

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, November 23, 2005

1:30 p.m.

Date: 05/11/23

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly Mr. Brian Rushfeldt, a constituent of mine from Calgary-Mackay. Accompanying him today is an individual who is very familiar to you, Mr. Speaker, and to members of this Assembly, Mr. Julius Yankowsky, who served as a member of this Assembly from 1993 through 2004. I ask them to rise and please receive the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. The first guests are seated in your gallery. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly His Excellency Alan Baker, ambassador of Israel to Canada. His Excellency is accompanied by his wife, Ms Dalia Baker.

The ambassador is on his first official visit to Alberta. His Excellency has a very busy schedule in the next couple of days, building upon a \$100 million trading relationship between Alberta and Israel. With his training in law His Excellency has been an important part of the state of Israel's search for Middle East peace. I'm looking forward to hosting an official luncheon for His Excellency tomorrow. In the meantime I would ask that our honoured visitors please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I have seated in the members' gallery two very special guests from the town of Tofield that I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly. Seated are His Worship the mayor of the town of Tofield, Mr. Nabil Chehayeb, and accompanying him is Councillor Laurie Weatherill, tremendous volunteers in the town of Tofield who have served on council for some length of time. I would ask you to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise to introduce to you and through you a gentleman who has 28 years' experience as an education professional in our province and who happens to live in the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency, but with that member's indulgence I've been allowed to introduce this gentleman, who is also a journeyman mechanic with a red seal. He's spent a great deal of time advocating for vocational studies and industrial arts courses in our high schools. He's also someone that I referred to in my maiden speech in this House, almost five years

ago, as someone who I'm very, very proud of, and that is my brother Rick Horner, who's seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you a gentleman who has been associated with my office for a considerable length of time. He is a former principal with the Edmonton public school system, and he is married to my assistant Sandy Semeluk. I would ask Len Semeluk to please stand and receive the very warm welcome of this Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It does give me great pleasure to rise on this glorious Alberta day. In fact, at noon the weatherman said that it would be the warmest on this day since 1890, so it's a great day to be travelling up here from Winfield. For guests to introduce today, I have visitors from Winfield school: 21 students accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Terri Cocke, and the principal, Mr. Elwood Johnson, who was my former teacher when I went to Winfield school, and also parent helpers Mrs. Jeanette Chappell, Mrs. Kathleen Zimmerman, and Mrs. Brenda Hoflan. I'd ask them all to rise in the members' gallery and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. S.N. Sinha. Mr. Sinha is a lawyer who is visiting Alberta from Ranchi in Jharkhand state, India. I'd ask Mr. Sinha to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a class who is attending from NorQuest College today. I'm going to introduce them, and if they would please rise when I call their names: Prakash Awasthi, Hamid Chaudhry, Nancy Guan, Asish Kumar, Edgar Mosquera, Adnan Naeem, Shama Naqvi, Myoungbum Park, June Park, and Muhammad Sheikh. With them are their instructors, Allan Carlson and Margarita Cameron. Would you please join me in welcoming them to the Assembly.

I have a second introduction, if I may, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to welcome and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a student activist and keen follower of politics in Alberta. He's also been active with the Young Liberals. I would ask David Cournoyer to rise, please, and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly. He's accompanied today by my assistant Jane Wisener. Would you please rise.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud and honoured today to rise and introduce to you and through you 57 of my young friends from Ormsby elementary school in the constituency of Edmonton-McClung. They're here on a tour of the Legislature. They're joined by their teachers/group leaders, Ms Cathleen

Gardner, Mrs. Joanne Zuke, Ms Alana Eaton, Mr. Thomas Lock, and parent helper Mrs. Annette Vawter. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 37 bright, energetic, and inquisitive young men and women from Duggan elementary school in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. They are accompanied today by three teachers, Mme MacLaren, Ms Eliuk, and Mrs. Rattray, as well as parent helper Mr. Wesenberg. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Laura Lowrie. Laura has been an active member of the United Food and Commercial Workers union local 401 for the past 24 years. She's been an ardent supporter of many NDP candidates, past and present, and is active in her community on a number of fronts. Some of the issues important to Laura include the entrenchment and improvement of worker rights and the preservation of the public, not-for-profit health care system. I'd now ask that Laura rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Mr. Don Stuike. Don is one of the directors of the Edmonton Friends of the North Environmental Society. He and others from his organization have collected signatures for a petition urging the government to declare a moratorium on any further expansion of confined feeding operations. He is seated in the members' gallery, and I would now ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions this afternoon, and perhaps I could get the three of them to rise at the end when I'm finished with the introductions.

First of all, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Mr. Ben Howse. Ben is a lifelong resident of the Kikino Métis settlement. He is a third generation Métis advocate on issues and Métis rights. In particular, he is an advocate for self-governance and is a former board member of the aboriginal rights society.

Second of all, I'm happy to introduce Tracy Harris. Tracy has been assisting us in my constituency since September. She previously worked in the health field, for the last 16 years. Tracy is currently a student in the registered social work program at Grant MacEwan College.

Last but not least, Mr. Speaker, is Jennifer Binkley. Jennifer was born and raised in Edmonton and did much of her postsecondary studies in B.C. She completed the business management and legal secretary program and was working in banking. Jennifer decided to volunteer in my constituency as an assistant, and she did such excellent work that we recently decided to employ her at my office.

I'd now ask that Jennifer, Tracy, and Ben all rise and receive a warm welcome from this Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm truly delighted today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Ms Donna Martyn. Donna and I have known each other since the '60s, when both of us were students at the University of Alberta in the same department. Donna is a schoolteacher and has taught across this province. She is also a passionate advocate for human rights issues in this province. She recently won a case through the Human Rights Commission against the Edmonton Taxi Cab Commission, the city of Edmonton, and two taxi companies who were found to be violating her human rights and the rights of those requiring accessible taxi service. Donna is also the NDP federal candidate in Edmonton Centre. Donna is seated in the members' gallery, in this corner. Please give her a warm welcome.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a further introduction, three very important individuals that I would like to introduce through you to all members of this Assembly. The first is a long-time supporter of my political career as well as a very active advocate and volunteer in the community. His name is Dr. Harb Sandhar. Dr. Sandhar is a member of the Gateway Rotary Club. In fact, he was a founding member of that club, which coincidentally celebrated its 20th anniversary this morning.

With him today is his daughter, Dr. Kulwinder Sandhar, who is a graduate from Punjabi University with a master of science in zoology and a PhD in immunology. We are fortunate to have her moving to Canada. She is quickly going back to India to be married on the 20th of December and then will be making her residence in Canada early next year.

As well, he has with him today a very special young lady who he refers to as his other daughter. Sophie Krzymien is a Rotary exchange student from Poland who is spending one year in Canada, sponsored by the Gateway Rotary Club. I had the honour, Mr. Speaker, of presenting Sophie with a centennial medallion this morning at the Rotary club. That was on behalf of the government of Alberta in recognition of her stay in Alberta during our centennial year.

They're in the members' gallery. I would ask all three to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a gentleman who means much to many Albertans. His membership is, I believe, around 60,000 now, and he has done a bang-up job for those members for many, many years. I'd ask Dan MacLennan to stand in the members' gallery and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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 the members of this Assembly a group of communications interns from various departments of our government: Amy Wolski, Erin Martin, Nick

Kaczmarek, and Trevor Gemmel. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Securities Commission Investigation

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Securities Commission saga continues to twist. More evidence is being made public this week by an investigative journalist that there exist two sets of enforcement rules at the ASC, one for the well connected and one for everyone else. The situation with Zi Corporation, formerly known as Multi-Corp, a company well connected to top Tories, raises serious questions about the ASC enforcement process. To the Minister of Finance: given that Zi Corporation failed to disclose the name of the buyer of more than 10 per cent of its stock, which is contrary to Canadian securities law, why didn't the ASC intervene?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is referring to an article in a paper, and he's referring to activities that happened some time ago. I suggest that if the hon. member has any – any – substantiated fact, he has a responsibility to bring it forward, and it will be investigated.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Complete dodge.

To the same minister: will the minister clear the air categorically and bring this all to an end by denying that Alberta Securities Commission senior enforcement staff were pressured to drop their investigation into Multi-Corp?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, again, if this hon. member has any – any – substantiated, factual information on this allegation that he's bringing forward, I believe he has a responsibility to bring it forward, and it will be investigated.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the minister responsible for the Alberta Securities Commission, the Minister of Finance. Again I repeat: yes or no? Will the minister clear the air and categorically deny that ASC senior enforcement staff were pressured to drop their investigation into Multi-Corp?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I have a greater responsibility than reading articles in the paper and making allegations regarding them and accepting them as fact. I will repeat one more time – and this hon. member could or could not answer yes or no – if he has any factual, substantiated information that this is in fact a fact rather than another allegation against a very important regulator in this province, he has the responsibility to bring it forward, and he should do so forthwith.

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

Nutrition Programs in Schools

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, again, thousands of Alberta children are sitting in schools hungry because there isn't

food at their homes. [interjections] It may be something for the Tories to jeer at, but it's not for those kids.

Thousands of children are mired on waiting lists for school lunch programs because this government refuses to act. If achievement tests were given for caring for hungry children, this government would fail miserably. To the Minister of Education: does this minister at least acknowledge that hunger is a serious issue for thousands of children in Alberta schools?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, food, clothing, and shelter are important to all of us, and clearly the first responsibility does lie with the parents or legal guardians.

I just want to tell the hon. member asking the question the level of assistance that is available to individuals or to families who find themselves in difficult situations. That level of assistance is available, for example, for a single person who's looking for work to receive about \$402 a month to help out. A two-parent family with three children under 12 years of age could receive up to \$1,126 a month. Parents who are looking for work, Mr. Speaker, can get an additional \$324 a month from the federal national child benefit supplement. There are other programs like that, and there are community agencies. There could be a good neighbours fund who are there to help out.

Mr. Speaker, if he knows of some circumstances, perhaps he could let those families know about that or direct them to us, and we will help them.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. To the same minister. Listening to his response, then, is it this minister's position that it is the child's fault when there is no food at home to have a meal on a school day? Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, you know, it just amazes me how low some people in this House will go. It just absolutely amazes me. While I'm prepared to tolerate that from certain members, to come from the Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition is just simply, absolutely amazing.

There are programs that can help these children. There are school boards who care deeply about these children. There are community agencies who care deeply, and we have a provincial government that helps out when we're asked to do so through our various support programs.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. My last question is to the Deputy Premier: how can this government refuse to provide meals to hungry children in Alberta schools that cost \$2 each when it provides \$45 million a year to prop up the horse-racing industry?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, this government stands on its record of support to children, and I would like to give the Minister of Children's Services an opportunity to just remind this House of the tremendous support that we give to the children in this province.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important. Since we brought in a new act last November, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act – the incredible success that we're having with this act. We're doing early intervention. We're working with the families to provide them the basics for their family, some education

about making sure that their children don't go to school hungry. This act is a first in Canada and is being widely watched right across this country and has been hugely successful.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Sour Gas Well Safety

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recent blowouts involving toxic hydrogen sulphide gas in our province have illustrated that there are some serious flaws in the response procedures of the EUB, industry, municipalities, and even health authorities. The Acheson blowout in late 2004 and, more recently, the leak outside Innisfail illustrated ignorance of the risks, confusion, and serious lack of communications. In these most recent incidents the government quickly reassured Albertans after the panic and emergency actions were taken that they were never in any real danger. My question is to the Minister of Energy. When will this government acknowledge that the province's sour gas response plans are dangerously inadequate?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, they're not, first off. With respect to the Acheson well that you've referenced, there was quite an investigation in response to that. That well itself: levels of emissions were so low that that well never was described as a sour gas well, high critical, or anything like unto it. What that report did say is that they were overly precautious in evacuating people beyond even the need. Certainly, no one faults anybody at any company at any time in trying to be overly precautious on evacuation or anything like unto it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how many close calls is this government willing to allow before it insists on having an effective response plan in each setting with all players before approving sour gas developments near populated areas?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, let's place some things into context. The industry as well as the regulators on the standards have had decades of experience in managing this substance very safely. That does not mean that you're not continually trying to upgrade and update with the latest technology and procedures to ensure that all safety issues can be addressed.

The Energy and Utilities Board, being very proactive, a few years ago did an extensive consultation and research on the sour gas itself as to the procedures, approval, and likewise. There were about 87 recommendations. Most of those have already been implemented. The last few are still requiring some further work before implementation can be complete. The Energy and Utilities Board takes safety as the first and paramount issue in regard to approval of any activity in the energy industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's not the impression of most Albertans. Given these recent events does the minister support the recent application by Compton in proximity to 150,000 people in southeast Calgary?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, those things are put, appropriately, before the Energy and Utilities Board. It is there as an independent

body having the expertise to judge all of the factors coming forward. They will not approve any wells under any circumstances if it cannot be safely done. That said, the Energy and Utilities Board is best in position to evaluate those and any other future applications that come with things like sour gas.

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

Corporate Accountability

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Conrad Black, Bernie Ebbers, Martha Stewart, and Ken Lay are among the corporate CEOs who have either done or are facing jail time in the United States for violating corporate laws. Unlike the United States, which has zero tolerance for corporate crime, this province fails to rigorously enforce the few rules that it does have. The result is a growing climate of corruption in this province. My question is to the Minister of Finance. When the former superintendent of Treasury Branches was accused of getting hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash delivered in brown paper bags to bribe him into signing a sweetheart deal for West Edmonton Mall, why did the government cover this up by settling out of court and to this day keep all of the documents safely locked up inside an ATB bank vault?

Mrs. McClellan: I'm looking to the Minister of Justice for some advice on dealing with this, Mr. Speaker, but I'll take this question under advisement. I think I need to review it before I know whether I could appropriately respond.

Mr. Mason: We'll move on then, Mr. Speaker. When there are not one but two sweetheart land deals in Fort McMurray with the same Tory-friendly developer receiving free land and sweetheart financing, why is no one being held accountable for this corruption and wrongdoing?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has delivered a report to this Legislature on this matter. I read that report, and I certainly did not read those words in the Auditor General's report. I would suggest that the hon. member refer back to the Auditor General's report on this matter before he frames another question on it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We'll move on again. When Alberta's top securities cop is caught red-handed by the Auditor General making a significant profit trading shares in a company that he himself is investigating, why is the minister allowing this conduct to go unpunished?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, again the hon. member should read the Auditor General's report because I think he's mixing up people that are involved in this. When he says that it was a company that he himself was investigating, I think he is in error. However, what I did say yesterday in the House – and I stand by that, hon. member – is that I will provide for you a sequence of events in this matter as quickly as possible. I had hoped I would be able to give it to you today. I cannot, but my hope is that it will be tomorrow at the latest, and then we'll have a further discussion on it.

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

Aboriginal Issues

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the late 1980s, almost 20 years ago, there was a meeting of the first ministers on aboriginal issues. Tomorrow, after more than 20 years, the first ministers' meeting on aboriginal issues will begin in Kelowna. This is an important historic meeting between the government of Canada, the provinces and territories, and aboriginal organizations throughout the country. My questions are for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Considering the importance of this meeting to the future of aboriginal people in Alberta, what did you hear from aboriginal leaders that you met with in advance of this first ministers' meeting?

2:00

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, it's the first meeting of first ministers that I have ever attended, and I'm very proud to be going to this meeting. As a result, to prepare ourselves, I did meet with the First Nations and the Métis leaders, and we did that a number of times: on October 11, October 12, and again on November 8. Basically, we wanted to make sure that that input would be coming to the table so that we knew, when we were going to the first ministers' meeting, that we'd be well prepared.

The First Nations and the Métis people have told us that they have certain views. One is the need to honour and respect the spirit and the intent of the treaties from the First Nations, the desire to participate fully in the social and economic life of Canada and specifically in Alberta, and of course the need to close the gap between First Nations and other Canadians on a number of fronts. Of course, that would be education, housing, and health.

The one common thread, Mr. Speaker, that I thought was really interesting is that they continually said, whether it was the First Nations or the Métis, that we must improve the quality of life of aboriginal people on and off reserves as well as in Métis communities and urban centres.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. I think the minister has addressed the key issues that will be discussed at this meeting. So my next question, my last question, would then be: how will Alberta move forward, and what steps will you take following the first ministers' meeting?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my first answer, the areas that we're going to be dealing with, of course, are relationships, education, economic opportunities, housing, and health. All of these are interrelated. If you don't understand the aboriginal community, you can't begin to see how they see everything as interrelated and interconnected. So what we wanted to do was make sure that when we brought the information forward, we would be looking at how we can improve the lives in aboriginal communities. The First Nations and the Métis people were very good in determining what it is that they want us to bring to the table. They wanted us to make sure that whatever it is, it will improve the lives of people at the community level.

The next step, of course, Mr. Speaker, is to see how we can implement the recommendations and concrete actions that will come out as a result of this meeting. I know that on this side of the House we want to see what we can do to improve the lives of aboriginal people in this province.

Minable Oil Sands Strategy

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, this government recently released the plan

for developing the minable oil sands strategy northeast of Fort McMurray. Basically, this plan will strip bare a 2,500-kilometre zone. We're sacrificing environmental integrity for rapid and uncontrolled development. My first question to the Minister of Environment: given that the MOSS plan clearly indicates that the government policy is to get as much oil out of the ground as possible with no regard for the consequences for the environment, is this a policy that would dictate the future resource extraction for this province?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, if I could put in proper context the purpose of MOSS. The MOSS is to streamline to ensure, number one, that the environment is protected and, number two, that necessary regulation is put in place to prevent unnecessary delays. Clearly, today MOSS and the sole purpose of MOSS is for the greater enhanced protection of the environment.

Mr. Bonko: To the same minister: given that the Auditor General clearly stated that without commitment to sustainable resource and environmental management, and I quote, awareness and interest will diminish, can the minister tell the House and all Albertans if he will regard the recommendations and follow them, or will they be ignored?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, we are following the ruling by the Auditor General, which we believe is very substantive and has very good substance to it. Further to that, though, and most importantly for all Albertans, this member also calls Fort McMurray home, where my family is. We breathe clean air, and the clean water we drink and the land we work will never, never, ever be compromised for development.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that this new strategy clearly indicates that the government is not committed to sustainable development, is the minister telling us that the principles of balancing resource extraction and environmental protection are no longer possible or desirable for this government?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I'll also have my colleague the Minister of Energy respond. The integrity of the oil sands industry and what their work has done over the last 25 years – it's important to note here today that pertaining to CO₂ emission, because of technology they have dropped their emissions by 50 per cent. Nowhere else in this entire country has such a feat been accomplished in protecting the environment. Technology will continue to play a key role in helping enhance the environment. I can assure the member and members of this Assembly that the environment and the sustainability of the environment that we are blessed with in this province will always be protected.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, there were six policy areas that were part of the minable oil sands strategy. They haven't at all focused on – for example, the first one was that it be “managed as a co-ordinated development zone”; that we look at this as a regional approach rather than project specific. I usually hear from the opposition that they would wish that we could take a look at the entire context rather than the project, the cumulative issues. That's what this is about. It talks about “progressive, timely and seamless reclamation” – I thought that's what they supported – “to a self-sustaining boreal forest ecosystem.” Number 5 says that “the environmental liabilities from oil sands mining will not be passed on

to future generations.” I’m not certain what they would oppose in that context. It says that “both existing and new operators will be expected to continuously improve their technology and methods.” All things that I think Albertans would support.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Student Loan Program

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I was approached by a university student who had received a letter from an Ontario company that administers Alberta student loans advising him that his six-month grace period to begin repaying his loan was coming up next month. This letter indicated that he had an Alberta student loan of \$30,000, which could be repaid using two options available to him. He could either repay it using a floating interest rate, which would be prime plus 2 and a half per cent, or he could have his interest rate fixed at prime plus 5 per cent. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Given that the Alberta student loan is usually one-third of Canada’s student loan, which means that the student could have a total student debt of \$90,000, what is the government doing to ensure that Alberta postsecondary students who have to finance their education can graduate and enter the work force without having a crushing amount of debt hanging around their necks?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If that is the debt load that the student has graduated with, if that \$30,000 worth of debt is Alberta student loan debt, then one can only assume that that student has graduated from a professional program. The normal student debt application would be that for a four-year undergraduate program you could graduate with a maximum debt load of \$27,000. That would be this year. It was \$20,000 up to now. All of that would be federal student loan debt. If you used more than \$27,000, all of the provincial debt would have been remitted or forgiven on a student remission completion payment. So I can only assume from the circumstances that are being described that the student involved was a professional student graduating in medicine or dentistry or a faculty like that and, therefore, in a position to carry a greater amount of student debt.

In terms of the description of crushing student debt, one has to look at the context of the student in terms of what they’re graduating in to determine the ability of the student to repay. We do have in this province significant loan relief completion payments, which we apply. For most students, particularly those in undergraduate courses, if they’ve completed with a debt over \$30,000, all of their provincial debt would be relieved, and they would be paying federal student loan debt.

Mr. Shariff: My second question is to the same minister. Can you clarify how the interest rate paid on student loans is structured and if it is the official policy of the government to gouge our students to pay prime plus 5 per cent?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, borrowers have a choice of whether to pay their student loans back with a fixed rate of interest or a variable rate of interest, as the hon. member has indicated. They’re responsible for repaying principal and interest over a period of time. In my experience we had a 10-year time frame to repay. In fact, that’s

what I had to face when I graduated. Payments do begin six months after you cease to be a student.

The two options of interest are, in fact, as outlined: a variable rate of prime plus 2 and a half, or with the prime rate currently at 4.75 per cent the current student rate would be 7.25 per cent. That’s not an unusual rate of interest based on what a consumer would pay at the bank if they were borrowing without collateral, but it is a high rate. The fixed rate, which they could choose, is prime plus 5 per cent. So the rates would appear to be high, but in the context of what’s charged on student loans across the country, I can assure the hon. member that only one jurisdiction is lower than that.

2:10

Mr. Shariff: My final question is also to the same minister: given that a residential mortgage is usually prime or prime plus 1 per cent, would the Minister of Advanced Education consider limiting the mortgage on an Alberta student’s career – by that I mean a student loan repayment plan – to bank prime or prime plus 1 per cent?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, of course, we have been in the process over the course of this year of looking at affordability, and we’re working very hard to come forward with a policy both with respect to tuition rates and affordability. Everything is on the table. So, yes, of course, one of the things that has to be looked at and looked at very clearly is the interest rate.

Now, I would hesitate to relate a student debt to a mortgage because if one doesn’t pay the mortgage, of course, there’s foreclosure. There’s security on that debt. There’s no security on a student debt. So there is a default rate. The interest that’s currently being paid with respect to student finance is based on and reflects the fact that there’s no security involved.

However, this minister knows and this government knows that an education is the best investment that any Albertan can make, and therefore we should be looking at education as being a valuable investment and one which should attract lower interest rates.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor.

Access to Postsecondary Education

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the Conservative propaganda that all you need to do to get ahead in Alberta is work hard and pay off your student debts, this government actively engages in policies designed to keep the poor in their place. University tuition has tripled in the last 12 years while average incomes have been stagnant. You don’t need a math degree to know that that discriminates against low-income Albertans who want to better themselves through higher education. To the Minister of Advanced Education: how does the minister justify a postsecondary system in which the poor are left behind?

Mr. Hancock: Actually, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would be wrong in that assertion. The poor Albertan is among the best financed in our student system because we have grants and loan remission, which are best aimed at the lowest income. The people that he really ought to be talking about who have trouble in this system are the middle-income Albertans. They’re the ones that we need to work really hard with to figure out how we ensure that a postsecondary education is affordable, and we’ve been working very hard on that. Now, we won’t leave out the poor in that process by any stretch of the imagination because every Albertan has to be encouraged to get an advanced education, and every Albertan should

know that finances are not a barrier to getting an education. But when he looks at the equation, those at the lower end of the income stretch are well financed by this government to get an education.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that campus food bank usage at the University of Alberta, for example, has increased almost tenfold over this same period, will the minister concede that the student aid system is failing learners from – he can concede whatever he wants – low-income families, moderate-income families? Will he concede that the system is failing?

Mr. Hancock: No, Mr. Speaker, the system is not failing. What I would say to the hon. member and to students across the province is that if anybody gets into a position of crisis, there are opportunities for them. They can go to the student aid office at their institution. They can call student finance. There are emergency relief programs with student finance. There are emergency relief programs at students' unions in each of the institutions. So if students do find themselves in an emergency situation or where they're hungry and they need relief, they need to get some assistance, there is assistance available.

If there is any failure in assistance, perhaps it's that we haven't communicated that as well as we should have, so I thank the hon. member for raising the opportunity so that we can communicate it again. There is relief available for those who need it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the waiting lists for campus daycare spots can be two or three years, will the minister today fund additional daycare spaces at Alberta universities and colleges to ensure that single parents can continue their education?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Children's Services has been working on daycare policy and has just signed a national agreement with respect to daycare policy. I think that when you're talking about daycare, you shouldn't necessarily single out any specific area but work globally to make sure that daycare and child care are available to any Albertan who needs it at an appropriate level.

Now, with respect to each institution, again, in my knowledge and experience most of the institutions do have daycare facilities available and work very hard to make sure that both staff and students have appropriate child care opportunities on campus.

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

Electricity Line between Edmonton and Calgary

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently many of my constituents received some information regarding a new transmission line that is proposed to run across their land. They've been hearing about this for several months now and have several concerns regarding the transmission lines. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Why are new transmission lines needed between Edmonton and Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's Electric System Operator has a mandate of looking at the needs of transmission around the province. They have put together a 10-year plan. They're working on a 20-year plan. All of us wanting electricity in our homes need a system that's reliable. We have to make sure that that backbone is there to support any generation that comes forward. We have a huge challenge with the growth coming at us of a need for quite a bit of additional capacity between the Edmonton-Calgary corridor. It's in that light that this will help ensure that there's reliable electricity delivered to each of our homes when needed, as needed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that my constituents and other area residents have expressed their concerns to AltaLink on several occasions, but they are not convinced that their concerns are being taken into consideration during this approval process, what is the government doing to ensure that the residents of these communities are heard in this process?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the transmission facility owner, AltaLink, was assigned to build the project in their area, and they are conducting consultations with affected people in the areas when they're looking at the siting of these lines. That will be happening to the end of this month and through the beginning of December. These lines and the final approval still have to go through the Energy and Utilities Board, so both consultations will have to be required, and individuals can certainly ensure that their comments are made.

I'd also like to highlight that we put in place a transmission committee, actually chaired by the MLA for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne along with two other members. Their task, working with the regulators, is to ensure that these transmission lines are implemented, that those concerns are heard, and that they can be facilitated to ensure reliable access to electricity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Energy: given that it sounds like this new line is a go, that the construction is going to be happening, what is the province doing to ensure that Albertans don't experience electricity blackouts and aren't burdened with excessive costs for these necessary investments?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, with respect to these transmission lines, clearly, they do cost money. They are costs that would be borne by all ratepayers across the province. Initial estimates show that residential customers would pay no more than \$1 to \$2 per month, and that's out past 2010. But the likelihood is that there still could be very substantial savings had by having more transmission capacity. The lines that we have now between those areas are heavily congested. You can reduce the line loss by having more capacity, so there could be savings also by having greater capacity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Impoverished Albertans

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Living in poverty causes

stress and anxiety, which damages health, limits choices, and impacts the ability to participate in society. Improving conditions for children will impact their lifestyle for decades that follow, creating healthier, more successful Albertans. Almost 14 per cent of children in Alberta live in poverty, which is not by choice. To the Minister of Children's Services: when will the minister establish plans, timelines, budgets, and targets for reducing the number of children living in poverty?

2:20

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that goes back to my question earlier. The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, that is just celebrating its first birthday, is an act that deals with it at an earlier time instead of what happened before when we were at the protective side. The new act has been highly, highly successful. We're dealing with families at an earlier time, dealing with some of the issues that they're dealing with on an earlier basis, and we're very excited about what we're seeing coming out of that new act.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the number of homeless children in Alberta continues to rise year after year, can the minister tell the House what kind of cross-ministerial approach is being developed to deal with the problems of homelessness in Alberta?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we should be very clear that, first of all, we never turn away a family in need, and we'll provide them with emergency accommodation if necessary. The social workers, or the case workers as they're now called, do a wonderful job trying to meet these family needs. We're in discussions with the minister of seniors and the minister of human resources trying to see how we can further enhance these people's lives.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that there is a clear link between low income and poor health and education programs and pamphlets on nutrition don't seem to be making a significant difference, what concrete action will the minister take to address proper nutrition and wellness for Albertans living in poverty?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, one of the initiatives that's part of the third way is the early child development piece, which talks about health supports for families, for parents. We have presently arranged for Fraser Mustard with population health to come and review the wellness opportunities that we have to expand existing programs, making sure that children and families right from the time of birth and before birth, prenatally, are given the proper supports, given the kinds of information they need, given the tutorial to help parents know where to get additional supports so that at least in the early days with the other agencies in the community, with parent link through child and family services, we're able to connect. Frequently it's the lack of co-ordination of effort that enables children to fall through the cracks, which is really most unfortunate. So we hope that with this education we will bridge a portion of it.

I'm sure the Minister of Human Resources and Employment is just dying to talk about the programs for the third quarter.

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

Climate Change

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's Environment minister has said that he will attend the largest meeting of climate change experts in international history in Montreal next week, but Albertans must question the value of such a journey. The government's policy on regulating large industrial emitters is a national and an international embarrassment as it only allows our emissions to increase, not decrease. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Seeing as Alberta has failed to curb greenhouse gas emissions and has no intention to do so, why doesn't the minister spare Albertans the travel tab, stay home, and get to work on a real climate change plan?

Mr. Boutillier: Well, Mr. Speaker, the alternative would be to let him go, so think about that one.

I might add that Alberta, this province, is a leader across Canada, and I might add that the federal counterpart, the Liberal Minister of the Environment, has acknowledged Alberta's leadership relative to reducing greenhouse gases in this entire country.

Mr. Eggen: Well, we're all in big trouble if we take the Liberal plan for environmental climate change.

Given that the minister's climate change plan continues to increase emissions by 26 per cent over the 1990 levels, why does the minister insist on flying to Montreal with the sole purpose of being a long-winded apologist for environmental destruction?

Mr. Boutillier: These questions are fun, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that, clearly, I'm very pleased that actually the Liberal opposition are going to be attending Montreal as well because they see value in it, and I suggest that he may want to talk to his leader about attending as well. I welcome his involvement.

One thing for sure. As we go there, we will be ambassadors talking about the technology front, talking about the fact of capturing and storing CO₂, talking about agricultural practices and how we're reducing greenhouse gases. We are the only province in Canada with a climate change law. We are the only province in Canada with a private/public partnership such as Climate Change Central.

Mr. Speaker, let me conclude by saying that if I had time, I would walk to Montreal, but I'm going to have to take a plane to get there quickly to represent Alberta.

Mr. Eggen: Watch out for Stéphane Dion. He's a very tricky guy, you know. You'd better watch what you're dealing with.

Given that the minister is defending a plan that fails to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, fails to regulate large industrial emitters, and fails to invest in renewable energy, how can the minister insist that he has a serious plan?

Mr. Boutillier: Mr. Speaker, we are the only province in Canada that has a climate change law. Not even the federal government has a law. We will be the first province in Canada to have a regulation that the federal government has assured me it's going to follow. Again, Alberta leadership at its finest.

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

Services for Immigrants

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's call it a happy coincidence for the province of Ontario on the eve of a federal election. Our federal government has just announced an increase of

funding to Ontario for programs and services for new immigrants. Canada's shortage of skilled workers is well documented and well known to us all. This shortage in particular is evident in Alberta, where employers are unable to compete for their projects and costs of projects are rising. To the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Affairs: what is our government doing to secure the same level of funding consideration for Alberta as Ontario has just received for immigrants from the federal government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the new agreement that the hon. member has raised, the Ontario government will receive approximately \$3,400 per immigrant for services covering language and supplement. Now, that again is over five years. We don't know as yet how that will break down over that period of time. Presently we receive about \$1,020 per immigrant for the same supplement purposes. We are working closely with the federal government. I met with my counterpart, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, plus the Minister for Internal Trade to work towards settling once and for all a fair and equitable treatment to Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: has the minister considered negotiating an agreement with the federal Department of Citizenship and Immigration to allow Alberta in co-operation with the feds to process our own applications for visas and, like Quebec, have more control over immigration?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a good question. Currently we have an agreement with the federal government to co-fund settlement services and to fast-track skilled workers to the provincial nominee program. We are encouraging the federal government to live up to its responsibility and try and reduce the processing time for skilled workers. We are not of course considering taking over any federal responsibility. That is a federal role. Our responsibility that we will take a leading role in at the provincial level is marketing Alberta in other jurisdictions outside of Alberta to ensure that people know that Alberta is here. We have a strong economy, the best government in the world, and the best place to live.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Advanced Education: since we are often criticized as having the best educated taxi drivers in the world, what will the Ministry of Advanced Education do to tackle that problem and allow the immigrants who are already here and are underemployed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of elements that go into what Advanced Education does in this area. First and foremost, when bringing in workers to the province, we do have a process where we can certify their education before they come, or we can assist them with certification of their education after they get here. Our international qualification assessment division, for example, will look at qualifications that people bring to

Alberta and certify what standing they might have and provide a certificate so that they can show employers or others what level of education they do have and what it equates to in terms of a Canadian or an Alberta standard. About 3,500 of those certificates will be issued this year. That's a way of helping someone who's got an education through a university in another part of the world: to have someone here understand what that education might equate to. That's a very important part.

2:30

Another important part, of course, is bridging programs, which are shared both by Advanced Education and Human Resources and Employment, to assist people to get the language skills they need for the job or to otherwise get the skills and training they need so that they can get employment in their field in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Education Fundraising

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A key principle of the publicly funded education system is equity. Parents are paying hundreds of dollars a year in school fees and fundraising for educational basics like tables and books: all this work in order to support an educational system where only 69 per cent of the students graduate in three years, hardly an equitable system. My question is to the Minister of Education. Why won't this government commit to abolishing fees and fundraising for basic educational services and remove these barriers to an equitable education system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, obviously the hon. member wasn't listening when I answered part of this question last time, but let me just repeat some of that because it is good information. First of all, this was the first item on the agenda of the meetings that I just held right across the province with 62 school boards. I specifically asked them about school fees: how much they were roughly getting in terms of school fees and what specifically they were charging them for. Now, the School Act allows for school fees to be assessed, collected, and otherwise determined by the local school board working with its local school, and as long as those particular school fees apply to nonbasic items, to nonessential items such as consumables or other instructional materials and supplies, then they are conforming to that School Act that I've referenced and also to the ASBA, or Alberta School Boards Association, general policy.

School boards also told me that they don't feel any tremendous amount of discomfort yet with respect to the fact that some of the fundraising that is going on may be creeping over into the basic area. Now, there might be the odd exception to that – I will concede that – but it has not been brought to my attention in that way. Should it be, then I would ensure that something would be looked into to alleviate the problem.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When will this government recognize that the dependence of schools on fundraising leads to have and have-not schools and abolish fees and fundraising for educational basics?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me make it perfectly clear that we spend about \$23 million each and every school day to help support education in this province from kindergarten to grade 12.

That's a significant amount of money. We also do it at the request of the school boards, I should say, with a maximum amount of flexibility. If the member would take a look at this renewed funding framework, which all school boards have and several others have as well, he would see just how those monies get distributed.

Furthermore, with respect to the school fees issue and the issue of fundraising there was a reference to this in the Learning Commission report, and I have undertaken to respond to that more fully. That's why I've asked school boards for their input, and I will be doing that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Instead of studying this issue, why doesn't this government solve this problem now by committing to guidelines on fees and fundraising and putting it in the 2006-2007 budget?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as part of those consultations with the school boards I specifically asked them a very important question in this regard as well. I asked them if parents were complaining to them about school fundraising and so on. Virtually every single board told me that parents don't mind having some level of involvement in the education of their children directly at the schools, and they don't mind doing fundraising per se unless there's too much of it or unless they might be creeping into the area of essentials or basics. Otherwise, parents appreciate having a little bit of involvement.

As I've indicated, we have studied this issue, we have consulted on this issue, and I will be making a further comment on it very soon in response to the Commission on Learning report.

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

Workers' Compensation Appeals

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Workers' Compensation Board plays an important role in insurance coverage for workers who suffer an accident at work. But for this accident insurance program there are serious issues and hot disputes between the injured workers, who suffer from the real pain of injuries and denial of coverage or are forced to go through many costly and lengthy procedures, and the insurer, WCB, who makes such decisions. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment, responsible for WCB legislation. Given that recommendation 15 in the MLA recommendation report on WCB dated January 31, 2001, states that "an injured worker's benefits must not be cut-off until conflict in medical opinion is resolved," can the minister tell the Assembly: what is the policy written by the WCB to deal with this situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My answers won't be too long. The policy that the member asks about sets out, actually, the criteria for when a worker is eligible for disability benefits. If there is a medical-related conflict between WCB and the worker, there are steps to resolve such disputes, including a medical panel review and the Appeals Commission.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you. To the same minister: does this continuation of benefits include the agreement of the WCB chief medical adviser to implement the medical panel on the claim?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be short. A new process for medical panels was implemented, of course, in 2002. A medical panel has a set of criteria for when it is used. The criteria are clearly outlined in the policy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the continuation of benefits be implemented after or before the decision review body or the Appeals Commission decision?

Mr. Cardinal: Again, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A reinstatement of benefits can occur at any point in the process where new evidence is considered and a decision changed.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds I'll call upon the first of six, but in the interim might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you nine seniors from the constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark who are here to watch the daily pageantry of question period. They are Ruth Mark, Sandra Miller, Earl and Lynn Milner, Beryl and Mike Nahornick, Adrian and Johanna Petoom, and Barbara Wiseman. Would they please rise and accept the traditional warm greeting of the Legislature.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Enron Activities in Alberta

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I plan to table later on today and next week proof of Enron's direct influence over the Progressive Conservative government in this province. Enron's influence was to serve their own financial needs. I'm disappointed in this Progressive Conservative government, that readily agreed to accommodate their demands even when they knew of Enron's pending financial collapse and criminal investigation.

In December of 2001 the government found it undesirable and unnecessary to release publicly the details of the cabinet decision to split the Sundance B power purchase arrangement. Enron quickly sold this generation capacity in 10 days to AltaGas Services Inc. for \$220 million. In October of the same year Enron's corporate lawyers demanded and instructed the secret changes to the deal to senior government officials, which facilitated the sale of Sundance B power purchase arrangements. These arrangements provide some of the lowest cost electricity in Alberta with an all-in cost of less than 2 and a half cents per kilowatt hour. The average electricity

price for 2001 in Alberta was 7.15 cents per kilowatt hour. Where was the benefit for consumers in this sweetheart deal?

While the Alberta government was catering to Enron's demands, south of the border American authorities were starting to conduct investigations into the fraudulent activities of Enron. We need a public inquiry into Enron now. The following questions could be asked at that inquiry, and hopefully we would get answers. Why did the Progressive Conservative cabinet have the opinion that the publication of the deal be deemed undesirable and unnecessary to the public? Why was the deal made with Enron here in Alberta while at the same time in America Enron was under investigation for fraud and price-fixing? Why did the Progressive Conservative government allow Enron's legal department to dictate the words of the secret changes to the power purchase arrangements?

More later.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

2:40 Memorial to Fallen RCMP Officers

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Almost nine months ago four young RCMP constables made the ultimate sacrifice and were lost tragically in the line of duty. This devastating loss continues to be felt in my constituency and throughout the province.

People feel a need and an obligation to remember the sacrifice made by these four brave and dedicated men, who were loved and respected members of their families and their communities. The need to remember these four individuals is the motivation behind the desire to build the Fallen Four memorial in Mayerthorpe. This memorial will serve as a way to honour the memory of these four constables forever and help the community and the province to heal.

This past Thursday, November 17, an official launch of the 7-Eleven and Wal-Mart Kids 4 Cops product sales took place at the Elmer Elson elementary school in Mayerthorpe. Seventy-six 7-Eleven and seven Wal-Mart stores have agreed to be an official point of sale for Kids 4 Cops products, which will include vehicle magnets and decals. These products will be available until mid-December, with all proceeds going to the building of the Fallen Four memorial.

The co-operation of these stores and the hard work of many people in my constituency will ensure that these men will not be forgotten.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Community Learning Campus at Olds College

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize an outstanding educational innovation within my riding, the community learning campus at Olds College. The CLC is an innovative, groundbreaking approach to learning. Integrated within the Olds College campus, the facilities of the community learning campus – a core high school, e-learning centre, health and wellness facility, and fine arts and multi-media centre – provide a framework upon which opportunities can be built for learners of all ages. These facilities create a system of seamless educational delivery which takes students smoothly from high school into the postsecondary system.

The CLC concept is focused on students, the community, rural growth, and lifelong learning. This project is designed to help inspire a new generation of leaders who want to live and work in the communities in which they were born and raised. I believe that as our province moves forward with the rural development strategy,

other communities could benefit from examining how the community learning campus operates at the Olds College.

Mr. Speaker, the community learning campus as an innovative approach to educational design and community partnership has recently been recognized with a prestigious international award. This award was presented by the Council of Education Facility Planners International at their annual conference in San Antonio, Texas. The CLC project in Olds was selected for this award because it exemplifies the community learning concept, serves as a centre of excellence, and has renewed enthusiasm for this rural community.

Project architect Craig Webber, community learning campus director Rob Mackenzie, and all those involved in the community learning campus are to be congratulated for the fine work that they've done and a job well done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Affordability of Postsecondary Education

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About 400,000 Albertans live below the poverty line, 400,000 individuals each with their own personal life story, their own unique set of circumstances. There is no magic pill to cure poverty, but over a century of research tells us that one of the most effective routes out of poverty is education. I know that the Minister of Advanced Education recognizes this because that message came through strongly in the minister's review of postsecondary education this past summer and fall. The minister's forum and the process leading up to it began as an affordability review of Alberta's postsecondary system.

Many Alberta learners from low-income families are already in or trying to get into postsecondary education, and their efforts are causing them financial problems, huge problems. They're taking up to seven years to complete a four-year degree because they have to keep taking off time to work. If they have to leave home to go to school, they're running up enormous living expenses just trying to pay the rent in places like Grande Prairie, forced to rely on campus food banks in Edmonton. They're graduating with thousands of dollars in debt and entering into their adult working lives with one if not both arms tied behind their backs. They're delaying buying a house, getting married, starting a family. Their debt loads prevent them from being fully participating members of society, and that hurts Alberta's productivity.

Mr. Speaker, the minister's review sought to lay the groundwork for the postsecondary education system of the 21st century. I think that's both commendable and achievable, but while we're working on that, we need to fix the problems in the 20th century model we're using today. To my mind that means that the minister has to re-engineer the student aid system in this province to meet the needs of the students participating in the system today and reduce their debt burdens. It's rather like having an old car that you won't be ready to trade in until next year but which needs brakes right now. You have to replace the brakes if you're going to keep the old car on the road till the new one is ready. The student aid system can be and must be fixed this year in time for this fall.

Mr. Speaker, education is a route out of poverty only if the poor can afford it.

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

Municipal Excellence Awards

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties recently held their annual confer-

ence here in Edmonton. The Alberta Urban Municipalities Association held their convention in early October. Each year at these gatherings of municipal leaders the minister's awards for municipal excellence are presented by the Minister of Municipal Affairs to recognize the outstanding accomplishments of Alberta's municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge this year's recipients in appreciation of the important role that municipal government plays in delivering service to Albertans. I'm very pleased that the partnership award went to Strathcona, Leduc, Beaver, and Lamont counties, and 15 federal/provincial departments and nongovernmental organizations for their joint work on a land management framework for the Beaver Hills-Cooking Lake moraine.

In addition, the town of Rocky Mountain House took home the innovation award for its vision and commitment in creating an antibullying bylaw. The town of Black Diamond was awarded the smaller municipalities award for a unique program that supports and encourages youth in their community.

Finally, this year's outstanding achievement award was presented to the city of Calgary for its 311 state-of-the-art telephone information line providing a one-window approach to city services.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's municipalities symbolize the collective spirit across this province in continuing to develop creative solutions to keep our province a safe, well-managed place to live, work, and raise a family. I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and all members of this Assembly will join me in extending their best wishes and congratulations to all of this year's award recipients.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Historical Preservation in Wetaskiwin

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the past year there have been multiple celebrations throughout our province in honour of Alberta's centennial anniversary. These celebrations have given us an opportunity to look back and reflect on the history of our province. Historical sites and artifacts provide a special insight into past events that cannot compare to a textbook or a photograph. The preservation of Alberta's physical history ensures a greater understanding of how Alberta was developed over the years, changing from a province wholly dependent upon agriculture to the development of other industries and the rise of the oil patch in our province.

For this reason I am proud to rise in the House today to recognize the efforts at historical preservation which are being undertaken in Wetaskiwin. In October, marking the end of 14 months' labour, work was completed on refurbishing one of the most visible landmarks in my constituency, the Wetaskiwin water tower. This tower has stood vigil over Wetaskiwin for close to 100 years. It is the oldest working water tower in western Canada. Instead of demolishing the water tower, the community decided that preservation of the tower was a goal worth reaching, and they threw their support behind it. While the provincial government provided funding, the bulk of the money for the project came from fundraising by the Memorial Fund Society and from the city of Wetaskiwin itself. Because of this support Wetaskiwin and Albertans have a living, working piece of history in our province.

Of course, the water tower is not the only place in Wetaskiwin where history is being preserved. The Reynolds-Alberta Museum is home to over 8,000 artifacts. This museum is unique because it is dedicated to following the history of the machine in our province. A walk through the halls of RAM is a walk in the footsteps of pioneers of agriculture, aviation, and industry.

Alberta's history is one which is rich and diverse, and I would like

to commend the people of Wetaskiwin and all Albertans who work to preserve our heritage.

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

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: 2:50

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a great group of students. Time is precious. They ended up having to leave, but I'd like to introduce them. They have two wonderful supervising teachers: the principal, Mr. Roger Baldry, and the vice-principal, Mr. Darryl Christensen, who go to great lengths to make social studies exciting and for them to understand the democratic process and the Legislature. They come from the town of Magrath. They've had a long day, and they're heading back because they've got a tight schedule. I'd just like to give them a warm welcome from this Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: My apologies to the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner for not getting him in a little earlier when his group was still here.

Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, by way of historical vignette two important events in the history of Alberta on this day. First of all, 18 years ago November 23 was the day of election for the hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance and MLA for Drumheller-Stettler.

A lot of few years before that, in 1925, the Hon. Herbert Greenfield resigned as Premier of Alberta. From 1921 to 1925 Herbert Greenfield presided over the province's first United Farmers of Alberta government. He emigrated from England with his family to eastern Canada in 1892. There he married, and then he came west as a farm labourer. In 1906 he moved to the Westlock district to be a homesteader and became a successful farmer and, ultimately, a Premier of the province of Alberta.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to present a petition today from 100 Alberta tradesmen and women from the communities of Barrhead, Bashaw, Didsbury, Glendon, Cereal, Chipman, Millet, Thorhild, 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, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am submitting a petition signed by concerned parents from the communities of Siksika, Cluny, Coaldale, Lethbridge, and Turin, and it reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take measures that will require school boards and schools to eliminate all fees for instructional supplies and materials and general school services, including textbooks, musical instruments, physical education programs, locker rentals, lunch hour supervision and required field trips, and to ensure that schools are not deprived of the resources necessary to offer these programs and services without additional charges to parents or guardians.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the citizens of Alberta I present a petition for a province-wide moratorium on confined feeding operations.

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

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table two petitions today. The first one has 509 signatures on it. This petition was co-ordinated by the Edmonton Friends of the North Environmental Society and calls for "a moratorium on any future expansion of Confined Feeding Operations, with a view to phasing out existing operations within the next three years."

I would also like to table a petition that I've been circulating across Edmonton and northern Alberta. This first instalment has 155 signatures and is calling on the government to "immediately provide funding [for] municipalities and the RCMP to hire 500 additional community police officers" in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday the hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance took under advisement three questions directed to her by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. At this time I would like to table responses to those questions.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings, three annual reports, to table today. I'd personally like to table the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission 2004-2005 annual report, the Charitable Gaming in Alberta 2004-2005 annual report, and the Horse Racing Alberta 2004 annual report.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the required number of copies of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy annual report 2004-05. This marks the 10th anniversary of the FOIP Act, and I'm pleased to support legislation

that continues to preserve the balance between access and privacy, as Albertans desire. Since the act took effect, provincial government bodies have handled more than 20,650 requests for information and responded to 93 per cent of them within 60 days. Administering the act will continue to be part of this government's commitment to openness and transparency balanced by our responsibility to guard the personal information entrusted to us.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings today. First, I'm tabling copies of eight motions that I presented to this morning's Public Accounts Committee meeting and in doing so gave them notice of motion asking them to debate this at the meeting next Wednesday. These are amending Standing Order 50 to create a more effective Public Accounts Committee.

My second tabling is from Shirleen Smith, who is writing with an idea for a lasting legacy rather than the \$400 rebate cheque, suggesting the creation of a charitable, nonprofit society to which people could donate their cheques to buy books for schools.

The next one is from Cherylyn Stacey, who is suggesting that "in Alberta there's a whole other area of importance that has long been neglected and appears to have been overlooked now," that "it is not only social justice to take heed of our disadvantaged, it is simple prudence." She would like to see the money "put into people and programs instead of concrete."

Finally, a submission from Mary Anne Jaedicke, who's the executive director of the South East Edmonton Seniors Association, again talking about rather than the need for \$400, the need for funding for daycare facilities, crisis centres, and seniors' centres, urging us to reconsider the delegation of the money and to support FCSS initiatives as we should.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first one is an e-mail dated October 9, 2001, from Robert.Hemstock@enron.com to Joseph.Segatto@gov.ab.ca. These are instructions from Enron to the government's Legislative Counsel in regard to the sale of the power purchase arrangement at Sundance.

The second tabling I have is a letter dated August 14, 2001, to the president and CEO of Enron Canada in Calgary, and it is from the Minister of Energy. It states among other things that "we look forward to working with Enron on the continued development of a competitive electric industry in Alberta."

My third tabling this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is a letter that I received from the hon. Minister of Energy dated October 31, 2005, and it is in regard to the temporary suspension of maximum rate limitation requirements on oil wells and oil production.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from a constituent, Mrs. Karen Maloney, whose husband has been going through cancer treatments for the last nine years. They have to travel to Calgary for the IVF treatments, and they can't afford a huge amount of money. The clinic fees are about \$6,500 and the medication \$2,500 to \$5,200, plus travel allowance. She is asking the government of Alberta to cover all the expenses.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table the requisite number of copies of an e-mail correspondence from a constituent by the name of Carol Carbol. She is writing today to express her grave concern regarding Capital health's proposed plan to replace the outpatient residence at the University hospital and Stollery children's hospital "with a private full service hotel that will be available to patients and their families at a much higher cost." She's inviting all members of the public to an information picket on November 29 between 11:30 and 12:30 in front of the outpatient residence.

3:00

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

Mr. Flaherty: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table a Showcase Celebration of the Public School Boards Council, held at McKay Avenue school last Friday, November 18, and there are five copies.

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. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness, the Alberta Dental Association and College annual report 2004, the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta 2004 annual report, the College of Dietitians of Alberta annual report 2003-2004, the College of Dietitians of Alberta annual report 2004-2005, the College of Alberta Psychologists annual report 2004-2005, and the Alberta College of Social Workers annual report 2004.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Human Resources and Employment, the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association report of proceedings of the 96th annual general meeting, April 21 to 23, 2005; the College of Alberta Professional Foresters annual report 2004-2005; the Workers' Compensation Board annual report 2004; the Certified General Accountants Association of Alberta annual report 2005; the Consulting Engineers of Alberta 2004-2005 annual report; Workers' Compensation Board Alberta 2004 accountability framework report; and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2004.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**
Microphone System in the Chamber

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call Orders of the Day, just a little note. At the beginning of this session I indicated that the microphone system in the desks had been changed. Today and yesterday there seem to be some members' voices that penetrate quite well in the Assembly; others do not.

Look, we had undertaken a Pavlovian approach with the reorganization of the desks. The tradition is that when members raise questions, they raise them through the chair, which means that they should look at the chair. When members respond to questions, they should give them to the chair, respond to the chair.

The previous microphones in the desks were in the centre of the desks. Members tend to start moving away and start putting their backs to the chair, so the chair cannot protect them. If you look at the desk, the microphones are on the extreme left-hand side of the desk, which is the direction of the chair. When you turn toward the chair, the microphone will activate. If you turn away from the chair, the microphone will not activate to the same degree, so not all

members will be able to hear. Secondly, if you take a piece of paper and block it, because of the sensitivity of the mike, it will tend to blur it a bit. So the best thing to do is just line up with the mike, which lines you up with the chair, and you'll project very, very well.

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

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

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

Health and Wellness

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

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. Alberta Health and Wellness requested an extra \$64.6 million in the supplementary estimates this year to provide funding for 14 health capital projects. The funding was part of a multiyear, \$1.4 billion announcement that was made for 20 capital projects on October 14. There's an investment here of dollars from the unbudgeted surplus, and it will provide additional bed capacity in the form of new buildings, renovations, and expansion of existing facilities. This historic investment is evidence of our commitment to take concrete action on wait-time reduction.

Mr. Chair, as we look at capital priorities, responsibility for capital planning is shared between the ministries of Health and Wellness and Infrastructure and Transportation as well as the health authorities. The health authorities are responsible for assessing the impact of operational strategies contained in their plans on their capital assets and formulating appropriate capital plans and projects to implement those strategies. As the Minister of Health and Wellness I'm responsible for setting health system priorities, including recommending specific capital priorities. The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation oversees the implementation of approved capital projects and programs. Alberta Health and Wellness consolidates health authority plans and in consultation with Infrastructure prepares the priority list.

For the Calgary region. The Calgary health region will receive \$50.9 million for five projects. The Peter Lougheed centre will be allocated \$18 million this year for phase 2 of its redevelopment. Phase 2 involves construction of a six-storey east addition. Levels 2 and 4 and portions of level 1 will be finished to provide additional beds including intensive care unit beds, coronary care unit beds, and medical surgical beds. Phase 2 also includes expansion of cardiovascular diagnostics and partial emergency department redevelopment.

The new Sheldon M. Chumir health centre has been allocated \$8.1 million this year. This exciting project will involve construction of a new facility on the former site of the Colonel Belcher veterans centre to house a 24/7 urgent care centre, outpatient mental health programs, chronic disease management programs, primary care clinics, and a new aboriginal health centre program.

The Foothills medical centre redevelopment project will receive \$11.3 million this year. The phase 1 expansion will include construction of a new addition to house an expanded intensive care unit and emergency department as well as space for the future expansion of surgical and diagnostic imaging.

The Rockyview general hospital redevelopment project has been given \$10.5 million this year. Phase 2 work includes construction

of a south addition to the Highwood Building to house an expanded emergency department and provide space for a future intensive care unit, coronary care unit, and ambulatory care and clinical support expansion. A new heliport will be constructed, and renovations will be done to provide two additional operating rooms.

The Richmond Road diagnostic and treatment centre will receive \$3 million in 2005-06 for renovations to convert the former Alberta Children's hospital to a diagnostic and treatment centre providing day surgery, day medical, and outpatient programs.

For the Capital region. The Capital health region will receive \$13.4 million for six projects in this fiscal year. The Eastwood primary health care centre replacement project has been allocated \$2 million this year. The funds will go toward constructing a new facility to accommodate relocation and expansion of public health and community mental health clinic programs and to introduce primary care medical services and 24/7 urgent care. The facility will also house region 6 child and family services programs.

The Strathcona county hospital and health centre will receive \$7.4 million in 2005-06 to begin work on a new hospital and health centre. The facility will provide acute-care services and will accommodate a primary care network, family practice, community health services, and children's services programs.

The Fort Saskatchewan health centre replacement project has been allocated \$3.6 million this year. This project involves replacement of the 32-bed hospital with a 38-bed health centre on a new site. It will feature expanded acute-care and community health service capacity.

The Grey Nuns community hospital has been allocated \$100,000 this year for redevelopment. The project involves renovations to expand the intensive care nursery, diagnostic imaging and emergency departments, reopening in-patient units and operating rooms, as well as development of a geriatric assessment unit.

The redevelopment project of the Misericordia community hospital has been allocated \$200,000 this year, and Health and Wellness will be in support of that program.

3:10

Some of the other projects that have been identified on the list, including the Edson health care centre redevelopment, the Lethbridge regional hospital redevelopment, the Barrhead health care centre redevelopment, the Viking health centre renovation and expansion, and the High Prairie health complex replacement, are projects in other health regions. That means that we will have 45 additional acute-care beds in rural Alberta. In total, there will be 162 more acute-care beds in Calgary, 459 more acute-care beds and 100 more long-term care beds in the Capital region, and projects in the other regions will mean 45 additional.

Mr. Chairman, it's my contention that this expenditure this year, which enables all of these projects to be launched, will be a very solid opportunity for the projects to create an estimated 666 additional acute-care beds, 85 long-term care beds, and vastly improve the circumstances for providing better access throughout Alberta for the treatment and support of patients.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak to this. I will note on the record my disappointment with the limitation of three days set aside for supplementary supply. We have not been able to give adequate debate in the previous two days set aside, and I'm hopeful that we'll make it today, but it does mean that we're spending approximately 17 minutes per department, which does not seem adequate for a good exchange of questions and answers.

Going directly to what has just been outlined by the minister and what appears on pages 37 through 40 in the supplementary estimates 2005-2006, general revenue fund and lottery fund, the October 14, 2005, media release announced that \$1.4 billion in funding had been approved. I believe the media release actually talks about this money coming out of – yes, indeed. I'm quoting from the October 14, 2005, media release. The health minister is quoted as saying, "Government is using the unbudgeted surplus to help build Alberta's future." As part of this, in the same press release it talks about \$1.4 billion for health infrastructure.

What I see before me, Madam Minister, is \$64 million and change, and I'm wondering where the rest of the money is. I look forward to a description on that. Essentially, there's a discrepancy here between the \$1.4 billion that was announced in October and what we actually see in this supplementary supply being asked for, which is \$64,630,000. Where's the rest of the money that was announced, or why don't we see what was announced in October? We were told that it was unbudgeted spending; it was from the surplus. Where is the rest of it?

The minister has attempted to go through and list how the \$64 million is being divvied up. I made notes as she spoke. I might have missed something, but she did say that there were six projects being funded in the Capital health region. I got the \$100,000 for Grey Nuns, the \$7.4 million out of \$85 million for Sherwood Park, \$3.6 million out of \$40 million for the Fort Saskatchewan hospital, \$2.2 million for Eastwood. It never gave us a price tag in the original press release. One, two, three, four: that's all she mentioned. I'm wondering what else is happening out of the Capital health region.

The other slight discrepancy I picked up was that at one point she talked about 100 more long-term care beds, but the media release was talking about 85 more long-term care beds. So if she could tell us where the 15 new long-term care beds will be located and how that funding is working, I'd appreciate it. And, of course, where's the rest of the money between \$64 million and \$1.4 billion?

My next question is that the \$1.5 million contract with Aon Consulting is not listed here, so I'm presuming that that means that it was included in the budget that was presented in this Assembly last March. My question is: did the minister know prior to the symposium that she hosted in May that she would be contracting with a private company to create a three-tiered health system or the third way health system or however she wishes to term it? I'm interested in the timing on that one, Mr. Chairman. If that \$1.5 million contract which was let to Aon Consulting was not anticipated when the budget was presented, where is it? It should be in this supplementary supply, and I don't see it. So if the money has been freed up from somewhere else, I'd like to know where it was freed up from.

There has been extensive coverage this summer about long-term care flowing from a great deal of advocacy by the community and members of the Official Opposition and the third party opposition and validated by the Auditor General's report released in early May. As a result of that, there was a long-term care review committee, comprised of two government MLAs and one opposition MLA, that spent the summer holding public consultations and released a report.

We've heard all kinds of price tags on implementing that report. I'm wondering from the minister: where's the money? I take it that there is no money for long-term care or to do anything with long-term care prior to the next fiscal year, as it is not listed in what we are looking at for supplementary supply. So can the minister, then, confirm that there is no money that has been allocated for the implementation of the recommendations from the long-term care review or from the Auditor General's report from May of 2005?

The question that I have been asked the most often around the

announcements of infrastructure funding in the Department of Health and Wellness is: where are the accompanying operating dollars? I've had all kinds of letters from people saying: are we going to have empty buildings with empty beds because there is no one to staff them? So we are contemplating here new buildings being built. I guess what we need to hear from the minister is: what is the timeline that is accompanying these facilities and expansions and renovations, and when will we see the matching money that needs to go along with it to pay for the human resources to actually operate and work in the infrastructure that is being built here?

I'm interested in how this money is being used specifically. Most of it is fairly small amounts from fairly significant price tags. I'd mentioned some of them: you know, \$10.5 million for phase 2 on the Rockyview out of \$92 million which was announced in October. So I would like some detailed information from the minister on exactly what is going to be paid for from this money. She gave us a sort of general overview: it would go toward this and so. I'm interested in seeing what is anticipated here. Particularly, if there are going to be contracts signed to provide architectural drawings, to do initial cost assessments, to dig the foundation, where is the money that is allocated in this fiscal year that we are contemplating before us today from this supplementary supply estimate? How exactly is that money going to be spent? How is it contracted? To whom? Obviously, she is not going to have time to give that to us today, so I would appreciate receiving that from her in written form.

3:20

I'd like to know, because these are partial payments toward much larger price-tag projects, who made the decision. Did the minister approach the regional health authorities and say: I'm going to give you X amount? For example: "Calgary, I'm going to give you 50.9. You figure out how to divvy it up, and get back to me. Capital health region, I'm going to give you 13.4. Figure it out, and get back to me." Did the department go through and decide how to allocate the money specifically to various projects? Did you all have a big party, and everybody pitched, and somehow they figured it out on the spot with a calculator? I'd like to know how these amounts were arrived at for these particular projects.

I would also like to know if other monies were reallocated during the year. I'm suspecting that monies were in fact reallocated inside of the budget year, and we're not seeing that in the supplementary supply because it's moving between line items, and it's not asking for additional supply from the Crown, but I would be interested in where other monies were reallocated during the year. From where did they come, to where did they go, and why?

One of the initiatives that was listed under the minister's third way initiatives was mental health, and I don't see any money allocated for mental health in this supplementary supply. My understanding from talking to someone earlier today was that someone from the department had been saying that there was an expected \$300 million going into infrastructure for mental health facilities. One, is that true? Two, why isn't it in this budget? Three, when do we expect it?

Again looking at the fact that we are getting partial payments, what is the schedule for the rest of the payments? More particularly, do we have to wait for another surplus to get the next instalment on the building or on the renovation? We have a situation here where there's a long wish list and a long need list of capacity building and infrastructure in Health and Wellness, but we don't see it in the original budget that comes forward from the minister. When we ask questions about it, we're always sort of given a catch-all phrase that's it in a business plan and we need to do other things and we know what they are, but we're not telling you.

So now we have unbudgeted spending. What do they call it? Off-budget spending, which always reminds me of off-track betting. They're both done in the dark and away from the real action. I would like to know where the plan is. Does this mean now that the remaining money, the difference between the \$40 million for the construction of a new hospital in Fort Saskatchewan and the \$3.6 million that they were given through this supplementary supply – do they have to wait until there's another surplus? If there's no surplus in the next fiscal year, do they then just halt everything and leave the wires sticking out of the ground until there is a surplus, and then they get another allocation? Or will there now be a concrete plan with timelines, expected outcomes, contracts, dates, amounts, monitoring, and evaluation that goes along with it? I'd really like to see how the minister anticipates laying that out and whether there's a concrete plan to have this roll out over so much money and so many other years or if this is again awaiting surpluses.

Another question I've been asked a lot by people that have written to me is: why did the government make this announcement after the budget was passed? Why not include this money in the budget planning in the first place, where we had a level of detail that would make it clear what the government was anticipating rather than getting a big announcement on the 14th of October with two pages' worth of listings of what's going to be covered?

The other thing I've noticed from serving on Public Accounts for many, many years is that for funding that comes after the budget is passed, particularly late in the year, there's always a sort of rush to spend the money before the end of the fiscal year. In that rush, well, sometimes contracts aren't signed before the work starts, might skip a little bit on some of the monitoring. I mean, maybe all of the performance measurements aren't looked at, or the contract isn't evaluated. The key points in there are kind of skipped over. So how do we get reassurance from the government that these funds will be properly expended, they will be properly contracted, and that the risk will be acknowledged and planned for and hedged against? It's taxpayers' money here that could be wasted if things are not done properly and either have to be redone or done, for example, in an unsafe way.

A slight repeat, which is the question: where are the operating dollars that match the infrastructure that's anticipated here? Is there a budget in place that actually tells the minister how much money she's going to need in order to staff these new hospitals and, in some cases, expanded hospitals? I think the background to that is that we're already experiencing staff shortages and heavy workloads for health professionals. I'm sure we've all heard of that. The United Nurses of Alberta recently warned the province. What was their quote? Something about don't be buying bed sheets because we don't have people to actually staff the beds that they have. The University of Calgary's executive dean of health sciences is quoted as fearing that physician shortages will become a crisis in the next eight to 10 years. They're not even coming close to meeting their needs.

My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is: what is the short-term strategy and the long-term plan to increase the amount of health professionals in Alberta; in other words, to staff these very buildings that are now going to be built? What programs are in place for recruitment of health professionals? Exactly what is being done in conjunction or collaboration with the Ministry of Advanced Education in an effort to recruit and train health professionals? We know that there's a limit on the number of spaces, for example, in med school. There are only so many of them, and that's it. People get in, and those spaces are filled, and you only graduate so many of them. Only so many are funded, more to the point, by the provincial

government. So what collaboration is happening cross-ministry with the Ministry of Advanced Education?

I'd like to know, given the shortage of health professionals, particularly in rural Alberta, why the decision was made to not provide extra supports to the rural physician action plan? It strikes me that if we have a health workforce crisis, and particularly I think we see that manifested in rural Alberta, why was this extra support not provided there?

So the additional questions. I'm wondering if there is any money targeted from off-budget spending? I'm beginning to wonder if there isn't another supplementary supply that's coming that's got the rest of this money in it. Is there any money that's targeted from off-budget spending for the third way initiatives? Additionally, is there any money targeted from the budget money that is specific to third way initiatives?

The minister did go through, for the most part, how much money was targeted to each facility but with a very general description, and I would like much more detail, please. I would also like to know how much has been spent. Given that the original announcement was October and the government – well, certainly the Premier has made it very clear that he regards the debate in the Assembly as a much-after-the-fact, long-after-the-fact rubber stamp, how much of the money that is being detailed here has actually been spent as of the end of this month? Was most of it already spent this summer? By the end of October? Will it be mostly spent by the end of December? Where are we with that?

3:30

I'm also interested in the \$919,852,000 that are listed as credit or recovery for balance of expense. Could we get a breakdown of exactly what that amount of money represents? I'm assuming that this is recovery, so it may well be premiums, health care premiums, but I'm interested in whether that is what it is and what else is included in that. Are there other fees? Were there monies unallocated that have now been transferred? Did they say that they were going to do something that they didn't? Where is that money from?

I'm being very aware of the extremely limited time that we have here and the number of my colleagues that also wish to debate. I note today that as well as Health and Wellness we're trying to get through Sustainable Resource Development, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Community Development, and Environment. Left over from previous days we have Children's Services, Solicitor General, Infrastructure, Seniors, and Municipal Affairs. So I will take my seat and allow the minister an opportunity to briefly respond. I believe that there are others of my colleagues that also wish to direct questions to the minister on this particular supplementary supply.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much for the questions. Let me just say at the outset that the unbudgeted surplus that's been the basic host for the expenditures is to host capital expenditures. Plans that were announced last year, both in June and in October, were the target of these expenditures. These were plans that were in various stages of development, functional studies, planning studies that were announced in 2004 that had not been fully acknowledged in this year's capital budget. Of course, there were many capital projects under way this year. This fulfills the obligation of plans that were announced, projects that were in various stages of development, and provides an accounting for how those projects can be funded in future.

The funds are held in an account, obviously, under the support system of the rules of Finance and through Infrastructure and Transportation, who manage the release of the funds. When the

regions came forward and presented what they would absolutely need in this budget year, 2005-06, to accomplish at least the start-up for those particular projects or the advancement of those projects, these dollars that were given, the \$64 million, were an acknowledgement of what their needs are today. They did not acknowledge next year's expenditures.

Next year's expenditures will be invoiced to those accounts that are identified and properly tracked for those particular projects. Calgary health authority, for example, will receive the money that's allocated for their projects on the basis of when they use it. So if there was a lack of opportunity, if there was some shortage of supplies, then that advancement would not be made. So it's in a very controlled situation. When invoices are received, they are paid through the sign-off in Infrastructure and Transportation. That's part of the service of management that Infrastructure and Transportation gives to approved projects.

Long-term care, because it is predominantly staffing, although there is an accommodation portion of it as well, which the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports has in her department, will be something that we will come forward and talk about at a different time. The approvals were announced in October, and these supplementary estimates focus on those approvals. Later approvals would come from later dollars that would be available. So that would deal with long-term care and any additional funding.

On the subject of the Aon contract there were dollars that were in a consulting budget that were identified in Health and Wellness to enable us to hire people to provide work for either the third way or other projects. It's from those dollars that are available for contracted services that Aon was retained. Right from the time that the RFP was announced in July, I think it was clear that there would be dollars expended on that contract. It is not part of the supplementary estimates.

The operating dollars is a very good question. I could give just as an example a summary in today's dollars of cumulative annual operating cost implications for the new health projects. For example, Edmonton Eastwood primary care over the next three years is not anticipated to have any operating dollar implications because it will take at least that long to build. In 2009-10 it's anticipated to be \$1.751 million, 2010-11 to be \$2.865 million, 2011-12, when it's getting more fully operational, \$5,092,000, and 2012-13 to be \$7.319 million annualized, so that's at a fully operational level. In 2013 it's anticipated that that primary health care replacement, a new project, would cost about \$7 million in operating costs.

The staffing plan both for rural projects and for urban projects is being developed as we speak. Parts of that have been done. For example, Edson in their redevelopment phase 2 is not anticipated to have any additional operating costs. I believe the costs were nominal. About \$146,000 was expected to be the cost. So it depends on staff deployment and each individual project.

The decisions on these projects, as I said previously, were from decisions made, submissions initially by the health regions last year, announcements that were made in support of those health regions. Then at the juncture of making a final determination of the amounts of these particular projects, significant conversation was engaged between the regional health authority with Infrastructure and Transportation and Health and Wellness. So the final determinance was a blend of participants in decision-making.

Briefly, on the mental health that has been referenced by the member opposite, some \$300 million for a mental health facility. Although there's been speculation about the mental health facilities in the future, this was not part of this announcement.

I'd like to clarify that while she asked about, quite properly, the long-term care beds, although 100 new beds are being built in the

Capital health region because of a redeployment of patients in the Barrhead health care centre renovation projects, it's a net of 85 because 15 patients in the Barrhead facility are being relocated to other existing facilities, to new supportive living facilities that will serve their needs. So although we build a hundred, it's, in fact, this year a net of 85 new long-term care beds.

In terms of third way initiatives, again, not part of this particular supplementary expenditure.

On the reference to some \$919,852,000 we will provide a written response so that it can be detailed and, quite properly, precise mathematically so that that's available for the hon. member.

I will say this, and I'm sure sitting with her colleague on the benches opposite: the challenge of the health workforce is something that we are all struggling with. One of the things that I think I'm encouraged by is that the Minister of Advanced Education agrees with me, and we are working together on a plan to add to that supply because, obviously, with a buoyant economy and the growing population we need that. A number of initiatives, I think, will take some coalition building. We've talked today with some of our federal counterparts about some things that we can do as strategies Canada-wide to encourage the support of a viable, healthy workforce.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

3:40

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and ask some questions of the hon. minister with respect to her supplementary estimates. I'd like to start, if I can, with the government's approach to private insurance. I understand that this isn't directly under the supplementary estimates, which are capital items, but I'm pleased that she did respond to my colleague from Edmonton-Centre on this question.

One of the great concerns we have is that the terms of the contract for Aon Consulting did not include establishing a comparator for the public sector. In other words, this company is going to be looking at how you would structure private health care insurance in this province and how that might be done, how much it would cost and so on. What's missing, Mr. Chairman, is a comparator in the public sector. We, of course, think that there's lots of evidence to indicate that the public sector will be able to do it more cheaply. So in the absence of one it makes it very, very difficult to actually make a policy decision with respect to public versus private.

Related to this is the whole question of extending private coverage to all nonemergency health care services. I would appreciate it if the minister could give us an idea of the scope of what the government considers to be nonemergency services. As we understand it, nonemergency might include very, very serious surgery that was not instantly required in order to save the patient's life. In other words, if you need some heart surgery at some point or if you're going to have a heart attack but you haven't yet had the heart attack, that would be considered nonemergency.

Ms Blakeman: A kidney transplant.

Mr. Mason: Or a kidney transplant, my hon. colleague said, and so on. Even cancer treatment could be considered to be nonemergency. So, Mr. Chairman, this could extend to almost anything that didn't involve the emergency room or intensive care in a hospital. In other words, the vast majority of the system could be up for privatization. So I think it is very important that we get some clarity from the minister about what exactly is on the table with respect to the potential for private coverage.

I know that the Premier is talking about the potential of violating the Canada Health Act. He has raised this himself in the past, and he's now being asked this question in eastern Canada, and he's really not being very, very crystal clear about what the government has in mind. Under what circumstances would the government agree or decide to violate the Canada Health Act? What is the potential cost to Alberta of doing so? If, in fact, we do lose that funding – and it may be, according to our calculations, up to about \$3 billion a year – how will that be covered and whether or not that will be covered by extending private insurance to Albertans?

The question of wait times is very important. I'd like to know how the government is doing with respect to reducing waiting times, and how successful the national strategy to reduce wait times is, what progress has been made, and what money from the federal government for that has been put towards?

I had a chance to discuss with the minister in her office the whole question of pharmaceutical savings when we talked about our bill, which was just defeated yesterday on second reading, the Alberta Pharmaceutical Savings Commission Act. I wonder if the minister will just express for the House her comments with respect to what the government has been doing in that area and the status of the national work that's being done on that. In my view, I was somewhat surprised when I did meet with the minister that, in fact, it's considerably less than maybe some people have been led to believe.

I want to ask a little about long-term care; that is, the conversion of long-term beds into assisted-living beds. This is an area of great concern to us right now: what the changes are when a bed is changed from a long-term care bed to an assisted-living bed, what services are no longer covered or are no longer received by the person in that bed, what the cost savings are to the owners of the facility, what the cost savings are to the government and, conversely, what the additional costs may be to access those services outside the system – what is the policy of the government toward controlling the conversion of long-term beds into assisted living, and how much conversion has already taken place? – what the stock of long-term beds is, what the government's plan is, what the government estimates the need for long-term beds to be in the future, and how we relate to that.

This is a very serious concern, Mr. Chairman, and it's been an issue. The government has committed to dealing with the Auditor General's report on long-term care, but they haven't really addressed the whole question of this conversion process that's going on, and it's causing a lot of difficulties for people. It needs to be seriously addressed.

I would also like to ask the minister on the same point what the government's commitment is relative to the Auditor General's report on long-term care. At the time that the Auditor General made his report on long-term care, the Premier stood in this House and said that the government was committing to every single recommendation of the Auditor General. But then the government appointed a committee of MLAs, including a Conservative MLA and a Liberal MLA, and that report came back with a considerably less rigorous set of recommendations than the Auditor General had. In fact, it fell far short of what the Auditor General had said. So if the government is going to adopt those recommendations, does that mean that they are no longer committed to adopting and putting into place all of the recommendations of the Auditor General's report? That's a very important question because it's created a lot of confusion about where the government's commitment actually lies.

I want to ask about the two hospitals in Sherwood Park and in Fort Saskatchewan. The Premier had identified in some of his comments that this was solving a political problem – I assume, a battle between two towns, the hamlet of Sherwood Park and the city of Fort

Saskatchewan – over where the hospital would be located. In a Solomon-like decision they decided to split the baby. I would like to know from the minister and I wonder if she would commit to providing a timeline of the decision-making around this and to also provide cost estimates of building a single hospital as opposed to the two separate stand-alone hospitals, those costs and the comparison. Also, the costs of operation of two smaller hospitals as opposed to the cost of operation of one larger facility would be much appreciated by us.

I'm sure that the government did its homework and actually looked at that whole question because I'm sure that they're committed to providing the very best and most cost-effective use of taxpayers' dollars when it comes to building and operating new facilities. So they must have looked at that, and I'd certainly like the minister to provide that.

I just want to conclude by saying that I have appreciated this minister's openness to discussion and dialogue. Although she doesn't agree with our point of view, nor do we agree with her point of view, it is a bit refreshing to have a minister that is prepared to share information and have a dialogue even if it's sometimes just off the record a little bit, to have some back-channel communication. It's most appreciated, and I think that it would lead ultimately to better government and better opposition.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3:50

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Yes. I'm going to more fully respond to the detail of questions that the hon. members opposite have given at a later date.

I'd like to just indicate that the points that the hon. member has raised relative to the structure of comparators for the models being developed to evaluate the actuarial costs for any change in the insuring of services – supplementary health services, pharmacy and drug-related costs, or continuing care – are points that I will respond to, will take back, in fact, and ask our administration how they view the capacity of the RFP to respond to those models with a comparator. It's my understanding that that in fact is going to take place, but I want to gather that assurance so that I am providing it quite properly.

The hon. member tempts me when he talks about the definitions of emergency, non-emergency, and medically necessary. Something may not be an emergent health issue, but it will be medically necessary, and at some point it may become an emergent issue. Things that are medically necessary are obviously not always emergency related. When you review the comments about the vagueness of the Canada Health Act on this issue, governments generally tend to define what they don't consider to be emergent but may at some point require more immediate care.

So while it is an interesting discussion point not necessarily related to the discussion of this particular supplementary estimate, I take most seriously the evaluation of how we best define this. I am sure that over the months ahead we'll be compelled to provide that so that Albertans know what is non-emergent and what is medically necessary and most things that may not be an emergency but are medically necessary for treatment at some point. I digress, but it is an important element for us to understand so that we aren't in violation of proper care.

The Premiers of Alberta and Quebec have talked about the need to look at options and to debate the issues surrounding the Canada Health Act at this time. Quebec's Jacques Choulli, speaking at a conference I attended in Vancouver, said that by Justice Deschamps' adjudication of section 1 of the Quebec charter as being like section

7 of the Canadian Charter, in his view section 1 and the decision they've made on that subject should also be imposed on section 7 of the Canadian Charter. Ergo, it's his belief and the belief supported by some of the judiciary that were at that conference that in actual fact Alberta and any province that held a prohibition to private insurance would already have a strike against that private insurance prohibition because of the Quebec ruling. I think we're very anxious to see the white paper that Quebec brings forward and examine whether or not this is more significant, in their judgment, because of the similarities between the intent and the design of section 1 of the Quebec charter and section 7 of the Canadian Charter.

We're working on getting a wait-time report available not only for Albertans but for Canadians. This bed capacity that is provided in the supplementary list here I believe will ultimately improve our bed capacity.

The conversation about the operating costs of the two hospitals, both located in Sherwood Park and Fort Saskatchewan, is an interesting one. At full operational costing the Fort Saskatchewan health centre replacement in today's dollars in the year 2013 is estimated to cost an additional \$205,000 and the Sherwood Park facility \$22 million. When I discussed with the capital region, "Why not one hospital instead of two?" they said that, in their view, from the studies between both, yes, there was a political issue, but they felt, I think, that the needs of the population are better served by defining primary care centres in close proximity to the populations.

The building of one stand-alone facility, either between the communities or in one community or another, might well cost more because the pressure would be on that facility to become more of a regional hospital by definition rather than two facilities, health care community centres, that will deliver health care in, hopefully, the new and more advanced way of having health teams to adjudicate the problems and to respond to them.

I do appreciate, as I've said previously, the views of the hon. members opposite, of the third party, because I'm encouraged that they are looking at being creative and innovative about how we reduce our costs.

In terms of the long-term care and moves to assisted living, that is something that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East and the government members on the long-term care review panel looked over very seriously. In the definition of standards that will ultimately come forward – they are in draft form now – we have to have very carefully articulated protocols because my understanding is that two things are in play. The assisted-living definition isn't the same in every community. Also, the long-term care patients that are more appropriately placed in assisted living need to be assured through their assessments that they are suitable for those placements, and ultimately the standards will compel that to happen.

In the short term in Chinook, for example, where many are being located to assisted-living supports, there's careful work being done both with the guardians or the families involved, and hopefully those placements – some will be grandfathered – will be in the best interests of the patient, which is ultimately the responsibility of the health services delivery.

I just want to say this. I see that the Auditor General's report was one piece to be responded to, and yes, we accepted those recommendations. The recommendations from the MLA committee that reviewed long-term care will supplement and add to the strength of those recommendations, gave a more detailed opportunity for us to review the issues, and I would suggest that when we ultimately bring forward the government response and the plan for implementation, the hon. member will be reassured that we are making some gains on that.

I think that the difficulty that I face in reviewing all of those

reports is that it's not having standards on paper that is ultimately going to affect better care for people in long-term care or in home care or in assisted living. It's having the staff understanding and the commitment and the regional health authority commitment to making sure that that implementation takes place that will tell the tale. So we have work to do.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my great honour to rise and speak to the supplementary estimates on Health and Wellness. I want to start with the Grey Nuns hospital, which is in the Mill Woods area. The people there have been experiencing shortages of staff and beds for a long, long time now. I heard that the current budget is only for new beds. In emergency the waiting time is still four to nine hours, and I have seen people suffering and some people crying. You know, it's a big problem there. So I request the hon. minister to look at it as sometimes they are continuously suffering as a result of the shortages of staff and beds. I want to ask the hon. minister: when will this government provide new staff and place all the new beds in the Grey Nuns hospital in Edmonton? Also, I want to know: when will this government solve these problems in this hospital and how?

4:00

My constituents are firmly in favour of a reformed public health care system. They've asked me to let you know that their stand on public health care is firm. What are the short-term and long-term plans for this particular hospital? My constituents are anxious to know the answers from the provincial government. They are anxiously wanting to know the reforms promised by the Tory government. They are totally confused about the government's three-way plan, so they keep on asking me to ask the government. So please, please tell Albertans. If you have any sustainable policies, please let us know.

Thank you.

Ms Evans: Just briefly I'd like to identify that the bed reclamation phase 4 of the Grey Nuns community hospital is anticipated to have a total provincial support of \$49,700,000 and a hundred thousand dollars for the redevelopment this year.

I'd just like to make one observation. The expanded use of the Alberta wait list registry will hopefully enable people to see, when a bed is not available in their local community hospital, where they could possibly get served. We do have to encourage Albertans to look at their health delivery in a different way and, if their local hospital isn't available, find out what the wait times might be like for procedures in other hospitals. Although it would be lovely to be able to just serve one person in those hospital beds, it's not always possible, and I know that the hon. member opposite understands that.

In terms of the public system I would tell anybody that asked, "Are they committed to public health, number one," yes, \$1.4 billion for new public facilities to help us acknowledge the growing Alberta population. So we are working in that vein to improve the capacity in the public health system.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, in light of what the Speaker stated earlier on, I would caution everyone that the noise level is getting very, very high. The microphone system has to have the ability to pick the voice of the speaker. So please reduce the level of noise. The Minister of Health and Wellness has the floor.

The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Yes. So just briefly in conclusion to the hon. member opposite, the commitment is solid in the public system and the commitment for possible innovations or other things in the future; for example, looking at how we deal with supplementary health care funding or health services funding, how we look at the continuing care funding in the future. Those are chapters that haven't been written yet. We're using our RFP to make examination of the costs, and in due course Albertans, stakeholders, will hear from this government on those issues.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to be able to stand and make a few comments on the supplemental supply for Health and Wellness. The first thing I want to say is that one positive point is that at least our Premier is out there saying that health care is not sustainable in its current situation, and as soon as Canadians realize that, we can start doing some serious changes to our system to actually serve Albertans better. [interjection] We will. Be calm for a minute. Be happy to. That's why we're here.

I'm always amazed at how many people say that there's no way for private facilities. I don't think that too many people back up and realize that most doctors' offices are private facilities here in this province, and they function and serve us very well. [interjection] Absolutely. That's what we need to keep. It's critical that we have single-payer . . .

Mr. Mason: Single-payer, private, two-tiered health care.

Mr. Hinman: No, no. Let's just keep going here, and we'll stop the rhetoric bit.

At this time I'd like to share with the minister some innovative ideas that I've heard from many Albertans because they are not in the new supplemental supply, and I thought that some of them might be. One of the things I wanted to talk about is the pharmaceuticals. We all know and understand the cost of research and development of new drugs and the fact that these corporations have to recoup that, but by not allowing any of those new drugs onto our list of availabilities, they keep those prices very high. I was wondering if the minister has ever talked to those pharmaceutical companies and asked them: would they reduce those drugs if, in fact, we were to put them onto the list that could be utilized by Albertans to improve their health? There are many new ones out there that are a great advantage, but the cost is prohibitive, and perhaps we could strike a deal to show them how many patients would be using those drugs and get a reduced cost and thereby get them onto our list sooner.

Another thing that's often talked about is the actual cost of each, whether it's a hip replacement, kidney. We talk about actuaries, trying to find out the prices. I feel that that's where the free market has always done its best. If, in fact, the minister was to put out and say, for example, "We're doing 5,000 hip surgeries this year" or whatever the numbers are. Due to the lack of funding our research in this caucus isn't always as good as I'd like it to be, so I don't know the numbers on hip surgeries or MRIs or those things. You know those numbers, and if in fact you were to put them out and say, "We're looking at a five-year contract; we have to have this many," facilities would be built by private industry if the funds followed those services. I feel that the fastest, quickest, most efficient way – and I've talked to many rural areas – is by putting those out for an open bid by the doctors here in Alberta. Just like their own private clinics where they treat the average Albertans, we could also have many private clinics that would do perhaps MRIs, CAT scans. We

already have some in the province. Look at that on all types of services that we have such a huge backlog on. The most painful part about our healthcare here is how long many people have to wait.

I know a lady in my area who I consider to be young, in her late 40s, that needs a knee replacement, and it's just terrible that she's going to have to wait possibly another six months and is not able to work. That's something that we can and should be able to facilitate. By allowing the funding to follow the service, we would get more of it coming online.

Another interesting area is the cost and the amount of people that come and utilize our emergency services. It's a struggle to keep those people out, but as those of us who have gone and visited emergency just to observe, we do see that there are a fair amount of people that walk in that could go to more evening clinics if, in fact, we had them open. Again, if those services were being funded by the province, I really believe that the private enterprises would open more facilities at no cost to us and that the money would go to services being provided again. So if the minister would look at that.

Another area of great concern in the south with the Chinook health region and other small regions – currently to my understanding such things as angioplasty are off-limit for smaller regions to offer. Down in the States a little town like Kalispell actually has a surgeon that does angioplasty, and they're able to function in small areas. Once again, if the actual funding followed the service, the Chinook health region I believe would already have an angioplasty surgeon from the States who wants to come back to Canada, but because the funding doesn't follow the service, we have a backlog and a shortage.

Many times at the Lethbridge regional hospital people don't get in in time, and the time for the air ambulance is too late to get to Calgary. It would take a great load off the big regions if, like I say, we'd allow that funding to follow the service and let small regions, if they have someone who can come in willing to do it, take that on.

I guess my last comment that I'd like to make today is that fear at the greatest height is the unknown. Albertans have gone on for a long time through many reports on what this government is proposing, and the fear is still at a very high level with all this talk of this private health care and private insurance. I don't believe we need to go to that length if, in fact, we would just fund the services that are provided here in the province. We have the opportunity. That should be the first step that we take and realize how well that can work.

4:10

By not allowing those funds to follow service, it seems like it's more bureaucratically driven. When a budget is given to the different health regions, they look at every service that comes in as an expense out of their budget. I really believe that by turning that around and by saying, "What services have you provided Albertans, and we will pay you," they'll be driven by service and satisfaction and not try to hoard the money and close down operations for four or six hours a day because they say: well, we don't have the funding. We could have those running 24/7 in many facilities, including MRIs, if in fact they're being paid for the services.

So I'd really encourage this minister to continue with her openness and be more open and let Albertans know what's coming down and the ideas that are there. Let's seriously look at, I ask, funding following the services and let free enterprise step up and help Albertans and reduce our waiting lines.

Thank you for the time.

Ms Evans: Mr. Chair, I'm just going to be very brief. There are many thoughts that have been expressed by the hon. member

opposite, but one of the questions really relates to the fact that the private sector, especially insurance companies, could analyze and give us a pretty good feel for how much the cost would be and engage in help to the system.

I guess the thing that I have always wanted as a consumer is to be able to estimate or at least know what I'm likely to pay for something before I go shopping. I think this Alberta government, if in fact we change – and I stress if in fact we change – any way of supporting people to receive health care in the public system, has to know that if we remove our prohibition to private insurance or if we open the door to more private insurers to take part in Alberta, if they so choose – they may well not choose – we will always have a core of people that require our support, that are either unable to provide that support for themselves, that are unable to plan for their future because of their economic circumstance, or that are already senior and on fixed incomes. No matter what, we have to know the equation so that if we say, "All right; we are going to, for example, look at future generations paying towards supporting their own continuing care if they're financially able to do so," we still have to know what remains in the system.

The other part is the pre-existing conditions. If I'm already a person with multiple sclerosis, what opportunity will I have to gain insurance? So you have to cross that bridge for those people that are medically fragile or have a pre-existing condition. I think that's another part of why we have to look at those kinds of things.

I thank you for the observation that we are open to looking at other things. I would like to indicate that when I listened to Gordon Gibson, who was formerly assistant to the former and late Prime Minister Trudeau, he quoted that today the health care systems – and I'm just going to paraphrase – have a need to introduce a more honest dialogue and transparency about what's happening because we are not sustainable in our current form. We have to look at what's happening with other OECD countries who may be able to do it better and get people in and shorter waiting times and make sure that we have a better functioning system.

Last but not least, the national organization the Canadian council on health care has observed that waiting times may harm patients, and that's their number one principle. We have to pay attention to that regardless of private insurance or private care or anything else. Waiting can harm patients, and if we know that as Members of the Legislative Assembly, for that reason alone it behooves us to find better ways. So thank you for that encouragement.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, there are a number of issues to be discussed this afternoon, and there is so limited time. However, I have some questions in regard to the health care budget and the supplementary estimates that are being discussed.

When one looks at this amount, when one looks at the entire government budget, we hear the arguments from across the floor about how our health care system is not sustainable, that we have to initiate change because it's just not sustainable. But I believe that we have to heed the words of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and consider better management of the system.

We are looking at new facilities. Again, I remind all hon. members of this House that it's the same government that dynamited a perfectly good hospital in Calgary and closed many others. [interjections] It was a perfectly good hospital. The hon. Minister of Advanced Education may disagree with that, but many of the fine citizens of Calgary are still puzzled about why it was blown up.

Here we have a decade later the same government. I'm sure

they're going to give themselves centennial medals for their hospital reconstruction efforts, but that goes back to what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview stated, and that was that we could manage the system better.

The public accounts, that were tabled yesterday, indicate that we had in the Calgary regional health authority an amount in excess of \$2 billion granted. If we compare that to Edmonton, the Edmonton Capital health authority is roughly a little greater than \$2 billion. Edmonton would be \$2.2 billion, and Calgary would be \$2.1 billion. In light of the time, I'm certainly not going to go through all of the regional health authorities that are included in the public accounts, but could the hon. minister provide to me, please, the per capita amount of Alberta Health and Wellness funding for 2004 and 2005 for each of the respective health authorities in the province. I would really appreciate that.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner was talking earlier about procedures that are available in Montana. I understand that there are a number of pilot projects going on in both the Capital health authority region and the Calgary health authority region to increase the number of knee and hip replacements through a partnership or an alliance. One specific company here comes to view, and it's numbered company 1157268 Alberta Ltd. I was wondering if we could get an update, please, on how those pilot projects are working out.

Of course, our Premier is travelling and explaining to the rest of the country exactly how health care should be operating in the rest of Canada. I don't think that anybody from this government has the right to tell the rest of Canada how to deliver or to eliminate in this case public health care, particularly with the performance in the last 10 years of this current government. We have to go back to what the Member for Edmonton-Riverview said. We've got to manage what we have better. Privatization is not the answer. I find it quite ironic that on the current speaking tour being conducted by the Premier, the Premier on behalf of this government wants to tell the rest of the country how to manage their health care affairs.

4:20

Now, certainly, the Health Care Protection Act came into effect with a lot of questions by the public in regard to this. How exactly would this work? Mr. Chairman, one only has to go to the Calgary regional health authority to find out how this is working. We've always been promised that this is going to work out and that it's going to reduce wait times.

If we look, for instance, at ophthalmology in Calgary, in that regional health authority the wait list, as I understand it, for cataract surgery has increased 11 per cent when compared to the previous year although the wait time, fair enough, has remained constant. Now, I learned through the annual report from the Calgary regional health authority that in January of this year as a wait-list reduction endeavour the Calgary health region approved 1,000 additional one-time cataract procedures. Also, the Calgary regional health authority approved an increase in the number of cataracts to be completed in 2005-2006, increasing from 7,000 to 8,500. This agreement, as I understand it, is in effect until March 31, 2008.

Now, we were told and promised that this was all going to work out. If this is an experiment, I would like an explanation from the hon. minister as to how this is actually working. Whenever we heard that privatization would reduce waiting lists and reduce waiting times, it's apparent from the annual report that that has not happened. Calgary seems to be leading the charge in this sort of privatization by stealth. If the hon. minister could provide me with the information in regard to that, I would certainly be grateful.

When we look at the contracts in this regional health authority

under the Health Care Protection Act, if we compare last year to this year, we will see that there has been almost a 30 per cent increase in those contracts, and there also has been an increase in contracts to health services operators. If I could have the information provided to me for the other health authorities through the course of our discussion this afternoon at some time – and I can understand if the hon. minister does not have that information available and could provide it in writing, hopefully, before the end of the year – I would be grateful.

With that, Mr. Chairman, that is all I have to say at this time in regard to the supplementary estimates of Health and Wellness. Thank you.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I will respond to the hon. member's observations, but I'd just like to make one observation, not because of this minister's involvement but because of the involvement of my predecessors who sit in this Chamber and one that doesn't. Alberta is respected across the country as having one of the most advanced health care systems on every front. Alberta is also recognized as a place that has been much more restrictive to the development of private care than either Ontario, Quebec, or British Columbia. So criticisms that our Premier should not shine the light on this issue I think are misplaced. Our Premier is, in fact, I think openly encouraging discussion because of the inequities we find ourselves in in terms of the manner in which we're dealt with as provinces.

Today I listened to the people from New Brunswick who came and identified that it's the first time that the Canada Health Act dispute resolution will be applied in their particular part of the country. Not in Alberta. Alberta has had a track record of being in compliance with the Canada Health Act over the past several years and I think has shown by the number of specialists it has attracted that it is capable of delivering a very sound system.

In terms of the pilot projects and numbered company 1157268, I believe that would be illustrative of one of the partners delivering the hip and joint replacements. That is a project that's going extremely well. I'll clarify that when we look at the Blues and make sure that we table those responses.

The Deputy Chair: After considering the 2005-2006 supplementary estimates for the Department of Health and Wellness for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, are you ready for the vote?

Hon. Members: Question.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$64,630,000
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The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Sustainable Resource Development

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coumts: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and colleagues all. I'd like to certainly address the Assembly this afternoon on the need for \$80 million in supplementary estimates for the Department of Sustainable Resource Development; \$75.2 million of that request for \$80 million is needed for wildfire-fighting costs, which would actually bring the total operating expenditure for the year to \$151 million.

There were over 1,300 forest fires this last season, mainly as a result of dry weather in the remote northern section of Alberta, and this happened especially early in the season. There weren't a lot of fires in the southern section this year because of climatic conditions. There was a lot of moisture in our forests, and that's a good thing. Totally, the fires that we did have this year, Mr. Chairman, consumed more than 60,000 hectares of land. Because these wildfires were in such remote locations, as I said, access to water supplies was often limited, and they were quite expensive to suppress in this particular year. As a result, a forest fire emergency was declared. Wildfires, that certainly disrupt communities and impact our environment, for example, threaten to destroy sensitive watersheds. When this occurs, these wildfires must be actioned.

Most Albertans aren't even aware that we still have wildfires burning in Alberta. Even though the fire season officially ended on October 31, only yesterday a forest protection crew worked with the Slave Lake and area fire departments on a grass fire 20 kilometres west of Slave Lake, and that's because of the unusually warm weather and yesterday's very strong winds in the area. The local fire department and our crews made sure that the fire was out in very good time and saved some of the houses that were very, very close to the beginnings of this fire.

[Ms Haley in the chair]

So this demonstration of always being ready for a fire, Madam Chairman, is a very good example of our staff's efforts to manage many wildfires not only during the high wildfire season but also throughout the year.

The department also requires an additional \$4.8 million to address mountain pine beetle infestations, which were quite intense this year along Alberta's western border. I've spoken in this House many times about the pine beetle and how it's encroaching into Alberta. In order to stop that, it takes significant expenditures of manpower and dollars to attack the pine beetle at those locations that have been identified by our aerial and our ground surveys as well as by the forestry companies and the national parks that are very, very close to the forest and can recognize fader trees where the pine beetle is starting to infest. So we require an additional \$4.8 million to address the mountain pine beetle infestations, and that would bring the total expenditures in this area to \$7.4 million for 2005 and 2006.

4:30

Madam Chairman, the mountain pine beetle is just what we are starting to term and starting to consider as another smouldering fire developing in the bark of these trees. Certainly, our surveillance discovered large infestations in the Willmore wilderness park as well as the Kakwa wildland park. Along with the co-operation from Community Development, again an emergency was declared. We worked very quickly in cutting and burning more than 5,000 trees in four weeks with minimal impact.

We learned from our neighbours in British Columbia, who are struggling with the mountain pine beetle, that inaction is not an option. British Columbia saw the mountain pine beetle infestation spread from about 165,000 hectares of land in 1999 to an estimated 4.2 million hectares in 2004. We don't want that to happen in Alberta, so quick, decisive, aggressive action is required. That's why we have had to limit the spread of this forest pest in Willmore as well as Kakwa this year. Also, in the last fiscal year in parts of Alberta we identified areas from the Crowsnest Pass right through to K Country and the Bow Valley park.

Our surveillance and our prevention and control measures here in Alberta along with both sides of the border remain a priority. I also

have to commend the B.C. government for assisting us in that project in terms of their memorandum of understanding and co-operation between our two provinces to stop this pine beetle. It's in their best interests to do the same.

I'd like to also just briefly remind the House that it's important that we stop this beetle because there are 2 million hectares of pine forest at risk along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. That has an estimated economic value of more than \$23 billion. That's just in the forest resource itself. That doesn't include any effects that it would have on our tourist industry as well if we had a red forest out there, not a green forest, against the beautiful majestic Rocky Mountains. So it's important that we continue to treat this as a slow fire.

So, Madam Chairman, I request the support of the Assembly for funding to protect Alberta's most valuable forest resources not only from wildfires but also from the pine beetle threat. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Mr. Minister. I do believe that an opportunity arises right now to be able to speak to this important but underfunded and underutilized ministry. We're to ask you for a supplemental requisition of \$75.2 million for forest fires and then the small amount, unfortunately, for controlling the mountain pine beetle. Perhaps with our combination of requests for this, next time with supplementary requests we can get more monies because we do realize that the mountain pine beetle is, as you pointed out, threatening to destroy a multibillion dollar industry. Oil and gas isn't the only industry that employs people in this province.

The pine beetle is a natural, unfortunate part of the ecosystem. It attacks mature standing lodgepole pine forests. As well, when they're infested, they quickly lose their market value within about four to five years. It's an increasing problem as warmer weather in winters continues to persist. Fire suppression and migration from B.C. have allowed the population numbers to increase. There are no chemical pesticides that we're aware of that can be used, and the only viable treatments on hand so far that I've heard is burning infested trees, called the fall and burn, harvesting the infested wood, or harvesting the prescribed burning and mature pines before they can be infested. That's about the extent of it so far besides releasing woodpeckers, I believe, but they're not into this area. They're usually into their own areas and don't travel too far outside them.

The extra money is good, but I would insist that it does not go far enough. We've been calling for more and more money to be put into this in the past, and we'll continue to call on this government to invest more to resolve this problem before the pine beetle can spread, damaging more trees and affecting this vital industry. The pine beetle's infestation in B.C. is huge, and it covers a larger area than New Brunswick itself. It will remove the timber supplies for the whole forest and dependent communities could fall then.

It's ironic that this ministry is asking for more money for fighting forest fires because it addresses the mountain pine beetle. While fighting forest fires is vital to protecting public safety and private property and structures and buildings and valuable timber, the experts have now concluded and are saying that fires are a normal part of the forest. In B.C. they recognize that the highly successful fire suppression has made the mountain pine beetle infestation worse by allowing it to increase its habitat into the mature pines.

The mountain pine beetle is now considered individually the most expensive piece that we're going to be fighting in the next few years. So I would ask some specific questions then. Is the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development considering the role of forest

fires for controlling the pine beetle for starters? Do they have a fire management plan as part of the larger ecosystem management strategy for this forest? What exactly does the word "control" mean in reference to the \$4.8 million going to control the mountain pine beetle? Is this ministry investing in research, planning, and other proactive efforts to control this beetle or just responding in an ad hoc fashion? How did they decide on this amount? Given the cost of an action seen in B.C., do we feel that \$4.8 million will be sufficient to control the pine beetle for the next year? What role is industry playing in fighting the pine beetle? Have they invested staff to coordinate effective longer term approaches?

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Now going on to the supplementary supply of the forest fires point, which is \$75.2 million. The firefighting costs are familiar from what we've seen in the supplementary supply estimates. The government has asked each year for more and more. In 2002-2003 the suppression costs were overbudgeted by about \$227 million, in 2003-04 they were overbudgeted by \$128 million, in 2004-05 they were overbudgeted by \$124 million, and now we're at about \$75 million for this year as a result of the severe drought conditions. The base budgets always remain relatively stable. It is important to fight forest fires that threaten lives, property, and commercial forest values, but the budget should reflect the actual spending levels.

So some of the questions are: do we have a plan to accurately budget for the fluctuating forest fires and suppression so that the people of Alberta can understand the actual true costs of fighting the fires? What would be some proactive steps that were taken to reduce the piece with regard to the forest fires? I know that's a tough one: you know, huge uncontrollable fires and the property losses. What would some of the steps be to ensure effective forest fire management costs?

If I can maybe deviate a little bit, we've got those two areas basically covered, but I would go off and ask for maybe a supplementary supply that could also include considerations in other areas such as putting in more field officers or conservation officers, fish and wildlife officers. I feel that there is a real need to be able to monitor the activity in the province as the population has grown. The season right now is still the hunting season. It's still alive and kicking, and we need to have enough people to do enforcement.

I do appreciate the piece from the Public Accounts Committee where the minister has provided that there is almost \$3 million spent directly on monitoring the lakes and the fish stocks. I got a call to my constituency office. They're concerned that when the lakes freeze over, the people take on the recreational point of it and ice fishing pops up on the lakes. We do have derbies that happen. There's one derby that's going to be taking place in February on Gull Lake. It's a relatively shallow lake. They're going to be punching about 2,000 holes and charging about \$75 per person. I think that comes out to about \$150,000, and the prize for the biggest fish that day would be about \$50,000. Some individual has invested in this particular tournament, resides, I think, in Winnipeg, and will be taking his windfall of \$100,000 for organizing it back to his province and leaving our lakes depleted as a result. I'm just wondering if the minister would be able comment particularly on that piece, which was brought up as a concern for some of the anglers and the fish and wildlife people in that particular area.

4:40

The other concern I would be able to maybe raise. It's still hibernation season for some animals. Spring would be the awakening for others. With awakening, I'm referring to the grizzly bear.

What would this ministry have as a real plan to protect the grizzly bears? I would like to see, perhaps, a suppression or a temporary moratorium placed on a spring grizzly hunt until actual numbers could be confirmed. It's unfortunate, but overall I think industry and recreation has continued to strangle the amount of territory that not only the grizzly bear but the caribou have to migrate and cohabit. Unfortunately, even this summer there were more bears killed as a result of some traffic fatalities there, which has continued to deplete the stocks.

I've given the minister a number of specifics. I'll sit down here and wait for his response. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Chairman, thank you, and thanks to the hon. member for a number of questions that pertain directly to the supplementary supply but also outside of the supplementary supply. We have other departments that want to get on here this afternoon, so I'll try to be brief. Anything that I do miss I will definitely make sure that you get responses on in writing.

The comments regarding the pine beetle. It is important that we put as many dollars as we possibly can into fighting the pine beetle now because if you have beetle kill as was mentioned in British Columbia, that beetle kill is a fire hazard itself. If that permeates itself into Alberta, we have all that dead forest out there. In future years fire suppression and firefighting are going to take a lot more than presently. What we average per year is about \$195,000 to a million to about \$210 million, depending on the amount of fires that we have every year.

Certainly, the value of the timber and the cutting sequences when there is a tremendous amount of beetle kill has a tremendous effect on the industry. The industry is as concerned about that as we are. They want to be sustainable for the future. They do not want this beetle to take over a healthy forest. The industry also identifies valleys where the pine beetle can actually move up and go into some mature stands of pine forest, so we work with industry to make sure that the cutting sequences that they have in their annual management plans can be looked at and altered to make sure that that food source is taken away. We think that that's being very proactive.

You asked about the role of the firefighters. The 5,000 trees that were cut in the Willmore wilderness area and the Kakwa were done by our fire suppression crews. Well-trained helicopter tactical teams went in once the trees were identified and cut those individual trees. It's a very expensive way of fighting the pine beetle, and that's why the need for more dollars. Is it enough? It's probably enough for this year in terms of the fact that the beetle itself actually flies the latter part of May and June and into early July and then gets into a stand of trees. You really don't know about whether or not they've attacked a tree until later on next spring. Is it enough for this year? Yes. Will it be enough for next year? We don't know. It depends on the amount of beetle infestation. How can you plan for that? You can only plan by doing aerial surveys next spring and keeping industry informed but also making sure that our national parks are well aware of protecting the stands that are in their areas as well.

A big expense that we're going to have is a prescribed burn that we're looking at for the Meadowland Creek area, and we will have our fire suppression teams there to make sure that that doesn't get away on us. So it is about control.

In terms of research, between jurisdictions across this country and into the United States we pretty well know everything there is about the mountain pine beetle, so to put money into research might not give us any more information than we presently have. I'd sooner take the dollars and put them into seeing if we can stop the pesky

little beetle rather than putting money into research. It might I think be good money after bad. I talked about the industry being a big player in this because it's in their best interests to help us as well.

In terms of the firefighting costs, on average we would have firefighting costs of about \$195 million to \$210 million, depending on the amount of fires. Before we actually have a fire, contracts have to be put in place in getting ready for a fire season. Even though we think we have the fire season over by October 31, we have to have contracts in place for all of our fire suppression needs by the 1st of May. So that comes automatically. Without having a fire, that comes to about \$75 million. It's really important that we have that in place to provide the security for communities, as you mentioned.

Another thing that we work on – just outside the estimates and a question that you had regarding more field officers to look at more enforcement and being on the ground. That certainly would be a great asset to Sustainable Resource Development in terms of making sure that if we have some pockets of mountain pine beetle that haven't been detected, if you have more enforcement guys out there, they can tell us and work with the department. So that's a real bonus to us.

The other thing you talked about that is really important in terms of fire suppression and saving dollars is that we have expert staff. Even in the off-season, our department works on FireSmart communities and FireSmart plans for communities so that we can save houses, save people's livelihoods, and those types of things. It's really important for us to make sure that we have the dollars to keep those people on in the planning stages. Certainly, that's part of the great work that forest protection services does in the off-season as well.

Along with that, of course, you talked about wildlife displacement and plans for caribou reclamation, et cetera. We have recovery plans in place, and I would be more than pleased to provide you with details on those recovery plans. We have a plan in place right now particularly on grizzlies, and I've articulated it in the House many times, but I'll be glad to put that in writing. The plan that has come forward from the provincial committee has not reached my desk yet. You know, you're absolutely right. We had 10 bears taken last year during the hunt. We probably had more grizzly bears taken by – I mean, even the unfortunate one of the two orphan cubs that were hit on the highway. Certainly, we'll lose more bears to human contact. We'll lose more bears to cars, trains, and those types of things than we will by the actual hunt. Also, having a bear smart program, an education program, for communities that live in the foothills and close to the mountains is really important too.

Maybe we won't have to worry about the ice fishing because if the weather keeps going the way it is, we won't have any ice. But I will certainly share with you in writing the ice fishing regulations.

With that, Mr. Chairman, maybe you can call the question.

4:50

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Dr. Swann: I just want to ask a quick question about the sustainable resource and environmental management program. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, somebody has just drawn to my attention that you are not in your place. Is that correct?

Dr. Swann: That's true.

The Deputy Chair: You will have to move to your chair to be recognized.

Hon. member, since you're now in your place, you are able to speak. Go ahead.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Could you comment on whether any of the supplementary supply is involved in the new sustainable resource and environmental management integrated land use planning process that you've struck?

Mr. Coutts: That's a good question, Mr. Chair. The answer directly to that is no. This is for forest protection. The supplementary supply is for costs incurred for wildfire expenses for this year and also for the mountain pine beetle. It does not include anything on the integrated land management. That will come forward in next year's budget, through our business plan and through our budgeting process in the coming year.

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

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$80,000,000
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The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be here today to discuss Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development's supplementary estimate request. I don't need to tell anyone in this Assembly how challenging the past few years have been for our agriculture industry. From disease, border closures, drought, and low commodity prices our producers and processors have faced the gamut of challenges, and as a government we have stood by our industry.

The majority of the supplementary estimate, \$169 million, is to offset disaster assistance that helped with the continued impacts of BSE and the border closures. Of that, \$154 million is directed towards increased payments to our beef, dairy, and other ruminant producers under the pilot program that changes the way CAIS payments are calculated. Changes to the way benefits are calculated has meant that the program responds better to back-to-back disasters. However, it has also meant increased costs, which are outlined here.

Direct assistance is not enough. That's why there is also a request for \$10 million to assist municipalities with infrastructure that they need to support increased agricultural/industrial activities such as slaughter and processing. These would include such things as municipal waste water and environmental infrastructure. We have also allocated an additional \$3 million to continue to build beef product and market development within the province.

Finally, none of these measures would be effective without reopened borders, and that's why we've allocated \$2 million for an enhanced age-verification initiative, allowing us to have the first age-verified herd in Canada. As of last week more than 800,000 cattle have been age verified within the province. Being able to prove the age of cattle gives us one more unique tool to help us reopen those borders.

This year was also hard on our crop producers. Increased demands on programs such as CAIS and crop insurance have meant an increase in payments, and \$118 million of our supplementary estimate is for agriculture insurance and lending assistance costs. Of that, \$47 million is the provincial share of crop insurance premiums, specifically revenue insurance coverage and spring price endorsement, more than budgeted because of higher than expected crop losses, and \$71 million is to help with the retroactive changes to the CAIS program for our other producers. This is the balance of the costs for the CAIS program changes, amounting to a total of \$224 million. Finally, \$109,000 is to offset increased costs for wildlife damage and compensation.

That concludes the explanation of our request, and I'd be happy to take questions. If I am unable to give you an answer this afternoon, I will seek the assistance of my very capable staff and provide you with a written response in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, it's a pleasure to participate in the debate this afternoon regarding Agriculture, Food and Rural Development's supplementary estimates. I heard the minister earlier today in Public Accounts discuss at length the CAIS program and some of the questions put by the members of that committee. However, one question they didn't ask and I would like at this time to discuss before the floor of the Assembly is in regard to the CAIS program. I appreciated the letter that I received from the minister's office some time ago in regard to the 2003 benefit year and the fact that there is over \$80 million outstanding in overpayments in the CAIS year ending in 2003. We're looking at a substantial amount of money here, over \$226 million, in additional funding for the CAIS program, the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program.

Some of this money, I should say, is coming from the sustainability fund. That was the idea of the former Member for Lethbridge-East, Ken Nicol. This government just called it the sustainability fund, but he called it the stabilization fund, the stability fund. He would be pleased, I think, to learn that his sustainability fund is being used in this manner. The minister is absolutely right: there have been some tough years for the farming community and the ranching community. Hopefully, they're behind us.

However, there is an additional amount asked for here, \$71 million, "for retroactive changes to CAIS program benefit calculations that are not related to disaster assistance, and increased provincial administration costs." The first question, Mr. Chairman, would be: for the year ending 2004 and an estimate for 2005, what are the overpayments in the CAIS program? How much of the money that was announced – I don't have the press release with me, but I think it was \$224 million that's going to be allocated for the CAIS program. How much of that money will be used up by the producers to eliminate these overpayments, regardless of when they happened: 2003, 2004, 2005, to date?

Also, Mr. Chairman, I'm quite concerned about these administration costs. Now, we in this province are administering the program. It's a 60-40 split with the federal government. There are other provinces that have the federal government administer this. There are some professors of agriculture from the University of Saskatchewan who have conducted research into the administration costs of this program. I'm led to believe that the administration costs are higher in this province than in others, and I would like to hear the minister's opinion on this. We shouldn't be looking at increased administration costs.

Many hon. members of the Public Accounts Committee expressed disappointment that the local ag offices had been closed going back to 2002. This was at Public Accounts this morning, and those members thought that perhaps there should be a decentralization of Alberta Agriculture, and there should be more employees of the department sort of located at the foot of the farm gate.

5:00

Mr. Oberle: One thought that, anyway.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, there was quite a discussion on this.

However, if we could get an update on why these administration costs are going up. Is it because we have eliminated those offices? I would be very interested in hearing the minister's answer. There are many people who have questions about the administration of this program. They are the producers themselves. They are the academics that are having an overview of this. Whenever those groups have questions, I think that we have to provide an answer.

With those questions, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and await the minister's reply. In conclusion, I must say that his answers were concise and of interest and were appreciated this morning at Public Accounts. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the hon. member for the questions.

First of all, I'd like to talk a little bit about the overpayment situation, which the member alluded to, for the year ending '03. With many of the overpayment situations – and I believe it was alluded to in the letter that we sent out; I don't remember when it was sent either, but I know that it was some time ago – effectively what had happened is that there was an advance initiated based on the herd that a producer would have based on what we projected the cattle prices would be given our BSE situation at the end of the claim year.

The advances were sent out based on what the entitlement to that particular producer would be based on our estimate of what the prices would be at the end of the year. Fortunately or unfortunately, dependent upon how you look at it, the price of cattle did rise. It did not rise to the extent that it recovered to 2002 levels or anything of that sort, but it did rise quite a bit higher than what we had forecast those prices would rise. That meant that the inventory that those producers held was higher than what the forecast was, and therefore their entitlement under CAIS would be diminished by that amount. That gave rise to in some cases an overpayment situation, which the producers had been advised of when they received those funds.

When we go back through those applications, which we are doing on every one of those overpayment situations, we're going back through them for a number of reasons. One of the reasons relates to one of the other points the member brought up, and that's the questions on CAIS. The reason that we're going back through these applications is to ensure that if there are errors, there is a catalog of the errors being made on these applications and the information coming into the AFSC office because we want to identify the common errors that are slowing down the process of the CAIS application.

We get this catalog of errors, and then we can go back out to the accounting community and the farming community and say: lookit, here are the common errors that are being made on the input that's coming into the office on these applications. If the applications have errors, that's what slows down the system. We want to reduce the amount of errors. We want to make the system a lot simpler and less complex for both the producer and our office.

The other thing that we're finding is that there are a number of errors in the calculation of the entitlement on these overpayment applications. Some of the initial indications that we're getting upon the review is that upon a detailed review of an overpayment application 40 to 50 per cent of those producers are actually being reduced to a zero overpayment because we've maximized their entitlement. That, hon. member, was even before we announced changing to an optional three-year average calculation.

I believe that once we've gone through this total calculation and this total optional calculation of either the Olympic or the three-year average, a good portion of those overpayments for the '03 year will probably show a higher entitlement because of going back three years as opposed to an Olympic average, not only for the cattle industry but also for the grain industry, which is the intent of doing that three-year averaging. Had we done that at the outset, which is one of the things that Alberta had presented, we probably wouldn't be in that situation that we find ourselves in on those overpayments. So there is a twofold reason for doing that calculation review that we're doing on every one of those.

In terms of the '04-05 situation there was no advance of that nature in '04 or '05. There are advances against the CAIS program, true, but they're based on an estimate of the overall farm operation, not just on cattle prices. So that type of an advance isn't available anymore which caused the overpayments in '03. I can't give you a number off the top, but we will certainly get some information back to you from AFSC if there is an indication of any type of overpayment in '04-05.

As it relates to the administration costs of CAIS, the hon. member is quite right. Alberta and a number of other provinces, three other provinces, do the administration of the CAIS program ourselves. That's very, very beneficial to us, Mr. Chairman, because we have been able to respond much, much quicker. We have been able to make our process that much easier. I know it's hard to believe, but in other provinces the situation is even worse in terms of complexity, delays, and overpayments than it is in Alberta.

In fact, I recently had a very good meeting with one of the largest farm accounting organizations in western Canada. They handle probably 18,000 to 20,000 CAIS applications and farm producers every year across western Canada. They recently made a presentation to the national CAIS committee, and in that presentation they cited the good work that Alberta was doing and asked that the rest of the country follow our lead in calculations, in how we handle the information coming into our office, the processes that we dealt with upon reviews of applications.

I'm very, very comfortable, from this third-party type of compliment of our operation, that we are on the right track to make this system simpler, more effective, more responsive, that we are on the right track to finally get to a position where the CAIS program can become a business management tool just as much as it is a business risk management tool. In other words, I can see a point in time where the producer individually will look at his CAIS application, be able to look at the numbers, and make management decisions based on what's happened either in the past or what he forecasts will happen in the future. That will be a very valuable tool for our producers.

As to the administration costs the studies that I've seen would indicate that we are half – half – the cost per application of what the rest of Canada is. I don't know the professor's due diligence in the University of Saskatchewan, but I can tell you that if they included all of the costs associated with the CAIS application, as we do, my guess is that you would find a different outcome in their analysis. I think that's pretty indicative of a lot of the things that we're doing in CAIS, and I cite the leading accounting firms' analysis of this; it's

not our own. We are the leaders in the advancements and progress being made on the CAIS program.

It's unfortunate that the federal government doesn't seem to have as much faith in that CAIS program and a targeted approach as we do, as evidenced by their recent announcement of, once again, an ad hoc without consultation.

I think I've answered the questions of the hon. member. If there are other things that are out of that, more detail, we will provide those.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate this opportunity to go over the supplemental supply for Agriculture.

I guess the first thing that I'd like to comment on is that we seem to constantly be in a struggle with the federal government on numerous programs. Once more, with most of the rural people that have talked with me in the past, CAIS is a very, very complicated filing system, and even the CGAs mess up to a great extent. It's good to hear that someone who files \$18,000 is becoming good at it, but I guess I have to question: why do we always grab onto the coattails of the federal government and their programs?

Perhaps it's time that we stand up, much like Quebec often does, and say: well, you send us the money, and we'll run our own programs. I'm always disappointed in the federal programs. It seems like the complexity of them and the difficulty they cause the producers at large – and CAIS has been no exception, as you are very much aware and have shared with me, with the number of times we have to relook. It's been very discouraging for producers in my area on being told that they have to pay that money back when the ones that I've talked to haven't seen a significant change in their filing, yet it's there.

5:10

One of the major concerns – and I don't see anything in the new supply bill that you've brought forward – is some innovative ways to help the farmers help themselves. Input costs have been going up astronomically with the cost of natural gas and electricity. Is this government looking at anything to rebate? We rebate the housing costs, the fuel heating costs. Farm fertilizer has been a big issue. Farmers are very nervous going into next spring with the price of fertilizer. If we were to reduce the taxes on that, it would be very helpful.

The same with the cost of farm fuel. We're continuing to tax those areas. I consider this very much like basic tax exemption. Why do we tax in areas where we already understand they're under duress? Why would we want to tax, as we don't here in the province, someone making \$12,000? Why do we want to tax the farming industry at this time, when commodity prices are down for the grains, when the weather has not been the most conducive to growing? A lot of the quality of crops was down this fall because of the moisture, yet with those farm input costs many farmers who traditionally have put in the fertilizer in the fall have chosen not to because of the cost. It would be great if we were to eliminate those taxes off those.

Another area that I'd like to address. We seem to have got a good grasp on the tar sands, and we need capital expense in there. We've given them some very good incentives, and I wish those incentives would go over into the agricultural business. We talk very much about value-added. I know that you're a keen believer in that. Perhaps if we were to have capital costs that had the same type of writeoffs. I realize that we don't have royalties, but if in fact, for example, a feedlot decided to put up a biomass reactor to deal with

the manure on the place, instead of paying taxes, you know, perhaps 80 per cent of their taxes could go to paying off those capital funds. We could stimulate a whole new level of industry in agriculture if, in fact, we could have capital cost writeoffs and reduce our taxes. I think there are many areas in which we can do that.

Another area that I would urge the minister to continue dealing with Ottawa on is that we are driven many times by our tax problems. During the drought the stock replacement was given a two-year vacation. They weren't taxed on the inventory that they sold. It just seems like the federal government has many tax laws that are driving our industry. We saw the same thing with the feedlots. They had taken terrible losses, yet they still had to put back their inventory. Otherwise, they were going to be taxed as if they'd made a gain.

There are many areas. It would also be another area that would help farms with energy in the south if they could in fact use windmills as a capital expense and write those off, thereby decreasing our shortage of electricity here in the province.

I would strongly urge the minister to try and put in more incentives where farmers could help themselves and put the capital costs in. There have been many co-ops that have wanted to get up and running – you can give written response, I guess, and there are a lot of farmers that wanted the check-offs and to be able to get some . . .

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

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, but pursuant to Standing Order 59(2) and Government Motion 23, agreed to on November 16, 2005, I must now put the following question. Those members in favour of each of the resolutions not yet voted upon relating to the 2005-2006 supplementary estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund, please say aye.

Some Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed, please say no.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Deputy Chair: The motion is carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that the committee rise and report the supplemental estimates as dealt with in committee.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

Ms Haley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2005-06 supplementary estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

The following resolutions for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, have been approved.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$288,289,000.

Children's Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$38,400,000.

Community Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$24,030,000; capital investment, \$2,970,000.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$5,200,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$64,630,000.

Infrastructure and Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$526,836,000; capital investment, \$231,180,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$138,235,000.

Seniors and Community Supports: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$109,000,000.

Solicitor General and Public Security: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$7,494,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$80,000,000.

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

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **5:20 Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 43

**Alberta Resource Rebate Statutes
Amendment Act, 2005**

[Adjourned debate November 22: Mr. Hancock]

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 43, the Alberta Resource Rebate Statutes Amendment Act, 2005. I'm in a very unique position here with respect to this bill in feeling that I must support the bill and, yet, deploring the conditions that gave rise to this bill in the first place. The reason that I'm supporting it is because so many of my constituents and so many Albertans are depending on this bill and are desperate to receive the money that they need. I cannot certainly in good conscience turn my back on those people, although I hasten to add that this government in fact has turned its back on these very same people and are offering them crumbs at a time when they need a loaf of bread to feed their family.

Let's just take a look at it. I represent, Mr. Speaker, one of the poorest constituencies in the entire province. I have a lot of individuals in my constituency that live in poverty, and my office has received many calls from people who are very much desperate to receive these cheques. The fact that in the land of plenty there are so many people that are desperate for \$400 speaks volumes about this government's failures to deal adequately with those issues.

We continue to have in Alberta a very significant percentage of our citizens that live in poverty notwithstanding all of the wealth that's being generated in this province and in particular being generated for the government's friends. More than 14 per cent of the children in this province live in poverty, Mr. Speaker. That's 100,000 children. In 2001 the census found that nearly 400,000 Albertans lived below the poverty line. Alberta has the highest per

capita food bank usage in Canada. The homelessness count in Calgary, according to the most recent data, is that 2,000 people in Calgary are living without homes.

I think that there are some other factors that need to be taken into account when we judge the need for this bill, and that is that the average income of women in Canada is only 62 per cent of men's income, so women are disproportionately in need of assistance. This gap between men's and women's earnings is the greatest in Alberta and the least in Prince Edward Island. In Alberta men's income averaged \$40,297 in 2000. In the same year women averaged only \$22,462 in income, or only 56 per cent of that of men. So a large number of the people calling my office waiting for these cheques, Mr. Speaker, are women that are trying to feed their children.

You know, we have such an enormous wealth, and we've been very critical of the government over the years for underbudgeting on resource revenues by low-balling the prices for natural gas and for crude oil. The result has been a number of surplus budgets that have occurred in almost every year for I think about \$20 billion over the past nine years or so in surplus. The government has dedicated a lot of this to fighting the debt and paying off the debt and prides itself on paying off Alberta's debt. The high price of oil and natural gas made that comparatively easy to do, but I don't want to underestimate the sacrifices that have been made by Albertans in accomplishing that.

To everyone's amazement, when the government reached the point where they had in fact paid off the debt, it became apparent that they had no plan for the surplus revenues that were coming forward, and in fact they still don't. I've heard the hon. Finance Minister talk about: yes, we have a plan; we just adopted it last week at a caucus meeting. Then a few weeks later they change the long-term plan in a substantial way again, and they're trying to find ways to spend the money because they haven't thought ahead, and they haven't planned ahead.

I think it's very important right now that we would have some sort of dialogue with Albertans because I think we're at a crossroads. Where do we want to go now that we're debt free and we have all of this money rolling in? But the government is not doing that, so they go into caucus meetings in different parts of the province, and they cook up ways to deal with the surplus. One of the ways that they cooked up was to give everyone a rebate cheque.

I've indicated already why I think many Albertans are desperate for this money. It's interesting because it's split very much. The polls show that Albertans are very much split on the advisability of this program. Higher income people think the money should be invested in programs and long-term planning, and lower income people, quite understandably, would like to see some sort of rebate program.

What could the government do instead, Mr. Speaker? Well, we put forward some proposals. If they scrapped health care premiums instead of using health care premiums as an incentive or to soften the blow of private insurance, which is what they're planning to do – they're going to say: we're going to scrap health care premiums, but by the way for all these things you're going to have to take out private health insurance. So they're going to use that as a little bit of honey on the bitter pill of private insurance, but if they scrap them

now, they would save \$528 per adult Albertan each year. I think that that would be a very good form of tax reform. They could deal with the question of school property taxes.

Now, it's interesting because I've heard the Minister of Municipal Affairs talk about how, when he talks to the municipalities, he wants to eliminate the provincial education portion of property taxes, and he gets great applause. Then when the Minister of Education speaks to the Alberta School Boards Association, he says something quite different, and he gets a round of applause. So we don't know where the government is going on that, but eliminating school property taxes would be a good way to go.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that this \$400, as needed as it is by some Albertans, would be needed less if the government's policies in general were more favourable to low-income people. If they had public auto insurance, we might see substantially lower auto insurance rates. If we hadn't gone down the road of deregulation, we would see lower electricity rates. If we eliminated health care premiums, we would see families getting this kind of savings on an ongoing basis and not just a once-only basis. Ultimately, we need to see the surplus revenue that we're receiving, and we're not receiving nearly enough because of the low royalty rates that we have in this province. If we increase the royalty rates to a reasonable level to get the return on what is a declining capital resource of the people of this province, then that money could be invested to a green energy corporation that would position Alberta as the future in nonrenewable energy to lead the country, to maintain its position as the energy capital of Canada but to do it in a way that takes into account that conventional reserves of oil and gas are very, very limited.

That's the kind of leadership that we should be getting from the government. We should be seeing the government investing the declining oil and gas revenues so that all generations benefit as much as this one. They're not doing that, Mr. Speaker, because they don't have a vision. So they make up policies almost on the back of a napkin and issue these cheques.

I'm forced into the position of voting for the bill because I want my constituents to have the \$400, but I want so much more for my constituents than just \$400. I want low insurance rates for their car. For their home I want lower home heating bills, lower electricity rates. I want a government that cares, that puts in place actual social programs that help people get out of poverty. I want the government to deal fairly with people in long-term care or who are on AISH or on workers' compensation, none of which this government is doing. But they are giving \$400, Mr. Speaker, and I guess for that we have to be grateful.

I just want to indicate that that is why I am supporting the bill. I do believe that there's so much more that the government could be doing to help people's pocketbooks on an ongoing basis, which they're refusing to do. So, as I say, Mr. Speaker, this is crumbs from the table, and the fact is that the feast . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 8 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

