

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title:** Tuesday, November 22, 2005

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 05/11/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

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

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

**Mrs. Tarchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a gentleman who is no stranger to many of us. He is Mr. Gord Button. He's the seventh Ombudsman of the province of Alberta. He is sitting up in the Speaker's gallery, and I'd ask that he please stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly nine members of the Prairie Land regional school division board of trustees who are in Edmonton for meetings with the Alberta School Boards Association. Seated in the members' gallery are John Neill, chairman of the board; Linda Danielsen; Bill Lee; Bev Lee; Gloria Nelson; Elaine Horner; Duane Roy; Sheila Taylor; and Sharon Orum. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two residents of my constituency, Brent and Craig Korte. Craig is a grade 6 student from St. Marguerite school in Spruce Grove and is currently studying the government. He's very active in his school as a class representative on student council and is currently working on a leadership project in which he's chosen one of our former Premiers, Premier Peter Lougheed. Craig is also active in several sports in the community. He is accompanied today by his father, Brent, who works in government relations for Janssen-Ortho. Brent is also quite involved in sports in the Spruce Grove community as a coach of minor football and minor hockey. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

**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 six members of my department who are here today for a public service orientation tour. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**Mr. Lougheed:** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members assembled a group of students from James Mowat school in Fort Saskatchewan. They're accompanied by Mrs. Maureen Kondro and Mr. Ted Fellows and also by parents and helpers Mrs. Jennifer Proctor, Mrs. Donna Bruce, Mr. Brian Pearce, Mr. George Spindler, and Mrs. Frances Mangold. They're in both galleries, and I would ask that they please stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two fantastic and tireless workers from the Alberta Liberal Party office. Justin Archer, who is seated in the public gallery, graduated from his studies in law and society from the University of Calgary last year. He's since relocated to Edmonton to work as an administrative co-ordinator at the party office. He's interested in the Alberta political landscape and is an advocate for the renewal of democracy and good government in Alberta, which is why he fits so well with us.

Our other guest is Mike McLaughlin, who works in the accounting department at the Alberta Liberal Party. Believe it or not, he is busy there. He's originally from Toronto. He spent many years in the banking industry and also a decade in television program distribution. He's a proud father of two daughters. One is a student adviser at Grant MacEwan student resource centre, and another just graduated from the public relations program at Grant MacEwan. Mike is thrilled to be working for a better Alberta.

I'd ask the two to rise and please receive the warm welcome of all MLAs.

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to rise and welcome 69 of Edmonton-Mill Creek's brightest and best young students. They are here from Velma Baker school, and today they are accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Brent Kapicki and Mrs. Kimberly Devereux, and some parent helpers, Dave Eriksson, Vicki Moore, Trina McCloy, Kendra Black, and Marla Phillips. May I ask all of them to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In my former profession as a teacher, similar to yourself and many others of this Assembly, it is indeed my pleasure today to introduce through you to members of this Assembly two distinct representatives of Fort McMurray who capture our city slogan and spirit of We Have the Energy. They are the chair of the public school board, Jeff Thompson, and also his lieutenant of wisdom, Rhonda Reich. I would like to ask both of them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Mariette Sutton of Sherwood Park. Mariette has been a friend of my wife, Angie, since the '70s, when they met at Mount Royal College. Mariette was a very long-time downtown Edmonton

businesswoman and is a recent cancer survivor. She's an energetic person and focused on continually helping, motivating, organizing, and encouraging people around her in an effort to make this world a better place. She's accompanied by my wife, Angie. I would ask both of them to rise and receive the 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 rise to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly some very special people. Our visitors are from Suncor Energy and are partners with the Alberta Conservation Association and this government in a newly established boreal habitat conservation initiative. Through this initiative privately owned land in our northern forests will be bought and donated to the province's publicly protected land base for conservation. Already more than 400 acres of shoreline around the Winagami Lake have been purchased and boreal habitat added to Alberta's network of parks and protected areas. In the members' gallery representing the private partner in the boreal habitat conservation initiative are David Byler, the executive vice-president of Suncor Energy, and staff members Pat O'Reilly, Gord Lambert, and Cathy Glover. If I could ask them to rise and I would ask this House to extend its usual warm welcome.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Marty and Linda Rybiak. Marty received his bachelor's in engineering science at the University of Western Ontario. Linda also graduated from Western university with a master's in chemical engineering. Both Marty and Linda are the proud parents of two young boys, Samuel and Andrew. Marty volunteers in a number of organizations, including Habitat for Humanity, and coaches basketball. He and Linda are active members of the Southminster-Steinhauer United Church. Marty is also the NDP candidate in Edmonton-Leduc for the upcoming federal election. I'd now ask that Linda and Marty both rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a group of very enthusiastic, bright young scholars. They are grade 6 students from Garneau elementary school, a very well-known school and one of the oldest ones in my constituency. They're accompanied by their teachers, Ms Susan Kosanovich and Ms Tara Calver, and by parents Ms Karen Dyberg, Lauren Beaupré, Linda Tennesen, and Ms Bev Wilson. I believe they are sitting in one of the two galleries. Wherever they are, I'd ask them 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.

#### Children in Poverty

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across Alberta the so-called Alberta advantage is not for everyone. In recent conversations with homeless shelters in both Calgary and Edmonton we've been told

that at times shelters must even find space for mothers with newborn babies. It's shocking to think that in this province children and even moms with newborn babies can end up in homeless shelters. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Can the minister explain how it is that in a province as wealthy as Alberta this government tolerates situations where little children and even moms with newborns end up squeezed into homeless shelters for adults?

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

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased that this question has come forward, actually, to the Legislature because I have had the opportunity over the past week to two weeks to discuss with my staff the contingency funds that are in place for the homeless shelters, especially in Calgary. Having said that, you're aware that with homeless shelters what we look for are people who are at risk of being homeless, and we add funding to transitional housing.

Now, with the homeless shelter situation, in the Assembly over the past year we've brought forward budgets where we've increased the funding for that, Mr. Speaker, by 42 per cent, which is a very large increase. We provide over \$20 million a year to homeless shelters throughout the province of Alberta. I think that 42 per cent is significant.

I also think that what we've discussed with transitional housing, what we've discussed in the Legislature with affordable housing for low- to moderate-income people, Mr. Speaker – it's important that the opposition recognizes that we are working toward this regard for people at risk.

**Dr. Taft:** Mr. Speaker, the shelters are bursting at the seams.

To the Minister of Children's Services: will the minister admit that this government is failing its responsibility to ensure that children, impoverished and struggling children, are properly supported when children and even babies end up in shelters for homeless adults?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that our ministry takes care of those who are vulnerable. For anybody who comes in seeking help in any of our authorities here, we do the best we can. We provide the services that we can under the ministry, and we'll continue to do that.

**Dr. Taft:** To the same minister: can the minister explain to the over 100,000 impoverished children in Alberta what the Alberta advantage is and where they can find it?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell this member that any child or family that needs help under our ministry is helped.

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

#### Nutrition Programs for Schools

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Poverty in the midst of plenty. Today as we speak here now, 1 in 5 Alberta children is living in poverty and is at risk of poor nutrition, yet when asked yesterday about hot lunch programs in schools, the Minister of Education shrugged off the issue and pointed people needing a meal to a website. This morning while the Minister of Education was having his breakfast, 3,000 children in Edmonton alone were going hungry, stuck on waiting lists for oversubscribed school lunch programs. To

the Minister of Education: why won't this government commit now to a hot lunch program for all Alberta children at risk?

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much. I think that as I was having a bit of breakfast, the hon. opposition leader was enjoying a breakfast as well, and I don't recall him having raised this then.

The short answer to this question, Mr. Speaker, is simply that we do see several school boards already who provide hot lunch programs or who provide breakfast programs, and they do it in a very nice way with the community agency partners in some cases and in other cases with parents who are showing up as volunteers to assist. I did indicate in my answers yesterday what it is that we were planning to do by way of looking at this issue, and I would just refer the hon. leader to please refer to yesterday's *Hansard*.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are 3,000 children on waiting lists for school hot lunch programs in this minister's city, is it this government's position that it should stand back and let Alberta children go hungry because their parents can't feed them?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I did indicate as part of the answer yesterday that if there are members in this House who know that there are families in need, we have support programs either through Children's Services or through Human Resources and Employment. For heaven's sake, please let those families know what those programs are, and if you won't, then direct them to us, and we will.

**Dr. Taft:** Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that there are 3,000 kids on waiting lists right now, what ideology is this minister standing on that justifies his openly accepting that thousands of impoverished children are going hungry in Alberta schools today?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a serious issue, I'm sure, and I don't appreciate the inflammation that is being given to it, the tone of it. We have locally elected school boards. There are some members of those school boards in our galleries today, and they do have flexibility to address these policies, and many of them do. I'm sure that once the Edmonton public school board or the Edmonton Catholic school board see these issues coming forward, they do their best to help out and address them or direct them to places where help is available, and that program seems to be working relatively well. If there are some improvements needed toward it, then surely there are ways of addressing those particular problems as well.

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

### Employment of Children

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The United Nations convention on the rights of the child states: "Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child." This government has lowered child employment restrictions to 12 years old for work in restaurants. It has asked in its recent review if this should be extended even further. We're not talking paper routes and farm chores here. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources

and Employment. How far is the minister prepared to go in putting 12-year-old grade 6ers into the workforce?

**Mr. Cardinal:** Mr. Speaker, of course, part of the review of the minimum wage, for an example, which was increased recently, also dealt with youth employment. We made sure when the program was announced that the youth were well protected, giving the parents the opportunity to determine if it is safe for their children to work at certain places. It also gave the employer the opportunity to assess the situation as far as safety. What will have to happen is that both the parent and the employer have to sign a form, which is a checklist to show that the place is safe and that the parent has agreed that the young person should be working in an environment like that. The responsibility is up to the parent to determine that, and I think that's a good move.

1:50

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: does the minister expect 12-year-old grade 6ers to be contributing to the upkeep of the family household even if they are foster children?

**Mr. Cardinal:** That is, of course, not the plan, Mr. Speaker, to force children to work. There are lots of jobs out there. It's only fair to give the opportunity for any youth that wants to work, the opportunity for any employer that wants to hire youth, and the opportunity for the parent to decide – for the parent to decide – if the youth is in a position to work by going through this process that is really complicated to fill out and sign. They take the responsibility.

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplementary to the same minister: will this minister tell us how many Albertans both in his department's surveys and letters, e-mails, and calls have complained about the initiatives to increase child labour in our province?

**Mr. Cardinal:** Mr. Speaker, I don't have that figure in my hands here right now, but I will provide it in writing to the member.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

### Securities Commission Investigation

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Securities Commission director of enforcement is the top cop policing the Alberta securities market. As such, his conduct needs to be beyond reproach, but he was caught red-handed by the Auditor General making a significant profit trading shares in a company that he was responsible for investigating. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Given that the ASC's top securities enforcer made a significant financial gain on a short-term, speculative investment in a company under ASC investigation, why does the minister refuse to acknowledge possible violation of the rules against insider trading and that this should be investigated?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member infers that this was only noticed because the Auditor General caught it. In fact, the reason that the Auditor General caught it is because it was documented in the files. There was nothing hidden about that.

Mr. Speaker, on the same line of questioning yesterday I informed

the hon. member that there will be a complete statement outlining the events, the chronological occurrence of those events. I did check before I came into the House today because I know how important this matter is, and I know that the hon. member wants the answer. I was informed that it wasn't ready today, but it is their hope that they will have it tomorrow. I made the commitment that when that statement that outlines all of the events surrounding this is available, I'd be happy to discuss it further.

Mr. Speaker, I have never suggested that this was not a breach of the conflict-of-interest policy of the Alberta Securities Commission.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, if the minister has never denied that it was a breach, why is she asking for chronology instead of taking action to ensure that either discipline occurs or, in fact, a criminal investigation into insider trading occurs?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, as I said, I think that if you have all of the events before you, you would be better able to question what should happen. There has been a full investigation on this matter by the Securities Commission. There is a sequence of events that occurred, and I again invite the hon. member to ask me further questions when he has the opportunity to see that in its fullness.

**Mr. Mason:** Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe we're getting somewhere, but it remains to be seen.

What does the minister think will come about as a result of the chronology? If the chronology shows that, in fact, as she says, there were serious breaches of the internal policies of the ASC or a prima facie case of criminal activity, insider trading, then is she going to commit to this House that she will take prompt and decisive action to make sure that wrongdoers are brought to justice?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, as I've outlined over and over and over again, the Auditor General in his report clearly lays out this issue, three pages, in fact, on this. The Auditor General in my review of the report – now, he may have read something different, and I'd look forward to his sending me something over – has not suggested criminal activity.

I remind the hon. member and all members of this House that it was I who asked the Auditor General to perform this audit as speedily and efficiently as he possibly could, which in fact he did. What the Auditor General did do in his report is provide two recommendations on processes that would be put in place to ensure as much as possible that this could not happen again. The Securities Commission, prior to the Auditor General's report, had not only put stronger measures in place but have committed to have those measures suggested by the Auditor General reviewed and in place by January 1, 2006, which is about 30-some days from today.

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

### Avian Influenza

**Ms Haley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency recently announced positive test results for avian influenza in two separate cases: the first regarding the H strain found in wild ducks in Manitoba and Quebec and the second being a duck testing positive on a commercial farm in British Columbia. These announcements will certainly heighten awareness and concerns for avian influenza right across Canada. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Could the minister please explain what kind of plans the province has in place to protect our poultry industry?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very good question. Alberta's poultry industry and all of our feather industry in the province have learned some valuable lessons from the experiences in B.C. of 2004. I would like to in this forum congratulate the poultry industry for a well-defined plan of action that they have in place.

We've taken a number of steps, and we have a number of protocols and plans in place to mitigate any type of outbreak that we might have in the province. We have a surveillance system ongoing right now on commercial poultry and backyard flocks, where we test dead birds that might be at a higher risk of having avian influenza, or AI. We also work with the veterinarians across the province, Mr. Speaker, under a surveillance network and an early warning system, if you will, to report anything that might have a zoonosis aspect to it or to detect animal diseases. As well, we are part of a new program, a national surveillance program, to detect the prevalence of avian influenza in Canada's wild waterfowl population. Our preparation and planning are ongoing and change as required.

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

**Ms Haley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental goes to the same minister. Given that test results on wild birds have been announced for Quebec, Manitoba, and British Columbia, when can we expect the announcement of results for Alberta?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned previously, we are participating with the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre as part of a national surveillance program to determine that prevalence. As the hon. member mentioned, there have been some announcements of results in some of the other provinces. We have completed 580 tests of the 800 samples that we have. To date we have not identified H5 or H7 strains. We do expect that the work on the rest of the tests will be done either by the end of this week or very early next week.

It is important to note that the recent positive test results found in Quebec and British Columbia and Manitoba of the wild waterfowl weren't unexpected. There's no increased threat to public health. Various types of avian influenza have been found in healthy waterfowl for well over a hundred years, for as far back as we know.

As the federal and other provincial counterparts have mentioned already, the H5N1 strain that was found in two Manitoba wild ducks is not the same Asian strain that we hear so much about. It is what they would consider low pathogenetic, which means that these viruses would only cause a mild disease, if any, in the waterfowl.

**Ms Haley:** My last supplemental, Mr. Speaker, is for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Since wild birds, especially waterfowl, seem to be the source of the virus, is there anything being done to make sure that waterfowl hunters are safe when they handle or consume this meat?

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

**Mr. Coutts:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's really important to note that there are no new threats to waterfowl or to hunters as a result of the recent reports of the influenza virus in Canadian wild birds. These viruses typically are present in wild birds and have very little effect on the health of wild birds. So that's important to

note. Alberta has good information on the viruses in wild birds, and we certainly are a key partner in the current national survey. To answer the question directly, to protect hunters, it is recommended that careful handling, cleanliness of course, and proper refrigeration as well as proper cooking precautions be taken in handling wild birds. That is definitely our recommendation.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

2:00

### Aboriginal Issues

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first ministers' meeting on aboriginal issues begins in Kelowna on Thursday, and aboriginal peoples right across the country are looking forward to this event with great anticipation and hope for a better future. My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. The federal government is prepared to spend billions of new dollars on aboriginal issues to help break the cycle of poverty. What is your ministry prepared to bring to this meeting?

**Ms Calahasen:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to thank you for that question. I really appreciate it. As you know, the Premier and I are going to be attending the meeting, the FMM, on the 24th and 25th of this month. That's actually Thursday and Friday. To be able to prepare for that, I have met with First Nations across this province and the Métis community and their organizations, and they have certainly provided us with some information that we could utilize as we're dealing with the issues as they come forward from the first ministers.

For your information, the First Nations and the Métis people of this province have indicated that no one speaks on their behalf but themselves. They do have a spokesperson, Grand Chief Sandford Big Plume, whom they've requested to be at the table so that he can also bring the message that the Premier and I will be bringing to the table.

It is very important for us to be able to look at what's coming down. As you know, the money that supposedly is coming down: we have no information as to what amount it will be; we have no information as to how the delivery process will be. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we are making every attempt to make sure that what the First Nations and the Métis people of this province want is going to be at the table.

**Mr. Tougas:** So the answer is nothing then. Thank you.

Why has not one cent of the government's unbudgeted surplus gone towards addressing the specific needs of Alberta's aboriginal people?

**Ms Calahasen:** Mr. Speaker, this is really a fantastic question. I'm going to ask all those ministries that have provided some guidance and some dollars that will be going towards the First Nations and the Métis people of this province. I'll just give you an example. First of all, we have had what we call traditional land-use studies. As a result, we have spent about \$1.5 million for traditional land-use studies, which the First Nations of Alberta have been requesting so that they can map historically where they've been.

We've also looked at economic initiatives, Mr. Speaker. On the economic side we have put I think about another million and a half to see how we can identify where the First Nations can begin to be involved and how we can help them to ensure that business plans can be developed.

Mr. Speaker, on the tourism side we have also had an aboriginal

tourism council established mainly to look at the tourism aspects of what's possible in this province with the help of the First Nations and the Métis community, not the Liberals but the Métis and the First Nations community. I'm going to ask some of my colleagues . . .

**The Speaker:** Well, may I ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to proceed with his third question.

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So it's nothing then. No new money. Nothing at all.

With the Alberta economy experiencing unprecedented resource-based prosperity, why is the aboriginal community still not enjoying the benefits of the so-called Alberta advantage?

**Ms Calahasen:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, we on this side of the government and that side certainly understand the needs of the aboriginal community, and that's the reason why we believe that working with the aboriginal community is probably the number one priority of this government. As a result, what we have done is work with that community to be able to identify, first of all, the capacity issue within the First Nations and, secondly, the economic possibilities with the First Nations so that they can take advantage of the Alberta advantage, as you have identified, and, thirdly, to make sure that government has the capacity to be able to work with the First Nations and the Métis community so that we can begin to see the economic possibilities that this province has to offer.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

### Calgary Ring Road Southwest Portion

**Mr. Magnus:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province and the Tsuu T'ina nation need to have a land transfer agreement in place in order to start building the desperately needed southwest portion of Calgary's ring road. A draft agreement was to be in place by November 1 of this year, but the deadline was not met. My question for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: why was the deadline missed?

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

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Through to the hon. member, the extension of the deadline should not be viewed as a setback in this particular negotiation. The Tsuu T'ina nation and my department, the chief and myself, are actually working very closely together to come to this particular agreement.

What happened, Mr. Speaker, is that we had an agreement where we each would pick an appraiser if we had to and then a third appraiser would come and rule on what the two appraisers said. What we did, which is actually quite unprecedented, is agree on the same appraiser. So even though we are seeing a little bit more delay on the initial side of the project, we are hoping, because of this particular feat that was accomplished, that we will see an expedition of the particular project in question, the ring road. It's actually very, very positive.

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

**Mr. Magnus:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this is a bilateral deal between the province and the Tsuu T'ina nation and because of

the enormous impact on the city of Calgary, have the mayor and council been active in these negotiations?

**Dr. Oberg:** Mr. Speaker, the mayor and council have not been active in these particular negotiations. These are negotiations purely between the province and the Tsuu T'ina. However, we have been keeping the mayor and council completely up to date on everything that is occurring. These negotiations are between us and the Tsuu T'ina nation. They truly impact the city of Calgary, and therefore we are keeping them absolutely up to date as to what is occurring.

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

**Mr. Magnus:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental to the same minister: when will construction start on the southwest portion of Calgary's ring road?

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

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much. Our prediction is that we should be able to get started by the fall of 2007. There are some wild cards in this, Mr. Speaker. One of the issues, of course, is that they have to go to the federal government to get a decrease in the size of their reservation. What we're looking at doing is actually purchasing some land from the Tsuu T'ina nation, and for any change in the boundaries they have to go and have an OC at the federal government. We anticipate that this could actually take a year, although if there tends to be a different government in place in Ottawa, who knows?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

#### Health Care Costs

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the health minister listed for the Assembly the costs of treatment for certain procedures.

If you had a stroke, it would be \$25,000 if you spent four days in bed. If you had a child that was born premature and spent 42 days in an ICU, it would be \$42,000. If you had a kidney transplant, it would be \$37,200.

This government rationalizes that advertising the price tag of a procedure will affect the use of health care. My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Does the minister honestly believe that a patient would look at the price of a kidney transplant and decide to go with a cheaper therapy?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, as has been duly noted, it's about accountability. It's about making people sensitive. On the floor of the AAMD and C just last week I was asked why we don't provide everybody an itemized costing of what they've actually spent. I have always responded in two ways. One of the reasons why we don't usually do that is because of the privacy issues and the legislation we have around privacy and the freedom individuals have to protect their own privacy. If we, for example, sent a notice to a dad, and the mother and the daughter and the son were on that notice, what they had spent on healthcare, it may not protect the privacy of the individuals also on that card.

The second reason, Mr. Speaker, is that in different communities, in different regions it's very hard and it's very elaborate to cost out exactly how you represent that cost, whether it's facility costs and some of the other measures that could be costed.

What I am actually responding to is not only a public request for

information but a request from several people to know what we're spending, how we're spending it so they can judge for themselves if they're getting value for the dollars that are spent. It's nothing more than that.

2:10

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how does knowing the cost of an operation shorten a wait list or make a procedure more successful?

**Ms Evans:** Oh, it has nothing to do with procedures being more successful. What it actually does, though, is enable people to understand what value they're getting when they go to the doctor. Many people today, Mr. Speaker, are looking forward to our electronic health record. Why? One of the biggest complaints I get is that if they have a test in Lloydminster and come into the city and have to have another test, they're conscious that it costs money. Many of these people, particularly seniors, want not to waste our system but to use our system in the very best way possible. That's why we're talking about costs.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. To the minister again: how does knowing the cost of a procedure make health care better? It doesn't shorten the wait list. It doesn't make it better.

**Ms Evans:** You know, there are several things that can make health care better. One is the individual's duty and responsibility to themselves to look after their own health care, and that's important. The second responsibility is for a government to support that person in executing their duty to be well. Mr. Speaker, there wouldn't be billions of dollars spent in North America if people weren't concerned about . . . [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, why should I answer? They're not even interested.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

#### Learning Assessment

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Teachers in my constituency have raised some questions and concerns about two initiatives known as GLA and CAA. My first question is to the Minister of Education. Can he please explain what grade level achievement is and what computer adaptive assessment is, and what's the difference between the two?

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, we're dealing with questions on government policy here, not interpretation of words.

Now, hon. minister, with a great deal of trepidation, go forth.

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Mr. Speaker, actually, the hon. member has hit on a couple of contentious issues in the communities, and these were raised today in some private discussions with school board members. I'll be very brief. Basically, GLA, or grade level achievement, is simply a method by which a teacher will indicate to a parent whether or not that child is performing at grade level standard or not whereas CAA, a completely different initiative, computer adaptive assessment, will simply be a computerized assessment vehicle that will be available for teachers to use with students on an optional basis if they wish.

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

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: could you explain why your department is pursuing these initiatives?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, in a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, GLA is going to be an important way for parents to know whether or not their children are performing to a grade level expectation and, if not, at what grade level they are in fact performing. CAA, on the other hand, is necessary to pursue because this is a method of helping teachers assess students. It's simply another tool in the assessment package, in the tool chest, if you will. It provides immediate results on certain aspects of the curriculum, which will tell a teacher in almost an instant how that student is doing in that particular area. So those are two reasons why we're pursuing those.

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

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: could you explain to us your implementation timeline and what costs we can anticipate?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, GLA is actually an initiative that has been worked on by ministry officials and by the ATA and by the Alberta School Boards Association since about the year 2000. About a year and a half ago or so a couple of schools were identified to pilot it – six or seven schools I believe was the case. This year we hope to have every school board identify only one school where GLA reporting will be done. Then perhaps a year or two after that we should be able to implement it system-wide so that teachers will have it and parents will know what grade level their kids are at. The costs are negligible. They're absorbed in the department.

CAA, on the other hand, will roughly be a million dollars per year over the next three years. It's an advanced state of computer technology used by many entities.

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

### Centennial Project Funding

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This summer the Mill Woods Presidents' Council was denied a centennial grant to help support its centennial and Canada Day celebration. Sixty thousand people attended a real celebration there. I personally spoke to the minister, who informed me that there were no centennial funds available. Very recently this government awarded \$5.5 million for a centennial grant to a prominent filmmaker after a private meeting with the minister and the Premier. My questions are for the Minister of Community Development. How was the deal brokered?

**Mr. Mar:** Mr. Speaker, the \$5.5 million that was put towards the project regarding the film *Passchendaele*, which is Paul Gross's film, was an extraordinary opportunity for two reasons. One, it's the centennial year, and *Passchendaele* is a significant element of Canada's history. There's a particular Alberta story with the four regiments from Alberta that participated in the battle of *Passchendaele*, which was part of Vimy Ridge and largely viewed by historians as being a place that was Canada's coming of age. Secondly, it is, of course, the Year of the Veteran.

The combination of these two things made good sense for us through a program that we have where we support film development in the province of Alberta. Currently that program is worth \$13.5

billion. But this was viewed as a particularly valuable addition to the celebration of the centennial and the Year of the Veteran together, to put \$5.5 million over and above our existing budget for the film development program.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** To the same minister: does this mean that only prominent artists deserve provincial support or the ear of the Premier?

**Mr. Mar:** The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that we've supported artists throughout the entire centennial year, as we often do through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts each and every year. As an example, the member opposite would be well aware of Alberta Scene, where approximately 600 artists went to Ottawa, put on some 95 different presentations in several dozen venues. The reality is that through the annual budget of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts hundreds of artists, thousands, in fact, are supported throughout this province. This is a very important part of the quality of life in the province of Alberta and something that Albertans appreciate greatly.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** To the same minister: did the minister consult any stakeholders before handing over public dollars for private films, please?

**Mr. Mar:** Mr. Speaker, we're constantly engaged in the consultation with stakeholders not only in the arts but in all areas of government enterprise.

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

### Public Accounts Committee

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, there are a number of changes needed to improve this Legislative Assembly's oversight of over \$27 billion in public expenditures. These changes include allowing the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to meet outside of session and to question the heads of public bodies like health regions. The federal government and other provinces have already implemented these kinds of changes to improve legislative oversight. My question is to the chair of the Public Accounts Committee. Can the chair outline the difficulties the current restriction on committee meetings poses for the effective oversight of public finances in this province?

### Speaker's Ruling

#### Questions about a Legislative Committee

**The Speaker:** We have a tradition and methodology for dealing with such questions, and the chair has allowed questions to the chairman of select standing committees dealing with agenda items. That's about it. All other matters should be dealt with in the committee. Failing that, various House leaders might want to come together and review the Standing Orders.

So second question, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

2:20

**Mr. Martin:** Point of order.

**The Speaker:** Absolutely. I surely expected that.

### Public Accounts Committee

(continued)

**Mr. Eggen:** I'll ask my second question, directed to the Government

House Leader then, please, Mr. Speaker. Given the interest in the government caucus for improvements in the oversight function of the Public Accounts Committee, does the government support making such changes, and if so, when and how?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government House Leader is accountable to the Premier and the government caucus, not to the Legislature. I am accountable to the Legislature in my capacity as Minister of Advanced Education and would be pleased to answer any questions from the hon. member with respect to accountability for public policy in Advanced Education.

**Mr. Eggen:** To the Government House Leader: would you be interested in supporting, if the opportunity arose, increasing and diversifying the powers of the Public Accounts Committee to help for a financial oversight here in this Assembly?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, what I am personally interested in is of absolutely no relevance to the House. I'm here in my capacity as the minister responsible and accountable for public policy of Advanced Education, and it would be inappropriate and improper for me to answer a question with respect to my personal interests.

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

#### English as a Second Language Programs

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently our government announced a long-term and short-term strategy regarding human resource development for Alberta. We encourage people to come from all over Canada and the world, and according to Statistics Canada 17 per cent of our population indicate that English is not their mother tongue. This number is growing to 25 per cent in the next 10 years. The ability of the English language is very important to our economic development and our social harmony. So my question to the Minister of Education: given that our hard-working minister has spent time with 62 school boards across the province, can you tell us what you are going to do to address the ESL issues?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue and a great question because ESL needs are growing in many parts of our province. It's true that we are actively recruiting more immigrants to our province to help fill skilled labour shortages, and others are coming here because of the tremendous economic climate and so on and so on. Of course, many of those children do present with language needs, specifically English as a second language. So as part of my meetings with all 62 school boards over the last few weeks we did talk about the renewed funding framework, and the member will be happy to know that I recently appointed a ministerial advisory committee to study the renewed funding framework and the ESL pieces within that. So it will get a very thorough review, and I expect to have those results I hope by the end of February.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the same minister. Given that the Coalition for Equal Access to Education did a comprehensive study and made a specific recommendation on ESL to the government last August, can the minister tell us how he plans to respond to this specific report?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, that was indeed a very passionate presentation by that coalition group on a very important issue to them and to us and I'm sure to all Albertans. As I've just indicated, there will be this review done of the renewed funding framework, but I should also let the member know that there is a review going on as well of the entire K to 12 system with respect to what it might take to help give students that extra hand up, that extra boost if you will. One issue that surfaced is the issue of the cap. At the moment five years of ESL education is being provided, and I think they were advocating for it to be increased to seven, so we will look at that. I should also just conclude by saying that there was an adult review group who did some similar work, and we're looking at those items as well.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given, as an example, that the Calgary board of education indicates a huge increase in ESL students, from 3,870 in 1995 to 15,493 in 2005, and the parents of these students are working very hard for our economy, what is the minister doing to help in such a situation of increase?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I am very sharply aware of Calgary's need in this area and Fort McMurray's and a few other places that are really bustling with more immigrant workers and so on. In particular, with the Calgary situation, as I recall, their budget would have increased by about 75 per cent over the last year or so. In fact, ESL program funding throughout the province over the last couple of years has increased by about 68 per cent. I will acknowledge that there is some additional work to be done there, and that's why I called for the review.

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

#### Mental Illness and the Criminal Justice System

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The criminal justice system in Alberta is becoming a warehouse for mentally ill people. Prisons and the police are not equipped to deal with people suffering from mental illness. Failure to address this problem can have tragic results. My questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Given that the fatality inquiry into the death of an RCMP corporal and mentally ill gunman in Spruce Grove has clearly indicated that police feel powerless when dealing with the mentally ill, will the minister immediately implement special training for all police officers to effectively and safely deal with the mentally ill?

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

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a very good question. During recruit training in both Calgary and Edmonton and I believe the RCMP as well they have a number of individuals that come from the community. Some of them come with disabilities to speak to the officers regarding their culture. Some come from the gay and lesbian community. Some come from the seniors' community. As well, we have individuals that do come with a mental health illness or issue. So our officers are trained. They are aware of it.

This member states that additional training should be required. Mr. Speaker, our police officers throughout this province receive continual training in a number of different areas, and from the fatality inquiry obviously this one will be placed on the agenda as well.



**Dr. B. Miller:** To the same minister: given the fact that at least 12 per cent of inmates across Canada are seriously mentally ill, what steps is the minister taking to implement treatment programs in our prisons?

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

**Mr. Cernaiko:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We strongly support initiatives within our correction centres that provide for programs for individuals with mental health illnesses. The issue is that one of the reasons why they may be in the justice system is the fact that they may have a mental illness. We have programs throughout the province through the Alberta Mental Health Board, which received funding this year to assist in the diversion services, but these are also addressed when they are going through the court system. The Crown prosecutors are very well aware of what some of these issues are. So, yes, we have facilities that we have to place offenders in within the correction system, but we do provide programs for them because of the fact that they do have mental illness issues.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. It's been reported over and over again that funding is the main obstacle to viable treatment programs for the mentally ill. Can the minister tell us when this government will provide the necessary support to treat the mentally ill in the prison system? The safety of the public and the police is at stake.

**Mr. Cernaiko:** Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to clarify. The average length of stay in our corrections facilities in Alberta is 33 days and 13 days in our remand centres. During that period of time, when they do come in and they are incarcerated in a corrections facility, we assess them through the caseworkers that we have, psychologists that are employed by us, nurses that are employed by us, and we look at the program that they may need. If they do have a mental health illness, obviously they're going to be placed in various programs so that we can try to assist them in that short period of time that they are with us.

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

### 2:30 Red Deer River Water Transfer

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Red Deer are very concerned about a project that proposes taking water from the Red Deer River and diverting it south to the special areas. They are concerned about the transfer of raw water from one river basin to another. They are concerned about a report that says that the project is neither an efficient nor effective use of this resource. My questions are for the Minister of Environment. What is the minister doing to ensure that there is enough water available for this project in good times and in bad and that the soil that is to be irrigated will be productive?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, it's such an important issue any time that this Legislature by law under the Water Act considers transferring from one basin to another, as the hon. member has mentioned. Presently the top priority of this ministry is to, number one, ensure that water is provided to the existing, those with licences and users, and second of all to protect the environment but also to meet our

provincial commitments in the water licences that we have already issued.

In fact, at this particular point in time I want to say that we have an approach, what is called first in time, first in right. To the city of Red Deer and its residents, I want you to know, Mr. Speaker and members of the Assembly, that the current licences would also have a higher priority than any proposed new project that would come forward. So it's very important that this transfer would end up in this Assembly if, in fact, determined.

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

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you. To the same minister: I understand that this project has received support from the communities it will serve, but what kind of consultation was done outside those special areas?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely correct in the fact that this project is well supported in the special areas. In fact, they have held 11 open houses, which impacted over 700 Albertans. I also want to say that citizens from the Red Deer area were part of that consultation. But before this project proceeds, I want to confirm a complete, concise consultation. It will be thorough, it will be complete, and everyone that has an interest will be consulted. Just to give you, finally, an example, presently the Special Areas Board is consulting with our First Nations. Of course, their views are equally important on this issue as well.

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

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you. Again to the Minister of Environment: given that this project will cost hundreds of millions of dollars but only benefit hundreds of people, will this minister present a cost-benefit analysis of the project before it proceeds?

**Mr. Boutilier:** I think, Mr. Speaker, that the suggestion of a cost-benefit analysis is very important. Part of the rural development strategy, as you know, in this area – it's a very dry area. Before any dollars or any type of situation of transferring water from one basin to another is determined, a complete, concise consultation will take place. But I can assure you that if any decision is brought back to this Assembly, clearly a cost-benefit analysis would demonstrate that there is definitely a need and a purpose for it in benefiting Albertans, who require this blue gold resource that we call water.

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

Hon. members, one year ago today, on November 22, 2005, an event occurred in the province of Alberta which saw a member return to this Assembly. We want to congratulate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on his second, I guess, return to this Assembly and to congratulate as well 27 other members who were elected to this Assembly for the first time.

To the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, the Member for Edmonton-Manning, the Member for Edmonton-Decore, the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, the Member for Calgary-Varsity, the Member for Edmonton-Calder, the Member for Edmonton-McClung, the Member for St. Albert, the Member for Highwood, the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, the Member for Calgary-Hays, the Member for Calgary-West, the Member for Stony Plain, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, the

Member for Peace River, the Member for Lethbridge-East, the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the Member for Calgary-Currie, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the Member for Calgary-Foothills, it is now your first anniversary. All excuses now end.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

#### International Students

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whenever the subject of international students is mentioned, most likely we think of college and university studies. Today I rise to speak about international students in our Alberta's school system. I want to use the international student program of the Calgary board of education as a typical example. The Calgary board of education offers to international students from all over the world the Alberta world-class education system, that includes ESL, high school credit courses, academic preparation for university, college, and technical institutions, with their highly trained and experienced staff.

The CBE founded its International Bureau on the belief that international students are appreciated as assets academically, culturally, and financially to CBE students, staff, and the Calgary community. CBE staff and students benefit from the cultural, intellectual, and economic resources international students bring. Currently over a hundred international students study in CBE elementary and secondary schools. Nearly 130 international students who are 18 years and older study at Chinook College, and teachers from Japan, Mexico, Korea, Taiwan have participated in professional development offered by the CBE.

Mr. Speaker, the story of international study can be found in other school systems across our province. International students in our school system help to pay for the cost and more and help to make the space utilization more efficient in some schools, but most importantly they are the future of their countries. They are Alberta's long-term investment for our valuable international relationship in the global network. The Alberta government needs to capitalize on and develop further and faster this international student opportunity as many other jurisdictions are already ahead of us.

Thank you.

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

#### Edwin Parr Education Awards

**Mrs. Ady:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year the government of Alberta will invest \$4.7 billion in support of kindergarten to grade 12 education. It's a huge investment that returns huge dividends. Alberta's kindergarten to grade 12 education system is among the best in the world, and our students are head of the class in national and international tests. Our centrally developed curriculum is acclaimed around the world, and we have outstanding teachers, teachers who help our children and youth to grow as individuals and to acquire the skills and capabilities that they need to make informed choices and become good citizens.

In short, teachers are integral to the excellence in education, and each year the Alberta School Boards Association recognizes six exceptional first-year teachers with the Edwin Parr awards. The award recipients demonstrate excellence in using instructional strategies to reach students who have different needs. Last week the

Edwin Parr recipients were Shane Clark of Roland Michener secondary school in Slave Lake, Kristy Purcell of Father J.A. Turcotte school in Fort McMurray, Fred Wilkes of Parkdale school in Edmonton, Erin Bodnar of St. Francis Assisi middle school in Red Deer, Stephen Kotkas of Tom Baines junior high school in Calgary, and Brandon Fletcher from Lethbridge Collegiate Institute.

Mr. Speaker, let us all thank and congratulate these outstanding new teachers.

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

#### Centennial Events in Airdrie

**Ms Haley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to address the House briefly about the centennial. I have always loved my province. It was ingrained into me by my father. He was the guy who would stop his truck on the border of Alberta and get out and kiss the ground whenever he would return from B.C. or Saskatchewan. He taught me that if you work hard and you look after this province, this province will look after you. He would have been very proud of Alberta this year as we reached our 100th birthday.

A highlight this year was the visit from the Queen. I had a chance to invite my mom to have lunch in the presence of the Queen. It was just a great day for both of us. Amidst the lineup of parades and functions throughout my constituency organized to celebrate the centennial, there were three that stood out the most.

First was being able to present Eva Wagner with a gold medal for her 100th birthday. Truly an amazing lady, still talking about getting married if she can just find the right man. I liked her immediately.

2:40

Another memorable event was the celebration at the Jones Hereford ranch. Their family received the centennial family farm award, a family like many others that have been here since we became a province and have had a huge impact on the economic diversity of Alberta.

The best night of all, Mr. Speaker, was just a few weeks ago, when we had our centennial medal presentation. All of the recipients were nominated by various community organizations in my constituency. Everyone who received an award that night has made a mark on Alberta and mostly because they volunteered for everything from the local 4-H to local community committees to make their province a better place to live. It was an incredible honour to be able to meet with and present medals to this group of outstanding individuals. We had a high tea at the legion in Airdrie, and as part of our evening Staff Sergeant Garth Patterson was there to present medals with me.

The medal nominees that night reflect only a small portion of the worthy Albertans who should have received a centennial medal, Mr. Speaker. There are just so many of them. We have a province built by great entrepreneurs who also understand the importance of giving back to the community and getting involved.

Mr. Speaker, it truly will be a year that I will remember forever. I am very proud to be an Albertan.

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

#### Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll make my comments in the spirit of our esteemed colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere. During this centennial year in this House, in Calgary-

Lougheed, and across this province as chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission I've learned a great deal about what makes this province so great. Later today as an example of this I'll be tabling the AADAC annual report. Right now for the information of our members and their constituents I'll list just a few of AADAC's good works in the recent past with a very quick glimpse to the future.

Last month AADAC partnered with the Lung Association and the Canadian Cancer Society to launch a new online smoking cessation site, [albertaquits.ca](http://albertaquits.ca), and a thousand Albertans have registered since its launch as they access support in their attempts to quit smoking.

Last week AADAC launched the Alberta drug strategy. It's a five-year plan that sets a vision and an action framework for a co-ordinated, collaborative approach to prevent and treat the harms caused by alcohol and other drug abuse. At the same time, AADAC opened new residential addiction treatment programs in Edmonton and Calgary that fit within the framework of the Alberta drug strategy. These programs include 24 beds which serve youth aged 12 to 17.

In addition to services such as these provided by AADAC, government has developed a co-ordinated response to methamphetamine that reflects provincial priorities for health renewal, and the co-ordinated response includes TV commercials targeted at youth and parents, strong support for local drug coalitions, educational materials, and curriculum-aligned school resources.

Yesterday we kicked off National Addictions Awareness Week, the goal of which is to provide information and promote activities that generate awareness of substance abuse and gambling problems and solutions.

Mr. Speaker, as we look forward, it's worthy of note that on Canada Day 2006 Bill 202 will become law. This bill will give provincial authorities and parents the power to place children under the age of 18 into drug detox and assessment programs.

Thank you to all members for your assistance with AADAC and its initiatives.

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

### Vocational Education

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to address vocational education in Alberta's future. As Alberta's economy charges forward in the next hundred years, I pause to reflect on the important role an education system should be playing in preparing future workers. I'm particularly concerned about preparation for careers in the skilled trades. I don't believe we are taking the right steps now to ensure that high school students can assess the rewards of a vocational career.

Our future depends on the contribution of skilled workers, a process that begins in the publicly funded school system. I spent a career in education. I've spoken to many Albertans in my role as the Education critic. I've come to the conclusion that a number of changes are necessary. Vocational education must be seen as equal and not the lesser cousin of academic learning. The current system is focused on students who continue to go to university, but the reality is that only about a third of high school students choose that route and fewer than that graduate.

As I talk to teachers, school boards, parents, and schoolchildren, I hear similar stories everywhere I go. The schools need greater funding for vocational teaching facilities. There need to be more teachers trained in teaching vocational skills.

Lastly, there is a vital shortage of career counsellors in junior high

schools. Grade 9 is vital. Students should be meeting with their counsellor two or three times in this crucial year to discuss their options for the future. The registered apprenticeship program is a start, but it needs to be critically evaluated, it needs to be better funded, and it needs to improve its completion rates. There are rumblings of change, but we need leadership from this government. That is why I rise today, to urge this government into action in the support of vocational education.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Resource Revenues

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is currently touring Canada trying to show that Alberta's good fortune is Canada's good fortune. No one doubts that, but there's so much more we could be doing if we had a real vision of our province's place in Canada and the world.

The resource revenue we're now receiving, not to mention all the forgone revenue we should be receiving through fair royalty rates, is merely a down payment on our future. These are windfall, one-time returns on a rapidly depleting capital asset. That's how we should think of it when we invest it. The Alberta NDP's vision for Alberta is that it must become the leader in Canada for renewable energy. In this way we can make sure that this province retains its economic and social advantages long after the oil and gas are gone.

The NDP's plan for a greener, more diversified provincial economy is built on a foundation of fair royalties for oil and gas. Our current royalty regime was established for \$10-a-barrel oil. It's six times that now, and Albertans need to receive a fair return on their resources.

The NDP believes that the resulting additional resource revenues must be invested in a public enterprise that would help transition this province into a world leader in energy efficiency and clean, renewable energy. We should establish partnerships with municipalities, other provinces, the federal government, and the private sector to explore new ways to diversify our economy.

Alberta must invest in an energy strategy that will benefit the entire country while retaining full ownership of its resources and the economic benefits that flow from them. An investment in renewable energy will be a way to use Alberta's energy wealth to benefit the entire country. We can again be leaders and nation builders with a visionary approach to building a renewable energy strategy for the country. Such an opportunity comes but once in a generation. We can leave our children and grandchildren with the same advantages we enjoy today if only we act. Let's seize the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

### Vignettes from Alberta's History

**The Speaker:** By way of an historical vignette for the day hon. members might appreciate that a special session of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta wrapped up on this day in 1938. That session was called primarily to deal with legislation regarding oil and gas conservation in the province. The sitting lasted from November 15 to November 22, and eight bills were passed, the most important of which was Bill 1, an Act for the Conservation of the Oil and Gas Resources of the Province of Alberta, which gave the Oil and Gas Conservation Board the power to enforce its regulations. That was in 1938, and that came about after an almost 10-year debate in the province of Alberta, from 1928 to 1938, about oil and gas conservation.

head: **Presenting Reports by  
Standing and Special Committees**

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

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on Private Bills has had a certain bill under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that the following private bill proceed with amendment: Bill Pr. 4, Brooklynn Hannah George Rewega Right of Civil Action Act. As part of this report I will be tabling five copies of the proposed amendment to Bill Pr. 4.

Mr. Speaker, I request the concurrence of the Assembly in this recommendation.

**The Speaker:** Will those members in the Assembly who concur in the report please say aye?

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**The Speaker:** Opposed, please say no. The report is carried.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table a petition signed by 20 constituents requesting an immediate increase to AISH rates "based on the feedback received during the Government's low-income review."

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to present a petition from 106 Alberta tradesmen and women from the communities of Airdrie, Alix, Caroline, Bonnyville, Lethbridge, Fort Saskatchewan, Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, and others, 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.

Thank you.

2:50

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition with 509 signatures on it. This petition is calling for "a moratorium on any future expansion of Confined Feeding Operations, with a view to phasing out existing operations within the next three years."

Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Finance I'm pleased to table today the response to Written Question 36.

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

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission it is my pleasure to introduce these five copies of AADAC's 2004-2005 annual report summarizing AADAC's leadership in delivering services that assist Albertans in achieving freedom from the harmful effects of alcohol, other drugs, and gambling.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one is a letter dated November 15, 2005, that I received at our constituency office in Edmonton-Gold Bar, and it is from Kane Veterinary Supplies Ltd., which is a business that is writing in regard to the proposed amendment to the Veterinary Profession Act. Thank you.

My second tabling is information that I received through access to information from the Department of Energy. This is a series of e-mails going back to November of 2001. They are from Robert.Hemstock@ENRON.com, and they're addressed to Ricardo Shillingford, <Ricardo.Shillingford@gov.ab.ca>@ENRON. This is a dedicated government address to Enron, and it outlines close links between Enron and our provincial government.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter tabling from constituent Janice Radloff. She's concerned about family law. She has suggested some very valuable points. She believes that these laws are sexist against fathers' rights, that no one parent should have all the rights and others have none, that this is discrimination against men. She is urging the government to have a full discussion on family law.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings today, which I'd like to table on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. The first is a letter from Alice Williamson, who is very concerned that the government's so-called third way on health care will increase costs, particularly for seniors.

The second document is a letter sent to all MLAs from Reverend Lynn Maki on behalf of the Alberta and Northwest Conference of the United Church of Canada. The church recently passed a motion urging the government of Alberta to recognize the social determinants of health and to do a better job of supporting people living on low incomes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, pursuant to section 28(1) of the Ombudsman Act I am pleased to table with the Assembly the 38th annual report of the office of the Ombudsman for the period April 1, 2004, to March 31, 2005.

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. Mrs. McClellan, Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Conflicts of Interest Act and the Legislative Assembly Act the report of selected payments to Members and former Members of the Legislative

Assembly and persons directly associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly for the year ended March 31, 2005. Also on behalf of hon. Mrs. McClellan a report entitled General Revenue Fund: Details of Grants, Supplies and Services, Capital Assets and Other, by Payee for the Year Ended March 31, 2005.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Human Resources and Employment, the Alberta Dental Association and College 2004 radiation health and safety program annual report January 1, 2004, to December 31, 2004, with attached Alberta Dental Association and College radiation administration program financial statements; the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association radiation protection program 2004 annual report; the College of Chiropractors of Alberta radiation health administrative organization annual report for the year ended June 30, 2005, with attached College of Chiropractors of Alberta financial statements dated June 30, 2005; the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta radiation health administrative organization annual report for the period April 1, 2004, to March 31, 2005; the University of Alberta authorized radiation health administrative organization annual report 2004-2005; the University of Calgary radiation health administration organization annual report for the period April 1, 2004, to March 31, 2005, with attached University of Calgary authorized radiation health administration organization financial statements for the years ended March 31, 2004, and March 31, 2005.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, pursuant to the Agriculture Financial Services Act the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation annual report 2004-2005; pursuant to the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council annual report 2002-2003; pursuant to the Brand Act, the Livestock Identification and Brand Inspection Act, the Livestock and Livestock Products Acts, and the Stray Animals Act the Livestock Identification Services Ltd. manager's report April 1, 2004, to March 31, 2005, with attached Livestock Identification Services Ltd. financial statements for the year ended March 31, 2005.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Melchin, Minister of Energy, return to order of the Assembly MR 8, asked for by Mr. Eggen on April 11, 2005.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on a purported point of order.

#### Point of Order

#### Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 13(2) I'm curious. As the Speaker has pointed out, I've not been in the House for some time, so I'm probably missing something, but Standing Order 13(2) is just an explanation. I'm really trying to get clarity about question period and who we can direct questions to because I'm thinking of *Beauchesne* 405 and *Erskine May* 345, the 23rd edition.

I think the Speaker would recognize that when I was here up to '93, these questions did go to the chair of Public Accounts at least a couple of times. I've found out – I'd forgotten – that I'd actually directed one to the chairman of Public Accounts on March 26, 1991, to the chairman, who was Mr. Pashak at the time. Obviously, there have been some changes, so I'm trying to get some clarity in terms of the ruling. Can we clarify who can accept questions, then, in the House?

**The Speaker:** Well, hon. member, nothing has changed, so it may be something else.

If the hon. member wants to quote *Beauchesne*, he can look at

section 411(3). It basically says that a question may not “seek information about proceedings in a committee which has not yet made its report to the House.” That perhaps is one. But, more importantly, I think that the hon. member would like to go to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 429, Questions Concerning Matters before Committees.

Questions seeking information about the schedule and agenda of committees may be directed to chairs of committees. Questions to the Ministry or a committee chair concerning the proceedings or work of a committee may not be raised. Thus, for example, a question would be disallowed if it dealt with a vote in committee, with the attendance of Members at a committee meeting, or with the content of a committee report.

So nothing has changed with respect to that. I did make a ruling in this Assembly on May 1, 1997, with respect to the form and the relationship with respect to committees.

Now, out of interest today was a good example of a report coming from a committee chairman. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill presented a report to the Assembly coming out of the Standing Committee on Private Bills. That report is debatable, could have been debated. So the question was, as the member moved, that there be concurrence in the report. No debate, but the question was called, and the question was passed.

3:00

Presumably when and if the chair of the Public Accounts Committee were to bring a report of that particular committee to the Assembly and the chair would be reflective of the operation of the committee, then there would have to be concurrence asked of that. There would be a debate. But other than agenda and scheduling, no. That applies to all committee chairmen, by the way.

#### Speaker's Ruling Bills Containing Similar Provisions

**The Speaker:** I do need to just update the Assembly with respect to two bills. One, Bill 47, the Alberta Association of Former MLAs Act, is now at the Committee of the Whole stage, having passed second reading in the afternoon of November 15, 2005. Members will note that the bill is virtually identical to Bill 207, which has the same title, which has yet to come up for second reading. The authorities are clear that no two bills that are virtually the same can proceed after the House has made a decision on one. The House has already made a decision with respect to second reading of Bill 47, so Bill 207 will not be proceeded with and will come off the Order Paper.

head: **Orders of the Day  
Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

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

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

#### Advanced Education

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Might I start by saying what a wonderful team of people I have the opportunity to work with in the Department of Advanced Education. We are joined by some of them in the gallery today, and I'd just like to briefly introduce them: the deputy minister, Bill Byrne; the assistant deputy minister,

Phil Gougeon; Marg Leathem; Gerry Waisman, who's in charge of the student assistance area; Blake Bartlett; Solomon Quarshie. Rai Batra and Michael Shields were going to be there; I don't see them, but that might just be my eyesight. I'd ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House because they do a fantastic job on behalf of Alberta students.

Mr. Chairman, on April 19 we presented Advanced Education's supply estimates for the year. On that day I presented a new vision for our postsecondary system and the actions that we have taken as a province to achieve new vision. That day we received support to move forward with our vision, mission, goals, and strategies, and I believe we've achieved a significant degree of progress during this fiscal year.

There's still more that can be done always, and as the opportunities present themselves, we listen to partners. We consult with stakeholders. We've consulted with Albertans, and when opportunities come up, we take action. As a result of opportunities having come up, we have now before the House supplementary supply in the total amount of \$99 million, I believe. That \$99 million is made up of a number of component parts; \$8.1 million of that is a grant to Grant MacEwan College.

As a government we've made a commitment to increase access to postsecondary education for Albertans. The commitment is expected to add 15,000 new postsecondary spaces by 2007-08, 60,000 spaces by 2020. We've been encouraging and working closely with institutions to implement changes that will increase opportunities for students.

One of the significant outcomes of these efforts was Grant MacEwan's application for and receipt of degree-granting status starting 2006-2007. We made a commitment to support institutions with initiatives that will increase accessibility. To that end, we have provided Grant MacEwan with a one-time grant of \$8.1 million, which covers the start-up costs for two degree programs. That \$8.1 million is used for curriculum development, for the hiring of additional staff members, and will go towards facilities; for example, library upgrades and facility upgrades which were required in the review of the program.

As members will know, any new program has to go through the Alberta quality council, and the Alberta quality council will indicate if there are areas that they think need to be upgraded. In this case there were, and we were pleased to provide support for that.

Fifteen million dollars for the University of Calgary. We indicated in the spring of this year – in fact, the Legislature passed in Bill 1 the provision to set up the access to the future fund and to endow it with \$3 billion, and then in subsequent years \$135 million would be available in each year when it's fully funded to support or encourage individuals to contribute and the community to contribute to postsecondary education for quality, accessibility, and affordability.

Well, almost immediately upon tabling the bill, I had a phone call from the University of Calgary's president indicating that a donor had come forward who wanted to make a pledge of \$25 million to the University of Calgary engineering school to set up some very significant scholarships and to fund a chair and to fund some programs at the University of Calgary's Faculty of Engineering, which would be of significant benefit to engineering students. In order to assist the University of Calgary in achieving that donation, we agreed to move forward with a \$15 million matching contribution, actually a \$25 million matching contribution, but the \$15 million matches the money that's already received. Mr. Schulich's additional \$10 million will come later and will be eligible for matching later.

Although the access to the future fund was not fully funded as yet

and we didn't have the resources in place out of that fund to do this, we felt that it was a significant gift that ought not to be passed up. So we made the commitment to assist them in being able to deal with that.

Those two initiatives represent the first two items on our supplementary estimate list. The government contributions totalling \$23.1 million will not increase total government spending, Mr. Chairman. These initiatives are funded through a reallocation of \$4.6 million in voted spending as well as a reallocation of \$18.5 million in uncommitted funds from our statutory budgets into voted spending. So we need the supplementary estimate to be voted on to allow that reallocation although it does not increase government spending.

The additional \$80.5 million is for postsecondary facility infrastructure, and I'm sure the House would agree that when the opportunity is there to move ahead with the plans that we have in place for postsecondary infrastructure – and we have 21 public postsecondary institutions, all of whom are putting together their plans, know what their direction is or are looking at their direction for the future and what their infrastructure needs are going to be, and also, of course, have a number of areas in which they need to do some remediation or there needs to be some maintenance done. So we're very pleased that we could move ahead with \$80.5 million in that area.

The original budget for the 2005-2006 projects has remained in Infrastructure, where it was voted, but funding for new projects will reside with Advanced Education. Since April 1 \$185.8 million has been approved for new high-priority capital projects at postsecondary institutions, which is part of our plan to invest the surplus. Now, that money, Mr. Chairman, of course goes into the capital fund. But what we're asking for is for the Legislature today in supply to give approval for 80.5 million of those dollars to be voted for expenditure in this year to increase access to postsecondary education, increase research capacity, strengthen capacity in rural locations, respond to situations where infrastructure conditions and functionality affect program quality or program delivery, and contribute to the success of Campus Alberta initiatives, cross-ministry initiatives, community partnerships, et cetera.

I won't go through the myriad of programs that that involves, but I will indicate to the House that that involves \$15 million to assist the University of Alberta to purchase and renovate the Bay building, which is a partnership that they've created with the city of Edmonton and Edmonton Economic Development and will help them to relocate the learning transition facility that they have on the university campus; \$10 million of the commitment that was announced to Olds community learning campus; \$10 million which was announced to the University of Calgary and which assists them with this year's portion of the work towards the new space for the faculty of veterinary medicine and some other remedial work that they're doing and some planning work that they're doing relative to four major projects that they've talked about publicly; \$4 million to the University of Lethbridge for the Water and Environmental Science Building – the total approved funding for that building is \$12 million but \$4 million in spending this year – and additional projects right across the province, projects which will enhance the capacity and ability of the postsecondary learning institutions to make space available for students and faculty and advanced learning in the province.

I'd be happy to answer any questions or to deal with any of the subjects that have come up.

3:10

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased and intrigued to rise today to discuss supplementary estimates for the Department of Advanced Education. We have much else to do today, so I will attempt to be brief because we have a lot of ground to cover. We've already been informed that there is no opportunity to extend debate on supplementary estimates whatsoever, leaving at least a couple of departments already in some jeopardy of being discussed. We are talking about an awful lot of money here. We're talking just \$99 million for this department alone, the Ministry of Advanced Education, which at my allotted time if I take it all – and I promise I won't – works out to about a debate of \$5 million a minute. So let's get down to business here. I have essentially five questions for the minister.

Regarding the \$8.1 million in one-time funding to support implementation of the new Grant MacEwan College baccalaureate degree programs, many universities across Canada have clearly stated that they will not automatically accept a MacEwan degree as equivalent to a university degree for the purposes of postgraduate study. Would the minister explain how this money, this \$8.1 million, will ensure that MacEwan attains national recognition as a degree-granting institution so that MacEwan grads can enjoy the same access as graduates from the U of A, the U of L, the U of C, or Athabasca to a master's program at the institution of their choice anywhere in this nation? If this money won't, will he explain how he intends to achieve that? A baccalaureate degree, after all, is only worth having if it's the equal of the comparable degree from any other university.

Regarding the \$15 million to match the Schulich donation to the University of Calgary, would the minister confirm that this is off-budget spending from the unanticipated surplus versus dollars from the access to the future fund, one of whose purposes, of course, is to match private donations? When will the minister put the advisory council and other regulations into place regarding the access to the future fund that will transform this fund, absent those regulations, absent the existence of that council right now, from something that could be seen as being akin to the minister's personal piggy bank into an accountable decision-making body with clear rules and regulations?

Question 3. Regarding the \$80.5 million for additional postsecondary facilities infrastructure, would the minister please show the House specifically how this spending links to improving access to postsecondary education in Alberta? I'm looking for some hard numbers of spaces, of students, of FLEs here. Given that the current budget projected access growth or expanded system capacity of just over a thousand spaces, do these dollars merely contribute to that projection, or do they actually increase the projection, and if so, by how many spaces?

Still on access, the Campus Calgary group of institutions indicate that they need an additional 19,700 spaces in Calgary alone within five years, by the year 2010, in order to meet demand and support that city's growth. The government's commitment to Calgary in terms of FLEs as of September of this year is 390 spaces. Is it just me, or are those two figures just a little out of whack?

Finally, does the minister support the University of Calgary having to borrow \$113 million in order to move ahead on its library expansion, which is one of the U of C's access initiatives, in a timely fashion? If debt is bad for the government of Alberta, how can debt be good for a publicly funded institution of higher learning?

Those are my questions, Mr. Chair. I look forward to the answers. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Very quickly, on the \$8.1 million for Grant MacEwan and degrees not automatically being accepted, to the best of my knowledge graduate programs don't automatically accept anyone. They look at the credentials to determine whether the credentials are appropriate and whether they're acceptable for the program. The understanding that I have – and I've delved into this quite significantly – is that the rigour of the program that Grant MacEwan will be offering is one which will stand up to scrutiny among universities and colleges across this country for going to the next level if somebody is applying for a master's program. The Alberta quality council is set up as an accreditation process, I think I could say the most rigorous in the country, the only accreditation process of such rigour in the country although there are others in two other provinces that are set up similarly, and other provinces across the country also have ways of doing accreditation. One of the things that Alberta is leading is a process for national accreditation standards, which are extremely important.

Now, some would suggest that membership in AUCC is an accreditation process, but it's actually not. It's membership in AUCC, which is an important thing for those that want to join it, but it's not the be-all and end-all of accreditation. So it's important for Alberta institutions for recognition nationally and internationally and for Canadian institutions for recognition internationally to have an appropriate national accreditation standard. Alberta is leading the way in helping to prepare that, and the Alberta quality council, if I may say so, is at the leading edge of accreditation both in terms of its quality and process. So I'm very confident that graduates of Grant MacEwan's new programs will be seen to be of a quality in nature that any university in this country will want to have their best and brightest.

With respect to the Schulich gift to the University of Calgary, as I indicated in my opening remarks, the revenue is not yet coming out of the access to the future fund, so that \$15 million is being proposed to be matched out of monies that are available by reallocation from within the department's existing funds. It's not the way I'd choose to do it necessarily, but that was a gift which did make and will make a very, very significant difference and was one that we couldn't allow to be passed up. The University of Calgary was very keen on making that arrangement. That's exactly what the access to the future fund was set up to do, so we felt that it was appropriate to move forward with that particular process.

In terms of the \$80.5 million, all of those postsecondary infrastructure dollars are intended to improve access quality for students in this province. Some of them are being used with respect to maintenance projects, which are necessary to keep existing facilities serviceable or to improve them; for example, \$3 million to the Grande Prairie college to replace some portable trailers that they have that they've been using for a significant period of time which are no longer really habitable and ought to be replaced. I can't say that all of those dollars are going to add space, but a significant amount of those dollars are going to add space, and certainly all of those dollars are going to make sure that we have quality spaces available for students to learn in and for professors and teachers to teach in. That's a very important part of making sure that access is there for students.

With respect to Campus Calgary I think the hon. member asked: is he the only one who thinks there's a problem with the numbers? I think he probably is. So going on to the fifth question . . . no. I think what he intended to ask was about how we're going to get to the number of spaces we need for Calgary students to access opportunities for education. We're working very closely with Calgary institutions and all the institutions in the province to make

sure that there is a place for every Albertan who wants to advance their education. We've set some ambitious targets; we're working very quickly towards those targets.

I think the number that the member referenced in terms of the number of additional spaces being 390 is very significantly lowballing the number of additional spaces made available to students. I think he's probably referencing the recent access growth fund announcement which, of course, talks about some specific additional spaces being paid for. He should be aware – I hope he's aware – that there's been a 30 per cent increase proposed in this year's budget and the next two years in the business plan. That money, the increase of 6 per cent to the base grants plus additional grants that bring it up to about 10 per cent on average, is money which institutions are using to expand access for students in programs.

3:20

There's a significant increase in capacity into the system, not the least of which, I might say, are probably close to 4,000 and perhaps as high as 4,500 new apprenticeship spaces, new apprentices recruited into the system, many of which, I am certain, will be studying in Calgary. So lots of additional spaces in the system, lots more work to do in that area. I would certainly appreciate any support that the hon. member and his colleagues in caucus will give in terms of ensuring the additional resources. When we bring Budget 2006 to the floor, I'm sure he'll support additional resources going into accessing more spaces in that area.

We're working very closely with the institutions, as I said, to make sure that the capacity is there. There is right across the system some capacity already in terms of the physical space, and we have to make sure that we make best utilization of that. We're moving ahead with the colleges and universities, leading a design of a single point of entry, for example, so that we can make best use of space.

I think there was a second question with respect to the Schulich donation, a second question with respect to when the rules and regulations might come in with respect to the fund. I can tell the hon. member that we had an interim committee review the issue of how we can best allocate resources and deal with it. They've reported. We've now sent that report out to stakeholders for comment, or it's in the process of going out. It probably hasn't left my office yet, but it will be going out in the next day. I'm anticipating comments back from institutions and other stakeholders and interested parties with respect to that report. When we get those comments back, we will be then bringing forward a form and structure for the application of funds.

There's a basic rule with respect to application of funds which should assuage any concerns the hon. member has. In fact, I think he referenced it as the minister's personal piggy bank, which is really quite an offensive way to talk about public money. I can assure you that I would never treat public money in that way, and no member of this government would consider that. It's very clear that the access to the future fund is there to encourage both the contributions from the community, commitment from the community, stepping up of the community to improve access, quality, or affordability in our public education system and to provide for resources for ingenuity or, as the committee's report calls it, a renaissance, a way of developing projects which would transfer knowledge or develop knowledge.

Those two aspects of the fund, I think, are very clear. It's very clear that any public comment that's been made by this minister about the fund to date about potential projects are all areas where people have stepped forward, making a commitment to a public institution in a manner which the institution has confirmed will be utilized for access, quality, or affordability. Those are the basic

rules and guidelines. Of course, the only payout in the context of the fund so far is the \$15 million that we're proposing here for the Schulich monies.

The last question was with respect to the \$113 million for the University of Calgary's digital library project, an excellent project which I hope will be going ahead very quickly. It will in fact free up other space around the campus for expansion of academic space and other necessary space for the University of Calgary to add access in that area. So that's a project which is a very important project.

We do need to look at how we build postsecondary facilities across the province, and when I say we, I mean the system, not just government. If you take a look out over five years and perhaps as long as 10 years, there's a need of \$1.5 billion to \$3 billion worth of facilities that either have been proposed or are being part of a conceptual plan or are under what I would say might be expected after institutions have studied their go-forward process. Obviously, not all of that is going to be funded in any one year, nor can we commit to funding it. We've moved aggressively and, I think, appropriately on the highest priority areas.

I welcome the opportunity and have taken the opportunity to sit down with institutions to talk about how they might plan their 10-year strategic horizon for providing space, making space available to students, improving quality, making academic space available so they can attract the best and brightest professors and teachers to the province. Certainly, we'll work with them in any appropriate format to see how we can put space in place as quickly as is appropriate to move forward and make that space accessible. So I'm not going to shut the door on a proposal that's legitimately made by a legitimate board-governed institution with respect to how they might legitimately finance postsecondary projects to get them going faster than we might be able to put the resources out.

**The Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. For the record the minister knows that I am eager to work co-operatively and collaboratively in making the system better. He and I and everybody else in this House and in this province have a direct stake in excellence in postsecondary education access, affordability, quality, and sustainability. I think we're all on the same page of the program as far as that's concerned. He's asked for my support, and of course although I cannot ever offer unconditional support, the minister should know – and I think he does know – that he can count on a supportive attitude from me as long as I get straight answers to my questions.

One of the areas in which, of course, I'm looking for straight answers is in hard numbers having to do with how many spaces we are creating. There have been many promises made around that by the minister in terms of 15,000 spaces across the province over three years, 30,000 over six, and 60,000 by the year 2020. By comparison to that, we have a very hard target from Campus Calgary of 19,700 spaces in the city of Calgary alone by 2010.

Those are goals in both cases, and what I'm interested in in terms of access are hard numbers as measures of performance in terms of how many spaces have been created, are being created, and how they relate to the money spent here.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm interested in those very same numbers, but I think the hon. member has to understand and appreciate that the campus of the 21st century is not the campus



of the 19th century. We're not just talking about adding traditional space to traditional universities and counting individual students coming in for the traditional semester. What we have in Alberta today, and very appropriately so, is a wide range of student opportunities, learning opportunities for Albertans. Some of those Albertans, even Calgarian Albertans, are going to be attending at Athabasca University electronically and online. Some of them are going to be attending . . .

**Mr. Taylor:** They can still be counted?

**Mr. Hancock:** Yes, they can still be counted, and we need to be able to develop counting mechanisms to do that and to make sure that we're doing it.

The important question is: does every Albertan that wants to have access to a learning opportunity get that access to learning opportunity? That's the common outcome that we're trying to do. I agree with the hon. member that there need to be measurables, and we're going to be developing those measurables. We're going to be finding the ways to best account for the way in which we increase capacity. But it's not quite as simple, and that's the only point I was making in saying: well, we need 19,700 spaces. I appreciate that institutions look forward and strategize and have a strategic plan to achieve numbers like that. I certainly appreciate the work that went into that. Unfortunately, it's not quite as simple as that.

Again, if the hon. member has any advice or ideas with respect to this area, I'd be open to them. I can indicate to the hon. member that we are developing formats to be able to properly assess progress along the process to achieve those 60,000 spaces that we're talking about. As long as he recognizes that those spaces come in many different ways and for many different students and many different Albertans who want to learn and move. Some of them will be moving to literacy, others will be moving to a PhD, and that's a very complex system.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I take this opportunity to join debate on supplementary estimates for 2005-2006 on the Department of Advanced Education. I thank the minister for being quite open to receiving questions and broader comments with respect to the future of the system and how we can get where we want to get over the next 15 to 20 years.

I was listening to the minister with some care when he talked about the expansion of the capacity of the system to have more spaces in it, the accessibility issue. That certainly has been one of the key issues that everyone in this province, including the minister and our sides of the House, has been talking about.

**3:30**

I just want to give some figures here that will provide the context for the debate. Mr. Chairman, in 1994-95, about 10 years ago, there were 106,000 full-load equivalents at universities, colleges, technical institutes, private universities, et cetera, and at the Banff Centre. There were about 106,000 full-load equivalents available in the system. In '99-2000 – five, six years later – the number went up to 119,574 full-load equivalents. So over five years the number of FLEs in Alberta went up by 13,000. Between '92-93, with 105,000 FLEs, and 2004-05, with about 139,000, the number of Alberta full-load equivalents increased by 34 per cent.

The government is proposing an increase of 60,000 spaces altogether over the next 15 years. My question to the minister is: if the rate of increase and growth over the last 10 years is any guide to

the rate of growth in future years and, in fact, to expedite the rate of growth given that we know that the participation rate in the postsecondary system in Alberta is one of the lowest in the country, how is that commitment that he has made to 60,000 spaces over the next 15 years going to lead to addressing effectively the problem of accessibility for Albertans over the next 10 or 15 years?

That's one key question I think we should never take our eyes off. It's an important issue. When we are debating these issues in the House, I think we should pay attention to the numbers and to the commitments that the government makes in relation to the information that I have on the rates of increase and the demand for spaces in the system.

Similarly, Mr. Chairman, another question that I have. I was hoping that the minister in the supplementary estimates request would pay some attention to addressing the ongoing concerns of the postsecondary students of this province with respect to convincing this government or having this government act on their concerns with the increase in tuition fees.

The government has over the last year made a commitment for the coming year to continue with the so-called tuition rebate program, about which students express a great deal of concern. They would have liked to see, at least, a firm commitment on the part of this minister and this government that it will not remain a rebate but will become a freeze and that, in fact, the government will present a schedule of reduction of the fees, rolling the fees back if we are to induce students, who are presently qualified to take advantage of postsecondary education but don't, to seek admission and participation in the system. If we keep the tuition fee issue the way it is now, that the students continue to worry about the annual increase in tuition fees forever, we will not be able to get the students who are presently staying out of the system to come into the system and become participants in it.

To the minister: why has he not taken this opportunity in bringing forward the supplementary estimates to ask for more money, to at least say that the postsecondary institutions will receive from this government an increase in funding added to their base budgets or whatever so that they don't have to continue to assume that they'll be called upon to increase or they'll be allowed to increase tuition fees two years down the line when this rebate is gone? I think there's a need for the government to make a clear statement to institutions that the base funding will be adjusted in a way that postsecondary institutions can assure their students that there will be no further increase in tuition fees and, on top of that, that there will in fact be systematic, properly scheduled rollbacks in those tuition fees.

The government is proposing in the next budget, if I may use a reference to that, to move forward with \$1.4 billion to \$1.6 billion in corporate tax reduction. If the government reduces the tuition fees by 50 per cent starting next year, it will cost the Alberta Treasury only about \$250 million. Imagine this. This government talks about postsecondary education being its highest priority. It talks a great deal about that. The minister talks about this and certainly conveys the message to students and faculties and management of our postsecondary institutions that he means business on this issue, yet the words which the minister uses and the government uses to put priority on postsecondary education are not followed up in action by making a commitment of, say, reducing tuition fees by 50 per cent, which will cost no more than \$250 million a year, and proceeding with a permanent loss on an annual basis of \$1.6 billion to the public finances of this province if it proceeds with its reduction of corporate taxes come next year.

I would have hoped that the minister would have indicated his intention by way of the supplementary estimates that he's going to

take concrete action that will assure students that the government has been listening, that it is planning to take action that will deliver goods to students that will deliver a reduction in their tuition fee loads as well as other costs.

Having said that, let me ask the minister another question. I notice that there is a \$4.6 million reduction in the student loan relief-benefit program. This money is going to be switched over to some other expenditure as part of the supplementary estimates presented here today. I think this warrants some explanation. What information is the minister able to give to the House with respect to why it is that the student loan relief-benefit will in fact go down by \$4.6 million this year when we know that more and more students are in need of that relief, more and more students are feeling the pressures of unbearable costs of going to a college or a university or an institute and staying there? Many of them are of course dropping out without completing or, rather than four years, taking six years, perhaps, or seven years to complete.

I think we need some explanation as to why this money is being saved and how come this is happening when, in fact, we do know that the need for relief is ever-increasing and is growing every year because of the increasing burden of the costs of going to school in this province, whether you go to university or college or whatever.

The third issue is the minister's response to the question of the quality of four-year degrees being granted at our colleges. Grant MacEwan College, certainly, has been given the go-ahead to do that in certain areas. Mount Royal may be another institution which is proceeding with that. There may be other colleges that are in a similar situation.

Now, it is true that we have the Alberta quality council, which must vet all the applications that come forward from colleges requesting the powers to grant these degrees, so there's some quality assurance in the work that the Alberta quality council does. But let me share an example with the minister on this issue because the Alberta quality council is a mechanism which tries to provide a certain standard, a certain benchmark, a kind of standard that must be met before colleges can begin to offer degrees. A niece of mine, going to one of the well-known two-year arts colleges in Vancouver, decided after finishing a two-year program at one of those colleges in Vancouver to go to Toronto and seek completion of the following two years at Ryerson University in Toronto. She did get the admission, but she has to do all four years. The two years' work that she had done on the assumption that those two years would be treated as the first two years of a degree program, regardless of where in this country she transfers to complete that program, did not prove to be true.

3:40

While the minister is saying that there's no guarantee provided by any university that a four-year degree, whether earned at a university or college, means guaranteed admission to a graduate program, I think the problem is more serious than that. It is a question of whether or not that four-year degree is considered equivalent to a four-year degree earned at a university, not merely a question of the next step, you know, in the student's pursuit of their program at the graduate level.

Employers make those distinctions. Those data are available. That is why the AUCC, Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, is an institution that many colleges who want to proceed with granting four-year degrees want to look up to and try to meet the expectations of and the standards set by this national council on the kinds of facilities and faculty qualifications and other infrastructure that must be in place in order for the institution that's aspiring to offer a four-year degree to be able to produce graduates whose

degrees will be respected at other places, not only within the province but across Canada. So there is a problem there, Mr. Minister, and I want you to address that.

Related to the \$8.1 million going to Grant MacEwan College, it's a one-time cost, as the estimates document states. Now, some of this \$8.1 million is supposed to be spent on recruiting faculty. I'm having difficulty understanding how a one-time grant, which will include hiring additional faculty to provide the coursework and supervision and lab work and all of that for a four-year program, can be sustained by a college. Is it going to become part of the line budget and then be funded by the ministry? How is it going to happen? I have some concern about asking a college to go ahead because the ministry is making a one-time grant to hire faculty. What happens the following year to the faculty? How are they retained on the college payroll if this is a one-time grant and a one-time only grant? So that's another question that I have for the minister, that I hope he will try to address.

The fourth question: "\$80,500,000 for additional post-secondary facilities infrastructure." Now, the minister knows and it's public information that postsecondary institutions certainly have huge deferred maintenance costs and deficits that run into hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars. For the University of Alberta alone, I understand that those estimates – and you would have, perhaps, more precise figures than I – run to about \$250 million in deferred maintenance costs. We have a large postsecondary system. Of this \$80.5 million, what percentage or how many millions of dollars from this sum are going toward deferred maintenance and what portion is going toward installation of new facilities or setting up new labs or setting up new classrooms? I think that part of your observations on how this money is to be spent had to do with increasing the number of spaces available at some of the receiving institutions. I understand that the U of A's portion of this amount goes to, I suppose, making changes to the Bay building downtown. No? No.

Anyway, so these are some of the questions for the minister to comment on, and then we'll see what happens. Thank you.

**Mr. Hancock:** I can indicate to the member that \$37 million of the \$80.5 million is directly for infrastructure maintenance although in some of those projects there might be a replacement as opposed to a repair. I would reference in that regard Grande Prairie Regional College. Three million dollars is going to Grande Prairie Regional College, which would replace the portables rather than repairing them. But most of that money, that \$37 million, is going for major projects like redevelopment of a shop or replacement of a roof or those sorts of repairs, the deferred maintenance item that you're talking about. The \$15 million for the Bay building is part of the \$80 million as well but supplemental to the \$37 million, not included in it, so that's not part of what I would consider to be renovation or an infrastructure maintenance program.

About half of the money is going directly to infrastructure maintenance programs although if you took a look at the rest of them, you might find some of the money in the rest of them; for example, the \$10 million that's being allocated this year for the veterinary medicine and project planning. I believe, subject to correction, that part of that veterinary medicine money is remediating some space or changing some space, which might deal with some of the deferred maintenance. Sometimes a new project actually reduces the deferred maintenance because it replaces a building that would otherwise have had to be redeveloped. So I would say approximately 50 per cent of that is going to what you might have included in your deferred maintenance numbers.

Going back to your first question, addressing the issue of accessi-

bility, I appreciate the numbers that you brought to the table. I think those are very informative. You ended up suggesting – and I'm not sure where you got your numbers – that there were 139,000 students in 2004. So if we were to add 60,000 spaces, one might say: well, that's a 50 per cent increase in student spaces. Now, that would be counting traditional student spaces, of course, and I already indicated in the answer to the opposition Advanced Education critic that what we're talking about in Advanced Education is the opportunity for every Albertan to advance their education. It's not just postsecondary in the traditional way that you talk about. It's not just university, college, technical institutes. There need to be opportunities for more adult Albertans to get literacy skills. There need to be opportunities for Albertans to have other learning opportunities. So while I appreciate the numbers, they don't tell the whole story.

Nonetheless, we do need to move to create those spaces, and those spaces are going to be created in a number of different ways. Spaces is probably a bad way to describe it; they're actually learning opportunities. There are a number of ways of doing that: by increasing community learning programs, by increasing the accessibility to trade skills programs. We're increasing apprenticeships by adding spaces in the traditional way. We've committed a lot of resources and will continue to commit resources to building the water building at the University of Lethbridge and redoing the Cousins Building at Lethbridge Community College and those sorts of areas.

So we're addressing the issue of accessibility, but I think the hon. member really in his remarks hit at the real nature of the issue, and that is that as we move to increase the participation rate to have more Alberta students finish high school and transition to postsecondary and more Albertans participate in the postsecondary system, we get those numbers up, and that's the real issue. Then we have to make sure that the learning opportunities are available for them. So we have to be talking about all three aspects of the system – access, quality, and affordability – and it all fits hand in glove. But we are moving very, very strongly to make sure that there are places available right across the spectrum.

Some of those will be electronic learning opportunities: a lot of colleges and universities working together in eCampus Alberta; Athabasca University working very hard to make sure that learning opportunities are available that way; Northern Lakes operating to make sure that in all of the communities they serve, there are learning opportunities. So a number of different ways of making sure that those spaces are available. I think the numbers are very interesting and put an interesting perspective on it. I can assure the hon. member that that's really one of our very important tasks.

3:50

The second question he raised was with respect to why we weren't bringing forward a budget with respect to tuition fees. The hon. member will know that we're in the middle of the year, that the postsecondary grants have gone out to the postsecondaries. Yes, we could, I suppose, give them a supplemental grant in the middle of the year, but it's much more appropriate to budget that sort of process as part of the ongoing budget process. That would be my intention, to deal with the broad-based grants to institutions in that way rather than trying to shoehorn it into the 1 per cent contingency allowance that we have on the operating side of our budget.

What we really have here is an opportunity, because of the surplus revenues that go by law into the sustainability fund unless they're allocated to the capital fund, to allocate some of those surplus revenues into the access to the future fund, into the scholarship fund. We've done that. We've allocated, I think, a billion dollars so far into those two funds and additional revenues as well into the

ingenuity fund and into the AHFMR fund, which enhances educational opportunities for Albertans but also moves on the infrastructure that the hon. member indicated was so important. So I think it is more appropriate at this time, you know, coming forward with supplemental estimates, to deal with the monies that are available, the nonrenewable resource revenues that are available, in terms of allocating those dollars to the capital fund and to the endowment funds rather than to deal with the ongoing operational side, where we're limited to 1 per cent of the contingency allowance.

Now, the hon. member's seatmate yelled out "prosperity bonuses," and I think the hon. member as well alluded to the context of a tax reduction in the amount of about \$1.4 billion. I assume that he's alluding to the prosperity bonus as well. That, indeed, is going to be done in accordance with the act that's before the House as a one-time tax refund because as the hon. member knows, you can't reduce tuition fees on an ongoing, every-year basis with one-time money. It doesn't work. But every student in Alberta will get a \$400 prosperity bonus, so there is some assistance to them with their living costs, their cost of gas and utilities and, perhaps, the cost of tuition. So in some ways we have assisted students by doing the prosperity bonus.

Taking that \$1.4 billion, which is, again, nonrenewable resource revenue, which is not consistent, year-to-year revenue, and talking about it in terms of an operational budget just means that you haven't quite got the picture of how budgeting happens. So I'd say it again. We have nonrenewable resource revenue, which if we don't allocate it – we allocate \$4.75 billion of nonrenewable resource revenue to program spending, that's the limit under the Fiscal Responsibility Act. The rest of it goes into the sustainability fund and can be allocated to the capital fund, which we've done. It can be allocated to savings, and we've put about \$1.4 billion, by my recollection, into savings in terms of the access to the future fund, in terms of the scholarship fund, both very important investments for Alberta students.

I think we are giving a message to students that postsecondary is important. I think he said: why don't we put something behind our words? We have. A 30 per cent increase in the operating budget this year, next year, and the year after is huge, absolutely, fundamentally huge in terms of the process. Is there more work to be done? Absolutely. Words are followed up by commitments. Those words have been followed up very, very strongly by commitments not just to continuing the tuition rebate but to funding appropriately institutions so that they can provide quality learning opportunities for students.

In terms of the numbers that the hon. member used, he suggested that it would cost \$250 million to cut the tuition fees back 50 per cent, I think, and my quick math is slightly different than his. My quick math suggested that it would be more like \$860 million, perhaps even a little higher than that, if you go by the fact that about an average 5 per cent increase, which we rebated last year, cost \$43 million. If you made that 10 per cent, that would be \$86 million. That was about a \$250 rebate. The maximum increase for tuition fees last year was somewhere around \$250. Closer to \$284, actually. So that \$284 increase cost us \$43 million. That was just in the public institutions. That didn't include the private, not-for-profit institutions. Anyway, I don't want to quibble about numbers, but I'd suggest that he's way low on the estimate.

With respect to the \$4.6 million reduction in student relief benefit, that is a puzzle. That is something that we do need to get to the bottom off, and we're doing it in the affordability review and the affordability policy for next spring in accordance with tuition. What that basically means is that we've had to make a smaller allocation for future costs of student loans, which means among other things

that perhaps the default rates have gone down. What this is is a provision for future cost. It's an accounting entry which allows us to book the future costs to government of the loans that have gone out, and those future costs to government come in loans that are not repaid. They're future liabilities for loan relief completion payments and defaults. That's basically what it covers. There are some other areas that fall into that.

The long and short of it is that what that may suggest is that students are not taking up loan funding at the same level we might have otherwise expected them to. Or perhaps it's a more positive thing and says that they're actually paying loans back at a higher, faster rate and that there are fewer losses. There are some interesting things to look into there, and I can assure the hon. member that we are looking through that to find out what's going on there and to find out if we can redeploy those monies in future years, perhaps, into other types of assistance or support or other types of opportunities for students.

Now, just so the hon. member will know, student relief was about \$35.4 million. Student loans and financial assistance was in the nature of \$483 million. So there's a significant amount of money going out to students. This \$4.6 million is basically an accounting. It's in essence what you might in other circumstances call an allowance for doubtful accounts, and we've been able to reduce that allowance and thus free up some of the resources to be able to use in the current year for other important spending opportunities.

Quality of four-year degrees: absolutely an important, important issue. The hon. member touched on the other aspect of that, which is equally important, and that's transferability. First of all, we're very, very comfortable that the quality council of Alberta has been constituted well. It's got some stellar people on it, and it's going to be recognized as being leading edge in terms of quality assurance in terms of the degree programs.

Yes, any institution that's offering a degree is going to have to get degree respectability. They're going to have to earn that degree respectability, but fortunately we have some great platforms to work off. Grant MacEwan has been doing great work and is recognized in the business community and the community at large as having top-notch learning opportunities for students. So their existing programs are well received, the existing quality of their work is well received, and we fully expect that that reception for their programs will be translated into the new programs that they offer, so they will have respectability in our community.

We also expect that they will have acceptability across the country. I know that the president is making it his priority to talk to other institutions across the country and work with them to make sure that they know of the quality of MacEwan degrees. So I am very, very confident that students with those degrees will be accepted, but as you point out, most people are not necessarily transferring to a further degree program. The degree acceptance in the community is extremely important. Luckily, Grant MacEwan, Mount Royal, and our other institutions all have stellar reputations in our community and are well known for the quality of graduates that they have.

Transferability is a very important issue. Alberta is well ahead of the pack in terms of our Council on Admissions and Transfer. But there's always more work to be done to ensure that there's a seamless opportunity for students, that prior learning can be assessed. For example, people going into the trades should know that after they've had a career in the trades, if they've amassed knowledge and experience, that knowledge and experience should count for something if they want to go back into the learning system to pick up another credential or to acquire other knowledge, skills, and abilities. So we work very hard on that area. We've got a

stellar group of people, again, in counselling, admissions, and transfers, headed by Mrs. Lucille Walters, and doing a very good job. Always more to be done in that area.

4:00

Certainly, within the province it works a lot better than it does across the country, so Alberta again will be working across the country to make sure that our transferability, not just on our degree programs but even from one college to another, works a lot better for students. That's very important.

Grant MacEwan. I dealt with the quality issue, but there was a reference to the \$8.1 million. I'm sure the hon. member will understand that when we talk about the one-time costs of recruiting staff, we're not talking about the ongoing salary of staff. There's a difference. But there are costs of recruiting staff: setting up offices, making space available, all those sorts of things. Those are the one-time costs of recruiting staff, and that would be in on this side.

We have indicated to Grant MacEwan that they will receive funding for the student spaces they make available and that that funding is what will go into their ongoing operational funding, which will be used to pay for consumables and for staff salaries and those sorts of things. In setting up a program, there are one-time costs. Because we want to encourage institutions to do this, we agreed to participate in helping to pay some of the one-time costs rather than have them take them out of their normal operating budget.

I dealt with the \$80.5 million in infrastructure, so I'd be pleased to answer any other questions you might have.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you. I want to thank the minister for the detailed response to my observations and questions. The issue of accessibility and the number of spaces that are needed in this province is a critical one, and there are some numbers here that the minister might find helpful, although I'm sure his very competent department staff do have some of those numbers.

Alberta has the lowest university participation rate in Canada. It's about 15.8 per cent. These are from the government's own numbers. Only 43 per cent of high school students move on to postsecondary education in Alberta, the lowest rate in Canada. A major contributing factor, obviously, is the cost of education, not just tuition but the overall cost of education. The minister is quite aware of that. While absolute numbers have been rising with the population increase, on a per capita basis the number of bachelor's degrees awarded in Alberta is 17 per cent below the national average.

Alberta has the highest high school dropout rates in Canada. Only 66.5 per cent of students earn a high school diploma in three years in Alberta compared to a 75.6 per cent national average. Imagine if our high school graduation rate moved up to the national average. There would be even greater demand and pressure on the accessibility side of the equation in this province.

Getting more students who graduate to college, university, some sort of technical program does require financing. Many students do take advantage of the Students Finance Board provisions for loans. To get more of them there, I think that if we moved to grants more than to loans, it would certainly make a difference and would encourage more students to come in.

This decrease by \$4.6 million in the student loan relief benefit program can be interpreted many ways, and I appreciate that the minister has tried to speculate on why it might be that we are projecting a drop in the need for providing relief to the tune of \$4.6 million to the end of this fiscal year. One possibility is that, in fact,

more and more students who find it extremely hard to take advantage of education – some are not turning up to enter the postsecondary system – are dropping out sooner than they need to. But we do need a more firm explanation of why it is that the need for loan relief is going down. It can't be because the costs have become more bearable. We know that the costs have been going up exponentially. We have been hearing that from students. The minister himself has heard about it at his forum and from many other sources. So I think we need some firmer and more clear answers to the question.

To me it's worrisome unless we get clear answers as to why it is that that need seems to have dropped this year. I don't know what happened over the last few years, if this is the first time it's happened, or if there's a pattern over the last few years that we need to look at. The minister has the resources to do that kind of research, and certainly it will be very helpful for us to know why it is that it's happening.

The one last comment that I want to make, Mr. Chairman, has to do with the overall deferred maintenance costs bill. It's close to a billion dollars, according to my numbers here. This comes from a submission of the Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations, August 2005, to Alberta Advanced Education as part of the Learning Alberta exercise that the minister has just gone through. Only about 45 per cent of postsecondary education facilities are in good condition; 55 per cent are not in what is rated as good condition.

So these are some of the numbers that I hope the minister will take another look at and see how we need to respond to that.

I'll conclude, Mr. Chairman, my comments.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, of course, I certainly appreciate, again, the homework that the hon. member has done. I'm certainly well aware of the deferred maintenance issues. I understand from the hon. member's comments that he is excited about the fact that we've been provided with more resources, asking the Legislature to confirm that provision of more resources so that we can deal with some of the deferred maintenance issues and ensure the quality of learning spaces and teaching spaces for students and for professors and teachers in our province. We have work to do in that area. We know we have work to do in that area, and I'm sure that the hon. member, then, won't mind one bit if, as a result of the third quarter we find additional revenues available, we make some announcements with respect to additional programs and come back to the Legislature again for approval of those.

There has been some real and implied criticism of the government for moving ahead and governing and providing resources to deal with just those issues that the hon. member has raised. I'm really pleased that he has indicated indirectly, if not directly, his support for our continuing to govern in that way and to make those commitments as the resources are available and to move ahead with those dearly needed projects as and when we can acquire the resources to do so. So thank you for that.

With respect to the drop, I don't think it helps, really, to speculate. I think the hon. member is right. We should do more research and get the detailed information with respect to why the change, but understand, again, that that's an accounting provision equivalent to a loan loss type of provision or an allowance for doubtful accounts. There could be some aspect of that that is as a result of a decrease in the number of students requiring financial assistance, and that could come for a number of reasons. It could even be as a result of a stronger economy, perhaps, that fewer students take up loans.

The interesting thing is that we do need to do more work, and that's why we will be working through the winter, taking some of

the information and certainly the visions and the frameworks that we got out of the summit process that we've just gone through and coming forward with an affordability in tuition policy in the spring. We will be doing the research to see what we need to do to make sure that finances are not a barrier to any student getting an education.

That's the mantra we have. I believe it's in place. We've got a very good group of people in student learner assistance. There's always a glitch on an individual basis, and they work very, very hard to deal with those when they're brought to their attention, but for the most part the system works well for the students that apply and need assistance to get an education. It's a decent system. It's a very, very good system, as a matter of fact, and it works well for most people, but we have to make sure that it works well for all people who need it, and we're working very hard to make sure that that is the case.

I'm not sure that I can accept at face value the member's assertion that the major contributing factor to a 15 per cent university rate or a 43 per cent transition to postsecondary or the highest dropout rate in the country is because the cost of postsecondary is too high. I'm sorry. That's not the reality that anybody is aware of. There's no research to back up that assertion.

**4:10**

In fact, we do need to work very, very hard. Moving to the national average of high school completion and transition to postsecondary is not acceptable. We need to move to a point where every Albertan or a very significant number graduate from high school. If 70 per cent of the new jobs in a knowledge-based economy in the future are going to require some form of postsecondary, then that's what we need to aspire to, for Albertans to reach those levels. That's going to take considerable resources and considerable work.

So again I thank the hon. member for his support in our getting those resources so that we can continue to do the work both budget to budget and in year, as and when resources are available.

**Dr. Pannu:** I never made the assumption that the low rate of completion of high school can somehow be explained by the cost of postsecondary education. What I said was: imagine if our high school completion rate went up, if we succeeded, using whatever means, in increasing that rate to the national average, to 70 per cent from 66 per cent, how much more demand there will be for spaces and opportunities at the postsecondary level. That's the point that I made.

The second point that I want to make to the minister – there's some confusion in the minister's mind. When I referred to \$1.4 billion, I wasn't referring to the actions that the government has taken now but to the projected cuts in corporate taxes that the government has already stated its intention to bring back in the new budget. What that means is a minimum of \$1.4 billion annual loss to the public Treasury if those corporate tax cuts are introduced in the coming budget. I juxtaposed the readiness of the government to lose that \$1.4 billion on an annual basis with what it'll cost to roll back the tuition fees by 50 per cent.

My numbers are \$250 million. The minister disputed that. Certainly, we can look at those numbers if they want. But I juxtaposed the government's reluctance to go in the direction of increasing costs of funding postsecondary institutions by \$250 million to achieve the 50 per cent reduction in tuition but, at the same time, its willingness and readiness to lose \$1.4 billion on an annual basis, every year, from the public Treasury if it proceeded, before it does anything about postsecondary education, with tax cuts to corporations.

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to discuss next year's budget when next year's budget is presented. If there is indeed a \$1.4 billion corporate tax cut at that time, I will be pleased to discuss that in the context of what, if any, increase there might be for postsecondary education. I think that would be an appropriate discussion for that point in time.

Right now we're talking about supplementary estimates, and I was explaining the difference between our ability to budget out of the contingency allowance and what was available on the surplus side. That's why I assumed that he was on the same page as I was and was talking about that side. I apologize if I misapprehended him. But I will be here, hopefully, to discuss supply next February, March, or April when it comes forward.

With respect to his assertion that we would need more space if we got up to national graduation standards and transition standards, oh happy day that we could get there. I think that's what we ought to aspire to. All of us ought to be working towards encouraging our young people to complete their education and to move to postsecondary in whatever their passion might be, whether it's welding, whether it's art, whether it's political science, economics, building houses, whatever it might be. We need to encourage more of our young people. If we could get not to the national average but to a point where every young person graduates from high school, that would be a great day. I'm sure every member of this House would be more than happy to foot the bill that would be required to provide the spaces for them to move to postsecondary.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. Just one very brief note because I'm anxious to move on. I would like to offer a revolutionary suggestion to this minister and the House. Consider discussing the budget in this House before approving projects and spending the money rather than seeking after the fact rubber-stamping approval.

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, no provincial Legislature in this country sits every day of the year. If you compare it to other comparable jurisdictions, some states in the United States sit every two years, sit once a spring session every two years. Different budgets are done in different ways.

One of the things the hon. member ought to understand is the difference between the government and the Legislature. Governments are taxed with the opportunity and the responsibility of governing, and they are accountable to the Legislature. We have been governing, and now we're accounting.

**The Chair:** After considering the 2005-2006 supplementary estimates for the general revenue fund and the lottery fund for the Department of Advanced 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                      \$99,000,000

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Opposed? Carried.

## Gaming

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

**Mr. Graydon:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to answer questions on behalf of the Minister of Finance requesting a supplemental amount of \$75 million for Gaming. The government has announced the uses of this \$75 million, but I'll be happy to recap. It's very brief. It's only three items really.

Seventy million dollars is requested to provide funding assistance for two of our well-known and far-reaching agricultural societies in the province. Northlands Park and Calgary Exhibition and Stampede will each receive \$35 million for capital redevelopment projects. This funding is part of the province's investment in centennial projects.

Northlands plans to build a new exhibition facility to meet the increasing needs of a growing region. They'll continue to host millions of visitors at numerous events for years to come. The Calgary Exhibition and Stampede will use the funding for upgrades to the Roundup Centre as part of their major expansion plans to continue holding world-class events throughout the year.

Northlands and Stampede, both rooted in agriculture, have demonstrated community spirit and continue to enhance the lifestyle of Albertans. Mr. Chairman, we are very fortunate in Alberta to have these facilities and an overall wonderful quality of life, but as we've seen recently, other countries have not been so fortunate. The additional \$10 million is being requested for two disaster assistance payments. The province committed \$5 million each for urgent funding assistance for relief efforts following Hurricane Katrina and the devastating earthquake in Pakistan. Alberta Gaming has provided the disaster funds and now needs to increase our spending authority accordingly to continue with the Gaming ministry's program delivery.

In total, the funding commitment outlined previously amounted to \$80 million. However, Gaming is only asking for \$75 million in supplemental spending as the ministry has identified \$5 million in our budget that will not be spent this year and will be used to partially offset the planned incremental spending.

Those are the few things that I have in my supplementary estimate request before you today. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the minister's brevity here, since we have a limited amount of time and a lot of questions to ask on the following. So thank you very much.

Just a few brief questions about Northlands and the Stampede. These are very large organizations that know well in advance that they need money, so I'm not quite sure why they need supplemental funding. I'm sure they knew years ago – or they've been working on this for some time – that they're going to need this money. Why isn't it in the budget from last year or the next year or something along those lines? These are big organizations. We're not talking about little guys who are just making it up as they go along. These are major organizations. I think they should be required to plan a little bit better rather than just going to the government and saying: can you give us a certain amount of money? This is a very large amount of money that we're talking about here. Yes, they do a lot of good work, but I think they should be held to a standard that the others are held to as well.

As for the money for Hurricane Katrina and the earthquake in Pakistan, nobody can argue with that. I just wonder if in the future you might want to establish a disaster relief fund using lottery

money. It seems like we're getting more and more disasters all the time. If we could have a chunk of lottery money just held there and the interest used over several years – put in \$20 million, \$50 million, or something like that that can be used instead of putting it into supplemental budgeting all the time because we are seemingly in an endless string of disasters, and we're going to have a lot more requests for money along those lines.

4:20

Briefly, I need a quick explanation: "Offsetting these increases is a \$5,000,000 reduction in lottery funded programs consisting of \$4,000,000 from the First Nations Development Fund grant program and \$1,000,000 in grants for Bingo Associations." I'm not quite sure where this money comes from. Are they losing their funding? Maybe you can just explain that to me because I'm really unclear as to what that's all about.

I'll sit down so you can answer my questions. Thank you.

**Mr. Graydon:** First off, Mr. Chairman, with Northlands and the Stampede these requests have been in for many years. They were just beyond our capability to fund in the normal course of events. We certainly have helped them out over the last few years. I believe that in this year's budget there was \$10 million to those two organizations, but their requests far exceeded what we were able to do in a normal budget year. However, with the unanticipated surplus and unbudgeted surplus that we're seeing right now and it being centennial year, it was felt appropriate that we could finally step up to the plate, if you will, and fund the requests that they had been making for several years.

The question of disasters. I did have the pleasure of presenting the \$5 million cheque to President Clinton along with the Premier in Calgary, and I have to tell you that he was so grateful and so appreciative that a province of our size would come to the aid of that particular disaster. It happened to be the same day that we'd also announced that we were giving \$5 million to the Pakistan disaster, the earthquake there. I believe he had a tear in his eye, and he said: you know, I can't believe how generous you are. The world is getting disaster burnout. As you've said, there have been three this year, I believe. The first one was the one in the Philippines and now Katrina and Pakistan. He said: you know, the people in Pakistan, a huge disaster, probably more children affected in that one than anything else. People weren't at that point, a month or so ago, really stepping up to the plate the way they had been with the previous ones. He said: for the province of Alberta to make this significant contribution very early on shows the heart of the people of Alberta. He recognized and everyone was recognizing that we are getting disaster burnout.

Since that time we have had some discussions and we will have more discussions about doing something through the Wild Rose fund. It's lottery money, but it deals with international events such as this, and we are looking at and exploring exactly what you've said, that maybe we should establish a disaster relief fund, if you will, under the Wild Rose guidelines so that it could be sitting there and we could access it without doing the process that we're doing now with the supplementary estimates.

The lapsed funds for First Nations and bingo halls. Basically, for the First Nations it was money that we thought we would take in, but obviously we're not going to because their projects aren't along far enough, so we won't be seeing that revenue. Revenue counts as an expense in the lottery fund. It's kind of a different way. Always hard to get that through my head, but it does. So we will not be seeing revenue from the First Nations fund this year. Bingo revenues are down considerably because of the smoking legislation

enacted in Edmonton and the surrounding region, so that's revenue that we don't see coming in this year because of that legislation, which took effect on July 1, I believe.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to have this opportunity to discuss with the hon. Minister of Gaming the reasons why some organizations would receive money under these supplementary requests and others would not. Certainly, this member would like to commend the department for their initiatives regardless of whether it's to Louisiana or to the earthquake which unfortunately occurred in Pakistan.

But there are disasters occurring daily not only in this city but across the province. I would consider disastrous our treatment to date of homeless people and the whole issue around homelessness. I would encourage the hon. minister and his department to be much more generous in the future in funding initiatives that will reduce – we will never eliminate, but we certainly can reduce – the amount of homelessness that is unfortunate in both the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary. I would remind not only the minister but all hon. members of this Assembly that charity begins at home, and we have a lot of work to do in this province. If we do have surplus money in the future, I would plead with the hon. minister at this time: let's not forget the people who live in this province, regardless of their age, who are homeless.

Thank you.

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

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

**Hon. Members:** Question.

Agreed to:	
Expense	\$75,000,000
Lottery fund payments	\$5,000,000

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Opposed? Carried.

### Infrastructure and Transportation

**The Chair:** The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. We have a very large sum of money that I am going to be asking the Legislative Assembly for approval of today. There's roughly \$527 million that is there for operating expense and equipment and inventory purchases. There's another \$231 million for the capital investment vote. I'm going to attempt to give you broad outlines as to what those dollars are used for, and where appropriate or where the opposition would like me to delve down into it, I certainly will.

First of all, the allocation of the \$527 million for operating. Thirty and a half million dollars of this is required to address operations and maintenance pressures. It is broken down as follows. Six and a half million dollars for property operations. Mr. Chair, property operations is responsible for day-to-day operations and maintenance

of government-owned facilities. What we're seeing in our own facilities is something that's very similar right around the province; that is, we're seeing costs escalate. To date, up until now, we have kept cutting back and cutting back on these facilities, but there comes a point in time when we do need to increase the costs just to keep them running, and that 6 and a half million dollars is for that.

There's also \$6.2 million for lease of government space. What we've seen is an increased demand around the province for facilities, and I'll give you an example. There's planning and study for the replacement of Henwood, which is an AADAC facility, for a hundred thousand dollars. There are lease positions to AADAC in Cold Lake. There are ARC upgrade ventilation hoods and so on and so on, Mr. Chair. That goes right throughout the massive amount of government buildings and space that we look after.

There's also \$10 million for capital and accommodation projects. This is also for changes that have occurred in government. Again, there are various locations around the province where we are looking at finding new lease space, doing some rental upgrades, basically doing management of the properties, Mr. Chair.

There's also \$500,000 for the Caroline highway maintenance yard, which we have to complete. Remediation is required. There was a spill of some gas and oil over the past 25 or 30 years, as has happened in numerous places. We're looking for \$500,000 to remediate that, which, obviously, is of critical importance to our environment.

4:30

There's also \$5.4 million for the provincial highways system, and this quite simply is for operation and maintenance. The same trucks that are going on the road are seeing the same increase in fuel costs, the same increase in labour costs that everyone in Alberta is, and this is simply to accommodate that.

Lastly, we have \$1.8 million for transportation safety services and the traffic safety initiative. This is involved with the impaired driving and child traffic safety programs, that I'm sure everyone in this House supports.

Mr. Chair, there's also \$50 million in operating for something that we have classified as small infrastructure requirements. I'll give you an example. In Camrose there was a seniors' lodge that has seen a huge amount of inflation. They had the lodge basically about half up, yet they were \$500,000 short in the amount of money that they received, and they couldn't finish it. That \$500,000 went to the Rose City disability society, I believe, or something along that line, so that's operating. We also helped finish off a lodge in Athabasca, and exactly the same thing had occurred. A lot of these volunteer facilities, in essence, have seen huge increases in their costs because of the same inflationary pressures that we've seen right across the province, and we've given grants to these people under operating.

There's also \$54 million for water and waste-water infrastructure projects and Water for Life projects. Mr. Chair, these have not been allocated out. We're requesting permission from the Legislative Assembly to use this \$54 million. There's also \$17.2 million included in this number from the federal government, which is the federal funding for the cities and communities program. Quite simply, it comes in to us and simply flows through. We do have to put it through a supplementary estimate because it does come into my budget, but it is federal dollars that come forward.

Lastly – and I think that this one, certainly, probably does not even deem a question – is \$375 million for the natural gas rebate program. What we've seen is the amount of dollars go up hugely from the original budgeted amount. We initially budgeted for \$1.50 a gigajoule, which is based on a market price of between \$5.50 and \$7.50. With the current prices we're budgeting with this \$375

million for rebates of \$3.51 per gigajoule in October, \$4 per gigajoule in November, and a forecasted rebate of \$3.25 per gigajoule for the months of December to March. Obviously, that's averaged over that time frame.

We also have an estimated \$231 million in the capital side of my department. There's \$3 million for remediation to the Turner Valley gas plant, and I think everyone in this Assembly has heard the issue about the hydrocarbons that are potentially leaking out.

There's \$180 million for provincial highway systems, and \$50 million of this, again, is what we call small projects. I'll give you an example. In Okotoks, when I went to the town of Okotoks, the most critical issue there was a set of traffic lights. It was a turn lane and a set of traffic lights, and the total cost for that was around \$200,000 or \$300,000. So, Mr. Chair, we're looking at doing a lot of these irritants around the province. We've got traffic lights. We've got interchanges. We've got all these different types right around the province that we're doing. We're looking at purchasing an AADAC building in Calgary. So that's where those are.

There's also \$30 million that we have built into this budget purely to accommodate inflation and cost escalations on road projects. We have not spent this money. This money has not been spent yet, but it is there because we all know the cost escalations. We all know the impact of these road projects. If needed, we will be using these dollars. This is a very important and a critical issue when it comes to road building because we are seeing close to a 20 per cent inflation this year.

There's also \$100 million there for provincial highway projects, and this varies right across the province. It's highway projects from one end right to the other, almost dead on, bang on at \$100 million.

There's \$48.2 million that is there for the strategic economic corridor, and this includes \$30 million for the Wood Buffalo resource region. I know the hon. member had asked me about this in a previous question period. The reason for \$30 million when \$200 million has actually been put forward is that this is all that we can spend this year. We have had some issues with weather. We've had some issues with not enough engineering, and obviously on these projects we have to do the engineering before we can follow with the project. We're putting on an extensive push for engineering projects this winter in a hope to really accelerate what is happening in Wood Buffalo and Fort McMurray in particular.

There's also \$18.2 million for cost and scope changes to the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads. And before the opposition jumps and leaps and does all of these other things, this is not the P3 component on the Anthony Henday. This is the part that we did conventional financing on, and we have actually added some interchanges. We added one interchange in particular where the developer put in \$3 million, so we sped that up. We had some increased costs to develop the road in Edmonton, and the combination of that was basically \$18.2 million. It's money that is well spent because it enables it to be more of a free flow on both of these roads.

Mr. Chair, that pretty well summarizes the amount of money that we're asking for. It is a very large amount of money, but I feel that it's money that is extremely well spent and will be well spent in the future. The advantage of my particular department is that we have a lot of projects on tap. There's been a lot of talk about unbudgeted surplus, but when surplus dollars come in, my department is an excellent place to put those dollars because we have projects that are ready to go tomorrow. If we get unbudgeted surplus in July, we can still do road projects up until October, November. If we get unbudgeted surplus in November, we cannot build roads in December, January, February. We have to wait until the next summer. So it makes sense that we get an extra three or four months of road building when that unbudgeted surplus is allocated to us in July after



the first quarter. If we were to wait until this particular time when the Legislature sits, we would not be able to build these roads until next year, hence adding a full year for people to wait on these road building projects.

So, Mr. Chair, that's a summary of how we're spending the money. I know that there's a shortage of time, so I'd be more than happy to take any questions and/or get any information that the opposition is looking for. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. I would highly recommend seasonal sittings for this House so that we could approve the budgets so that when spring does arrive, we can have the dump trucks, graders out there doing the road building.

I'm very aware that we are discussing millions of taxpayer dollars every minute. I don't expect the minister to on the floor at this time orally respond to the questions I'll raise. I would very much appreciate a written response following the receipt of *Hansard*.

We have witnessed the interim budget, the spring budget, the napkin ad hoc surplus billions budget, and now the supplementary estimates. With the exception of acts of God, such as two once-in-a-lifetime twice-in-a-week flooding costs this spring, budgets should be predictable. This particular budget in general has gone three-quarters of a billion dollars beyond the spring budget. We sometimes wonder: what was the point of the spring budget? I would like this government to be looking in a more visionary, sustainable manner and, rather than one-time rebates or one-time projects, consider creating capital endowment funds, as it has done with the heritage fund and the medical endowment funds, that would provide for sustainable funding when resource revenues drop, as they will in the future. I would reference our website, where the details of the 35/35/25/5 plan are spelled out.

I would like to thank the minister for recognizing the importance of transferring a degree of the infrastructure control back to the departments of education and health, supporting those two departments in seeing projects dealt with in a speedy, approved fashion. I think that was a very good move, and I thank the minister for that. Would the minister commit to providing my office with a detailed list of the projects regarding the \$54 million for addressing small, emerging capital expense needs?

4:40

Regarding the new deal for cities funding, while this initiative is a step in the right direction, this will not be enough to satisfy the growing stresses on municipalities. We need to continue to look at sustainable funding opportunities such as making room for municipalities by reducing the school property tax. This has been brought forward by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I would certainly support going that route; however, I don't want it to happen at the expense of education funding. If we're going to give that taxing ability back to the municipalities, then please fund education out of general revenue.

[Mr. Johnson in the chair]

This spring and summer I sent out requests to municipalities, school boards, health regions, and parks and protected areas staff asking them to list their top three infrastructure priorities. I received a large number of responses from cities and towns, health regions, and school boards. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Community Development didn't permit employees to respond.

I will quickly highlight some of the areas that I hope are addressed

in these four pages, but due to the extremely brief, generic, very few municipality name or district references I have no way of telling whether these infrastructure concerns have been addressed in these supplementary estimates. Again, I would refer the minister to *Hansard*. If he could, please, by reading the *Hansard*, respond in writing to these questions.

I want to bring out the problems that were brought out by school districts in terms of their infrastructure needs and the problems of the municipalities. If these have been addressed within the supplementary budget estimates, I'll be very pleased, as will the local municipalities. One of the biggest problems in school districts is portables. In Calgary there are 507 portables, of which 90 per cent were built pre 1997 and do not conform to current building codes. Calgary Catholic, Calgary public, Parkland, and Wild Rose listed them in their number one priorities. I'm not sure whether they have begun to be addressed in the supplementary estimates.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Audit upgrades. Apparently, the government completed facility audits in 1999 and 2000, yet many facilities have yet to complete upgrades. Prairie Rose regional division lists installation of sprinkler systems, replacement of fire alarm systems, lab ventilation systems, installations and upgrades, and electrical system upgrades as still outstanding. Six schools in Northern Lights have not had audit upgrades completed.

With reference to structural, mechanical, and electrical maintenance most divisions that have responded have noted that deferred maintenance costs have contributed to increased overall costs and that current amounts are simply not adequate to address current needs, let alone deferred work. The Calgary boards, public and separate, have a deferred maintenance debt of more than half a billion dollars.

There's the issue of new schools. Calgary public would require 24 in the next three years if we used the provincial utilization rates formula. These are needed. There are 40 communities without schools currently in Calgary. As well as replacement or modernization of four major schools Grande Prairie requires three new schools and modernization and redevelopment of four others. Northern Lights requires four new schools.

Modernization. Almost all districts listed outstanding modernization and redevelopment of existing facilities as a priority. This goes hand in hand with outstanding audit upgrades and also preventing districts from accomplishing best utilization of facilities.

Funding for admin and support facilities. Two districts noted that they did not receive any funding for their facilities.

Utility costs. This is a tremendously large concern, and I'm glad the minister referenced that \$30 million because hopefully this will go toward covering these utility costs. As costs continue to increase over time, this must be addressed in the long term. Costs have climbed from about 7 per cent of total budget in 2000 to about 15 to 16 per cent last year. Rescue funding makes budgeting difficult – this is rescue funding: supplementary estimates – and funds are drawn from other priorities to address utility costs. We need long-term solutions. Address inflation. Build it in.

Municipalities have a number of concerns. I will not take up the House's time with all these concerns. I'd like to highlight a few. Water, sewage, and waste water: Drayton Valley, Grande Prairie, Okotoks, Olds, and Wetaskiwin all require substantial funds for these projects. While funds have decreased, regulations have become more onerous, particularly for potable water.

Funding is also not adequate to address the needs of fast-growing communities. Deferred maintenance for municipalities is a major

concern and a very costly one. This, again, is a common theme. In areas such as Drayton Valley, Grande Prairie, and Fort McMurray there are comments about more rapid deterioration of existing roadways due to heavy commercial traffic and increased use by same. This requires increased dollars for maintenance, yet funding does not address this issue.

Another common theme is that the lack of funding for maintenance and rehabilitation for aging roads means that the costs of the same roads, et cetera, keep increasing as they deteriorate even further and faster. Funding does not seem to adequately address the growing traffic infrastructure needs of areas associated with or affected by strong economic industrial growth particularly due to the number and size of resource-industry vehicular traffic.

This spring I had the opportunity to drive out to Drayton Valley, and I crossed a large, two-lane, undivided bridge. Local Drayton Valley residents are extremely concerned about using this bridge when it rains or during the winter because of the huge logging trucks that go through the area and the huge gas and oil servicing rigs that pass this area. I would very much for Drayton Valley's sake like to see this bridge twinned. I know that lives could be saved as a result.

New traffic infrastructure. The minister referred to some of the new funding that he is providing, and I am pleased to hear that that is in place in Edmonton and in Calgary. We need funds to upgrade and build new infrastructure to meet new demands because currently that funding is inadequate. Long-term capital planning requires long-term commitments. Grande Prairie, in particular, has detailed the massive funding shortfalls even from what their acceptable capital planning shows is necessary.

Lastly, I'll not go into the health areas. Some of the concerns have been sort of addressed in an ad hoc fashion, but I just want to say to the minister: I will give you my complete support as soon as you wish to bring forward the implementation of the McDermid report. I will cheer for you in the same way as I cheered for the Member for Calgary-North Hill with regard to the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, Bill 39. This will save lives. It's a great initiative. Let's go for it.

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

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much. I'll keep my comments very, very brief as I know that there are other people that probably want answers. Thank you for the support of the McDermid report. We're currently looking at how that can be implemented. Obviously, it is a report that is multifaceted and has a lot of issues with it. It's a very good report, and it's a report that I feel very strongly for. So we are currently looking at how that can be done.

Drayton Valley. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar has made me fully aware of the issues out there on the bridge. Two things I will comment on. First of all, the road down to the bridge is what the main issue is, and we're certainly looking at what we can do to ensure that that road down there is much safer. The hon. member raised a very good point, and this was brought home to me by the logging trucks that are going through there.

The second point is bridge construction. I would ask the hon. member, if he has any connections to the federal Liberals that he will admit to, that we look at some rationality when it comes to building bridges. These people in Drayton Valley need a bridge. The problem we have is that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is so onerous when it comes to building a bridge. It takes such a long time to get the approvals in place for building a bridge that it becomes very, very difficult. Our traffic patterns changed significantly over a very short period of time, and unfortunately we don't have the ability to respond by building a bridge when the DFO takes

two, three, five years to give approval for going across any new waterway. So I quite simply ask the hon. member, if he admits, to talk to his federal counterparts and see if there is some rationality that we can get to that because there are people's lives that are at risk here.

Apart from that, Mr. Chair, I certainly will get back to the hon. member with the other questions that he has. I'll get back to him in writing, as requested.

Thank you.

4:50

**The Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. I want to thank the minister for specifically addressing the Drayton Valley bridge. I also want to thank the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation. I think the example that you've put forward in terms of the Stoney Trail bridge in Calgary – I really believe that this type of bridge is what is needed over the Tsuu T'ina area. This would be in the wetlands there by the Glenmore Reservoir. I think this type of bridge would receive quick federal approval. It's the type of infrastructure we need.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will not go on too long, just three or four points. I know that the minister in the past has been a big advocate of P3s. I think the history of P3s – and we've had this discussion – has not been very favourable, whether it be in Nova Scotia or other places it's been tried, Britain and the rest of it, and I know the minister is well aware of the Calgary courthouse. I know he's trumped the Henday project, and even the Auditor General talks about it. It's hard to get a handle on these figures because the minister first announced, I think, \$493 million. I think he stated at the time that traditionally it would be \$497 million and they were saving \$4 million. Then in the memo that we saw that went out, there was a wide range. So it gets very confusing. There was a \$50 million difference there.

The point that we want to make and, I guess, one question is that – and the Auditor General talks about it – we have to have some handle on these figures much better than we do even to evaluate because over the long haul, when you're paying \$30 million over a period of time, whether that's a debt or not, it's still money that comes out of the Treasury. So we have to evaluate these, I think, much clearer. My own assessment is probably that the traditional way works well. I think you just alluded to the fact that with a major project in Calgary you've gone back to what we call traditional financing. So I guess the question just in the very broad sense is: where do we stand with P3s as far as going into the future?

The other areas that I want to get some handle on – the minister used to have full control over schools, hospitals, universities, colleges, these sorts of things. Now it's a partnership, my understanding, but I'm not sure how the partnership works. Who is really in charge? I mean, I'm sure that the minister will say that there's co-operation between the ministers. For instance, to go into school buildings and utilization, I think both ministers of education and the minister of infrastructure in the spring session said that they were looking at the whole utilization, school closure, these sorts of things. So I'm wondering how much clout his department has in that area now. Really, who does call the shots in terms of what's happening in terms of hospitals, colleges, universities, and schools?

The last point I'd try to make, that's fairly clear, is – I'm trying to remember the infrastructure deficit that the minister brought to

cabinet. I think it was something like – correct me if I’m wrong – \$7 billion or \$8 billion. That shouldn’t have surprised us. I mean, the point is that if you don’t put money into your infrastructure – and we haven’t done that for a long time – you’re going to have an infrastructure deficit. We worry about the economic deficit. There’s a human deficit, that I’ve talked about, in terms of education and the rest of it. But you cannot catch up all at once. I think that’s the problem that the minister is facing. This, again, has to be part of an overall budget over a five- or 10-year period. It’s not always great to try to catch up when the economy is booming because then, as we know, you’re dealing with inflated numbers, and the costs of government are much more.

I hate to sound like an old Keynesian economist, but we probably should have been putting some of that money in when we started to hit the skids, back in the lower ’90s, because we would have had these programs, and they would have been much cheaper. I also recognize that you can’t turn the clock back and you can’t say: we’re not going to do infrastructure now because roads are falling apart, schools, hospitals, the rest of it. So we’re going to pay a premium price, but we have to balance that over a period of time.

I’m wondering, if it’s a \$7 billion deficit, when we will see sort of a long-range plan of that coming in the provincial budget rather than sort of hit and miss so that we can get some idea over a five- or a 10-year period what we’re looking at in terms of dealing with that deficit.

There’s a shortage of time, and I know that there are other groups coming up, Mr. Chair. I will sit down and either wait for the answers or get them later.

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

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I’ll make the answers very brief. First of all, the hon. member has some reasonable comments about the P3. The \$493 million public-sector comparator was not a very good figure. It was a figure that was shown in the Auditor General’s report. We certainly could have done a better job, and on future P3 projects we’ll ensure that the job done is better.

This was the first blush at it, and by all accounts the job that we got done, the deal that we got given to us or that we were involved in is something that is very, very positive now. That doesn’t mean that we stop our due diligence on this one. The same process will take place. We will put it through Treasury Board to a committee of independent people to take a look at it and so on and so on, as the hon. member is well aware.

We are going to be looking at other P3s, but again each one is going to be on an individual basis. Quite simply – and I’ll allude to the hon. member’s last question – we do have an infrastructure debt and/or deficit in this province. There’s probably somewhere close to \$7 billion of work that could be done at this particular point in time. There’s no way that I can sterilize my budget by simply saying: “Here’s \$500 million for the ring road. I’ll take it out of my budget this way. Oh, by the way, Fort McMurray, you don’t get anything. By the way, Brooks, Cardston, Calgary, you don’t get anything because we’ve done it all this way.”

So we do have to look at this type of financing in order to get the economic advantage that infrastructure gives to the province of Alberta. If we want to keep Alberta moving – no pun intended – we have to have the transportation routes to do this. We have to have the transportation available. By far the most important one, although there are lots of other ones such as air and rail, is our roads right now. The road to Fort McMurray, for example, has to be done. We’ve got to take a look at that. These are new roads; these are not upkeep of existing roads. They have to be done. So we have to find

other ways in order to ensure that our roads are looked at, that our roads are done right around the province. We can’t take \$500 million for one large project and say to Edmonton: “Good on you guys in Edmonton. We’re doing your roads. By the way, the rest of the province, no thank you.”

The schools and hospitals. It’s a good question. What the OC stated is that the schools, hospitals, postsecondary facilities are being co-managed between the departments of Education, Advanced Education, and Health and Wellness with the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. To simplify this, what occurs is that the departments of Education, Advanced Education, and Health bring forward the requests to me, to my department. We then have input into it, and both ministers sign off on it as it goes forward. So the approval is mutual. One cannot go ahead without the approval of the other on either side. Mr. Chair, that’s a very critical component of this.

The rationale behind it, I think, is very very sound, especially in health care facilities. When you build new facilities, there are also increased operating costs that go along with it. There has to be a recognition that there are the increased costs when you build a new facility. The best way to do that is to actually have you as a line department put out the money for the capital, and then you have to account for the operating expense as well.

5:00

So again, not being a hypocrite, Mr. Chair, that was one of the things that I put forward when I was minister of learning. I think that is going to work well. It probably has a little bit of growing pains, but I think that ultimately it’s the right thing to do.

The hon. member asked about utilization. We essentially took out utilization when we put the operation and maintenance formula into a per-student basis and put it over to the Department of Education.

The infrastructure that needs to be built in the province, whether it’s \$7 billion, whether it’s \$10 billion, whether it’s, you know, more than that – and I think the amounts could be argued depending on how you look at it. The bottom line in this province is that we need to see that number go down. That number can no longer go up; it must go down. It’s critical. The infrastructure and transportation in this province are absolutely critical to the economic success, and we have to see and show that the transportation component and the infrastructure component are essential cogs in the wheel of the economic capability of this province. We cannot have an exporting province not have good transportation routes out. As everyone in this Assembly knows, Mr. Chair, we are an exporting province.

So it’s my job, quite simply, to ensure that the number that I talked about goes down as opposed to goes up. I will do whatever is needed, whatever I can do to ensure that that happens. That means making deals with municipalities. It means looking at potential oil companies or forestry companies investing in our roads. It means getting the job done, and that’s what has to occur in this province.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It’s with interest that I rise this afternoon to participate in the discussion on the supplementary budget for Infrastructure and Transportation. I realize that time is limited.

The minister did talk earlier about the \$18 million for cost and scope changes to the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads. My question is specific to the Edmonton ring road. I appreciate the hon. minister’s willingness to provide any other information in regard to these projects. I would like to ask him through the chair: why is

there a reported \$43 million cost overrun on the ring road on the south side, the Anthony Henday Drive? What's costing this extra amount of money?

I'm astonished to hear that there is actually a shortage of cement powder. The economic activity is so intense that there is a shortage of cement powder, and sometimes the cement companies are on a quota system for the day for residential construction and for some of the road construction, so the cement powder that is going to Fort McMurray is an amount that keeps the activity going around the clock. If I could have some information on this \$43 million cost overrun, I would be very grateful.

Also, the flyway that intersects – I've got to think about this. The Queen Elizabeth highway, the old highway 2, and the underpass that was constructed and opened just before the IAAF games in 2001 – hopefully, that portion of the underpass is temporary. I can't believe that the department would not be going after the contractor for inadequate work. There are at right angles to the traffic flow considerable dips and heaves in the pavement both in the southbound and northbound lanes on the east side of the highway and the west side of the highway.

That road, in my view, Mr. Chairman, is relatively new, and that should not be happening. It's to the point now where it is unsafe. I would like to know what is being done about that because I think it is shoddy work – it's only four years old – unless, of course, it's a temporary road and the compaction was done rather quickly because it was going to be ripped up to facilitate a new interchange or a new surface when everything is connected.

If I could have an answer to those questions, I would be very grateful, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

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

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. First of all, with regard to the Q.E. II overpass, I will look into that. I have not been asked that question before, but if there is shoddy work, we certainly will look into that.

With regard to the cement the hon. member is absolutely right. What we saw this year is a huge increase in the cement costs. As he knows, the roadway is made out of cement because in doing the tender, we built in a time limit on it. For example, a cement road lasts 50 per cent longer, so we actually built that into the cost, and we paid for a road that is going to last 50 per cent longer.

One of the things that we didn't anticipate, though, was a lack of cement. That came out of the blue, and we didn't really see that one coming, and it has cost us more dollars. There's \$18 million in this estimate for it. Whether or not the number is \$43 million can be argued, but certainly we did get caught on inflationary prices. Another thing that we got caught on is gravel, and we got caught on cement.

The point that I'm leading to, though, is that the hon. member has just made a wonderful case for P3s. If what has occurred is with a P3, any of those problems that he just alluded to are all the responsibility of the contractors. The contractor has a legal obligation, and we have the legal right to go after them if there is shoddy work. If the price of cement goes up, it is the responsibility of the contractor; it is not our responsibility. The other very key component to the P3 is that we have a timeline, and I've mentioned this in the House before. In October of 2007 if that road is not done, on November 1 the fine is a million dollars, on December 1 the fine is another million dollars, and so on and so on. So, Mr. Chair, the hon. member has made a very good case from not a dollar point of view but from a quality point of view as to why P3s are beneficial to the citizens of Edmonton.

The problem that we have with the Q.E. II, because it's been four years, if it is rolly like that, we have no recourse back to the contractor because typically there's only a one- or two-year guarantee on these roads. On the Anthony Henday P3 we have a 30-year guarantee, so we have the ability to go back to the contractor within the first 30 years, Mr. Chair.

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

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You've brought some new issues to the table that I guess I'll address first. I don't see any reason why the government can't make the same contract with a private company you've hired as with a P3, why you cannot have a 30-year contract. As far as fines and quality, as you're well aware, they didn't meet the deadlines on the highway going through Magrath at a great cost to the community. Your letter stated that you weren't responsible for reimbursing those areas. I would think that what we should be looking at is that the government then definitely needs to be making better contracts and asking for 30-year ones, not one or two years and letting them off the hook.

Anyways, we definitely have an infrastructure problem here in the province, and one of the frustrations, I guess, in talking to municipal governments in some of those areas is that it seems like we're losing our common sense on some of these approaches, and we've almost monopolized the road maintenance to big corporations that aren't being as efficient as they could, and because so few can bid on it, the costs are going up.

I'll give you one example down in my area where two secondary highways – there's a 10-kilometre stretch between them that isn't secondary and isn't paved, so the municipal government has to go out 20 kilometres to do 10 kilometres because neither of the big contractors will do those. The reeve there has asked to get permission to do the 30 kilometres all the way out there at a substantially lower cost than what the current contractors have it at. It just seems like some common-sense approaches would be better.

Another question that comes up in my area specifically is the takeover of secondary highways with the promise to be paved. I understand from the minister that some answers are coming forward on highway 501 going east of Cardston. I'm looking forward to that.

Going back, it just seems like we need to have a longer term plan and priorities going out to these municipal areas so they know and understand what's there, also, more importantly, so that the contractors can realize that when they're buying equipment this year, they do indeed have a five-year plan that they can be looking at and not just covering the cost on a one-time effort. Perhaps putting some of that money into a trust fund or something to say, "Well, we don't have to spend it all this year because of the shortage of equipment, shortage of contractors," would be to the benefit in the long term even though we might have to tighten our belts for another year or two to get that good benefit.

5:10

Another area I want to address. You mentioned the DFO and the great struggle that we have trying to get bridges with the closing down of the Hines Creek mill. Twice I've been up to the northwest area and the Dunvegan bridge. Both times only one lane of traffic was going through, and it's not a great place to be. I have great concerns there and would like to know what the priorities on doing that are because there's been a huge increase in traffic. The government knew that those mills were closing down and that resources were going to be trucked down to the south. So have you applied to the DFO to look at starting to get a secondary bridge in that area? If you've got long-term planning, perhaps part of the

problem is knowing that the DFO is so slow that we need to be proactive. Maybe we won't put a bridge in, but let's please try and address it.

Another area I've talked to the minister several times on, and I'll bring it up again today. We heard some good ideas here today. I was pleased to hear the Minister of Community Development referring to \$5.5 million for this I'd call a heritage film for the veterans. We just had our Premier throwing out a \$20 million bursary fund to students in other places in Canada. I still think that we have a golden opportunity here in the little town of Warner to have a girls hockey school that not only attracts people from across the province but those from outside our country. I wish that the minister would please look at that. I've read that there have been several small schools set up for francophones in other areas, up to \$6 million for 55 students, but I wish that he'd put that on the priority list again and realize that this is a benefit for Alberta and for Canada and that we can have this value-added school, a unique school, here in the province with the amount of money that seems to be being disbursed around the area.

The one other problem that we have is the grants that you talk about for the inflationary energy costs. It seems like there needs to be a formula. These people shouldn't be held at bay wondering if a grant is going to come when electricity or natural gas shoots through the roof, wondering: oh, do we have to cover and cut other maintenance or infrastructure in order to cover our gas bill? I feel that there should be a formula in there so that they know that we're not going to hold them short when the energy costs go through the roof. The province does receive the benefit of those royalties and could offset those for our public areas, such as our hospitals, our libraries, our education areas. So I would hope that that would be part of the minister's plan as well.

Thank you.

**Dr. Oberg:** Mr. Chair, I understand that I have until 5:15? Thank you.

Very quickly, the francophone schools that we talked about are constitutional rights ingrained in the Charter under section 23. You cannot compare the small francophone schools to a small school in Warner because of that particular issue.

The Dunvegan bridge will cost roughly \$300 million to replace or to add another one. The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace has been more than cognizant of this and has been working diligently to ensure that his constituents get improved access to that bridge. We're currently in the process of putting lighting on both ends as well as assessing the hill coming down to the Dunvegan bridge to ensure that it is safe for those particular logging trucks.

The other quick point, Mr. Chair. The hon. member alluded to having a fund where you could actually put money aside and sit and wait and then do it later on so that it didn't qualify in the budget year. We have that fund; it's called the capital fund. And that's exactly what we do. I alluded to it in these estimates, where we're only spending \$30 million for Fort McMurray because that's all we could spend. We actually have \$200 million that is being put into the capital fund.

**The Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but pursuant to 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. Stevens:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**Mr. Johnson:** Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports as follows. The following resolutions relating to the 2005-2006 supplementary estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund have been approved as follows for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006.

Advanced Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$99,000,000.

Gaming: expense, \$75,000,000; lottery fund payments, \$5,000,000.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply also reports progress on Infrastructure and Transportation 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:** Concur.

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

The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps we could call Bill 44.

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

**Bill 44**

**Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)**

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Government Services.

**Mr. Lund:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to have the opportunity this afternoon to move second reading of Bill 44, the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2).

This act is a way of streamlining the whole dispute resolution process between tenants and landlords. Currently there are in excess of 5,000 of these disputes that end up going through the Provincial Court or through the Court of Queen's Bench. This process that we're putting in place through this act will simply streamline the whole process. Basically, the way the process would work is that a hearing officer would hear the cases. If there is a dispute, then either the tenant or the landlord could take the dispute and file to the hearing officer. If, in fact, the tenant is the first to go, then it binds the landlord. If it's the landlord that's the first to go there, then it binds the tenant.

Of course, we could have a situation where one goes to court and one goes to the dispute resolution committee all in the same day. That could happen. If that did happen, then in fact it would proceed through the court. However, the only other way that it could happen to go to court would be if, in fact, the hearing officer, when it comes to him or her, says that it is outside their jurisdiction. Then they could refer it to the court.

5:20

Of course, if the hearing does proceed, and it's determined after the hearing that, in fact, it was outside the scope of the hearing officer, then either one could take it to court. But there is similar to a privy clause, which basically means that the hearing officer is

quasi-judicial. Therefore, the decision at the end of a hearing could not be taken to court. Of course, the reason for that is because if we didn't have that in there, then it would destroy the purpose of this resolution hearing process.

The only other thing that I would want to comment on would be the fact that it's a pilot project. It would be set up here in the city of Edmonton. Currently there are about 2,100 of these disputes annually. So we would have it as a pilot to start with in the city, and if it worked well, then we would expand it to other parts of the province.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would move adjournment of debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, if we could call Bill 9.

head:                   **Government Bills and Orders**  
                                   **Third Reading**  
                                   **Bill 9**  
                                   **Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005**

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move Bill 9 for third reading.

We explained the purpose of the act in second reading and discussed it in principle at committee. Really, it's a very short piece of legislation. There's very little more to say. I would ask the House for support at third reading.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is the most brief I have heard the minister in my entire time in the House.

I'll go no further. We've discussed this at second reading and in committee, and I think we've worked through it. I don't think that we need to take it any further. We can call the question, in my opinion.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a third time]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that we adjourn until 8 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:24 p.m.]