five years, there are going to be some bumps and hiccups in the road, but we're going to be listening to what parents have to say and how we can address it. We're in year 1 of the agreement, and we've got four more years to go on that particular agreement. We'll listen to what they want and what they have to say about this agreement.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak on these supplementary estimates for Children's Services. One of the first points that I would like to make – and again it's certainly welcome to see some additional funding for children's services. I think this is an area in which this province has chronically underfunded their obligation to people in need, and particularly children and people with a low income. So it's always welcome to see some extra dollars there.

It does give me some concern to wonder why we are putting \$38 million in new spending in now. I certainly can see some of the things that needed to be done in regard to matching or to complementing the new federal money that has come in regard to affordable daycare services. You know, I'm wondering why we couldn't have tacked this onto the initial budget estimates that we debated and worked with in the spring. It seems like quite a significant amount of money.

You know, this is speaking to a general problem that I think we have in this Legislature where the budgets are changing very significantly in these supplementary additions. I question whether or not we are able to debate those adequately in this House as a result of sort of these add-ons. So, categorically, I find that difficult,

although certainly, as I say, this is an area that was so chronically underfunded that any penny we could certainly use.

First, in regard to child care it was brought to our attention that a forensic accounting firm, KPMG, completed a study on daycare facilities in 2002 entitled *Supporting Day Care Professionals: Issues and Options*. The study found that a subsidy for low-income Albertans paid about a quarter of its own costs directly by offsetting welfare costs, yet the maximum daycare subsidy available for low-income Albertans is \$475 for youngsters ages zero to 18 months, \$380 for children 19 months and older. Given that the daycare costs can be up to \$880, clearly I think this subsidy is not sufficient.

Further, the report said something called a quality gap – and this was a study of nonprofit and then commercial child care centres in Canada. It found that nonprofit child care was significantly higher in all areas, including areas of diapering, use of materials, activities for teaching, and overall interaction between staff and children. My first question in regard to child care is: why is the minister providing more subsidies to for-profit child care services when clearly nonprofit child care services are superior in most areas?

Second of all, a couple of incidents have taken place in Alberta that deserve attention. In May the Road Runner child care program in Calgary was found to have been negligent in their duties regarding the death of an infant in their care. In February, as you probably know, Edmonton's Bear's Paw centre was closed after staff there inadvertently left a child out in the cold. So I would like to ask: what measures are being put into place from child services to reduce the possibility of these sorts of incidents happening in the future?

Third, in regard to child care again I believe that there is a great boom in new child care services being provided with extra funding, mostly from the federal government. But we're hearing word that the accreditation process for new child care facilities in Alberta is causing some difficulties for daycare centres, and they're finding the process somewhat onerous, and it seems to take away from the actual child care that they can do. So I would like to ask, perhaps, what the minister would suggest to streamline, or at least look at the possibility of streamlining or changing, that accreditation process to make it not easier by any means but make it function better.

5:20

In regard to talking about safe houses. Now, this is always a controversial area. These safe houses, of course, were set up to implement the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act of 1999. Police and child welfare officials can apprehend and confine children for up to five days. There are some other amendments to that as well. Protective safe houses are effective in making some changes for some clients as well as providing the opportunity for safety, information, and reflection. Most staff and stakeholders considered the change in this legislation in 2001 to have been positive because of the previous shorter period that was usually only sufficient for client detoxification. Staff and stakeholders especially noticed increased exposure and awareness on the issue of child prostitution in general, decreased availability of children for johns and for pimps, and steering of children into more appropriate resources, keeping children safe, et cetera.

Clients of the PSHs identified positive impacts in many areas. However, this report does, I think, raise some serious concerns about the overall effectiveness of the program. Number one, the safe houses are not functioning with consistently high occupancy rates, although the problem of child prostitution is not widely believed to have been solved or even reduced significantly in the province of Alberta. The report calls for increased awareness of this program on the part of police officers and child welfare officials in order to increase the clients in safe houses. No one is disputing the effective-

ness of this program, but we should perhaps investigate how widespread the problem of child prostitution really is in Alberta and address it in a more specific sort of way. Is the minister investigating just how big a problem child prostitution is in Alberta? How is the ministry improving the awareness of the police and child welfare officials of this legislation and how might we address this problem in a more general way?

Those are my comments in the most general way. Again, I would conclude by suggesting that if we could perhaps have more accurate budget estimates when we are debating the budgets in the first place, it would be easier for us to assess and then evaluate the progress of how monies are being spent and the effectiveness of those programs over a longer period of time.

Thank you.

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

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think the first thing that I would like to say to the hon. member about the supplementary estimates of \$37.2 million is that this is going to be fully offset by the federal dollars that we're going to be receiving. So while we're here before it, he needs to understand that all of the money is going to be fully offset by the federal dollars that we're going to be receiving, but time is of the essence.

All daycares will qualify for all of the subsidies and incomes whether they're nonprofit or for profit. Again, the daycares that we're hearing from are all very, very excited about what's happening, and the daycare workers are excited about the salary increases. We've been very, very pleased.

The daycare closures that he alluded to show that the system is working. When we come to a point where we're closing a daycare, they've had some serious infractions. We realize the situation that the parents are in by all of a sudden coming in. A lot of times we've tried to work with the daycares prior to that in regard to some of the infractions that they're doing, or people from our department try to work with them on some of the complaints we're getting. It gets to a point . . .

**The Chair:** Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to our Standing Order 58(1), which provides for not less than two hours of consideration of estimates, I would invite the Deputy Government House Leader to move that the committee rise and report.

**Mr. Zwodzdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would now move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**Mr. Johnston:** Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports as follows. The following resolutions relating to the 2005-06 supplementary estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund have been approved.

Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$75,133,000.

The Committee of Supply also reports progress on the Department of Children's Services and requests leave to sit again.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table a list of those resolutions voted upon by the Committee of Supply pursuant to Standing Orders.

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a very invigorating day of debate. In fact, it's been a great opening week

of the fall session of the Legislature and a nice conclusion, in a couple of days, to Métis Week. I want to extend special congratulations to all of our Métis friends, and on that note I would move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; at 5:26 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]