

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 29, 2005**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 05/11/29

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my pleasure today to introduce three distinguished officers of the Canadian army, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery.

Canada's military contribution to Afghanistan is called Operation Archer, and in early February 2006 the Canadian army will be deploying nearly 2,000 personnel to Kandahar in southern Afghanistan. Our forces there will be part of a multinational brigade composed of British, Australian, Dutch, Romanian, Danish, and Estonian contingents. The officer who has been specially chosen to command this formation is Brigadier-General Dave Fraser of St. Albert.

General Fraser has spent much of his home service in Alberta. Abroad he commanded the second battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in Bosnia in 1996. A year prior on attachment to the French army in Sarajevo he was awarded Canada's meritorious service medal for his actions during the Bosnian civil war.

Colonel Tom Putt is a reservist and former commanding officer of the South Alberta Light Horse, the province's senior reserve regiment. He has seen service in Germany and with the United Nations Emergency Force. Colonel Putt has been selected deputy commander, National Command Element, Task Force Afghanistan. While Colonel Putt will be stationed in Kandahar, his responsibilities will take him to Kabul and elsewhere in the theatre.

South Alberta Light Horse Honorary Colonel Stan Milner is an outstanding Alberta business leader and philanthropist. A former chairman of the University of Alberta, he is an officer of the Order of Canada, a member of the Alberta Order of Excellence, and an honorary doctor of laws. His regiment will contribute 20 reservists to the Kandahar mission.

All three of our visitors were recently awarded the Alberta centennial medal.

Hon. members, the risks of serving sovereign and country on this mission are well known. We wish the two visitors, who will be deploying early in the new year, and those who they have the privilege to lead well in all that lies ahead. We pray for their safe return.

The majority of personnel for Operation Archer will come from Land Force Western Area, which is Canada's army in western Canada. The majority of the Canadian contingent will be formed from regular and reserve units from Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Morinville, and other cities and towns across Alberta.

I would ask these three great Albertans – General Fraser, Colonel Putt, and Colonel Milner – to remain standing as they receive the traditional welcome of this House. [applause]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 24 enthusiastic grade 6 students along with their teacher, Ms Margo Cahn, and two student teachers, Jill Williams and Shivon Lavallee, from Earl Buxton elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They are here today to observe and learn with keen interest about government. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very accomplished young woman, Ms Kristen Hedley. Kristen is joined by her parents, Robert and Leona, her sister Kelsey, her brother Kennan as well as one representative from my department's 4-H branch, Mark Muchka. Kristen is the 2005 4-H Premier's award recipient, the highest honour the Alberta 4-H program bestows on a member. The award recognizes young Albertans who demonstrate strong management, leadership, and communication skills as well as a strong dedication to their community.

Nineteen-year-old Kristen is from Consort, Alberta, and has been active in 4-H for more than 11 years. She is an accomplished public speaker, a dancer, has held several executive positions in the Consort Creative Hands 4-H Club, and has represented Alberta 4-H at national and international events. Currently she is a second-year educational psych student at the University of Alberta. I would also note that Kristen's grandfather was the late Hon. Gordon Towers, who was Alberta's Lieutenant Governor from 1991 to 1996. I'm sure he would be very proud of his granddaughter's accomplishments.

Congratulations, Kristen, and it is my personal pleasure to invite you and your family to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sitting above me today in the public gallery, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a group of 60 students from the Lorelei elementary school in north Edmonton. I had the pleasure of visiting that school just a few days ago, and I must tell you that it's seldom that you see students so well informed not only about what's going on in our Legislative Assembly but also in city hall and in the federal government, which definitely is a tribute to the students but also to the teachers who have prepared them so well. They are accompanied today by their teachers, Mr. George, Mr. Gibson, Ms McCurry, Ms Mockford, and Miss DeGroot, and also two parents, Mr. Poon and Mrs. Webb. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a veteran myself it's an honour in this Year of the Veteran to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 10 men who served our country

and its armed forces with distinction in both war and peace. With us are seven veterans who served in the Second World War. They are George Custance and Bob Storrer of the army. Bob also served in Korea with the decorated Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. Serving at home and in Europe during World War II were Canadian army veterans Bill Calder in England and the continent, Tom Hayden in Italy and Holland, and Al Sunley of the Royal Canadian Air Force on duty in Great Britain. In the north Atlantic were Stan Myers and Walter Sobkow with the Royal Canadian Navy. Mr. Sobkow also served in the English Channel, in the Pacific, and with the Fleet Air Arm. With them are three veterans of NATO service and service with the United Nations: Ben Murdock, a former soldier in the Canadian army; Don Pagee of the Royal Canadian Air Force; and Willy Willett, RCAF, who also served in the Sinai desert. I would ask these gentlemen to please rise and receive the gratitude and appreciation of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly visitors who are deeply concerned about the Capital health authority's plans to replace the current outpatient residence at the U of A hospital with a high-cost privately run hotel. They believe the outpatient residence provides a valuable service to over 5,000 Albertans every year, and they don't want to see Albertans who are already facing serious illness struggle to find affordable accommodation while receiving care.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to first introduce Tonya Malo, head of the local AUPE chapter, who is seated in the public gallery, and also Carol Carbol, a licensed nurse on the surgical unit at the U of A hospital. Carol has seen many of her patients and their families benefit from the outpatient residence. They both helped organize an information picket today, which I attended.

I'd also like to introduce Patty Moar. She's a current resident at the outpatient residence and has greatly appreciated the opportunity to stay there.

There are several other guests I'll introduce, and I'll ask them to rise as I mention their names. They are Alecia Hinton, Phyllis Patrie, Jim Shelley, Margaret Heil, Terry Nicholson-Knudson, Nancy Rakowski, Cathie Heard, Jeanne Payne, and Joel Byron.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in giving all of these guests the warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly my guests, who are seated in the public gallery and who have a keen interest in the actions of this government. My distinguished guests represent the Alberta Social Credit Party executive and membership, and they are here to see their petition regarding the need for reasonably priced energy for Albertans be presented to this Assembly. I know that they have done a lot of work to collect the thousands of signatures from concerned Albertans. I would ask that my guests Gordon Barrett, Ken Shipka, and Karen Richert please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Capital Health Outpatient Residence

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For 20 years the outpatient residence at the U of A hospital has been providing affordable accommodation for families dealing with illness. Now this affordable, publicly run facility is being replaced by a higher cost private hotel. The facility is outdated, and it does need to be replaced, but this costly change will be a major blow to rural Albertans in particular, many of whom have to travel from outside the region for prolonged treatment for transplants, cancer, kidney problems, and heart disease. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. How does this minister justify this blow to rural Albertans who have to travel to Edmonton from all over rural Alberta to receive medical care given that a quarter of Capital health's patients are from out of the region?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously the question is more likely directed to the minister of health, but as it relates to rural development, in the rural development strategy which we're coming forward with there is a need and a desire to move patients from the city centres to the outlying or regional areas of health care so that we can utilize those facilities outside of those major centres and actually have an expertise built in rural Alberta as well as in the city. It's also important – and the hon. member brings up a good point – to have facilities available for parents and for families as they come in. This government is not ignoring that fact. There will be facilities available for those folks.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: does the minister recognize that the increase from \$25 a night to \$100 a night is unaffordable – simply unaffordable – for many patients who need to stay for weeks at a time, patients who may often not even qualify for credit cards?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to answer this question. Subsidized arrangements will be available for low-income people who need that additional support. This last summer 1,800 outpatient folks that had come in that were surveyed were asked if they would like to have some kind of accommodation, and most wanted to have living facilities, parking, and some longer term capacity. Eighty-eight per cent agreed with this new plan. Eighty-eight per cent said that a modestly priced room for a hundred dollars a night was not too much to be expected to pay if, in fact, they were able to maintain a residence.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier would like to supplement.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt about it that Capital health plans to replace its outdated outpatient residence facility with an updated private facility. I need to stress that Capital health is the only health region in North America – and I hear the chitter-chatter over there about two-tier – that has subsidized accommodations for families. The only health region in North America with subsidized accommodations for families.

I'm told that the region surveyed people who use the facilities, not the NDs and not the Liberals but people who use the facilities, and they found that 88 per cent said that they were in favour of a new facility that could accommodate them in a reasonable fashion. Also, as the hon. minister pointed out, there will be subsidies for low-income families that cannot afford the facility.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: why are the taxpayers of Alberta putting millions of dollars into building this facility only to turn it over to Ritz-Carlton or Marriott or some other corporation? Why are we in the hotel business?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, Capital health is not building this facility out of public funds. The taxpayers are not on the hook for anything. The only thing that taxpayers will be on the hook for is the subsidization of a private facility. I would remind the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that this region is the only region in North America that offers subsidized accommodations. The only.

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

Securities Commission

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Securities Commission is vital to the integrity of our capital markets. However, as the days and weeks and months pass and the spotlight grows brighter on the ASC, information continues to flow forward indicating that our Securities Commission under this government is in disarray. Most of these challenges and controversies could be dealt with by the Minister of Finance, but she is failing to take a leadership role and get to the bottom of this issue. To the Minister of Finance: given that the Ontario Securities Commission enforces strict conflict-of-interest guidelines for its chairman the moment the person takes office, can the minister explain why the new chair of the Securities Commission sat as a director of not one but two publicly traded companies while sitting as the chair of the Securities Commission?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it was clear right from the outset, when the chairman took over, that this would be permitted in a transitional time frame to allow him to take on his responsibilities and to wind down his participation in this company. It was under very strict guidelines that the chairman would not deal with anything that would involve that company, and it was completely reviewed. No pretense at trying to avoid it; it was well known at the time.

Mr. Speaker, I question why the constant discrediting of the Alberta Securities Commission continues.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that ASC interim chair, Mr. Peter Valentine, sat on the boards of several publicly traded companies while serving as interim chair of the Securities Commission, what was the minister's due diligence process in handling his appointment and conflicts of interest?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Securities Commission has very clear conflict-of-interest guidelines. That has never been in question.

Again, with the interim chair all of his activities and involvements were reviewed. Any concerns around those are put to rest by the conflict-of-interest guidelines, which clearly state that they cannot involve themselves in any matters pertaining to those companies.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the Minister of Finance before her appearance at the Public Accounts

Committee tomorrow take the time to ask her cabinet and caucus colleagues if they have ever interfered with enforcement cases at the Securities Commission?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I invite the hon. Leader of the Opposition, before I appear at the Public Accounts Committee tomorrow, to come forth with some substantiation of any evidence that any member of this Legislature or my staff interfered with files at the Alberta Securities Commission. Day after day we have had allegations. We have no substantiation, and it continues.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, in order to save time at Public Accounts, I will ask any member of this caucus: please stand if you have in any way interfered with the Alberta Securities Commission. Please stand. Please stand. Well, there's no need to ask the question.

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

Turner Valley Gas Plant Historic Site

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is negligent in relation to reclamation of contaminated sites. Repeatedly this government refuses to prosecute and to hold industry accountable for spills, to require timely cleanup of abandoned sites, and to be open with the public in affected communities. Just ask the residents of Turner Valley, Black Diamond, and Okotoks, whose river is affected by the old refinery site, now a public liability since becoming an historic site under the Department of Community Development. My first question to the Minister of Community Development: why after 18 years has the Turner Valley site not been properly cleaned up?

Mr. Mar: Well, not only is the contamination of grave concern to us; it is something that we are acting upon. Some of the contaminants that are referred to by the hon. member are in fact naturally occurring ones. Some of it does come from the former site that was there. But I want to assure you, Mr. Speaker, and people in the Assembly and Albertans that the health and safety of people in Turner Valley is our priority. Results of drinking-water testing show that the water is safe. We are moving forward on infrastructure that will put a containment wall around this area. This has been in consultation with the people who live in the area.

Mr. Speaker, we met with Infrastructure and Environment and the people who live in the Turner Valley area as recently as about a month ago, and I think that, by and large, the people in the community are quite satisfied that we're taking the right steps forward on an infrastructure basis. We have money for this in our budget to place the containment wall to help mitigate the damage to the river.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Environment: with more mercury and hydrocarbons released from the summer flooding at this site and recently significant radiation found on-site, how can you reassure the public that you are protecting the environment?

Mr. Boutilier: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have been working very closely, as the Minister of Community Development has suggested, with the residents. Furthermore, we are constantly doing water testing, ensuring that, first and foremost, the drinking water for the citizens is safe.

The hon. member does mention the issue of radioactivity. We

actually just in the last 10 days have met with the residents again at a public meeting, and in actual fact we are doing more testing on the point by a professor who has done some radioactive testing. Everything that I have been informed of with my staff – we will ensure that the water is safe, that all Albertans enjoy safe drinking water. As the Minister of Community Development has mentioned, we will and are taking the correct steps of ensuring that this contaminated site is restored to something well before any laws were in place in Alberta, going back many, many years.

Dr. Swann: It's 18 years, actually, that we've been waiting.

Again to the Minister of Environment: how many more contaminated sites are there across the province, and how much will the public have to pay to get these cleaned up?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, this government initiated a plan, and in fact it falls under the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. I want to say that it identified contaminated sites across all of Alberta. It was really interesting. The plan was made up of \$60 million. There is no other plan like this in the country in terms of dealing with contaminated sites.

The question was asked: how many more sites? It's my hope for the benefit of future generations that the good work that we are doing within the environment, holding people to account for the contaminated sites, that the money we are investing is restoring the land to its proper order, and ensuring that Albertans who value the environment deeply will continue to appreciate this valuable resource we've been blessed with. Contaminated sites: zero is my ultimate goal as Minister of Environment in this province.

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

Long-term Care Standards

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fatality inquiry into Jennie Nelson's death is a harsh reminder of why we need better standards for seniors' care in Alberta, including staffing ratios, standards for training, and rigorous inspections. The Premier promised in this House to implement every single recommendation of the Auditor General's report on long-term care, but instead the government is deregulating care, allowing long-term care facilities to be redesignated as assisted living, where there are no standards whatsoever. It's a cruel game of bait and switch. My question is to the Premier. Given that the Nelson fatality inquiry is revealing the extent to which seniors' care must be regulated and standards set, why is the government allowing deregulation of seniors' care by redesignating hundreds of long-term care beds as assisted living?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the assertion is not true, and I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness supplement.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, first of all, because of the medical examiner's inquest I will not discuss any circumstance surrounding the very unfortunate death of the resident that's been referenced.

In fact, there are standards in our long-term care facilities. In assisted-living facilities, where they are yet unregulated, regional health authorities undertake a contractual arrangement identifying standards of care that must be in place so that if people have been reduced from the requirements of a long-term care facility and are placed more appropriately in a facility that is tailoring care to their particular needs, a contractual relationship enforces the standard that must be met in the care of those patients and the people that are resident there.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister has admitted that there is no regulation in assisted living, and given that there are hundreds of beds being converted right now to assisted living, why, when the Premier promised Alberta seniors higher standards of care, is he delivering them no standards at all?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, it's not by regulation and government-wide regulation that designated assisted-living residences have standards. It's by contractual relationship. I've just identified that there are standards in place. There must be standards in place or the government wouldn't provide funding for people in those residences. If people choose a private residence where there are not standards in place, that is not something that the government is involved with.

2:00

But there are standards in place, and through our review – and it's been an intensive review, following the review by the Auditor General – we are looking at a set of standards that would be a framework for Alberta for all of those people that enter care, whether they're coming in at the home-care entry point or whether they're in long-term care, and looking at how we collaborate with a set of standards with regions and all kinds of private or private/public deliveries that we have out there currently, today, and are expanding upon.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the Minister of Health and Wellness is trying to indicate to us that we have standards, can she tell the House if those standards are exactly the same as the standards that the government committed to in the Auditor General's report, and will she provide the House with a side-by-side comparison of the standards that she claims are available to people in extended care through contractual means?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, once we have committed to the Auditor General to undertake to provide standards and have accepted his recommendations, we will fulfill that to the letter of the law. To the particular standards in the various facilities with the regional health authorities, one of the commitments made in the review that was undertaken by the MLA task force is that we would assure that these standards had a common theme throughout Alberta, and we will continue and work in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, I stress: for anybody in a government-funded care centre for either designated assisted living, nursing home, long-term care, or any other of the continuums, including lodge care, if there's care being provided and it's publicly funded, there are standards for that care.

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

Highway 2A

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, there is a need for our highways and secondary roads to keep pace with the huge growth in population and economic development, especially in the fastest growing economic corridor in Canada. I have constituents who have expressed serious concerns about traffic safety issues on highway 2A, particularly from north of the Red Deer city limit to the town of Blackfalds. The area of particular concern is the part that provides access to Blindman industrial park. Due to increased traffic volumes on this stretch of highway and poor lighting at the intersection it has

become very difficult to turn onto this highway. During rush hours and in bad weather this stretch of road is very dangerous. There have been a number of serious accidents on this road. My questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Are there any improvements scheduled for this area, such as better turning lanes, widening of the highway, or lighting?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This section of the highway certainly has seen increased traffic counts. It's seen increased traffic. There presently is many times a seven- to 10-minute wait to cross the intersection in this particular area. It is scheduled for twinning. We have done the functional plan on it, and we are looking at twinning it as soon as the dollars bear out. I'm hoping that that will be sooner as opposed to later.

The Speaker: The hon. member. One question only.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: will you consider installing traffic lights at the busiest intersection to allow people to safely turn onto highway 2A?

Dr. Oberg: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we certainly will install the traffic lights. I think they're needed there. One of the issues that we have is that if we get into construction of twinning, then basically we will have put the traffic lights on there for nothing. So what we're looking at doing, quite simply, is that when the twinning is going to occur, if the twinning is not going to occur immediately, within the next year, we will indeed put the lights up to ensure that the intersection is considerably safer than it is at the moment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister: in order to make this section of highway safer, is there any consideration to reduce the current speed limit from the current 80 kilometres per hour since this extends to 90 K or more?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I certainly would hope that when the speed limit is 80 kilometres, people would go 80 kilometres per hour, specifically in the areas where there is a lot of congestion, such as this one. I don't believe that there's any point to decreasing it because, quite simply, those people that are going faster are going to go faster regardless. I certainly would ask, though, that the people of Red Deer and Blackfalds, when they see the 80 kilometres per hour, stay at the 80 kilometres per hour because it is quite a dangerous situation in this particular area.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Wildlife Conservation

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to stand by while all the controlled oil and gas, recreational use, and resorts squeeze Alberta's wildlife to the brink. The reality is that this government sees dollar signs and growth potential while failing its international obligations to protect endangered species. This government stands by and watches extinction in the 21st century. My question to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: when will this minister commit to a moratorium on hunting, establish recovery teams, and create grizzly bear conservation areas, giving the bears a faint hope clause?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, Sustainable Resource Development works very, very closely with the endangered species committee, that is chaired by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. They have made recommendations to our department regarding recovery plans for caribou, for endangered species like grizzly bear. We have put recovery plans in place, even prior to receiving all of their recommendations, because we are being proactive in managing and making sure that all species are part of the biodiversity of this province regardless of the industrial activity that is being placed on the land.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister has a caribou recovery plan, when will the minister defer development in critical areas and preserve the caribou?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have a caribou recovery plan put in place, and the caribou recovery plan is done in co-operation with industry as well as with our own biologists as we manage the threat that may happen where habitat is involved. We take a look at opportunities to maintain that caribou on the land and on our landscape, and we do that by providing, definitely, habitat that will keep the caribou and the caribou numbers across this province on the landscape.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will this minister table the latest DNA population results and give Albertans a clear sense of the bear numbers?

Mr. Coutts: In terms of the request for grizzly bear information and DNA, we haven't fully got that information available at this point in time. Our Foothills model forest bear recovery office is working on this, and, Mr. Speaker, you can rest assured that when the details of the DNA are available to me, I will make sure that the hon. member and this House and all Albertans receive that type of information.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Minable Oil Sands Strategy

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent release of a discussion paper termed Mineable Oil Sands Strategy, or MOSS, has caused concern among many northern constituents. To the Minister of Environment. The six key policy components in MOSS are progressive, supportive strategies with the exception of point 2: "Within the coordinated development zone, oil sands mining will have the highest priority." Will the minister assure this House and all Albertans that that strategy will not preclude protection of the environment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that probably in all my years sitting in this Legislature, that is perhaps the finest question I have ever heard, and the reason I say that is because it's about protecting the mother ship. I indicate to my colleagues all the time, as the Premier did, that the mother ship is protecting what Albertans expect us to protect, and that is the environment.

Mr. Speaker, it is grossly misunderstood . . . [interjections] If you

could listen just for a moment. It is grossly misunderstood about this principle. It's not a be-all and end-all in terms of compromising the environment for the sake of mining. Unequivocally not. My family lives there, and I do breathe the air, believe it or not, and we do emit CO₂ when we exhale. We actually drink the water; we do work the land.

Let me assure all Albertans that without any question we are going to do this right. We're going to do it in protecting the principles of environmental protection and sustainability, and at the end of the day we will never compromise the environment for mining. Unequivocally not. That is my backyard, and that is my commitment to every member of this Assembly and every Albertan.

2:10

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, that may be the best answer I've ever heard.

To the Minister of Energy: why is a MOSS policy discussion necessary at this time?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think everybody is aware around the world that this world-class resource has attracted, clearly, the attention and the investment of companies from around the world. It's in that light, especially how fast things have come about with technology and our ways to improve the development, that we wanted to take a co-ordinated approach to managing the development of these resources rather than just a project-specific, one-off at a time, that we do look at it as a co-ordinated approach. Even as my colleague the Minister of Environment just mentioned, these principles are to be in conjunction. The industry is supportive and certainly the Department of Energy is supportive that as we develop, there ought to be a coexistence of the development of these resources and those environmental principles.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: what is your department doing to ensure that the existing resource management plan will be strengthened by the minable oil sands strategy?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, the existing plan for the area was developed after public consultation in 1996, and it was further amended in the year 2002. The plan already recognizes the importance of the oil sands in the area. We use an integrated resource management and planning approach to managing these public lands and the resources. Those plans are developed after making sure that other affected government departments are involved in the planning process plus a public consultation as well. The proposed minable oil sands strategy is requiring an update because we would like to move from a site-specific or a project-by-project management basis to a larger landscape planning, and we're using public consultation to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Enron Activities in Alberta

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy's statements yesterday in this House indicated that the secret Enron deal was executed in the best interests of Albertans. However, the government allowed Enron to violate the very conditions

placed by them on the secret deal. In a letter dated August 14, 2001, the government gave their support for the deal so long as Enron did not sell its electricity generation capacity to a company that already owned generation capacity in Alberta. My first question is to the Premier. Given that the government stated in that letter, "We look forward to working with Enron on the continued development of a competitive electric industry in Alberta," why did this government allow Enron to violate the very conditions set forward by this government?

Mr. Klein: I don't know that to be true.

Mr. MacDonald: It certainly is.

Mr. Klein: Oh, well, Mr. Speaker, there are so many things going on in this government. This is a question I'd have to take under advisement.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and you can't answer your own question.

Mr. MacDonald: It's the only way to get an answer here, Mr. Speaker.

To the Minister of Energy then: can the minister please explain how a deal that included specific terms dictated by Enron's legal department to serve its own tax purposes is an example of this government acting independently on behalf of Albertans?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we'd have to get the specific dates in mind. He's going back to 2001. But first off, it was in August of that same year, of 2000 actually, that the PPAs were sold, of which some of those were purchased, and later Enron came asking about the resale of that. Through that policy it was determined, actually, that it was in the interest, as mentioned yesterday, that that specific PPA that Enron purchased, the power purchase arrangement, be split into two. So it was under that policy that we agreed as a department that it would be in Albertans' best interest that it be sold and split into two.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: given that this government secretly facilitated Enron's demands to transfer this electricity generation capacity without any public knowledge, how can the minister now claim that this deal was executed in the public's interest?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, these were contracts between individual companies. They clearly have the ability to sell those. They would have to have that and retain that permission through a regulator. So from that perspective a lot of those documents are not in the secret domain. They are in the sense that when you come forward, there's a lot of correspondence between the department, between regulators, between companies all the time. That's in the normal course of doing business. Some of that would be confidential, specific to their company. It's under that light when the regulators oversee and approve that. Nothing is secret at all. That's the due process that all departments are required to fulfill.

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

Caribou Conservation

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Much of Alberta's economic success is based on development of our natural

resources, including forestry, oil, and gas. However, this development may have a negative effect on wildlife such as woodland caribou, a threatened species in Alberta. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is his department doing to ensure that the caribou population is being adequately protected?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, I want to be very specific here and relate to you and to people that last June Alberta announced several actions based on a caribou recovery plan, which means greater protection for caribou and their habitat. We are committed to provincial land management that takes into account the importance of habitat for caribou remaining on the land. A caribou committee has been established to co-ordinate the management activities. As well, we look at selective predator management to protect caribou and their populations. We're in the process of hiring four biologists from Grande Prairie right through to Peace River, Fort McMurray, and the Slave Lake-High Prairie area to make sure that they can assist in those management activities as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. How does his department ensure that the industry follows government guidelines to mitigate effects on species such as caribou?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, to be specific we work very, very closely with industry to make sure that we balance the development with the environmental protection. Industry must submit a caribou protection plan each and every year, which we will enforce under our legislation. Over the past 10 years industry has been addressing the width size of seismic lines and co-operating with other companies in terms of the numbers of roads and where the roads would go in certain areas so we don't lose the habitat for the caribou. It's also important to know that forestry companies adjust their harvesting sequences to make sure that habitat is well looked after. It's part of their management plans. The department, in addition to that, has worked with Suncor and ConocoPhillips to make sure that their planning for their pipelines takes into consideration habitat, particularly for the Little Smoky caribou area.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. Because caribou require good quality habitat to survive, why doesn't Alberta simply put an end to industrial activity in sensitive areas until studies can be conducted to ensure that sufficient caribou habitat is being protected?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, in Alberta we continue to be innovative with the planning processes that we use, and we believe that caribou recovery can be achieved without a moratorium on caribou habitat. We are intensifying our areas to work in the forests with our oil and gas as well as forestry industries. We're promoting industry best practices more widely so that companies can operate on all caribou ranges. Some companies are actually going beyond that practice. In fact, if you look over the past 10 years, between the government and the companies they invest over half a million dollars a year into caribou management and monitoring just to keep caribou on the landscape.

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

2:20

Accessibility of Medical Education

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Too many Albertans do not have a regular family doctor, yet this government's policies are aggravating rather than solving the problem. Since 1993-94 tuition at the University of Calgary medical school, for example, has increased from just over \$3,600 to over \$15,000. Access is inequitable, and new doctors say that they're moving away from family medicine just to pay their student debts. To the Minister of Advanced Education: given all the evidence, will the minister admit that his government's user-pay ideology for education is in fact making all Albertans pay?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer to that is no. Neither would I admit it, nor is it true. The fact of the matter is that there is a lineup of people that want to get into medical school, and we need to find ways to provide more space for Albertans to get into medical school here and abroad. We've worked with the rural physician action plan to make sure that rural students have an opportunity to get medical training. We've worked with all institutions across the province to make sure that spaces are available for the training of other health care professionals. It's not the tuition for medical school that's the problem. It's the fact that we need to gear up to find more space to overcome a decision that was made about 15 or 20 years ago right across this country to cut back on medical training.

Mr. Taylor: Well, I didn't hear anything in there, Mr. Speaker, about family docs.

To the same minister: given that a new national study demonstrates that as medical tuition soared, access for students from low- and moderate-income backgrounds fell, will the minister reverse course and make medical education affordable to all Albertans?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's the policy of this government and the practice of this government that finances are not a barrier to a student getting an education. We have the best student finance system in the country, and we provide finances for those students who need to access it, particularly poorer Albertans, in terms of grants, loans, and other support.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, good enough is not good enough.

To the same minister: why are medical residents, who are still students, required to begin paying back their student loans? What happened to fairness?

Mr. Hancock: Finally a very good question, Mr. Speaker. That is an issue that we do need to work on. We do need to make sure that the opportunity is there for students, when they graduate, to have the time to get properly into the workforce and into a position where they can start to pay back. I've been talking with residents about this particular issue, and it is an issue that I hope we'll be able to resolve within the next year as we deal with the affordability policy that we're coming forward with in the spring.

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

Wait Times for Health Care

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to October 2005 stats on the government's wait-list registry, four times as many

Calgarians are waiting for cataract eye surgery compared to the number of Edmontonians waiting. Moreover, those Calgarians are waiting on average three times longer than Edmontonians. In Calgary almost 100 per cent of cataract surgeries are done in private, for-profit clinics while in Edmonton over 80 per cent of the procedures are done in public facilities like the Royal Alex eye clinic. My questions are to the Premier. Given this clear-cut evidence of privatization failing to deliver, why is the Premier indifferent to the pain and suffering of elderly Calgarians that this government forces to wait three times longer than Edmontonians for cataract surgery?

Mr. Klein: I really don't know that to be true, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've talked to people in the private system and people in the public system. Those people in Calgary practising ophthalmology say that services are much quicker in the city of Calgary. I don't know where he gets his figures. Perhaps the Minister of Health and Wellness can shed some light on it.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll send the Premier this information that he needs to look at.

Why does the Premier keep talking about cataract eye surgery being a leading candidate for further privatization when the existing Calgary private eye surgery clinics month after month and year after year fail to deliver timely access to cataract surgery?

Mr. Klein: Again I don't know that to be true, but I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that's happened in Calgary is that when patients take a look at the wait-list registry, they can find alternatives. It's when they choose a preference of a particular private facility, perhaps, that the wait times become more difficult. As we speak, the Calgary regional health authority has been doing extensive consultation not only with patients but with the ophthalmologists and the operators of private clinics as well as the surgery that's available in public facilities, looking at ways to resolve the situation with the excellent people that are providing cataract surgeries in Calgary. There was a cap put on which was restrictive for some of the ophthalmologists to provide the surgery that they were prepared to do. So as we look at it, they're looking at some of the alternatives, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Pannu: My second supplementary to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: why doesn't the government reduce waiting times for all Calgarians needing cataract surgery by adopting the successful model developed in Edmonton instead of letting only those select Calgarians who can buy private insurance jump the queue?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely false. As I understand it, all cataract surgeries are covered under the Alberta health care system, whether they're delivered under contract by a private operator or whether they're delivered in a public system. So for this hon. member to intimate that people jump the cue is wrong, and he ought to apologize for making an outrageous statement like that. Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

The Speaker: Well, I think we're probably going move on to the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Widows' Pension

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Some of my

constituents have expressed concerns about the ending of the provincial widows' pension and possible financial hardship that they may face as a result. What is going to happen to the widows and widowers who remain with this program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Legislation, of course, has been introduced in this Assembly to allow people who get the widows' pension today to keep getting the same benefits until they're 65 years old and qualify for the seniors' benefit. The program only needs to be extended until the last client turns 65, which is about nine years from now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Why was the decision made to end this program when, clearly, there should be plenty of dollars in this province to support needy people?

Mr. Cardinal: A very good question, Mr. Speaker. There are several good reasons to end the program, and they have nothing to do with money. The decision was made so that we could move to a single program based on income, not marital status, to provide consistent support to all Albertans in need. The MLA low-income review committee recommended a single program. Also, the courts have questioned having an assistance program based on marital status.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is also to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Why, then, is Alberta the only province getting rid of its widows' pension program?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, in fact, there's a good reason. Alberta is the only province in Canada that's ever had a program of this nature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Childhood Obesity

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The World Health Organization stated that government should take responsibility for leadership in responding to the child obesity crisis. Children who eat fruits and vegetables five times a day are substantially less likely to be overweight. This means that we need leadership from the government for a province-wide plan. Waiting will only mean increasing current and future medical costs. To the Minister of Education: will he respond to the child obesity crisis by banning the sale of junk food in Alberta schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful to the member for actually raising this issue because it will give me a chance to tell all members here that we are addressing this very matter. We started with the first part of the strategy just this past September. That was with the daily physical activity aspect, and that

is providing 30 minutes per day for all students in grades 1 through 9. The second part of this will come into place next September. That will be a focus on the nutritional aspects. That will come forward as part of the new health framework which we are developing with the ministry of health.

2:30

Obesity is a problem. We acknowledge that. It's not just a problem in this province, Mr. Speaker, as you well know. It's a problem right across the country, and we ministers of education have been dealing with this during the past few meetings that we've had.

So we are taking some leadership in that regard, and I'd be grateful for the hon. member's continued support.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll get into my second supplemental. I thank the minister for his positive answer. Education in health is a necessity for kids. When will the minister make healthy eating habits part of the education curriculum in all Alberta schools?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are numerous references within the existing curriculum that already address that. I want to make it clear that once the new health framework, which I alluded to in the first answer, is fully fleshed out and more complete and provided through to our stakeholders for their final input before we shoot that puck, so to speak, there will be a very comprehensive document available that complements what we have already in the system. Part of that focus will be not only on the nutritional aspects – in other words, the benefits of healthy eating – but also on the healthy habits that must accompany that to sustain it not only within the schools but also, we hope, in the community and in the home life. So we are doing a lot about that, hon. member.

Thank you.

Mr. Flaherty: My last supplemental: will the minister then tell us if he's going to ban junk food in our Alberta schools soon?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is no. I'm not planning to ban that, but I don't know what might come out of the review that is going to occur over this next little while. I should say that those kinds of decisions are really being taken very seriously, and they are being developed and looked at at the local level: local school boards and local schools. I can tell you that during the 62 meetings that I just had with the school boards, some of them did mention this issue, and the corollary of it all simply is that many of them have removed so-called junk foods from their rosters already.

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

Climate Change

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In July the federal government quietly introduced new regulations that classified carbon dioxide as a noxious gas under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. Last week the federal Minister of the Environment, Stéphane Dion, declared that the new regulations would allow Ottawa to directly regulate large emitters of carbon dioxide, including Alberta oil sands operations, pipelines, and refineries. My first question, then, is to the Minister of Environment. What is the government doing to protect Albertans against these predatory intrusions into provincial jurisdictions?

Mr. Boutilier: I think, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta is viewed by the rest of the nation as a leader, and as much as we're providing a valuable resource to the rest of Canada, it's very important that we avoid duplication. What I mean by that is that Alberta is in such a better position when it comes to the regulatory regime, that we have done a very good job with over the last 30 years. We want to continue in that leadership. To give you an example, the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose sits on Climate Change Central, which is an important leadership example of what Alberta has been doing.

I think it's really about proactivity. How do we continue to be proactive? Certainly, some of the correspondence I've received from my federal counterpart, the Environment minister, has been very positive. I do believe that we are continuing to move the football down the field in a way that doesn't protect, shall I say, the predatory and intrusive agreements from the federal government but, actually, what is most important, the environment.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the minister and some of his spokesmen keep assuring Albertans not to worry about these new federal regulations because Alberta can and will enact our own equivalent regulations that will pre-empt legislation. So my second question to the same minister is: what protection does enacting our own regulations give us if all we're doing is re-enacting the same rules and penalties enacted by the federal government? If the rules are bad, aren't they bad regardless if they're federal or provincial?

Mr. Boutilier: Hon. member, I have to reframe. First of all, the province of Alberta, with the only law in Canada on climate change emission management, will be the first province in Canada with regulations because we've been proactive. We have been leading on the climate change file, and we will continue to protect the environment.

So rather than following something that the federal government is doing in the future, it's important to recognize that I anticipate reporting back to this Assembly that in the next six months we will have completed a regulatory review. I'm eager to report back. I do believe that at the end of the day the federal government will stand down, based on the actual agreements that we had in place in the past and those that will be in the future.

Dr. Morton: Well, the minister seems to be saying that it depends on – the federal government's own data shows that current greenhouse gas emissions are 26 per cent above 1990 levels.

The Speaker: Preambles are not permitted in the second and third questions.

Dr. Morton: My question then is: what has the government done to communicate to the federal government that Albertans will not tolerate the shift of implementation costs of Kyoto onto Alberta oil and gas industries?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Environment my first and foremost principle is the protection of the environment. I believe that our actions have demonstrated that we are committed to that. I also might say that for the first time in the history of Canada the federal minister allowed Alberta to talk about renewable energies, to talk about technology, important initiatives that, again, Alberta is leading on. The minister of science and technology may want to, in fact I'd encourage him to supplement relative to the EnergyINet and the positive initiatives we're doing to help reduce

greenhouse gases in this province through our regulatory consultations that we're taking.

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

Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, by way of an historical vignette for the day, on this day in 1890 Lethbridge was incorporated as a town by the North-West Territories by way of Ordinance 24. The Lethbridge region was originally the home of the Blackfoot confederacy, but after 1890 European and American traders arrived in the area, and Lethbridge developed as a town and was incorporated as a town. On May 9, 1906, it was incorporated as a city as well. It now boasts a population of some 77,000 people.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Canadian Finals Rodeo and Farmfair 2005

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to mention the significant and successful events that took place in Edmonton earlier this month: the Canadian Finals Rodeo and Farmfair International. These events give rural Alberta an opportunity to put on a show for the city, and they give our province an opportunity to reach out to the world.

CFR is a sport up close and personal, and Farmfair showcases rural life and the products people have for sale. Our Minister of Economic Development wrote a wonderful article that appeared in the *St. Albert Gazette* on November 23 remarking how CFR and Farmfair are great educational and tourist events, with close to 100,000 people taking in the rodeo and another 50,000 visiting Farmfair exhibits and livestock displays.

The importance of CFR and Farmfair goes far beyond a visit to Northlands Park. They are provincial events that allow all types of businesses to benefit, not just those in Edmonton but throughout Alberta, as visitors travelling to and from the city stop for gas and food in towns along the way. Organizers estimate that \$60 million is spent in Edmonton and points in between as stores, hotels, and restaurants are filled with people in western wear from all over western Canada and the United States.

CFR creates economic waves through the province, but Farmfair and the CFR are far more important than the money generated. These events reflect our rural pride, our western heritage, history, and culture, and create new opportunities for tourism visits. It is imperative that our province continues to reach out to the world with events like these.

Congratulations to everyone that organized and participated in the Canadian Finals Rodeo and Farmfair International 2005. I hope that the CFR and Farmfair encourage Albertans from the city to take a mini country vacation to visit their rural neighbours, to experience the open skies, the friendly people, the great food, western art, and music and crafts of rural Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

2:40 Alberta Film Industry

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the economic significance of the film industry in Alberta. Last Friday I along with several other members of this Assembly had the

opportunity to visit a set being used in the filming of *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*. Located roughly 15 kilometres south of Canmore, this set has recreated the town of Creede, Colorado, an 1880s mining town. This impressive townsite, which cost \$1 million to build, was constructed with the expertise Alberta tradespeople have, using Alberta materials. While visiting the set, I had the opportunity to meet a few of the Albertans who make up the cast, crew, and support staff who have been involved in the shooting of this film since August.

It is not only those who work directly on the film whose employment is supplemented by the movie industry. Filming of this movie will result in roughly \$27 million being spent within Alberta on various products and services such as rental cars, hotels, meals, and employment. This is just one example of the many movies which have been filmed in Alberta. In 2003-04 the film industry generated a net economic activity of \$129 million, and this figure is estimated to rise to almost \$200 million in the 2005-06 fiscal year.

In addition to the economic benefits, the exposure Alberta receives through being on film generates a positive effect on other Alberta industries, such as travel and tourism. The benefits of having this industry are undeniable, and because of this, competition for production crews is getting intense. It is important for Alberta to continue to foster an environment which ensures that we remain competitive internationally to grow this labour-intensive industry which gives Alberta international recognition.

Thank you.

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

Forest Lawn High School Awards Night

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about an annual event in my constituency of Calgary-Fort. It's the Forest Lawn high school awards night. It took place last Saturday night at the school. First of all, I want to express our appreciation to the principal, Mr. Tim Main, teachers, and every staff member for doing a great job in providing excellent education services to our future generation. I also want to thank the chair, Michelle Wagler, and all members of the Forest Lawn High School Parent Council for their volunteering involvement with the school.

The students of Forest Lawn school are excellent. I have met many of its past graduates who are now leading citizens and professionals in Alberta, in Canada, and the world. This year 45 received our provincial Rutherford scholarships, 40 received outstanding subject awards, 100 received honour grade awards, and one the Canadian Governor General's award.

There were 30 bursary and scholarship awards sponsored by organizations and individuals who are sponsors of the school. As I don't have time to mention all of them, I would take the liberty to mention a few big ones: the Owen Hart memorial scholarships, the University of Calgary entrance awards, the government of Alberta Rutherford scholarships, the Alberta government school citizenship awards, the BP Canada Energy award, the city of Calgary scholarship awards, the Gerry Art memorial scholarship by our Calgary-Fort Constituency Association, the international peace bursary, and many, many more.

Mr. Speaker, the Ataturk peace bursary has been recently established by the Turkish Canadian Cultural Association of Calgary. This bursary amounts to \$1,000 for students graduating from high school. They plan to increase the number of bursaries from the current two to five in the coming year.

Mr. Speaker, our thanks go to all the scholarship and award sponsors, including the Member for Calgary-East. My congratulations to all the students.

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

Reclamation of Contaminated Sites

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Contaminated sites are a shameful legacy that we're leaving to our children. Today in Alberta there are thousands of contaminated sites with the potential public liability of billions of dollars as well as unpredictable health consequences. This government has legislated no deadline to complete surface reclamation and subsurface soil remediation. Companies defer the expense for many years, in some cases until after they go out of business. This leaves the cleanup to the public and to the future, an invisible liability to our children.

In addition, Alberta Environment lacks standards of remediation for many contaminants. With thousands of industrial sites across the province spills occur on a daily basis. Despite this, very few prosecutions occur, while the evidence vanishes over time, especially where a site is left for decades. This, of course, conveniently defers expenses for the company, assuming it is ever identified at all. Clearly, this failure to prosecute rewards rather than punishes polluters and means an invisible incremental risk to adjacent people, to the future, and to the environment. This is not acceptable.

Alberta Environment has a responsibility for issuing reclamation certificates for downstream oil and gas and for all other industrial sites. The capacity of Alberta Environment for monitoring a site reclamation is now so compromised by lack of staffing that only 10 per cent are actually visited and attempts made to establish the extent of remediation of contaminated soil. Unlike the upstream oil and gas sector, Alberta Environment has not established an orphan fund from industry to pay for reclamation costs when a company goes out of business.

Legislation is needed urgently to establish regulations, not guidelines; to require immediate cleanup of spills and prosecution where there is a violation of the act. No soft-peddling on pollution. Thirdly, legislation is required for timely reclamation preceded by a proper environmental assessment and, fourthly, to establish an industry-funded cleanup fund. New funds are needed to provide enough inspectors to actually test sites before reclamation certificates.

I call on the Minister of Environment to give a supreme effort to ensure that we do not leave a huge, shameful legacy to our children.

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

Enron Activities in Alberta

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Progressive Conservatives' close relationship with Enron during Alberta's deregulation process raises many questions. We in the Official Opposition believe that these questions can only be answered through a full, independent public inquiry.

Enron played a significant role in the deregulation process here in Alberta, a role that included drafting Alberta legislation to suit its own financial needs. Shockingly, the provincial government accommodated Enron every step of the way despite the fact that Enron was on the verge of financial collapse and the subject of a regulatory investigation at that time. Enron was able to secure a sweet deal from the Alberta government, purchasing some of the lowest costing electricity in North America. Meanwhile, Alberta consumers have been gouged by electricity deregulation.

By hiding its dealings with Enron from public knowledge, this government has displayed an utter disregard for open and transparent governance. This government concealed its dealings with Enron

because it deemed their publication undesirable and unnecessary. The only thing that is undesirable and unnecessary is this provincial government's eagerness to keep Albertans in the dark.

When people speak of a democratic deficit in Alberta, this is exactly what they are referring to. We have a provincial government that executes secret deals with a disgraced corporation and then hides these deals from public knowledge. The citizens of this province deserve to know the facts regarding Enron's role in the deregulation process. More importantly, they deserve to know why this government accommodated Enron at the expense of Alberta consumers.

The answers that we deserve will only come to light when a full, independent public inquiry is mandated to investigate this matter. While other jurisdictions investigate, the Progressive Conservative government here procrastinates.

Thank you.

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

Family Doctor Week

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with pleasure that I rise today to recognize Family Doctor Week in Canada, which runs from December 5 to December 11.

Each and every day family doctors diagnose and treat illness and injury and promote disease prevention and good health. They advocate on behalf of their patients and play a key role in co-ordinating care with other medical specialists and health professionals.

Public surveys repeatedly show that Canadians hold family doctors in high regard for the quality of work they provide, working from their offices as well as hospitals, long-term care centres, community clinics, and other community facilities. These doctors are involved in teaching students and residents and in supporting and conducting research to continually improve the practice of family medicine.

2:50

The contribution which family doctors make to Alberta's health care system is one which is appreciated by us all, so I wish to thank the family doctors from my constituency and throughout Alberta and Canada.

Thank you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions signed by two different groups.

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

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition on a province-wide moratorium on confined feeding operations.

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

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition from some tradesmen and -women from the communities of Duffield, Vermilion, Alliance, Elk Point, Okotoks, Barrhead, Westlock, Drayton Valley, and Rimbey, 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.

There are 210 Albertans on that list.

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

Mr. Martin: Yeah. I have a couple petitions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition today which has 386 signatures on it, bringing the total number of signatures for this petition to 786. The signatures were collected by Lynda and Ron Jonson of Seniors I Care. The petition calls for either the reinstatement of the 25 continuing care beds "that Hinton had before the Good Samaritans Society and the Aspen Health Region changed it to a Designated Assisted Living Facility" or, failing that, to commit to building a "new 25 bed Continuing Care Facility in Hinton."

Mr. Speaker, for the leader of the NDP opposition I have a further petition. I'd like to table today a petition by 1,584 individuals that urges the Alberta government to "increase infrastructure development funding for Highway 63." To date 6,496 Albertans have signed this petition.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to present a petition to this Assembly with over 8,000 signatures from residents across Alberta who are not feeling the Alberta advantage. They come from Peace River, Medicine Hat, Hanna, Fort Macleod, and Onoway, just to name a few. The petition reads: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to introduce legislation to re-regulate Alberta's utilities to restore reasonably-priced energy to Albertans."

head:

Notices of Motions

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I advised your office of my intent to move a motion pursuant to Standing Order 40 after completion of today's daily routine.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Would you like to read it into the record now?

Dr. Pannu: Yes. The motion, Mr. Speaker, reads as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly deplores the government for not providing sufficient time to debate billions of dollars in unbudgeted government spending, thereby undermining the democratic process and the integrity of the public finances.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise and table the required number of copies of the response to Written Question 17 and motions for returns 20, 21, and 22.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the required number of copies of the Ontario Securities Commission bylaws relating to the avoidance of conflict and disclosure guidelines as published on the Ontario Securities Commission website.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm submitting the required number of copies of a document listing current practice opportunities for physicians as per the Alberta rural physician action plan, RPAP, website as at November 3, 2005. This document lists in excess of 82 requests for general practitioners, or GPs, alone as well as numerous other specialists and highlights the plight of all nine health regions as they struggle to attract qualified medical practitioners.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from my constituents Mr. and Mrs. Dickerson. They have a concern about his appeal with respect to the provincial disaster fund and last year's storm damage. They paid \$21,000 from their own pocket and received only \$6,000 back. They're asking the government to consider their case on the grounds of hardship and special circumstances for the funds to cover their loss.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the required number of copies of a Statistics Canada research paper called The Impact of Tuition Fees on University Access: Evidence from a Large-scale Price Deregulation in Professional Programs.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter dated June 18, 2001, to the Minister of Energy, the government of Alberta, and this letter is from the Industrial Association of Southern Alberta, and it is in regard to Enron's apparent PPA offer strategy in the competitive market. This letter, among other things, states that consumers are getting fleeced as a result of the flawed Alberta market for electricity.

The second tabling that I have this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is an e-mail from a Mr. Joseph Segatto dated September 11, 2001, to Robert Hemstock at Enron, and this letter is in regard to the statutory authority of minister or cabinet to split Sundance B PPA through enabling regulation.

The third tabling I have today is from Joseph Segatto to Robert.Hemstock@enron.com, and this is dated October 10, 2001, and the subject of this is the final versions of Sundance unit PPAs and Enron's comments on regulation to amend, 175/2000.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As referenced by the hon. leader of the opposition, there was an information picket this afternoon in front of the outpatient residence at the University hospital. I'm pleased to table five copies of the pamphlet that was distributed by the AUPE urging members of this Legislature to say no to private hospital/hotel facilities and no to private health care in Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. One, for the leader of the NDP opposition, an appropriate number of copies of a letter from Nita Stein of Edmonton expressing her opposition to the Aon Consulting contract awarded by Alberta Health and Wellness.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter sent to the Minister of Education from the Canadian Council of the Blind, Alberta division, which expresses concerns about teacher aids, rather than certified teachers, teaching Braille to blind students.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. I'm tabling today a letter with the requisite five copies from a constituent who is a senior and expresses her displeasure at the time it takes for her new dental benefits to not only be approved but also paid.

I'm also tabling a letter with the requisite five copies from a constituent, Mark Busch, who objects to the systematic closing of long-term care facilities in the Chinook health region in favour of assisted living, including the facility that he's called home for 14 years. He expresses his concern for those residents like himself, paraplegic. He's not afraid of change; he's afraid of life-threatening change.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling a letter, with the requisite five copies, signed by 117 of my constituents who live in a lodge and realize that after paying for board and room, keeping the \$265 does not allow them enough money to pay for their personal needs in today's market.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter sent to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development by the Alberta Wilderness Association asking for a deferral of industrial activities until public hearings occur for the area known as the Rumsey natural area.

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, pursuant to the Dental Disciplines Act the Alberta Dental Assistants Association 2003 annual report and the Alberta Dental Assistants Association 2004 annual report, pursuant to the Occupational Therapy Profession Act the Alberta Association of Registered Occupational Therapists 2004-2005 annual report, and pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Medical Laboratory Technologists 2004 annual

report, College of Dental Technologists of Alberta 2004 annual report, and the College of Chiropractors of Alberta annual review 2004-2005.

head:

Motions under Standing Order 40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on an application for Standing Order 40.

Debate on Supplementary Estimates

Dr. Pannu:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly deplores the government for not providing sufficient time to debate billions of dollars in unbudgeted government spending, thereby undermining the democratic process and the integrity of public finances.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 40 I move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to deal with the following motion of urgent and pressing necessity. It's urgent that this request be approved and the motion debated today as the fall sitting of the Legislature will likely come to an end in the next day or two. There is simply no other time on the Order Paper to have this necessary debate unless we have the debate this afternoon.

Speaking to urgency, Mr. Speaker, this Assembly is being asked to approve \$1.8 billion in unbudgeted appropriations involving 13 different ministries. Yesterday evening the government only allowed a few speakers into the debate during second reading on the supplementary appropriations bill before moving adjournment and then only bringing the bill up when it, under our Standing Orders, automatically comes to a vote. It's urgent that the Assembly debate this motion, which expresses its disapproval of this undermining of the democratic process.

I urge all members to approve this Standing Order 40 request. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 52

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to move Bill 52, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2) for second reading.

The principle behind a miscellaneous statutes amendment act of necessity is that the matters which comprise the bill are matters that have been discussed with opposition members and are matters which either are in policy a matter of agreement or are of a technical nature and are amendments to various statutes to correct oversights. I will briefly describe the contents of the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act so that members are apprised of the particulars of the four separate acts which are the subject of the amendment.

The first one is the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act. That provision provides for a personal income support benefit for AISH clients who require additional support and have \$3,000 or less in assets. Where the \$3,000 asset limit is exceeded and the minister determines that there is financial hardship, an individual may be eligible for personal income support benefits.

The second relates to the Income and Employment Supports Act. That provides for the Widows' Pension Act to be repealed in 2014 instead of 2006.

The next piece of legislation is the Pharmacy and Drug Act. In this case it deletes a regulation-making power as it overlaps with a similar regulation-making power.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, there is a provision dealing with the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2005. This adds an offence for exceeding the maximum speed limit established or proscribed for a highway, section 115(2)(e), back into section 86 of the act. That provision was originally included in section 86 but was inadvertently left out when section 86 was amended in the spring of 2005.

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The question to be called? No need to conclude?

[Motion carried; Bill 52 read a second time]

Bill 55
Post-secondary Learning
Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)

[Adjourned debate November 28: Mr. Hancock]

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise on second reading debate on Bill 55, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2). This was a piece of legislation that was alluded to I guess before the fact a couple of weeks ago when we were in Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 9, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005, when the minister referred to a desire that he had to bring forward an amendment that would deal with the academic council composition makeup for colleges and technical institutes. He referred to it at the time as his hope that he could bring forward some legislation or an amendment in some form like that. It did not fit within the confines of Bill 9, so after some discussion, the minister has brought this forward as a separate bill now, Bill 55, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2). It offers, therefore, the opportunity for some debate on this particular amendment, this particular piece of legislation that will amend the Post-secondary Learning Act.

The idea behind this, as the minister has spoken to already, is to give some flexibility to colleges and technical institutes similar to the flexibility that our province's universities already have under section 33, I believe it is, of the Post-secondary Learning Act around the composition of their general faculties councils, which are the rough equivalent at the university level of what an academic council is set to do at the college and technical institute level, and to do that at the college level without necessarily compelling an institution, a college or a technical institute, that is perfectly happy with the model that it has now to have to go out and custom build an academic council above and beyond that.

You know, it's a basic philosophy here. This is something that I can certainly commend because we've talked about this and urged the government to do these sorts of things from time to time, not to fix what ain't broken. Where some institutions, some colleges, perhaps the bulk of colleges in this province are concerned, section 46, which governs the formation of the standard-existing academic councils now, does the trick for most of them.

3:10

There are, though, some which do or might like to tinker with that basic model for purposes that seem to suit them. One example of that might be to pursue accreditation by the AUCC – or recognition, I suppose I should say. Accreditation is not exactly, as the minister knows, the correct word to use here because the AUCC is not an

actual accrediting body. It's kind of a de facto accrediting body in the absence of a de facto body that does that. But AUCC recognizes degrees issued by its member institutions, and institutions which are not members of AUCC cannot be assured that their credentials will automatically be accepted by other institutions, particularly for graduate school applications.

This has become more of an issue, Mr. Speaker, in the last few years as more and more undergraduates have decided upon graduation that, in fact, they do want to pursue graduate studies and build on their baccalaureate degree because for one reason or another they find that the baccalaureate degree in and of itself doesn't get them where they want to go, or it doesn't get them where they want to go now that they've been through four years of undergraduate education.

Now, against that context we have the Post-secondary Learning Act, which established the Campus Alberta Quality Council to advise the minister on program and degree approvals so that other institutions that don't call themselves universities could nevertheless offer baccalaureate degrees in this province. At least one institution has taken on that model and has begun to offer baccalaureate degrees which are approved by the Campus Alberta Quality Council, but at least one other college has held back from doing that.

I don't think it's any secret in this House that that college is Mount Royal College in Calgary, and I don't think it's any secret in this House that Mount Royal ultimately wishes to become a full-fledged university. While Mount Royal very much is desirous of being able to grant degrees, Mount Royal feels very strongly that it needs AUCC accreditation in order for those degrees which it confers upon its students to be portable, transportable, to other AUCC-accredited or recognized member institutions so that a graduate from Mount Royal College with a baccalaureate degree can go on to graduate studies at a Queen's University or a UBC or whatever graduate school that does belong to AUCC should that student wish to do that.

This Bill 55, Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2), should give the flexibility to Mount Royal College to pursue AUCC accreditation by custom designing its academic council if it wishes, should provide the flexibility to other colleges and technical institutes to custom design their own academic councils for their own purposes of course in consultation with the minister. As I said a couple of weeks ago, of course the minister is not going to let an academic council that's been designed by a college pursue if the model simply doesn't cut the mustard, if the model stinks.

I find myself in an interesting position right now because, of course, we usually on this side of the House take the position that legislation is better than regulation and that less rather than more power to make regulations and make decisions should be concentrated in the hands of the minister, that consistency is better than flexibility. In this case we have a situation where this particular piece of legislation contains a number of things that normally we would not find particularly palatable or particularly commendable, but I think I understand why the minister has gone about doing it in this case.

So I would support with reservations Bill 55. Normally, we don't like legislative changes that provide the minister with too much power or too much discretion or which move the substance from the legislation into regulation, that can be changed by a minister or Lieutenant Governor in Council without debate of this House. This change does do that, but we are willing to support this because of our support for Mount Royal College in Calgary moving ahead with its governance and programming changes. The problem with postsecondary access across this province generally but especially in Calgary is acute, and allowing a change that would then in turn

allow Mount Royal College or any other college which wishes to take advantage of this to move ahead is I think one piece of the solution.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education to conclude the debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 55 read a second time]

Bill 58

Alberta Centennial Medal Amendment Act, 2005

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education for the hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move Bill 58 for second reading.

Bill 58 is a very modest amendment to the Alberta Centennial Medal Act, that was passed earlier this spring. It just allows for a minor amount of flexibility in the awarding of the centennial medals. As I understand it, the purpose for making this amendment was to allow for protocol purposes, really, with respect to interprovincial exchanges and that sort of thing. The bill is very short. It provides a section that says, "the Minister may nominate other individuals the Minister considers deserving," which is indeed a bit of a catch-all but, nonetheless, an appropriate way to make it possible to deal with the final matters coming out of Alberta's centennial year and the Alberta centennial medal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, what did I just say in this House not two minutes ago about the problem that I have and that we have on this side of the House with this kind of flexibility? You read this bill, and it essentially allows this government or a minister to go off and give a centennial medal to any Tom, Dick, or Harry that he or she should choose. I know that we've been told that this is for protocol purposes, but let's remember that the legislation establishing the Alberta centennial medal, which was "established as an official honour of the Crown in right of Alberta," says that "Canadian citizens who are current or former long-term residents of Alberta are eligible to be awarded the Alberta Centennial Medal." Not too many dignitaries from other provinces or other lands, one or two maybe but not too many, fall into the category of being current or former long-time residents of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, if the Premier of Alberta or the Minister of Community Development or the Minister of Advanced Education or any other minister of the Crown wishes to give his or her counterpart a lasting memento of Alberta's centennial, let them act now, in the next 33 days, and take that person out for a good Alberta beef dinner. That ought to be enough. If it isn't, give them an Alberta centennial medallion to boot. But these are centennial medals created under, you know, very clear, I think very specific, legislation, created to honour 8,000, give or take, hard-working Albertans, most of whom have given generously, beyond generously, of their time and their efforts and their talents to make their communities, their own communities here in this province, a better place to live and honour that.

For one, I don't think we ought to be handing these things out like, you know, candy from the 7-Eleven to anybody who happens to come here because this is a great place to live, work, and visit. It's

a great place to live and work, it's a great place to visit, but if you're a visitor, you don't qualify for one of these medals.

This legislation, Mr. Speaker, is bogus.

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

3:20

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to rise briefly to speak on Bill 58. It's our understanding that there's not a great deal to be concerned with with Bill 58 in regard to allowing the centennial medals to be awarded to individuals outside the province of Alberta. My understanding is that this was at least partially precipitated by the desire of Saskatchewan and Alberta to give medals across the border, this being both the centennial for our province and for Saskatchewan as well. So I think that in the spirit of that sort of co-operation we certainly would support this bill.

I, too, have some reservations about not having a limit on the minting of centennial medals, but I think that this is something that the government, I hope, can show some restraint towards because, of course, if something is not considered to be rare or it's given out in haste or is anything that's perceived as being frivolous, then perhaps it lessens the value of the medal in general. But, you know, I think that everyone in this House can agree that these medals have been a tremendous success and have perhaps been the very best part of the centennial celebrations, as far as I can tell, the ceremonies associated with giving out these medals. Then, again, to extend that to some degree to some individuals across our provincial borders shouldn't be such a problem.

I believe that Saskatchewan's Legislature is putting together a similar capacity for them to give out the Saskatchewan medals, so I guess this might be in keeping with that. I'm kind of secretly hoping that maybe Saskatchewan will give me one as well. Then, you know, we'll be able to have more than one medal across the blazer, which would look great at special occasions.

So as I said before, the NDP caucus doesn't have a great deal of problems with Bill 58. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Then shall I call on the hon. Minister of Community Development to close the debate? The hon. minister.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can first of all comment in response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder that in fact Saskatchewan pursuant to its legislation already has the capacity to confer a medal upon a nonresident of the province of Saskatchewan, so that is exactly what we seek to do through Bill 58.

If you look at the Saskatchewan legislation and look at Bill 58, they are mirror images of each other. I think that it has been quite well recognized by members of the Assembly, yourself, Mr. Speaker, and all Albertans that these medals have not been frivolously given out to individuals who are not deserving nor will they be in the future. This is not an invitation for simply another round of nominations. There isn't the time to do that between now and the close of the year. But I can say that in the very best interests of celebrating the centennial and the kind of co-operation that has taken place between the province of Saskatchewan and Alberta, in fact we will do what is appropriate with this bill in terms of conferring a medal upon a significant nonresident of Alberta. This particular example has been about Premier Calvert of Saskatchewan, and it is the intention of the province of Saskatchewan to confer a reciprocal medal upon our Premier.

With that, I wish to call the question and ask the Assembly for

support of Bill 58, being the Alberta Centennial Medal Amendment Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 58 read a second time]

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

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

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

Bill 52

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Traditionally with miscellaneous statutes, which is Bill 52 before us, there is an agreement with the opposition parties that any statute we're not comfortable with will get pulled and brought forward as an individual bill and that the package of the remaining statutes will go forward without debate. Therefore, I am happy to call the question on Bill 52, miscellaneous statutes.

[The clauses of Bill 52 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 55

Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to debate further Bill 55, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2), at committee. As I indicated in second reading debate, I'm certainly supportive of this legislation, with reservations, the reservations having to do with, you know, our general feeling on this side of the House that we don't like, as a rule, legislative changes that provide the minister or the cabinet with too much power, too much discretion, too much opportunity to change regulations without legislative debate. This change does have the potential to do that, but I think that in this case, provided that this is done right – provided that this is done right – this is a bill where the potential for benefit for the students in the province of Alberta specifically in this case outweighs the problems that we have normally with changes of this nature.

There is in section 47(1), which this bill would add to the Post-secondary Learning Act, an entire section that allows academic councils to be custom- designed, if you will, by a public college or a technical institute with the written approval of the minister, something that a university already has the ability to do, to craft, with its own general faculties council, which is roughly the university equivalent of an academic council. It provides the

opportunity for flexibility that allows colleges or technical institutions, should they wish, to go off in a direction that they believe will benefit their students over the long haul. I think this is a good thing. I think this is something in this case very much to be encouraged. But again I say: if the minister goes about it the right way. As usual, the devil is in the details or the regulations.

A couple of weeks ago the minister indicated his desire to bring forward this amendment, and that was before it existed as a separate piece of legislation. He referenced the one-size-fits-all academic council structure that is currently in the act under section 46, and I know that the minister will correct me if I'm wrong on this, but my understanding is that section 46 will continue to exist and continue to provide the default template, if you will. It's in place unless a college or a technical institute specifically goes to the minister and says: we want to change that.

3:30

So he recognizes that there is a one-size-fits-all component there, and he's willing to allow that to continue, and that, too, is a good thing. But if we want to build in this kind of flexibility that the minister has talked about, you know, a provision for a board of a college or a technical institute which wants to have a different form of academic council or needs a flexible structure in some other way than is in the act, regulations to give it that flexibility, then we have to be very careful about how those regulations work.

Really, my question to the minister is around those regulations. In introducing second reading debate on Bill 55 yesterday afternoon, he talked about wanting to consult thoroughly with colleges and technical institutes across the province with respect to the design of the regulations which would be put in place in terms of how or when a college or technical institute could move forward to utilize this particular section and ask for a specific design for an academic council for that college or institution. I'm taking it from that – and I know the minister will set me straight if I'm reading into his comments things that aren't there – that there are almost two sets of regulations needed here: a kind of governing regulation to which colleges and technical institutes across the province will be consulted that sort of sets the ground rules for an institution designing its own academic council and then regulation to follow to in effect ratify the academic council that has been designed by the college or technical institute in co-operation with the minister and his department.

What I need to know from the minister is whether the minister is committed here to a series of regulations that absolutely gives colleges and technical institutes, each one as an individual case, the opportunity to design in co-operation and concert with the minister and his officials the academic council that it feels works best for them, or are we moving in section 46 from one one-size-fits-all model to now in section 47(1) through the enabling regulation something that may turn out to be another one-size-fits-all option? If the minister could clarify that, I think I'd be prepared to move ahead from that point.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, clearly what we're trying to establish is: we have under section 46 a template which all institutions fall into. What we're offering to do is to set up a more flexible second option for institutions to come forward and say, "We would like to design our academic council in such a way for such a reason," and as long as it meets all the criteria and doesn't offend any of the sensibilities of the act, then there's no good reason why it shouldn't be.

The concept is that it would be at the behest of the particular institution with the approval of the minister in accordance with the regulations. The regulations, then, would set out the criteria, presumably, under which, first of all, the procedures for doing it, the composition, whether there needs to be any criteria – and I don't know whether there need to be any criteria with respect to the composition; that will be the subject of consultation with the institutions – and the powers and duties. I don't know whether there needs to be any prescription on the powers and duties, but I would assume so, that powers would be first of all delegated from the boards of governors.

The short answer to the question about whether this is a second template or an individually designed model is that I don't know the answer to that until I've fully consulted with the players. I am not about to design the system. I am about to work with them. What I am committed to is that we come up with a design that works. The contemplation here is that an institution would be able to come forward and say, "We have a particular need that we'd like to create around our academic institution," and then the test would be that if it makes sense under the act, if it doesn't offend any of the requirements of the act, we would be able to work with them to go ahead and put that model in place; in other words, a flexibility structure which would allow them to move forward.

Now, I have committed to the system that we would not design those regulations without having a thorough consultation with them. So I can't give the absolute assurance, but I can give this assurance: I will consult with the hon. member with respect to the regulations before I bring them through so that he's fully aware of what we're contemplating and can have input into them. What we're really trying to do is provide that flexibility so that an institution can say, "This is the aspiration we have," and as long as that aspiration fits within the system context, makes sense within the system, and doesn't leave holes, we would be prepared to work with them to move forward and put that in place.

That's what we're trying to achieve here. We have one structure that has worked, that is working for most if not all of the colleges and technical institutes, but there's a need for some flexibility to allow an institution or institutions to design their own. I don't know this as yet, but if it's possible, the ideal would be to be able to set up a structure so that each could come forward and say: here's how we want to differ from the template and design our own model. That would be the ideal. The fallback would be the position, as the hon. member outlined, that it may end up being a second template; in other words, an option. You have an option under 46; you have the second option under 47.1. My preference and purpose is the first, not the second.

As I say, we'll be consulting, and I'll be more than happy to give the hon. member assurance that before I bring something forward, we'll have a thorough discussion with him.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Chairman, I want to extend my thanks to the minister both for that answer and for his undertaking to consult with me as the process develops. I think he's been as clear as he probably can be at this time under the circumstances, given his commitment to consult with the other colleges and technical institutes as well. Certainly, for now, that answer satisfies me.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Given what the minister and the critic are saying – and I understand that, and I support what they're saying – I still always have to be cautious when I see the government

granting authority to itself to make regulations behind closed doors, particularly when we're talking about any institution. In this case it's our postsecondary institutions, but it could be any other institution. I must always put on the record my concern about that.

I appreciate hearing that the minister is willing to share that, but I think we always need to be very careful to make sure that this is a democratic process, that it's as accessible as possible. In Alberta I think I need to put on the record that it is not in any way benefiting the private sector over the public sector or disproportionately disadvantaging the public sector, in this case the public postsecondary education sector.

So thanks for the opportunity to get that on the record.

Mr. Hancock: I'll just briefly respond to that. This has no bearing whatsoever on private. This is entirely publicly governed institutions. The clear wording of the section, I believe, makes it clear that it's something that's done because "a public college or technical institute may, with the written approval." In other words, it's at their behest, not something that the minister does. It doesn't say: the minister can. It says: they can with the approval of the minister and in accordance with the regulations.

So the current situation is that under section 46 this one would make some flexibility so that a college could come forward in accordance with the regulations and ask for a change. It's nothing that we would impose on them. It would be providing the flexibility. So I think I can assuage the member's concerns.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I won't take a great deal of time. I understand the purpose of Bill 55, and I know that it's supposedly a work in progress, but I believe it's still somewhat a questionable solution to a very real problem. As I recollect, during the debate on Bill 43, I believe it was, a number of problems were identified including the one that we're attempting to deal with here, the one-size-fits-all approach to the establishment of academic councils.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but the minister seems to be saying that this is sort of a temporary approach, that we're dealing with this problem. I guess that to remove the legislative requirements entirely with only the written consent of the minister required and then give the power to cabinet to determine the composition of academic council seems to me to be part of Bill 55. Correct me if I'm wrong. I'm certainly quite prepared to be wrong if that's the case.

It seems to me that we're taking a provision from legislation where it's publicly debated in an open forum and giving more power than I think we might want to the minister and the cabinet. Ministers change. I know this minister would never do anything inappropriate, but ministers do change. It does show, though, the problem that I think we're trying to deal with with the one size fits all with the many different institutions that we have.

3:40

I note the minister looks a little baffled. Maybe I am wrong. I'm sure he'll straighten me out. The one specific question: has the minister considered adding schedules to the Post-secondary Learning Act with the institutions, sort of specific provisions, as an alternative to taking the composition of academic councils out of legislation and putting them in regulations so that it's a little more, you know, above board and open and transparent? I wondered if that has been considered.

Mr. Speaker, I think that I understand the reason for Bill 55. I guess that our hesitation on the opposite side is that it seems to be,

you know, keeping it under the control of the minister and the government. There seems to me to be, perhaps, better ways to do it. Maybe not. I'd be interested in the minister's comments.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I want to be clear about this. Section 46 is the template which sets what the composition is of academic councils for colleges and technical institutes. So it's clear. The minister can't change that. We can't change it unilaterally. We can't change it in any way. It's in the act. To change that, we would have to come back by legislation.

What 47 does is suggest that we would then have the ability after consultation, yes, to make regulations but not regulations that allow the minister to make individual determinations with respect to colleges or technical institutes but to set up a framework after consultation to say what's permissible in the setting up of an academic council. Then it would be at the behest of an individual college or technical institute to design their academic council within the framework and then come forward and request it.

Under 47.1(1) it puts the onus on the public college or technical institute to initiate the process. So it's not that the minister is going to have additional power to change academic councils in any way. What we would do after consultation with the system is say: okay, here are the parameters under which colleges and technical institutes might design their own if they wanted to. Then if they wanted to, they would bring forward their design within the context of the regulations for approval. If the minister agreed that their design fit the parameters and was in the interest of the system as well as in the interest of the institution, then you could approve it.

In this circumstance it's not creating a regulation that's sort of a *carte blanche* governing authority, as the opposition normally is opposed to, but rather the ability to create a framework within which the colleges and institutions, which are board governed, could come forward and say: we would desire this kind of flexibility. I hope that deals with the member's concerns.

Mr. Martin: Just a follow-up, if I may, Mr. Chair. It comes back to the last question. I understand what the minister is saying, that within the framework of 46 the minister under regulations can take an individual, say it's NAIT or whatever, and if they have a proposal, he can come in and make sure that it does follow the guidelines in 46(1). I believe that's what the minister is saying. I guess the question I'd come back with is: would it not be, again, more transparent if we could lay out schedules to the Post-secondary Learning Act so that there are rough guidelines that all institutions understand so we don't have to go through that process? Has some thought been put into that, or is the minister saying that there are too many permutations and combinations, that that is impossible? It seems to me that if we could do that, it would be a better way to proceed because, you know, everybody can see it. I'd be interested in his comments on that.

Mr. Hancock: The "too many permutations and combinations" comment would prevail.

Mr. Martin: Okay.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 55?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 55 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's carried.

Bill 58

Alberta Centennial Medal Amendment Act, 2005

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. [interjection] I'm looking forward to the Minister of Economic Development's contribution to this.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 58, the Alberta Centennial Medal Amendment Act, 2005. On the face of this it appears to be a fairly innocent and innocuous expansion to the centennial medal program that was instituted by the Minister of Community Development. My issue with this is that it gives a huge expansion without any reason for it. As we were brought to understand, there was a restricted number of medals and medallions that were made available for very specific purposes during this centennial year. [interjection] I see that Drayton Valley-Calmar is yipping off as usual. I'll be looking for his contribution to this.

An Hon. Member: He has a contribution?

Ms Blakeman: Well, I'm being kind in calling it a contribution, but others disagree with me.

The point to all of this is that what's being asked for here is a wide-open *carte blanche* to mint as many medals as he wants to without giving us any reason for it. Our understanding was that they wanted there to be an opportunity to do reciprocal medal presentations if we found ourselves in a position. For example, Saskatchewan is also celebrating a 100th birthday, and if we had their Premier or cabinet ministers offering a presentation of medals to our cabinet ministers or our Premier, we would like to be in a position to reciprocate. Fine. I don't think we have any problem with that, but the amending legislation should be tight enough to specify that, and that's not what we're seeing in front of us here.

This is essentially allowing the minister to nominate any other individual and then to approve his own nominations. We think that that's just not staying with the spirit of what we were told these medal presentations were supposed to be about. I understood that they were to be for people who were from Alberta and had long-standing contributions to Alberta. So I can see making an exception as a courtesy to other elected officials in other provinces or federally, but to open it wide and say that you can nominate as many people and produce as many medals and give them away I just think puts it open for abuse, and it doesn't put any controls on it. I don't like seeing that, so I'm speaking against the bill.

Thank you.

Mr. Mar: Mr. Chairman, I can assure you and members of this Assembly that the process by which medals are recognized pursuant to Rideau Hall's order of precedence has quite specific requirements with respect to how medals may be conferred. This is not done as a frivolous matter by anyone, and I should point out to opposition members who choose to speak against this bill that the government placed a great deal of responsibility in the hands of MLAs

themselves to exercise good judgment in the people that they nominated for these medals.

I should say, Mr. Chairman, that there should be the reciprocal kind of respect shown to government when government says that it also, within the spirit and within the parameters under which medals are given, should be conferred the same respect as we have given to private members of this Assembly.

Mr. Chairman, it's my pleasure to move this bill at the committee stage.

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

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you. We'll show great spirit and generosity. I understand that the proposal was because Saskatchewan and Alberta – that was the reason we were told back a while ago – could do a sort of co-operative venture across the way. Again, I have no problems with that.

Then maybe without being cynical about it, I'll ask the minister because it doesn't give us an idea of what sort of numbers we're looking at and what other purpose there would be: are we looking at the end at 500 more medals or what? I could see that maybe Premier Klein wants to give one to Premier Calvert. Maybe the cabinet ministers want to exchange, but there's no idea here. It's our job not to be totally cynical all the time, but with a bill like this it could be: "Gee, we can hand out 10,000 more medals; there are a few PCers that don't have them." I doubt that that's the point of the bill.

At least, give us some idea of what we are looking at here in terms of expense and numbers and that sort of thing. That would help us.

3:50

Mr. Mar: Mr. Chairman, in response to this hon. member's good question, I can say that, to the best of my recollection, in the order of precedence, the honours system in Ottawa, we cannot confer more than 9,000 in total. I can further advise that there simply isn't the time to confer a thousand more medals on anyone.

At this point what's contemplated is one. Mr. Chairman, there may be circumstances where it may be more than one, but this amendment is simply to reciprocate the honour that the province of Saskatchewan wishes to confer upon our Premier. So I can honestly tell the member that what's contemplated now is one. There may be other exceptional circumstances, but at this point the answer to his question is one.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 58, the Alberta Centennial Medal Amendment Act, 2005?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 58 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 43
Alberta Resource Rebate Statutes
Amendment Act, 2005

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

Dr. B. Miller: Yes. I think I'm the last speaker in Committee of the Whole consideration of Bill 43 on the rebate. I'm not going to say very much at all. I just want to make a moral statement. I was in a discussion with a group at a church in the city of Edmonton, and the majority – in fact, I think it was unanimous – of people there were against the rebate for the simple reason that giving \$400 to every person in Alberta does not recognize the inequality that exists in our province. So if the moral issue is one of trying to value equality by giving the same amount of money to every person, that flies in the face of the fact of inequality because \$400, of course, means nothing to someone with wealth. To someone who is poor, of course, it means a great deal.

But as one woman said to me, a woman who is on AISH – she receives about \$950 a month – she would gladly receive the \$400 cheque and the next one and the next one and the next one because, really, what this bill is overlooking is the fact that it's our basic programs that need support, the basic programs that would deal with people who are living in poverty. They need support on a continuous basis.

I came across this quote in an article reviewing the history of the welfare system, and I think it's very important.

There is a difference between the reasonable expectation of receiving a service and a possibly random act of mercy. The certainty of being entitled to the equal distribution of basic services and options is a valuable achievement.

I think that what's really important in our society if we're going to deal with the issues of poverty is that we have basic services that are reliable, that are there on a continuous basis. This \$400 gift is not the granting of a service or a program. It is more like a random act of mercy. In fact, Mr. Chairman, I would say that it's just a random act. It's just an act without rationale. It's an arbitrary act. There's no plan, no ongoing plan. Alaska has had a plan for many, many years of giving out dividend cheques every year. This is just a random act.

I think, Mr. Chairman, that what we need is a rationale, a plan for the long-term future, a plan in which we would take a public good – the surplus is a public good. It belongs to the people of Alberta, to be sure, but we need to use that public good for the common good and to invest it in programs and basic services and invest it in the long-term future. If there is a moral issue here, I think the moral issue is one of intergenerational equity because what we're doing is we're taking the surplus from the resources, from oil and gas, and we're spending it now instead of investing it for the long-term future.

So, Mr. Chairman, those are just a couple of the ethical questions that I wanted to raise. I think the debate has been a good one. Those are my comments. Let's get on with getting it out of Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Martin: Well, it will get out. I won't go on very long. [some applause] Thank you. Thank you. I love it when I get applause in this place.

The point that I want to make – I won't talk about the priorities of where the money should go in terms of social programs and that, but I want to come back to a debate that we had here. I see that the Minister of Economic Development is here. If we believe that part of this money should be given to people, especially people of middle or lower income, that they need some sort of tax break – and that was, I think, the argument that was given – then it seems to me that we have to move in much more of a permanent way in terms of a tax reduction that actually helps the people that we're talking about.

Nobody is going to turn down the \$400. Some of those people need it. As a result, as I said at the time, we're not going to vote

against this particular bill, but I come back and say again that if we want to get money to those people, it can't be on a hit-and-miss basis because once we start this – and I use the example of Alaska with the dividends – people demand sort of the same money every year. They get used to having that. And as their dividend fund keeps going down, people are still demanding. That's the problem you run into.

So I don't know what the plans are in the future. Are we going to have rebate 2 next year, rebate 3 the following year? That's, I think, a serious problem that we have to deal with because, again, I would argue that the oil industry in downtown Calgary doesn't need the \$400. Some people do. If that's the case, then, if we want to give some sort of more permanent taxation room, the easiest way is to raise the exemption at the lower level and, especially, get rid of medicare premiums, which are a regressive tax. Now, I know that costs money over the long haul, but the reality is, I think, that we could afford it. That would be the best taxation relief, and people struggling and middle-income and lower income families could count on that money coming in every year. So here we have \$400 this year. Is it going to be there next year? People will gladly take it. So I think that's the point.

The other debate is: well, this is the best way to spend the money in social programs and the rest of it. It shouldn't be an either/or sort of situation, as far as I'm concerned. That's the point that I want to make because it seems to us that it wasn't well thought out. It came all of a sudden out of the blue. We could have predicted back with the budget a while ago that we were going to have a big surplus because we were told \$2 billion, and then it was \$5 billion and then \$8 billion, you know, within a week or so. I'd like to know where the government is going in the next year. Is it going to be, as I say, rebate 2? Rebate 3? If we get into that, it becomes a very difficult thing to sustain if our oil and gas revenues go down.

I think a much better way, as I said – I just want to say it again – would have been to raise the exemptions a little bit and to get rid of medicare premiums, not for private insurance but to give people a little more money in their pockets, the people that actually need the money. They could look at that in a more permanent way. I wish the government would have gone in that direction. I'll certainly be looking forward to the spring budget to see where we're going with all of this.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The clauses of Bill 43 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

4:00

Bill 44

Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions or amendments in regard to this bill? The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As you know, this bill is simply setting up the residential tenancy dispute resolution service. Due to the leniency of the chair in second reading there were a lot of questions asked and I tried to answer them. I did miss a couple, so I will just briefly touch on those.

One was from the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. He commented that tenant/landlord conflicts are rarely simple and frequently involve complex issues relating to things like child welfare, health, disability, language barriers, et cetera. Certainly, that's true. Those do occur. What would happen, then, is that the hearing officer would identify that there are things that are outside the scope of the Residential Tenancies Act and therefore would refer it to the court.

Another question that was asked that I didn't cover. The hon. member asked about whether it was Provincial Court or Court of Queen's Bench. The type that we just referred to would be going to Provincial Court. The only time that it wouldn't be going to Provincial Court would be where there was a claim that amounted to over \$25,000, which therefore would go to Court of Queen's Bench. There could be a claim that maybe was \$30,000 or \$40,000, and one of the things that we would be watching for was to make sure that those weren't split into two claims and therefore avoid going to Court of Queen's Bench. But otherwise they would go to the Provincial Court.

I missed one question as well from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. Question 2: what does the minister anticipate would be the fee for these mediators? The fact is that the mediators would be hired through the public service and therefore would be paid on a salary basis depending on a range that they would qualify for.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that that covers all the questions that were asked in second reading.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Government Services for initially sharing the amendment with us and for trying today to reply to some of the concerns and questions that we raised in earlier debate.

I would thus move that all hon. members of this Assembly accept the amendments, and I'm hoping to co-operate with the government side on future projects. Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Yeah. Just very quickly, Mr. Chairman. I believe the minister said – and correct me, because it's been a while and I haven't had a chance to look at the bill – that this is a pilot project in Edmonton and that it would run for a year and see where it goes. I certainly support the thrust of this bill. Any time we can keep these disputes out of the courts, I think, everybody is better served.

I know that the city of Edmonton, in particular, has signalled its intention that it wants to shut down its Landlord and Tenant Advisory Board. For a lot of the issues that they deal with, the laws are province-wide. I take it that the purpose of trying this in Edmonton would be to see if we could have a province-wide board that would do some of the same things. Is that the goal ultimately, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Chairman, that's absolutely true. The difference between what we're setting up here and the committee that the city has is that they are a mediation whereas we're setting up something that is more formal, quasi-judicial. It's still not a court, but it has more power to enforce the Residential Tenancies Act. That would be the purpose of it. It is for one year, and we will be evaluating it as we go. If, in fact, it turns out that it works – and we think it will – then we would be expanding it to across the province because currently there is in excess of 5,000 of these disputes in the province.

Edmonton happens to have about 2,100 of them, so I thought it was an excellent place to try the pilot.

[The clauses of Bill 44 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 53
Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2005

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and open remarks on Bill 53. Just briefly, I'd like to respond to two comments by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore that arose in second reading.

First of all, the Member for Edmonton-Decore was concerned about how the Surface Rights Board would handle payments to landowners. I'm pleased to inform him that the Surface Rights Board would just use the existing process, the same principles of compensation as with any other right-of-entry applications to cover the same loss provisions.

Also, the member asked about consultations. I'm pleased to inform him that the Alberta Environment Oil and Gas Reclamation and Remediation Advisory Committee was consulted. This committee is made up of stakeholder representatives: landowners, the municipal and provincial governments, and nongovernment organizations. In fact, this bill arose out of a recommendation of that committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today on behalf of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore to conclude debate on Bill 53. In reviewing it, I noticed that it's not a malicious bill. It's useful. It offers a solution for those situations where the agency that was looking after the site has to regain access to that site to offer some cleaning up or to fix or remedy a problem or an environmental situation that needs attention. I don't think we're necessarily opposed to it, as was voiced by my hon. colleague.

I thank the sponsor of the bill, the hon. Member for Peace River, for his answers in this stage of debate. We will continue to look forward to co-operation on surface rights issues because it is on people's minds, in the rural setting particularly, because there is an apparent conflict between the rights of the landowner and the rights of the operator, and we need to achieve a happy medium that recognizes and appreciates and respects the rights and also the duties of both.

In doing so, I thank him again, and I move that we all accept this amendment. Thank you.

4:10

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

Mr. Martin: Yeah. Just a question. This seems to be sort of what we call no-brainer legislation, that if there's reclamation, we have to

do it. It seems to me that it would always be to the benefit of a producer, if they had land that needed to be reclaimed, to have this done. I was sort of curious as to why we needed this legislation. Has this been a serious problem in the past, where the landowner refuses, even though there's environmental damage and the rest of it? Or is this just that we're being proactive, that we need this? I want to understand why we're having this legislation brought forward at this time.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, to the best of my knowledge there are no situations presently where this has occurred. I think it's more of a proactive move recommended by, as I said, the stakeholder advisory committee

[The clauses of Bill 53 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 54
Alberta Centennial Education
Savings Plan Amendment Act, 2005

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with regard to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just very briefly, to put on the record. We on this side of the House with the Official Opposition did have problems with the Alberta centennial education savings plan when it first came out specifically because of the restrictions on eligibility, that this amending bill takes care of. Before Bill 54 came through, only children born in or after the centennial year were eligible for the centennial education savings plan. The amendment act enables students born before centennial year 2005 to be eligible for the second element of the grant program, the supplemental grants of \$100 provided to parents with RESPs, provided the parents also match this contribution. This is exactly what should have been done from the get-go. Better late than never. We're pleased to support it.

[The clauses of Bill 54 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 56
Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)

The Chair: Any comments, questions, or amendments in regard to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I know that some of my colleagues have spoken to this during second reading. It appears that what's being contemplated here is primarily

housekeeping, but it does include a two-year limit of liability for the former shareholder of an unlimited liability corporation. It's currently unlimited and joint and several, and this is proposing that it would limit the liability of the former shareholders to two years after the former shareholder ceases to be a shareholder. Boy, nothing is ever simple in business terms, eh?

We're willing to support this although we have some cautions. I believe that we had put our questions on the record during second, but our concerns were around whether this limitation would free the former shareholders who may have been involved in, for example, unethical activities. Does it allow them to escape responsibility for their actions? If that did happen, then who would be responsible or who could be held responsible for it?

As I said, it's primarily housekeeping. We just wanted to make sure that this wasn't allowing any additional wiggle room. Certainly, I think those in the private sector should be held to a very high standard of behaviour, and I would expect that this bill would be upholding that.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I could respond to some of the concerns that have been raised in second reading regarding the issue, primarily, of the obligations of former shareholders of unlimited liability corporations following dissolution of those corporations.

I believe that the concern stems around the possible shortening, as it's perceived, of the liability period for persons who are in breach of some ethics or make some transgressions during the course of their tenure as a shareholder and may no longer be with the corporation. If you read the existing section 15.7, it refers to "the liability of shareholders for obligations of the unlimited liability corporation." There is no exculpation of liability for shareholders for personal wrongdoings, but rather after two years from the period of dissolution there would no longer be liability for the obligations of the corporate entity itself.

I don't think that there's anything there that would remove the present limitations in the Limitations Act of Alberta, which presently provides for two years from the date of discovery of some wrongdoing and a 10-year ultimate limitation period. So I believe that those would continue to apply to someone who had committed a transgression while a shareholder of the unlimited liability corporation. It's only the obligations of the corporation that are being referred to here. I think that was the intention of the legislation as it was originally drafted. Unfortunately, the drafting did not make it clear.

I'd just point out also that the Business Corporations Act presently provides such provisions for a two-year period of limitation after the dissolution of the corporation for liability.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to participate at this stage of debate in discussing Bill 56, Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2). Of course, this is the second time this year that we revisit this statute, talking about the unlimited liability corporations and so forth. As was voiced by my hon. colleagues from both Edmonton-Gold Bar and Edmonton-Centre, we are in support of this bill. We like the idea that it is streamlining this legislation with others like it in Canada and that it clarifies the language and clarifies the clauses of the act to closely follow and mimic other jurisdictions.

I appreciate the opportunity that I had to have met with the hon. minister initially when this bill was part of the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act and the other opportunities I had with the hon. sponsor of the bill from Calgary-Nose Hill because he definitely has a lot of legal experience and he can understand the language and the convolutions of these clauses and subclauses and sections and all the legal mumbo-jumbo, basically.

4:20

However, the question that was answered today was about the two-year limit. When we met, we raised the issue that maybe personal culpability, as it was referred to, and being liable as a shareholder of a corporation for things that are beyond the corporation's actions, being personally liable criminally or financially, was not discussed here. However, it is not a big enough concern for us to stall the progress of this bill, so with that, I would invite all hon. members to support it.

I thank you for this opportunity.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I rise this afternoon in regard to Bill 56 to express my gratitude to the hon. member for his diligence in providing answers to the questions that we had from second reading last evening.

Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 56 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 57 Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2005

The Chair: Are there any questions or comments regarding the bill?

Mr. Hancock: Very briefly, Mr. Chairman. There were a number of issues raised last night in debate on second reading. I just wanted to assure the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning that there's no intention whatsoever to denigrate any trades. In fact, it's been my effort to promote trade training and trade certification. This bill simply is intended to correct an error. If there are other issues that we need to deal with with respect to trade certification, trade training, and valuing trades, I'd invite the hon. member to come and sit with me at some point, and we can discuss those and determine how we can do more to ensure that both compulsory trades and other trades are valued and to allay any fears of compartmentalizing or taking apart the trades into individual skills. I'd be more than happy to have that discussion with him. This bill is not about that, and I encourage support.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased to rise to speak on Bill 57, and I'm heartened by the minister's statements. I will take him up on that, and I look forward to speaking about the problems that many tradesmen have related to me about optional

certification, perhaps some of the difficulties of enforcement, and some of the other things.

I understand that we are looking to move quickly through the debates here today. I did touch on a number of things last night in second reading.

That's all I have to say today. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[The clauses of Bill 57 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 51
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act,
2005 (No. 2)

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for this opportunity to participate in this discussion on Bill 51, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2005 (No. 2), in Committee of the Whole. I would start off by saying that while I realize and appreciate the need to allocate the unbudgeted surplus revenues to programs and services for Albertans, I must repeat my concerns which I voiced back in the spring when we discussed the initial supplementary supply figures for this year.

Many speakers before me in second reading and in committee have asked the same question: why the rush? Why is this government cramming things through when the decisions we reach here today are this significant? Why not slow down a little and examine all our options so the amounts we earmarked or spent are allocated wisely and appropriately?

Mr. Chairman, supplementary supply this time around is roughly \$1.8 billion. A whopping six hours of debate was allocated for this meagre sum of money: \$1.8 billion that was discussed in six hours.

Ms Blakeman: Wow. How much is that a minute?

Mr. Elsalhy: It roughly translates into about \$5 million per minute. I think this is not only ridiculous, it should not be happening.

The Conservative government has basically scheduled 17 minutes per department for this debate. The 17 minutes were not even guaranteed for each department, so some departments received a little longer; some departments received no debate whatsoever. Democracy is not well in this province.

What is happening during the fall sitting of the Legislature is a symptom of a larger problem. Major decisions are being made behind closed doors, and funding is announced after the fact. Things are spent first, and then we bring them to the Legislature to talk about them in retrospect. Things are done without public consultation and without planning. The MLAs are expected and are entrusted to ask questions of the government, especially on financial issues, but their authority and their mandate is undermined.

A few misguided Conservative MLAs say that there is no need for the opposition to question the government decisions and that all is fine. The Premier himself once was quoted as saying that decisions pertaining to how the surplus is spent are none of the opposition's business. This is simply not acceptable.

Their federal Conservative cousins, for example, have suggested that Parliament set up an independent advisory council to advise the federal government and Parliament on how to allocate unbudgeted surplus revenues. What a novel idea. But I don't see the local Conservatives willing to relinquish the power or the control that they hold to an independent, arms-length, impartial, and objective organization. No. They want to keep it all, so they can be Santa when they please or Scrooge when they so decide.

Anyway, today I'm going to focus on things which I was disturbed to find missing from this supplementary supply, particularly as pertains to Health and Wellness. The Alberta Liberal plan for health care includes different initiatives, which can be summarized in the following brief points. One, maintaining and strengthening our public health care system by doing things like establishing an independent health auditor, restoring accountability by going back to having elected regional health authorities, and modifying the fiscal year for those health authorities so that they can plan their business and approve it before the provincial budget comes down.

Two, ensuring better access to care and reducing waiting times for medical treatments and surgeries. A subset of this would be to aggressively recruit and train sufficient numbers of physicians and other health professionals and ensure that there are enough residency training spots. Here an Alberta Liberal government would re-examine the roles and scope of practice of all health care professionals . . .

An Hon. Member: What about pharmacists?

Mr. Elsalhy: And other health care professionals including pharmacists, yes. Evaluating alternative and innovative methods of payment for doctors, including services like palliative care and midwifery as core health services, and offering full recognition and top-notch training to our nurse practitioners.

Three, using tobacco tax revenue to establish a community wellness fund to support wellness and positive lifestyle initiatives and expand family and community support services, FCSS, to build stronger, healthier communities from the ground up.

4:30

None of these ideas were considered when all this money was spent. Roughly \$1.4 billion was allocated to this ministry alone, and perhaps rightly so. We do need investing in our health care system. Health is on everyone's mind. The system needs to be better, to be improved, and to be strengthened and better managed. Pouring in more money is not the solution, of course, especially when done with no plan whatsoever just to please a certain voter group. Take, for example, the two hospitals for Fort Saskatchewan and Sherwood Park. For so long neither community was listened to. Now all of a sudden they both are. Where is the co-ordination and planning here? This is only one example, Mr. Chair.

This government has to shift its thinking framework from simple brick-and-mortar spending to the more comprehensive realm of investing in people to operate and run these empty shells. We do not need any more ghost houses. We do not want history to repeat itself, where in a few years this government will come around and close wards, or entire hospitals for that matter, pretending to be streamlining service or cutting costs.

My point is simply: what is this government doing to address the shortage of practitioners like I mentioned: physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and other front-line health care workers? All nine health regions are screaming for more practitioners, but particularly – this is of note – in rural Alberta. There is nothing in this

supplementary supply bill to try to alleviate this problem, which is both chronic and acute.

Earlier today I tabled information showing at least 82 requests for general practitioners from the Alberta rural physician action plan website. The Alberta Medical Association itself, as illustrated in their physician placement directory, opportunities for employment under their general practice list, is listing six requests for family physicians for the Aspen health region, for example, four for the David Thompson health region, nine for the Calgary health region, and nine for the Capital health region, and this is only their latest bulletin.

People all over this province, particularly new arrivals to any particular town or city, are increasingly having difficulty seeing a family physician. The seemingly standard answer that they receive now is: "Sorry. The doctor cannot see you." The poor patient then asks: "Okay. Can you tell me who would? Where should I go?" In turn he or she is told to check a website for who may be seeing or accepting new patients. The patient goes down the list on that website only to find out that these physicians have various restrictions and wait times, et cetera. Some physicians will only see pregnant mothers. Some physicians will only see children. Some physicians will only see you if you have a life-threatening condition. Winning with a scratch-and-win ticket has better odds than turning up an available doctor, as I was once told.

Older physicians are retiring, we're not graduating enough new grads, and even of those who graduate, a considerable number choose to leave for other Canadian jurisdictions or even south of the border.

Medical school tuition is really costly in this province, and it is only going to get worse as time goes, especially if the Minister of Advanced Education gets his way with deregulating postsecondary education.

We're also complaining about restrictions and unnecessary hurdles put in the path of international medical graduates, referred to as IMGs. The hoops they go through are unreal and unnecessary. Instead of practising in their much-needed fields, they drive taxis, clean toilets, or pump gas at gas stations. Why aren't we accelerating their equivalency accreditation? Why is this government stalling? The federal government some years back did establish a task force to examine ways of removing obstacles in the accreditation process. What has this provincial government done to match that?

At a recent meeting in Cold Lake between the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation and the local chamber of commerce the hon. minister explained why Alberta has a shortage of physicians. He indicated that when he graduated from medical school quite a few years back and opened his first practice in Cold Lake in 1983, there were 125 graduating physicians in Edmonton and another 95 in Calgary. He said that part of the problem now is that this number is going down. He also indicated that universities in this province do not have the physical space to accommodate more medical students, and even so, those medical schools do not prepare doctors for rural communities.

Another reason that he quoted was the change in demographics. Now we have more physicians who are females, and some of them might not want to practise full time or might find it less desirable to practise in the rural setting. He also went on to say, and I quote: I'm still of the belief that if you were brought up in rural Alberta, you will return to rural Alberta. But the statistics do not bear that out.

So, again, what are we doing to attract and retain top-notch practitioners in the rural setting? What can we do to alleviate that pressure that is faced by our small towns and cities?

In a recent study conducted by researchers at a western Canadian

university, it was confirmed that far more medical students are choosing specialty medicine over family practice, and the author of this study, a Dr. Fraser Brenneis, indicated that in his opinion there were many factors or reasons, one of which was, again, the rising tuition and debt that the students incur as they're going through their postsecondary education. They graduate – yes, physicians make a decent living – but their hands are tied. They're wearing cement boots, and you're just asking them to service that debt for many years to come.

Another reason that was quoted is the type of relationship students have with their patients. Again, this is an area where some much-needed help and much-needed life support from the province has to come in to allow more physicians to practise in the rural setting and perhaps also nurse practitioners and pharmacists, that are now getting more prescribing rights, and so on.

To summarize, the plight of both urban and rural Alberta, their needs and their desire to have qualified physicians and competent front-line health care workers, is real, and it is here. There is nothing in this supplementary supply that even tried to address this. I don't discredit and I don't disqualify and I don't argue with the need for acute-care beds, and I don't argue with the need for a hospital in Calgary. I don't argue with the need for a hospital in either Fort Saskatchewan or Sherwood Park but not both. Really, we have to look at the people. It's not only bricks and mortar. It's the people who run these services and run these facilities who we should be focusing on.

With this, I just wanted to express my surprise and my frustration that \$1.4 billion did not even try to address the chronic shortage of practitioners that we have in this province, that is now becoming more acute and more real and more scary. With that, I look forward to hearing more debate.

Thank you, sir.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Chairman.

Ms Pastoor: Chairman. I'm sorry. Well, I had two voices. I wasn't sure which was which.

I actually have some really pretty straightforward questions on Seniors and Community Supports. I'm certainly delighted with the dollars that have been put forward, but a lot of this is towards the bricks and mortar, which are more than necessary in this province.

One of the questions I would have is that there appears to be a discrepancy between the two announcements. One came out of the department, and one came out of the Premier's office. What came out of the department was \$109 million, and what came out of the Premier's office was \$140 million. So there's a discrepancy there that I'm not sure that I understand.

Another thing. With the \$50 million that had been previously announced for rural affordable supportive living, they speak of a 50-50 split, with the other 50 being private or the voluntary sector. So my question on that would be: are these going to be P3s, and is there any expectation that the municipalities or that the health regions would be included in that other 50 per cent? What would be the eligibility criteria to build these, either supportive living, the urban affordable housing, and the rural affordable housing? What criteria are you going to use as to who is actually going to provide the building?

4:40

Will the minister require that all of the homes outline in unambiguous terms who is responsible for the cost and delivery of the services? That really has two or three expansions on it. Who would be responsible for the services, the actual delivery of the building, but, then, also the services that could well be divided into that building, which would be the housing part of it; i.e., housecleaning and all those sort of things?

Then we go out, actually, out of this department and into the next one, which of course would be the care. Would the minister create a website where all the facilities are required to fully disclose their staffing, levels of service, programs, and all the related costs and fees? I believe that would be very fair to anyone who is under a crisis. Unfortunately, many people who are moving into these sorts of facilities, particularly the elderly elderly, are usually in a crisis to find some place to live. I think it's only fair that if they move into someplace, they understand fully what they are paying for and what they can expect to get.

The other part about the supportive living is that it does cover many, many different levels, and I'm more than aware that there will be standards and hopefully very, very clear definitions coming down by the end of the year relating to, really, what supportive living means. Is it lodges or enhanced lodges, et cetera, et cetera, in that whole continuum of conversation? What I would like to know is if by expanding what we call supportive living, is it going to be a replacement for long-term care because residents then cover more of their costs? How many supportive living homes currently exist in Alberta? Again, that may be, in fairness, difficult to actually answer because supportive living can be about five different kinds of definitions. So I appreciate that that will probably be difficult to answer.

How many designated assisted living are going to be built? Again the same problem: what is designated living? Does it fall under supportive living, or is it supportive living? But my question on that one would be: how many of those, meaning any kind of a definition for those buildings, are being used to replace long-term care facilities?

In the administration the joint agreement between Canada and Alberta says that the program, the affordable housing program, would be administered by Alberta Seniors and Community Supports, and it says that the department is responsible for the selection of affordable housing projects. My question on those would be: what is the criteria that you'd be using on who would be bringing them forward? Who would be on that committee that would choose the affordable housing projects? How will the public at large be represented on that group? Also, how would families be represented on that selection committee?

Again on the joint Canada/Alberta affordable housing program, they're saying that the federal assistance is 50 per cent of the capital costs to a maximum of \$75,000 a unit, which I believe has been raised. Now, I'm not sure what the definition of a unit is because \$75,000 for a studio apartment seems like a tremendous amount of money. So I'm not sure if that is speaking about a \$75,000 door, which then includes the unit, or just what that unit definition would be. Who would actually determine what that definition is?

I think that, Mr. Chairman, pretty much covers my questions. I just wanted them to be pretty straightforward and direct, and I certainly look forward to the answers. Thank you.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, along with our hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung want to express my concern

about the lack of time for debate of such a serious amount of money, \$1.8 billion. Six hours of debate is not enough. It equals \$300 million an hour. Every minute \$5 million will be debated.

In my previous job working in a church, we had a budget of about less than half a million, on which we spent hours looking at every line in the budget, being responsible because in a church it's money that people have voluntarily given. Here in the province money that comes from people through taxation – we're considering so much money and not enough debate. One word that I carry over from my previous career is the word "stewardship." You know, our responsibility as members of the Legislature is to act as good stewards of the wonderful resources that we have in this province. It doesn't seem to me to be an act of responsible stewardship to spend such little time debating such serious issues.

I want to make some comments about the Solicitor General and Public Security supplementary estimates. The Solicitor General's department's request for additional money is to the amount of "\$7,392,000 for additional operating costs primarily resulting from staff salary settlements in 2005-06." If there had been time for debate, I could have asked the Solicitor General a number of questions about what these numbers actually mean. Going through the list, there are a number of additional funds being asked for for different areas; for example, an additional \$162,000 for strategic services, another \$20,000 and \$47,000 for the minister's office and the deputy minister's office, \$112,000 for information management, \$143,000 under the security services branch for protection services. Security operations asked for an additional \$688,000. Adult remand and correctional centres asked for an additional \$4,040,000.

It's not clear to me whether this is all having to do with increases in salaries or other items. There's no breakdown, and I don't know how to get an answer to that. The young offender centres, for example: an additional \$868,000. Under community corrections another \$783,000. In terms of community corrections I'm very interested in the support to youth justice committees because I think that they are underfunded, and I don't know whether this money goes at all to youth justice committees. If it's all to salary increases, I don't understand why that couldn't have been in the original budget. What kind of planning is involved here when this has to be added for salary increases? Don't we know when those increases are going to come?

What is not in here is more serious. I have been asking questions in the House about the spending support, financial support for policing in Alberta. I have mentioned a number of times in questions to the Solicitor General that I think the funding for policing in Alberta is too little. We're falling behind other provinces. We're not keeping up with the kind of policing that we need.

Many of us in our constituencies work closely with community groups that are concerned about crime in our community. In my own constituency there's a crime council in one area of the constituency. There's a caring and safe community group in another area. These committees work with the police, and we're very impressed by the willingness of the police to work in our communities with people to discuss how to deal with increasing crime in many neighbourhoods. It becomes clear that many people feel a great deal of insecurity because they're not sure that there are enough police on the streets. Now, when you get outside of our major centres into the rural areas, there's even a greater concern about whether there are enough police in local detachments and whether they'll be there for people when there are crimes.

4:50

Now, in terms of the statistics the province of Alberta falls short of other provinces in Canada when it comes to funding municipal policing. In 2003 the per capita expenditures by the province rated

the lowest of all provinces. Alberta had the lowest per capita provincial contribution of all provinces at \$33.3 per capita in total funding. By comparison, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador had the highest provincial contribution at \$130 per capita. Other provinces, like Ontario and B.C., both had substantially higher rates of per capita funding than Alberta. For 2004 the province increased its share to \$42 per capita total funding for municipal funding. However, it is safe to assume that unless other provinces made dramatic cuts to their contributions for policing, the province of Alberta continues to contribute fewer funds for policing than any other jurisdiction.

This is serious, especially for cities like Edmonton and Calgary. I know that in response to the Mayerthorpe tragedy there was an increase in the number of RCMP officers in rural areas, and that is a good thing, but unfortunately for the cities we still remain underfunded. Huge additional money to the budget for the Solicitor General, \$7.392 million, but none of that translates into more policing for our cities.

Now, I think this is a very serious issue. I brought up many times that there's a problem with the formula. In negotiating with municipalities, the formula is too low. When we were in southern Alberta, we had some conversation with the mayor of Taber. Taber has its own municipal police force, and it has to spend over a million dollars a year on its small detachment for municipal policing, but it only gets about \$264,000 from the province. It puts the town of Taber in a great deal of difficulty trying to raise the rest of the money. They get some money from revenues from speeding tickets and so on, but mostly they have to raise the rest from their own municipal revenues. The problem is planning. A town like Taber can't plan ahead in terms of where the money is going to be because it doesn't know what the formula is going to be from one year to the next. This is a very serious issue.

I was hoping there would be more attention to the basic funding of policing in the appropriation supply increases, but nothing here, and I don't know whether I'll ever get any answer to the questions that I'm bringing. Those are my questions, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Supplementary estimates: \$1.8 billion. I remember that there was a time when supplementary estimates were a necessity, but they were there for emergencies. That's what the purpose of them was back then. Now they've become just part of the government. We don't need to take the budget seriously in the spring because we know we can bring billions and billions in later on in supplementary estimates. To me this is abuse of the Legislature, to be looking at these sorts of figures.

I look here at \$1.8 billion. I look at all the departments that seem to have emergencies: Advanced Education, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Children's Services, Community Development, Education, Environment, Gaming, Health and Wellness, Infrastructure and Transportation, Municipal Affairs, Seniors and Community Supports, Solicitor General and Public Security, and Sustainable Resource Development. I mean, if we handled our household budgets in this way, Mr. Chairman, we'd all be going broke. This government comes here, and, you know, we're lucky if we get six hours because with these sorts of little procedures, we can shorten that for the \$1.8 billion. I thought that we were going to get six hours from what happened last night. This will be over at 5:15, and we're dealing with \$1.8 billion. Not \$1.8 million; \$1.8 billion. This \$1.8 billion is probably more of a budget than some of the smaller provinces even have, and here we are dealing with it in this way.

I wish this government, who talk about being fiscal conservatives, would realize that this is not the way to budget. We have to make a lot of changes, I believe, in this order. That's why my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona brought in Standing Order 40, just to try to draw back to the members what we're doing here. Of course, the government side says that they didn't want a debate about the budget. No, they don't want to debate about \$1.8 billion, Mr. Chair. They just want to say: let's just pass it and move on. This is: "We're the government. We can do whatever we want." The fact is, I would remind them, that they had fewer votes than the opposition in the last provincial election. Things are changing, and this is partly why things are changing.

I remind you that this is just the beginning of it. After we brought in the budget in the spring, Mr. Chairman, we spent over \$4 billion on things that may have been desirable, some of the things, but surely if they're desirable, you can plan a budget around them. We're looking at probably \$6 billion that were unaccounted for in the budget that we're dealing with here after the fact. I suggest to you that that's just not the way to run a government.

We have to make some changes. Some of the budget estimates should be debated in committee so that we can look into them in a little more detail. We need other democratic changes. The chairman of Public Accounts is here, and I know that he would agree. We need to be able to bring in some democratic changes. We've had one-party rule here too long, and this is why we're dealing with this sort of money, Mr. Chairman, \$1.8 billion in supplementary estimates. We'll be lucky if we get six hours. We'll probably get three or four hours to debate this. I think members that call themselves conservatives fiscally should be ashamed of this sort of performance. They should be ashamed of it.

I say to the members, some of them who need things to do on the backbench over there, that perhaps they could start to tell the Government House Leader sitting across there and others that they find this unacceptable, that they find this approach unacceptable. If we're all elected to look after the taxpayer, we can have a debate about priorities – that's what it's all about – but surely there should be no debate about how we handle the finances of this province. To pass \$1.8 billion in a matter of probably three hours if we're lucky, with all these departments that all of a sudden had emergencies, not even counting the over \$4 billion that was spent on new programs that they couldn't figure out to budget for before, I find unacceptable. Surely the people of Alberta would find that unacceptable. I know that the Minister of Economic Development will – glad to give you some time, Mr. Minister, because we love it when you stand up and speak.

Mr. Chairman, there's no more evidence of the democratic deficit that we have in this province than what we're doing right here: \$1.8 billion, as I say, plus the \$4 billion. As legislators we should all be ashamed of this because we have no idea of where this money is going. We know that all of a sudden a bunch of departments had emergencies, but supplementary estimates should be for what they were intended to be, for emergencies that you couldn't foresee in the budget, not for this type of approach. As I say, this government is going to have to learn some lessons. Maybe they should go back to NAIT or something and take bookkeeping 10 so that they can begin to figure out how to budget.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

5:00

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise to speak to supplementary estimates, I suppose. The supplementary estimates

that we're looking at will authorize a \$1,531,247,000 increase in voted expense or expense and equipment/inventory purchases, a \$234,150,000 increase in voted capital investment, and a \$5,000,000 increase in voted lottery fund payments. The nature of the problem is in dealing with supplementary estimates in such amounts and all of the ways that this government seems to deal with sort of seat-of-the-pants management, which we see so often. We've seen it in the \$400 short-term gift, or whatever you want to call it, that's being sent out to everybody in the new year.

Mr. MacDonald: Legacy payment.

Mr. Backs: Legacy payment, I'm informed by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

The reality here is that there is no budgetary process in Alberta. There's the spring spending and there's the fall spending and then there's the supplementary spending that we get again later on.

Mr. Taylor: Don't forget the drunken spending.

Mr. Backs: Maybe there's the drunken spending, I understand from some of the members here.

The reality is that there is no plan; there is no budget. There's just an ability to say: oh, we need this tomorrow or next month or maybe in two months. To go beyond that, to actually budget for a year is not what happens in Alberta.

With that said, I see that the Department of Human Resources and Employment, for which I am the critic, did not have any supplementary spending in this. Seeing that we have this three-times-a-year see-what-we're-going-to-spend sort of process, I begin to wonder why Human Resources and Employment does not deal with some of the problems of those payments to people who are deemed the poor in our society. They're not getting real increases. They're not getting dealt with. They're not getting ways to get out of those problems that for some areas of our province create gang violence, create problems and difficulties with many areas of societal development and the children and all the rest of it, and the Human Resources and Employment department did not have one penny, one nickel, one quarter of supplementary supply to debate here. That gives rise to some great concern.

You know, if it was deemed to be a regular budgetary process and all departments were acting in this manner and being responsible, if that was what it was – but it's not that way. We seem to just have time and again these decisions to move when it's handy, to spend when it's handy. I mean, this was very obvious in the type of decision we saw for our so-called September 1 holiday that was to celebrate the Alberta centennial. That was thrown out there and it was going to happen, and then it didn't happen and it wasn't planned ahead and thought ahead and all the rest of it. It turned out that the school kids weren't even scheduled so that they could attend here at our Legislature Grounds ceremonies. It was sad because this is a huge thing, this 100th anniversary for Alberta.

Mind you, I was very pleased today to see that we could cap it off with the welcoming back of the Eskimos. I will just note that my colleague from Edmonton-Decore was able to get on his number 15 Ricky Ray jersey a signature from Ricky Ray and, with that signature on his back, hoist it above his head for a great memento picture. By the way, it was a great thing to end our centennial, and I think the Eskimos and the Eskimos organization again should be commended for all of that.

To end, the problem with the supplementary supply is that it is not a budgetary process. It's something that we see that's not acting as emergency spending. It's something that is part of the way that we

seem to be seeing the government spend our monies here in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Being on the football subject, I guess I'd like to maybe start there with this supplemental supply and how we enjoy that, and then go to education.

It's a worry to me that this \$1.5 billion is on expense or expense and equipment/inventory purchases. How can supplemental supply be going to that extreme on expenses? We've got a very little amount, \$234 million, going into capital investment, which might be something for the future.

What I want to go back to on education, to start with, is that the wonderful, booming metropolis of Raymond, Alberta, came up with a tier 1 championship here in Edmonton. I'm very proud of that little area. If you look at the investment that's put in there, they're getting a \$13 million school, which is long overdue.

An Hon. Member: Are you? You're getting a new school?

Mr. Hinman: Yes. My good buddy was down there and announced that. It's in the papers all over. The point is what we can and should do in Alberta, if we allow them to do it. They want to close down rural schools and say: "Well, they're not equitable, you know. It's not a good disbursement of money. We can do it better in the bigger areas." Bigger is not always better. This budget has gotten bigger, and it isn't better. It's become almost a joke when the government says that they don't like picking winners and losers, they don't like being in business, yet here's \$1.8 billion. What are they doing with it? Very much influencing business throughout the province.

The sad part, though, is that there is no plan. They talk about a 20-year plan. You don't have a plan unless it's written on a piece of paper and people can see it, and then you're held accountable to it. Many times when we were doing our budget in our business, we would put out our yearly, two-year, three-year, and five-year plan. In that plan we would have our priorities on what we need to do this year, what we'd like to do next year, and then we'd have a wish list in there. The province has none of these things.

The good Member for Edmonton-Glenora talked about the little town of Taber and their struggle with their police force. To me, one of the most discouraging things in this whole supplemental supply is that we have a backlog and a shortage of services throughout the province in policing and in health care for hip replacements, cataracts, all types of areas. If you have the extra money, this was the time to put an injection to get something for it. We need to give the services to Albertans, not just the money. "Here, my friend; here's \$5 million to do something on expenses," and we don't know what those expenses are. We have to ask the questions. Where is it going? Why aren't the details here for us to go over and to truly debate where we should be putting it?

Like I say, it's amazing to me that they can stand up and continue saying that they have a plan yet not show it. We need to show it, have it out there. Most importantly – and it was referred to a couple of times – what about a formula? How are we going to have these capital disbursements? How are they going to go to the municipal governments, that really are providing the services for the people? They need to be able to plan not just one year in advance but five years and 10 years. We definitely need to have that plan for them to do their planning because there is a deficit in the infrastructure in this province. They're struggling to meet those ends, yet they're all wondering if and when the lottery is going to come to their town and they're going to be able to address their problems.

5:10

The money going to the health regions. Again, I just want to go over that one. We have \$64 million, and once again it's just itemized as expense and equipment. We know the backlog we have on those services in the province. I mentioned earlier this week what I consider a young lady – hasn't reached her 50s yet – who's waiting for a knee replacement.

An Hon. Member: Oh, you're smooth.

Mr. Hinman: Speak up.

An Hon. Member: I said you're smooth: young lady.

Mr. Hinman: She is in my books.

The point is that she's been incapacitated for six months. How much longer is it going to be? That is the type of area. If we were putting this money to services, how many hips could we do? How many policemen could we have? How could we be helping the farmers with some rebates on their high fuel, high fertilizer costs? These are areas where inflation has really hit, yet we don't seem to address any of them, as the good Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview says, on an emergency supply bill. It's very discouraging to be going through all of this stuff like it's an emergency when it isn't. It's more like we're tourists in that foreign country and we've got to jump on a plane, so let's get our money spent before we go back home because the kids are going to have it when we get there.

I guess my final comment on all of this is that it definitely looks like a legacy that they're trying to build. I would not be proud of this legacy of drunken sailor spending. Unfortunately, it's not even the drunken sailor's money; it's the people of Alberta. We need services, not false promises and wondering where and what the money is going to.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. There is a lot to be discussed in this bill, and unfortunately there is so little time. There are things in here that perhaps shouldn't be, and there are things that should be in here that are not. Certainly, when we look at this Legislative Assembly and the priorities that are coming from this government as a result of this appropriation bill, one has to wonder about this government.

I was sitting here, Mr. Chairman, thinking about the Deep Six, the famous group of Progressive Conservative backbenchers in 1993 that were for less government and significantly less government spending. There were six of them obviously.

Mr. Dunford: I wasn't one of them.

Mr. MacDonald: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West indicates that he was not one of them.

I've forgotten who they were. Certainly, some of them are still in the House, and they are senior government ministers now. I've forgotten the membership of the Deep Six, but this government has forgotten what the Deep Six was all about. This government is now spending money, in my view, in some cases in a very wasteful way.

We could look at some of the priorities that have not been covered. We need to remind ourselves of some of the less fortunate in this province. Let's think, for instance, of the homeless people. The Edmonton community plan on homelessness uses the following definition, Mr. Chairman, for homeless.

A . . . family is considered homeless if:

- the individual or family has no residence at all and is living on the streets; or
- the individual or family is living in any premises which is not intended or suitable as a permanent residence; or
- the individual or family is at risk of becoming homeless
 - (a) through losing their residence, or
 - (b) through being discharged from an institution/facility and has nowhere to go, or
 - (c) through loss of income support.

I don't see any amounts in this bill to improve the conditions for homeless people.

Now, the 2004 rental market report from CMHC shows that in spite of the fact that Edmonton has the highest apartment vacancy rate since 1996, at 5.3 per cent, the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment rose by 1.5 per cent to \$597. Rents for a two-bedroom rose 1.1 per cent to an average of \$730. These rates are considerably higher than the shelter allowances provided by the province. I was very pleased to get this information from the general manager of a housing association. This general manager is working very hard, as is her organization, to improve the lot of many Albertans. Why isn't there a shelter allowance increase in this budget?

In fact, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning mentioned that Human Resources and Employment does not have any amounts listed in here, but certainly Community Development does and, more specifically, Seniors and Community Supports. We're talking here in excess of \$100 million, but there is no amount for an increase in shelter allowances. I think that at this time this is a very poor reflection on this government, and it indicates that they're not really sincere in their efforts to improve the lives of those Albertans.

Now, the shelter allowances in Alberta are as follows, Mr. Chairman: for a single person, \$168 a month; for a single mother with one child, \$428 a month; for a single mother with two children, \$503 a month; for a single mother with three children, \$524; for a single mother with six children, \$586. These rates include a utility allowance.

We all know, Mr. Chairman, how much the government has increased their travel and communications budgets in the last number of years. They've got no problem with that, no problem at all with hosting budgets, travel budgets, international travel, domestic travel. It doesn't matter. This is a government with itchy feet, but I think they should be staying here in the province and recognizing the problems that exist here and doing something to correct them, and they're not.

Now, we need to deal with this issue. We need to recognize that this is not enough money to get by on. It's not enough money to provide any sort of reasonable shelter that this government is currently providing. I would urge at this time all government members to have a look at these shelter allowances and then change your priorities.

At this time, Mr. Chairman, I would like to move that we adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was taken a little bit by surprise by that, but given that we've adjourned debate, I would move that the committee rise and report bills 52, 55, 58, 43, 44, 53, 54, 56, 57, report progress on Bill 51, and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

5:20

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 52, Bill 55, Bill 58, Bill 43, Bill 44, Bill 53, Bill 54, Bill 56, and Bill 57. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 51.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 8 p.m., at which time we'll return in Committee of the Whole.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:21 p.m.]

