

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, November 29, 2005 **8:00 p.m.**
Date: 05/11/29
 [Mr. Marz in the chair]

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

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

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

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to finally get an opportunity to speak again to the supplementary supplies that were introduced by the government this year.

I just want to be clear about what's happened here. Three days were designated by the government for consideration of the supplementary supply No. 2 this fall session. In attempting to have a reasonable question and answer period over those three days – by the way, each day, of course, is only 120 minutes long because it's set for two hours – what we were not able to get debated out of the 13 departments were Solicitor General for \$7.4 million, Seniors for \$109 million, Municipal Affairs for \$138.2 million, Environment for \$5.2 million, Community Development for \$27 million for a subtotal of \$286,929,000.

We were able to get some debate, but no vote was taken for Children's Services at \$38.4 million, Infrastructure and Transportation at \$758,016,000, and Agriculture at \$288,289,000 for a subtotal there of \$1,084,705,000. So in total, Mr. Chairman, the Official Opposition did not get an opportunity to debate and get answers to our questions for over \$1.3 billion worth of expenses that had been already allocated by this government.

Certainly, the public reaction to the arrogance that was displayed by the government in this off-budget spending – they've been fairly clear in that they felt that the budgeting should be a better process and that the government should be able to get closer to actually balancing its revenue and its expenses to deliver programs and services to the citizens of Alberta and that we should not have these totally out of whack budgets where the government somehow miraculously always manages to come up with billions and billions in surplus, which it can then divvy up away from the scrutiny of the public. The public is obviously not happy about this. So that was a real flaw in the process, what happened there.

Now we have that same supplementary supply coming before us through an appropriation bill in which, yes, we get an opportunity through second reading, Committee of the Whole, and third reading to comment again on what is in and what is not in that appropriation bill. But we do not have the opportunity for those departments, Mr. Chairman, and for those amounts of money to have an exchange of questions and answers with the ministers that are responsible. For those ministries we have no idea of what is going on. There's a one-line explanation that is provided in the supplementary supply booklet that is made public, and that really gives us very little information at all as to what's happening.

One of the things that the public that has contacted me has been really irritated by is that so much of this spending started within weeks, maybe even within days of the budget being passed last

spring. For all we know, maybe this spending was going on before the budget had even passed but was in fact before the Assembly. So there's a huge flaw in this process and, I would argue, is a huge arrogance on behalf of the government in that they don't feel they need to bring this before the Assembly and before the people of Alberta for scrutiny and for accountability. I think there's a real lack of respect for both elected representatives but also for those Albertans that they represent. That's what's really gone wrong in this system.

I would like to raise some issues both of what is specifically noted in the budget but also – perhaps it's in there, and I don't know because with a one-liner it's real hard to tell. Maybe it's in there, but without being able to have a Q and A with the minister, we really don't have any better explanation of what that money stands for than the one line. Under Children's Services, for example, the one-line explanation divides up \$38,400,000 and talks about \$1.2 million "in equipment/inventory purchases for information systems enhancements to support program delivery" under a couple of acts, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act. Sorry, I just remembered something else that I have a question about. Then there's Alberta's early learning and child care investment plan, which I suspect is actually the money from the federal government, and again some inventory and equipment purchases for information systems enhancements.

What I don't know is in there is the issue of any follow-up on the round-table on bullying and family violence that was held in May of 2004. I'm interested in hearing about what exactly are the firm timelines and budgets flowing from the recommendations from that 2004 round-table. Now, obviously, that international conference that was held in Banff in late October, which I attended, had something to do with what came out of the May 2004 recommendations, but that was never really clearly laid out. I would like to know what those actual timelines are for implementing what came out of that May 2004 round-table. The minister, I think, has claimed in the past that the money is in the business plan. Yes, but what are the actual measurable targets and timelines and outcomes and associated tasks that are affiliated with this particular initiative?

I have a question under Community Development. Ah, yes, the \$5.5 million which has caused both anger and great consternation in the arts community in Alberta. This is a community that exists under great embattlement, no small irony given the project that was approved here, so they do tend to stick together and support each other even when they're not entirely thrilled with what happens. Now, Paul Gross graduated a year after me from the bachelor of fine arts program in acting at the University of Alberta, so I know Paul Gross. Fine fellow; he's done very well for himself in Canada. Congratulations. But it does cause the community some concern when they see someone swan in from out of province, get an appointment with the Minister of Community Development, get an appointment with the Premier, and walk out of the meeting with \$5.5 million.

Let's put this in context, Mr. Chairman. That is one-quarter of the budget that is allocated to all of the arts. All of the arts. Not just the film commission, not just performing arts, not writing, not visual, all of the arts. The entire budget for the AFA that funds all of the arts in Alberta is \$21 million, and this guy walked out of there with 5.5 million bucks. So you can understand that it has caused that community a bit of consternation. Do they line up and start to phone the minister to get individual appointments now, or should they move to Ontario and come back here to get some kind of extra consideration with their grants?

8:10

There was a huge problem with the process here. It may well be appropriate given that it's the Year of the Veteran, and it may well be appropriate given that it's involved Albertan veterans, and it may well be appropriate that we fund it under the centennial act, but boy was there a huge problem both in perception and in reality with this one. It does not smell good. That community is very hard-pressed to come forward and say publicly that they have problems with this but, man, have I heard about this one. So I'll just note that one.

There were some upgrades for exhibit redevelopment in various museums and historical sites. Well, my question is: how long would we have had to wait? Where was it in the business plan that these various exhibits were going to be upgraded? Is it in the business plan, or do we just have to wait once again in arts and culture and historical sites for some bonanza to drop out of the sky so that they can actually get some funding for stuff? Was this just a bonanza, and they're going to have to wait until the next one or the next time the minister smiles upon them? Is there some actual planning about replacement of things, or do they just have to starve and wait? It's very poor planning here and very ineffective use of money, if we're trying to protect our historical sites and our resources this way.

I'm wondering if any of this money got allocated to the Human Rights Commission, which also falls under this department. What I'm interested in is whether there is any review being taken of the Human Rights Commission, whether there's any consideration being given to updating the human rights legislation to include a description of adult bullying under prohibited grounds for discrimination or for treatment.

That seems to be becoming an increasing problem, and at this point the commission can't do anything to help people because adult bullying, you know, harassment that isn't of a sexual nature is not specifically named in the act. Therefore, all the staff and all the resources there can't help people that come forward with a complaint about that. We're missing something in being able to provide service to our citizens in not being able to expand the act to include that. I'd like to know if that consideration is being taken here.

Are there any plans under the Human Rights Commission to change the way it operates? There have been concerns for a long time that there's a huge push on the claimants that come forward to settle, settle, settle, and there's great pressure, and people keep going to meetings with them and saying: "Well, won't you take this? Won't you just settle?" People went there because they wanted some action. They don't just want to have to cave and go, "Oh well; I guess it's okay," or "I guess I'll accept this." They wanted to see some action. They wanted to see some closure, and in some cases they wanted an apology or some kind of retribution, which is perfectly appropriate. So this constant push to clear off the books and just forgive and forget and walk away and accept whatever is being offered is very frustrating to people.

I'm also wondering if it isn't a flaw in the process at this point. There's no incentive for those that are being complained about. There's no incentive for them to follow through with the process, to indeed come forward, come to the table with any kind of apology or compensation in any way or whatever is being asked for. There's nothing that compels them to do that. Therefore, they can just hang back and keep saying, "no, no, no," and you know the person has got to be forced to settle on the other end. So there is a flaw in this system. I urge the minister to look at his colleagues' work across the country to see what amendments are being made to their human rights process and to their legislation.

I note with great interest that there was a ruling last week – I think it might have been Thursday or Friday – on the family law statutes.

Not that I'm going to stand here and say that I told you so, but you know what? I blinking well am. I stood here and debated all one afternoon in 2003 on what was being proposed by the government to amend the family law statutes. In each and every case I said that you were making a mistake and that this was not Charter-proof. I've been proven right because one of those amendments has now been struck down.

It was an amendment where the artificial insemination was set up so that it would – basically the flaw in the whole act and in what the government did was that they tried to exclude same-sex couples, so they kept naming heterosexual couples by being gender specific. They kept saying mother or father rather than saying parent or spouse. That's what I kept pointing out all the way along: you are going to have to go back and redo this. Indeed, you are going to have to go back and redo it because the AI section in particular was struck down. It was either Thursday or Friday, and for exactly what I said.

The way it's written, by naming the father, you basically had a situation where hetero couples would not have to go through an adoption process to make sure that both parents were legal guardians for the child. But you also had gay men because you could name both of them as fathers. They were okay too. What you left out there were the lesbian couples, and now you're in trouble because it's not Charter proof and you are discriminating against someone. We've had laws passed in the country that say that this is perfectly legitimate. Now you're in trouble because you've got legislation that you're going to have to go back and fix, and I told you so.

I wonder if there's any money in the budget or if there'll be any money in any subsequent supplementary supply budget to fix that. You're going to end up having to fix all the sections that I told you you'd have to fix. I refer you back to my debates in the spring – I think it was March 2003 – on the family law statutes because I was right all the way through there.

A couple of other points I'd like to raise with the Justice minister. There's nothing at all in here for supplementary supply, but one of the things that I'm noticing is that in the domestic violence courts the prosecutors are cycling through there at a rate of about six months apiece. I know that there is some great gung-ho idea in there to have prosecutors cycle through on a two-year basis, you know, to give them better experience and broader experience through different sections.

All well and good, but what's happening right now is that you basically have upheaval in that domestic violence court, which was supposed to be about stability. It was supposed to be about building expertise. It was supposed to be about having people in place that actually knew what was going on and could work together and share experience. Because the prosecutors are being shifted every two years and you've got several prosecutors working in there, you basically have a turnover of your prosecuting team every six months. Somebody is on their two-year shift and they're on the way out the door, and somebody new is coming. Six months later the next one's out the door, and the next one's replaced. It's upheaval. I don't think that's what the minister was intending to have happen here, and I ask him to look at that because I think that's flying in the face of what was the intent of that domestic violence court.

I have another question for that minister. Is there any money coming out of his department or is he looking in any way at the whole idea of going to a public defender system? We're hearing more and more rumours out of the legal community that that's what's being considered, and I'd like to get some expansion on that, please. That's quite troubling because it again puts us into following an American model, which arguably works for them – I think it doesn't – but we have a completely different system, and I would argue that it's not going to work well here.

Under Government Services, I think it would be. I've been contacted by Margaret Kocot, who's wondering about the recycling policy on computers, which was launched with great fanfare I think in this budget year. Her issue is that basically the government is paying recycling companies to recycle these computers without any requirement that you actually test the computer and see if it works. If it still worked, it could be going to schools. It could be going to nonprofits. It could even be sent to Third World countries to be used in the state that it's in. But that's not even being tested. It's just immediately being dismantled and the parts recycled. She's asking how together we could change this situation, stop all of the e-waste, she calls it, and get people in government aware of the benefits of these unchecked learning tools.

She's working with the Electronic Recycling Association of Alberta. They're a nonprofit association with a goal of keeping e-waste, electronic waste, out of the landfills. They're very proud to recycle. Their point is well made. This is coming from people whose point is to recycle. They think that more of it should be fixed and re-used than put into the recycling system.

I had a few follow-up questions to the Minister of Health and Wellness. The ministry didn't identify future expenses, so my question is: how does the department know the total amount of money that's needed for either the infrastructure projects that are being planned here or for the operating expenses to run those projects once they're completed if she hasn't identified future expenses? She said in response to a question that they hadn't identified future expenses. Well, then, how do you know how much the whole project is?

I think much more troubling to Albertans and the question they keep asking me is: how do we know that there's going to be money to actually operate the facility once it's built? People are really concerned that, you know, there will be a building, the lights will be on, and nobody will be working there because there's no money that's put into the annual operating budget, just these one-time injections of infrastructure money. How are these projects expected to be achieved when we're only talking about \$64 million in this supplementary supply out of a total of \$1.4 billion that has been announced for infrastructure projects in Health and Wellness?

8:20

Finally, when asked about the contract for Aon, whether they had identified that Aon was going to get this contract, where the money for that was in the budget, and why it wasn't talked about during the budget debates, they said that, well, basically they have a slush fund for consulting. My question is: well, how much is this slush fund or this fund for consulting services that they can basically pull any amount of money out that comes up? I mean, \$1.5 million is not a small consulting budget. What is the total amount of that fund for consulting? What are the contracts that have been identified on an ongoing basis, and what else has come out of that fund for this year?

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I look for an additional opportunity to ask the remainder of my questions.

The Chair: Hon. members, may we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With great pleasure I would

like to introduce to you and through you to all members here this evening my son Jonathan. Jonathan is very interested in politics and would like to know what his dad is doing down here. As well, he's a student at Victoria high school. I would ask you all to please give him the traditional very warm greeting of the House.

Thank you.

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

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

The Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, the background conversations tend to escalate the longer the speaker talks. I would just ask that we restrict them to very low tones or take them into the committee room out back.

The next speaker is the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. For the record I want to express the difficulty I have with the fact that there's \$1.8 billion worth of what I consider overspending that we're expected to rubber-stamp after the fact rather than preapprove. What I see is that this is a case of putting the cart before the horse. I have less trouble with the amount of money than I do with the procedure. If I'm concerned about the \$1.8 billion that I see as overspending, you can imagine how I feel about the government's attitude to what they consider to be their own stomping grounds, the unbudgeted surplus, which is basically double what we're talking about tonight.

I, again, don't have a whole lot of difficulty with the amount of money that is being spent when I can tell where the money is going, but I have a great deal of difficulty, as the former Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, in trying to track where this money is going.

Ms Blakeman: I'm still the current member.

Mr. Chase: The current member. Sorry. The former speaker, the current member. As far as I know, there's no assassination plot, and I hope there never would be.

I would actually like to provide more money for a number of the departments. For example, in Community Development I look at the figure of \$2,495,000 to replace firepits, picnic tables, and resurface roads within provincial parks. I would love to be able to grant the Minister of Community Development considerably more millions because this money does not begin to address the deterioration that has happened in these parks over the last 12 years. I'd be interested and wonder if the minister would reply: has any of this money gone to improving pathways? Has it gone to improving stairs that have rotted over the years? Has any of this money gone to fencing to keep the cattle out? We have this multi-use concern, where cattle roam freely among the tents and trailers. It's rather discouraging for the campers to find the overnight special deposits that have been left right beside their firepit, whether it's a new pit or an old pit that's been replaced.

It's great that the Canmore Nordic Centre continues to receive millions of dollars in upgrades, but my feeling is that this is because it's out there. It's in the public. It's on TV in terms of filming because it is a wonderful centre. It's one of those jewels that gets frequently thrown out as "this is what the Alberta government is doing in terms of sports and recreation" whereas when it comes to the wilderness parks that I'm more familiar with, it seems that they're basically abandoned.

The resurfaced roads. The parks that I'm familiar with and that a lot of Albertans prefer are the ones that are out in the wilderness, the ones where you go out on a forestry road and you turn off and you're onto gravel. Rarely have I seen, other than in the very early spring, a grader come down those roads to upgrade them or actually get so adventurous as to go into the park itself and grade the roads. I've spent a lot of time in my past shovelling gravel onto the back of a pickup truck and filling in those holes myself for the benefit of my former campers. So in this particular case I, if given the power, would be giving several million dollars more to upgrade the parks, to bring them back to the standards that they were when they were first conceived.

When it comes to Education, first off, look at the infrastructure of \$42 million, and look at the school facilities operations of 351 and a half million dollars. The Calgary board of education alone has an infrastructure deficit of \$400 million. This money doesn't begin to address it. The money in the spring budget didn't address it. The problem is that it goes unaddressed.

In terms of schools, Calgary got two schools. We've got a million population in Calgary, and we get two new schools. We're supposed to celebrate the fact that we got one new Catholic and one new public school. Again, had I the power, I would like to see a number of those 40 communities that are currently without schools have schools that are the centre of their community. I would also like to see the older schools in the established neighbourhoods being brought up to speed in terms of infrastructure instead of waiting until they get to such a sad state that basically they get closed. This has happened to a number of the sandstone schools in Calgary. This is part of our historic heritage, and we've lost it.

When it comes to Gaming, I have a great deal of difficulty thinking that large organizations such as Edmonton Northlands and Calgary Exhibition and Stampede need the government somehow to prop them up with a total of \$70 million. In Calgary we see great expansion plans, and I've seen the plans for Northlands. Obviously these organizations have a tremendous amount of money generated from the very wonderful agriculturally related fairs and activities that they put on, whether it be the Calgary Stampede, whether it's a series of agricultural AgriCom type of activities. Likewise with Northlands, whether it's Klondike Days or the series of activities that take place in those facilities: there is no doubt that they're popular. They should be self-supporting. This is basically government welfare for very wealthy organizations. Let them do it on their own instead of digging into the taxpayers' pockets.

8:30

When it comes to Infrastructure and Transportation, the minister and I, despite our exchanges, would get along very well because if I had my wish, I would be providing him with considerably more money. For example, instead of using \$3 million to build what could very well be a temporary cement wall along the river's edge to keep back further seeping of the Turner Valley gas plant historic site, I personally would like to see that whole area reclaimed. If we want to have an historic site, so be it, but right now what we have is a leeching, polluting circumstance. Simply building a portion of a concrete wall, that may wash out in the next flood, doesn't address it. I would love to give the minister of infrastructure the money to go ahead, to basically level the site, dig down, and if you want to create a monument, replace some of it. Right now that area has been allowed to rust and basically has gone its own way for the last 20 years. If it wasn't of historical importance then, how is it more important now that we're going to come to its rescue with a \$3 million wall?

The minister provided an explanation with regard to the \$18

million in scope changes to the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads. I accept the explanation. I appreciated it when it was first given. I realize that with the types of overpasses that have been planned and where they've been located, the off ramps and so on, you have to make adjustments. I understand that process.

I like the word "accelerate." It says: "\$100,000,000 to accelerate provincial highway projects in other resource development areas within the province." The idea of acceleration – the minister knows of two of my favourite highways, 28 and 63. I'm all in favour of accelerating. What this doesn't tell me is to what extent they've been accelerated, and possibly the minister can tell me. It's my understanding that originally this highway twinning was going to take 10 years, and then I believe we're trying for five years. I believe that is the case. When we did a bit of research, we found out that we could twin these two highways, 28 and 63, for the equivalent of 21 days of royalties. Our cost that we estimated based on a million a kilometre was \$491 million, so hopefully the money that will take those roads and twin them from Edmonton to Fort McMurray is part of that \$30 million to accelerate provincial highways in the Wood Buffalo resource region.

I'm wondering if any of this \$100 million will provide more than just passing lanes for people travelling from Medicine Hat to the Crownsnest Pass. I know that when I was down there earlier this month and talking to residents in Medicine Hat, they were very disappointed that instead of twinning they were only getting passing lanes. That same concern was expressed by people connected with the municipal government in Lethbridge. They would have liked to have seen that highway twinned the whole way to the pass. They see it as their lifeline, the equivalent of our highway 2, or the Calgary-Edmonton corridor.

Medicine Hat would like to see the same kind of economic advantages to an east-west road as we're seeing in our north-south corridor. They're envious of what's happening and would like to be included in the economic well-being of the entire province. Again, if I could be told how this money has helped to accelerate the timeline, how it's been changed, to know that the process has been speeded up, I would be very supportive of the minister in so doing.

I have trouble with the idea that we're here tonight rushing again through a process. To me what we should be doing is sitting in quarterly legislative sittings. If we're going to deal with these what I consider budget overruns, why don't we just simply have quarterly budgets? Why don't we meet and come up with: what are the needs of the province? Let's discuss those needs. Let's debate them. Let's prioritize them. Notice that I'm using the word "let's." The idea that the government in its omniscient wisdom can make these decisions by themselves, without any input other than after-the-fact stamping, is erroneous.

We all have a role in deciding how the money should be spent, what Alberta's priorities are, and I think there would be greater strength within this process if everyone and all parties were allowed an effective role and participation rather than after-the-fact approval. I would be interested in hearing from any of the ministers as to why they feel that it's acceptable to bring us in for this short period, this less than three weeks, to do this after-the-fact discussion. Why can't we deal with it ahead of time?

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Chair. I will start by looking at the Education portion of the supplementary supply. Let me just say this. Of the \$75 million that we're spending, I believe that what is required – and I think the government deserves some praise here. I

think that to move the school buildings under the Department of Education's control is a very good move, but in building portables and school buildings, I think it's important that the government come up with stable and sufficient and predictable funding for schools. The question that I think is important to look at is: if there isn't enough money for permanent schools, will the government in '06-07 plan for building schools before providing emergency funding? In other words, I think it's important that the government have a plan set out for school buildings, send it out to the school systems, let them react to it, and then submit a plan based on the criteria that the department sets.

Also, I believe that if we look at the plant operations and maintenance of the supplementary, we see that there is \$24 million required. This really makes me wonder: is this a sign that the new funding formula under the plant operations and maintenance aspect of the Education budget is well thought out, and is it providing the right kind of funds for school systems across the province?

May I also say that I would commend the government on their transportation incentive, the extra dollars for fuel, for diesel fuel for transportation. I think that was very, very critical and very necessary.

Let me then look at the supplementary supply in terms of what it may be lacking and what I was surprised was not there. It seems to me that all of the dollars were directed for matters pertaining to infrastructure, transportation, and that kind of thing. I think what is important to note is that in meeting with the two school districts in St. Albert prior to this sitting, one of the biggest problems that schools are having in this province is the matter of support services for the family. I would have been in joy to see if there was an estimate overlap in dollars, if we'd have seen more indication of support services for schools such as guidance counsellors, school psychologists.

Let me just talk a little bit, in light of that, not only in terms of support services, but let me talk about the need for good counselling services in terms of apprenticeship. We were told, in meeting with the chamber of commerce in I believe it was Calgary, that they predict that 90,000 skilled jobs will be required in the next five years. I'm glad my colleague from Edmonton-Manning talked about this last night when he said: why are young people not being attracted to trades? Why are so many employers making so little use of things like the RAP program? You know that these things are difficult. In other words, why do we not have more students going into the trade areas?

8:40

My belief is that the junior high school is lacking a good, solid career education curriculum program and also lacking support with good guidance counsellors. That stems right into the high school. I think we really have to look at this very, very carefully. In other words, I'm suggesting that if you have extra dollars that you require to spend, they need to be more in the service area for the school system.

Let me, then, just talk about kids with special needs and the whole business of early diagnostic and curriculum development for remedial education. I note that in the supplementary supply estimates there was no indication of a move away from the achievement testing at grade 3 and a move to more diagnostic and remedial curriculum activities for schoolchildren who are not making it – not making it – falling through the cracks because they don't have a good start in school. This is costing us a lot. I think this is something that we should ask this government to look at very, very carefully.

The other question that I would like to mention in terms of the

supplementary supply is the business of school fees. I think it's time that the minister looked at this issue, again urging him to look at it in terms of the new budget year, '06-07, that is coming up, not just studying it but making some reference as to how he will set some guidelines for school fees; in other words, what the department will supplement schools to help them and to help parents that have to pay these school fees and what other things parents will be asked to pay for, such as sporting events, extracurricular activities, that type of thing. I think there's some really needed leadership required here on school fees. I think this government should show this in the new budget year, and I hope they do.

Let me move to, if I can, Mr. Chair, the matter of a letter here from the city of St. Albert to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, I believe, where policing comes into effect. One of the things that I note here – this comes from the mayor of St. Albert – is that “the AUMA calls for full provincial funding of policing costs for the first 5000 residents in every Municipality in Alberta, \$35 per capita and for the next 10000 residents (up to 15000), and \$18 per capita thereafter.” I think I'll just read that again. For every municipality in Alberta they're asking \$35 per capita for the next 10,000 residents up to 15,000 and \$18 per capita thereafter. In other words, in St. Albert that would mean \$18 per head for our tax base. I think this is a very, very important thing in terms of security for our citizens.

Also, we have a major problem with some of the young people with crystal meth. Property damage has become intense. I think this would be very helpful if we could have this looked at in this budget area.

So those are some general comments, Mr. Chair. I'll sit down. Thank you for letting me speak.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. [interjections] Still listening. [interjections]

The Chair: Hon. members.

Mr. Taylor: Always pleased to see. Of course, Mr. Chair, I have a long experience, years of experience, in competing with other sources of noise for the attention of the listeners as they're drifting off to sleep, saying something pithy – pithy – from time to time, because sometimes I get into a pithy mood, to pull them back in to the speaker and get them to pay attention again. I hope I can do a little bit of that here tonight. Thank you.

I was reviewing *Hansard* from Tuesday, November 22, with interest here as my colleagues were speaking because there was an interesting back and forth between myself and the Minister of Advanced Education that day as we were discussing supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Advanced Education. There was some back and forth, as there often is when the minister and I get into an exchange in this House, a few digs, a few shots in there. But if you go back and you read the exchanges between the minister and myself, you do find that we come out of those exchanges with some fairly valuable information.

I feel that that was the case here in our back and forth, and I had to go back over territory a couple of times in a couple of instances to nail the minister down to some specific answers to specific questions, but eventually I got pretty darn close there, in the ballpark anyway. I walked away satisfied that we had in fact made some progress around the debate for supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Advanced Education. We were talking a fairly significant amount of money there, about \$99 million all told, as I recall.

I wanted to just refer back to that, and I may actually refer back to a couple of very short, specific, one might say pithy comments made during the course of that exchange as we go on here. In general terms, Mr. Chairman, I wanted to refer back to that because I've been listening to my colleagues, and I've been listening to the specific questions that they have had to ask, questions to which they cannot get answers from the ministers because we have moved beyond the supplementary supply debates into the committee debate on Bill 51, questions about departments that weren't debated: Solicitor General – and my colleague from St. Albert referred to that just a moment ago – Seniors, Municipal Affairs, Environment, Community Development. Very little, if any, debate on those particular departments.

There were 13 ministries in all, I believe, that were involved in the supplementary estimates this time. We know the total amount involved: \$1.8 billion. We've done the math over here and entered the results into the debate. We are essentially debating \$5 million a minute with the time that the government allocated for debate of this massive amount of money that they spent above and beyond what was agreed to in the budget that this House debated and voted on just last May.

Now, I want to refer back to a specific comment made in the exchange between the Minister of Advanced Education and myself on November 22. I had asked a series of questions. One of the questions had to do with when the minister was going to

put the advisory council and other regulations into place regarding the access to the future fund that [I said] will transform this fund, absent those regulations, absent the existence of that council right now, from something that could be seen as being akin to the minister's personal piggy bank into an accountable decision-making body with clear rules and regulations.

8:50

Now, I am taking the minister's response out of context because I just want to quote one very short part from that. I don't want to leave the impression that I was dissatisfied with the minister's overall answer there or anything like that. I just need to refer to this specific quote from the minister. It goes like this.

In fact, I think he referenced it as the minister's personal piggy bank, which is really quite an offensive way to talk about public money. I can assure you that I would never treat public money in that way, and no member of this government would consider that.

Well, without meaning to cause the Minister of Advanced Education offence – although one of the things that I learned in a long career in radio is that you can only control your part of the message that goes out over the radio. You cannot control how people are going to interpret what you say. You can't control the spin they're going to put on it. The fact is, Mr. Chairman, that there maybe should be some offence taken there.

There's some offence taken on this side of the House because it looks like – and I don't mean specifically the Minister of Advanced Education here – a whole series of personal piggy banks when you're confronted with \$1.8 billion in unbudgeted spending and supplementary estimates that are presented with the opportunity for six hours of debate and the notion that: well, if we don't get to a scheduled department on the scheduled day for debate, we'll just gloss over that department altogether, and maybe we can sort of pick it up with the trash when we're debating Bill 51.

This is no way to run a railroad or a government or a province or a democracy. I think that that is a concept that the government members opposite are having a really hard time after 12 years in power, 12 years of doing whatever they please, getting their pointed little heads around. I think it's about time that the government members opposite went off for a weekend retreat somewhere or

perhaps four years wandering in the wilderness, reconnecting with the people of Alberta, with the values of the people of Alberta, with the values that got them elected in the first place, which they seem to have lost all connection with, values of thrift and stewardship and fiscal prudence. Mr. Chairman, as far as I can see in this whole sad, sorry, pathetic process, that's all gone out the window to be replaced by featherbedding, arrogance, complacency, and this notion that, you know, when the government decides to engage in off-budget spending, it's nobody's business but the government's.

Mr. Chairman, the government works for the people of Alberta. It doesn't work the other way around. They've forgotten this basic first rule in their job description. You know, even if we had an extra hour or two or six to debate these supplementary estimates, I don't think we could ever have enough time to get these government members' heads reoriented back around to where their heads ought to be if they are going to be true public servants.

This government, Mr. Chairman, needs to go. It's old, it's tired, and it's out of touch. Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak on these supplementary estimates with sort of a grab bag of different departments and specific concerns that have come to our attention as a caucus not just over these past few weeks but since the spring sitting, when we initially approved the budget that we're now supplementing to such a high degree.

First, I was curious to look back and see the parting comments that I had made, Mr. Chair, in regard to the spring budget that we approved. I found it interesting to note that one of my big concerns – and it still is today – is this idea of deliberately lowballing the revenues that the government would collect and thus create the structure of how we build the budget. Lo and behold, I guess it was to no one's surprise that, in fact, our budget surplus grew to a tremendous extent. You know, the day that we finished with the spring session, I had made a note that the price of oil was at \$48 a barrel, and now I think we're up to something like \$59.

Now, there are certain problems or perils in perhaps guessing that your price of energy would be moving up in such a dramatic fashion as it has for the past six months, but the budget was based on a much lower price for both oil and natural gas than even the \$48. It made it, I think, a deceptive way to make this initial budget in the first place. We all knew that we were in for a tremendous surplus and that, in fact, many of the departments that had put forward budgets were not fully disclosing what they were intending to do as far as the responsibilities that they had for the coming year. So as previous speakers have mentioned, I think that it is confusing for the public to perhaps know in terms of full disclosure what is going to happen and when it's going to happen. It creates this culture of where the money sort of comes down from on high and individual projects are announced often four or five times just kind of out of the air.

One thing that I find particularly distressing about this very large supplementary budget estimate that we're now speaking on and will inevitably probably pass is that I think it creates a deceptive and confusing way of looking at government. So what I'm seeing to a large extent is that a lot of people who sort of put in their requests over the last couple of years are now calling in their chits, so to speak, to get their little piece of this surplus. It creates a very ad hoc way to plan for the future, Mr. Chairman.

I would suggest that in a number of these specific ministries it's not a question of spending the money. Certainly, we do need to spend money. There's a deficit in infrastructure; there's a deficit in quite a number of areas over the last 12 or 13 years of underfunding

public institutions in this province. At the same time, the helter-skelter way in which these budget surplus estimates are now coming in and the way they're applied to the supplementaries I think does not one any real service at all.

Just to look through various ministries here to give some examples, with SRD, Sustainable Resource Development, one problem I had in the spring – and it still does not seem to be addressed in any real way – is the problem that we have of not funding or taking proper stewardship towards our provincial parks with all of this extra money that's around. Provincial park plans is not something that is renewable in any way. Certainly, it's self-sustaining given the proper stewardship, but it's not something that we can grow on trees.

I think that what's happened in the last dozen years or so is that the amount of workers, either provincial park wardens or people working on the infrastructure for provincial parks, has been very sadly lacking, and still here today now with this budget supplement and the budget from the spring we still don't see any real progress. You know, I'm getting so much information from people in protected zones, provincial parks, who are saying that the parks are in a terrible state of repair and that no one is there to provide security for the parks. Lots of people are using them in inappropriate ways, you know: cutting trees and running ATVs there. Otherwise, there's no one to administer that thing. So I think that money is lacking for our provincial parks and protected areas, and we need to become much more serious about that and, in fact, designate more areas while we still can. Things are changing and growing and developing so quickly, Mr. Chair, in our province that we only have a small window of opportunity to protect special areas.

9:00

Again, in the area of the Solicitor General and Public Security one sore point I'm hearing about a lot from my own constituency is the lack of investment in new positions for police officers. I know that the hon. member has said that he has created some, but my sources tell me that, in fact, this just meets the rate of attrition for police who are retiring in our province and not creating new positions like we do need. Alberta's population is growing, perhaps at a greater rate than any other in the Confederation. We have a lot of movement of people, and there is an increasing crime rate that each member, I'm sure, in every constituency in Alberta would attest to being unacceptable.

So my position is very clear – and I think that I am echoing the concerns of my constituency and probably millions across this province – that we need to create at least 500 new police positions in the province of Alberta as soon as possible. I know that I'm hearing some signals that something like that might happen, but let's remember to create new FTEs and not just replacement positions. A focus on community policing, I think, at this juncture would be very much appreciated, especially in the urban areas.

In regard to Environment, one of the problems that I have is that this department seems to be being swallowed up by the Energy department. A case in point is the new MOSS strategy for northeastern Alberta. Please, don't get me wrong. I do appreciate the difficulties in managing such massive projects up in the Fort McMurray area and the difficulty associated with providing an integrated environmental strategy, but one of the problems is that I think the Department of Environment has lost its teeth to effectively and independently assess new projects as they come on board, and, you know, this is creating a very potentially difficult situation, Mr. Chairman. I would suggest that we need to look at it more honestly than we have been in this past 12 months.

Also, my suggestion – and I think that it's being echoed in some way across the floor, but I think that we need to be much more

serious about it – is to use much more of our energy windfall revenues to create sustainable, alternative energy sources in this province, not just to perhaps hope that industry might bite onto the odd windmill or what have you but, in fact, to take the bull by the horns and take some of our royalty money, a good whack of our royalty money, and invest it in a new sort of energy corporation, an energy corporation that could not only perhaps expand and meet the needs of our energy future here in Alberta but assist the rest of our country as well. There is a tremendous investment potential for alternative energy systems around the world. With our tremendous resource revenue that we're bringing in at this moment, I think we're in a position to take a leadership role in that regard. We're not doing that at this time, and I think it would take a much more focused set of resolutions from this government to do so.

In Seniors and Community Development we see a lot of investment in infrastructure, building new facilities in this province, Mr. Chairman. The problem – and it seems to be a perennial one – is that we're not meeting the staffing levels that would be adequate to provide the services that each of these new facilities might be there for. When we build new hospital expansions and new seniors' centres, long-term care facilities, and whatnot, it seems a bit ironic that if these buildings stand with insufficient staffing, they in fact are not functioning as they were designed to do. You know, a lot of the problems that we're seeing recently in terms of the lack of care or the crisis in long-term care and confusion about this is a lack of vision and direction in terms of the staffing that goes into these public institutions.

You know, we are responsible here in this Legislature to provide these services, these public institutions of health care and education to the public. If we are not meeting those needs, then we are not administering these funds responsibly. I would suggest that, in fact, the latter is the case, Mr. Chair, at this point because of the continuing problems in delivery of health care and in long-term care and housing for seniors in the province of Alberta right now. It's an embarrassment of riches, yet, you know, the money is not going directly to these sore points where we need it to be.

In regard to other ministries, Mr. Chairman, in Education, certainly, we're seeing some hopeful signs, but again, you know, the information that I'm receiving is that the class sizes, especially in division 2, are still not going down. While we might be considering new schools here and there, which is great, and most of the Learning Commission has been accepted on paper, the practice of funding our school systems still seems to be quite uneven at best.

It's a very time-sensitive subject because as each group of students passes through our system, that's the only opportunity we have to educate them. While we might be reflecting on this for a couple or three more years or four more years to reassess whether or not the monies to meet the needs of the Learning Commission are going through, a whole other generation of students has already graduated through the school system in large classrooms, perhaps unacceptably large, and with other resources lacking as well. Speed, I think, is of the essence in regard to secondary education, K to 12, and I would certainly encourage us to move post-haste to meet the needs of the Learning Commission in the best way possible.

In terms of postsecondary education, once again the very best that the Conservative government can do is Bill 1 from the spring, a great focus and a great deal of money on this postsecondary education problem that we have. Still, you know, in so many key areas as I travelled around the province to different colleges and universities, they're just not meeting those needs that people are bringing up. The needs are immediate financing to make it affordable for all persons to go to university. Still, at this juncture, I am seeing a lot of people making the choice not to go to postsecondary because they just can't afford it.

You know, we're losing. The very most conservative way to look at our population in this province, Mr. Chair, these are perhaps the students who would be best suited intellectually to go onto postsecondary but because of their socioeconomic conditions we lose those people. Again, it's a window of opportunity that closes rapidly as students leave high school and get older and move on to jobs. If they're not going to postsecondary because they can't afford it, well, that's just a crying shame.

Also in postsecondary a lot of infrastructure pledges in the budget but a problem of uncertainty in regard to staffing. I hear all the time about these beautiful buildings at the University of Alberta, for example, here in Edmonton that are just using temporary workers, and it's very unstable, and they can't attract the best staff necessarily because they don't feel as though they can put roots down because they don't know what's going to happen next.

Finally, just to close off, Mr. Chair, that's the structural planning problem of underestimating one's revenues in general, be it a government or your own personal revenues. By underestimating them deliberately, I would say that we're doing a disservice to the long-term planning for this province. We're building something for the future that lasts beyond the next budget cycle, that goes on to the next five or more years. That's what each of these departments requires, and that's what each of these departments deserve.

You know, there's been a lot of talk about a dearth of democracy in the province of Alberta, and it's not just from these quarters that this information is coming. I think we owe it to the people of Alberta to demonstrate that we are in fact interested in a proper process and transparency that comes with using this Legislature as it was designed to be used. We can make some moves even in this session. We still have an opportunity, for example, with Public Accounts. We have an opportunity to perhaps amend how Public Accounts is run and how it casts a critical eye on the finances of the province, and we can do that tomorrow.

9:10

So I think, certainly, we do have lots of potential in this province. We have a lot of potential because we have such great citizens who are interested in the future. We have some resources that our coming our way at this moment. Let's make the best use of those things and not build our budgets in an ad hoc, sort of secretive way. Let's put it all out in the open for the people of Alberta to decide in the best possible way.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a great privilege to stand and discuss estimates, Bill 51. I want to focus on a couple of departments, primarily Environment and Health, but will have a few comments about some others as well.

Clearly, the environment faces some serious challenges in the 21st century, and the goal of protecting and conserving the environment is a priority for most if not all Albertans. We've heard increasingly through surveys how they place this as a very high priority right next to health and education. The recognition that natural capital – that is, the water resources, forestry, wildlife, natural habitat, clean air – has a value inherent to it and must be balanced with the other resource needs and values is becoming increasingly pressing.

The importance of integrated land-use planning is another issue that highlights why Albertans feel that the future has to be addressed in a much more serious way and, in fact, that priority zones for planning need to be addressed. For example, a serious commitment to the eastern slopes as a recreation area, as a watershed, as a hunting and fishing area, as a tourism area has to be at least as . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the floor.

Dr. Swann: We have to be thinking about the eastern slopes, in other words, as a vital area for natural capital. The degree to which we exploit natural resources over protecting some of this natural capital will be judged in the future, I think, in a harsh way.

We need stronger legislation rather than guidelines, as I mentioned earlier in the House, in relation to the reclamation of old industrial sites, oil and gas sites. It's a serious question to ask why there are so few prosecutions in the province in relation to the ongoing smaller and larger spills that go on across the province. We must send a clear message that the polluters pay, that they are not asked for and give an apology afterwards. They must be more than encouraged and educated and admonished. They must be fined to get the message that this is not acceptable in Alberta.

Sustainable development has established principles, and this government supported them over the last decade in writing. It's not clear how these are being measured, how these principles are being lived out, and for many Albertans there's a growing lack of confidence that we are balancing appropriately the long-term needs of the surface environment, the subsurface environment, and the people in relation to extraction of resources.

Reclamation, then, is a serious issue and will leave a legacy to our children. We must have an orphan fund similar to the oil industry in this province, a clean-up fund that's industry based, to address some of the public liability in many of the sites that now exist across the province and which will default to the public as a result of them leaving the business, becoming bankrupt, and abandoning their responsibility. We need regulations for more timely reclamation. We need Alberta Environment to have sufficient staff to inspect sites. They need more in the way of resources to do that. At the present time we rely on industry to report its own faults. This is a perilous course to take in terms of protecting the environment. We need Alberta Environment staff to evaluate before and after reclamation to ensure that the job has been done. We cannot rely on a consultant's report to assess and provide reclamation certificates that relieve companies of liability into the future without doing more on-site testing. Ten per cent of sites simply isn't good enough.

In relation to climate change Alberta has been recognized as the number one polluter in the country, and it's a shame that we have not seen a more proactive position and the setting of clear limits on air emissions. We have an international commitment. We simply have to do better. The Kyoto agreement is a baby step towards reducing our impact on the environment. We have to do at least as well as 6 per cent below 1990, and indeed we are increasing and are well above 25 per cent higher than the 1990 standard for greenhouse gas emissions. This cannot continue.

More and more scientists are clamouring for a stronger commitment as we see increasingly unstable weather patterns, increasing infectious diseases moving north, the dramatic changes in our Arctic, the flooding in some of the coastal communities in the south, the poorest countries who have the greatest to lose and the least resources to cope with some of the impacts of climate change. We have to do better than that in terms of our commitment to climate change. The U.S., in fact, is ahead of Canada in spite of not having made the commitment to get lower than the Kyoto accord. Why is that? Why is industry setting the agenda in Alberta for climate change? The government has been elected to be an intermediary between the private interest and the public interest.

I have a question for the Department of Environment around the carbon dioxide pipeline and the CO₂ injection plans. He has indicated, at least in the press, that \$1.5 billion will be committed to

that. We need to see a lot more evidence that the cost benefit is there, that the technology is there, and that the return on the investment will be worth it.

In relation to specific challenges in the environment one of the most pressing this season was Lake Wabamun, and we still don't know what that's going to cost to clean up. I think we need to know what kind of fines are going to be levied against the company and how the First Nations are dealing with that issue, how it's affecting their own lives and their businesses. I don't think we've had enough feedback and enough connections with First Nations around Lake Wabamun to understand that as well as we should.

I understand that the supplemental budgets this session related to increasing waste management contracts, and I'm pleased to see that there is a commitment to recycling and especially the e-cycling program. I understand that there are some real problems, though, around Rimbey and a real question about how much of the electronic waste is actually waste and how much of it could be reused, in fact, if they had the staffing to assess some of these computers and how they could be refurbished and for a very low cost returned to use, especially in some of the nongovernment organizations, some of the poorer areas of the country, and some of the poorer countries of the world. I hope that we can see some cost-benefit in investing in some better assessment of the electronics before they're actually recycled and deconstructed, which they may well need to be but in many cases could be reused with a little bit of technical support.

9:20

In relation to water protection we still see a lot more rhetoric than reality on the ground in terms of the Water for Life strategy. I heard from the minister that something like \$150 million were released to Alberta Environment for water programs. It's still not clear from the budget whether some of that is included in this supplemental budget or what the millions are going to be spent on. It's my understanding – and it's not defined anywhere – that much of this is going into water infrastructure and not into the Water for Life strategy per se but into water quality issues. If that's the case, we still have a long way to go to implementing the Water for Life strategy, which receives only \$5 million per year and is expected somehow to protect the quality and the ecosystems and the quantity of water into the distant future for the major river systems across this province. This is not a commitment to water conservation and protection. We need to do better than that.

We need better science. One of the issues that has increasingly raised its head is how well we're doing on groundwater and how soon we're going to get an accurate inventory of the groundwater in this province. It's clearly an issue across this country. One of the Senators, I believe, has recently asked for a commitment across the country, provincial and federal, to examine more carefully our groundwater resources and the serious implications global warming and climate change have for our water supplies into this coming decade.

We are anticipating a new water bill in the spring for another request for an interbasin transfer – I think that's a very serious proposal – into the special areas. Albeit the Minister of Finance's area, it has serious implications for the long-term sustainability of water in this province and the precedent that it sets about taking water to people instead of expecting people to live within their means, conserve, and commit to adequate in-stream flows and the priority for people to move towards the water instead of awaiting increasing technology and costs and infrastructure to take water to them. I need to see a lot more evidence that that is a cost-effective measure in the special areas.

New technologies in coal-bed methane have raised serious

questions about the long-term impacts on water supply, water quality, including southeastern Alberta. We have called for a moratorium to assess more clearly the longer term impacts on water quality and water quantity. Many, many Albertans have raised concerns and sent petitions around the issue of understanding better the groundwater and the potential for irreparably damaging that through some of the new technologies of the new nonconventional oil and gas development and, specifically, coal-bed methane.

In relation to health I wanted to mention a couple of issues. I was disappointed this year in relation to the negotiations with residents and interns in the hospital sector. For the second term in a row they were denied real meetings and substantive discussions around their contracts. This is very discouraging for the budding physicians in this province and not setting a good tone for attracting physicians to this province.

On the question of privatization and the third way we've seen a flip and a flop and another flip since this first began its discussions. After the May symposium the minister indicated that we were going to move more along the status quo. Then by October there was a clear discussion around increasing the rate of privatization, examining even the medical services that are covered under our present health care insurance plan. This was quickly cut off by the Premier. Now again it appears as if we are supporting and are in some ways aided by the Aon Corporation's assessment despite its clear conflict of interest and corruption charges both in Canada and the U.S. This is disturbing in terms of our future priority for the ministry of health.

People in Alberta are very concerned, as they should be, that this government does not know what it's doing in relation to health care. There's been no serious commitment to reform in the health care system, to looking at ways of improving team functioning in the workplace, to emphasizing primary health care and community health centres, to streamlining the administrative roles and responsibilities, and to critically analyzing the unhealthy workplaces that many of our health care workers are working in, that sap their energy and increase their stress levels.

All of these have to do with improving the health and the quality of care that we can expect from a publicly funded health care system, which most Albertans continue to see as a priority. There's been over the last decade a consistent erosion of public funding and a predictable demand, then, for alternatives, which this government has interpreted as a need for increased privatization, which will neither increase quality nor over the long term improve access but will increase the conflict of interest for physicians who are able to practise in both the public and the private sectors and will unfortunately be in a position of trying to judge what is best for their patient and at the same time judge what is best for their pocketbook. This is clearly untenable.

In relation to physiotherapy it's disappointing, again, that this eminently effective preventive mode has been delisted in terms of its funding by Alberta health care. This is a false economy, to be sure, and leaves seniors particularly vulnerable to less than adequate rehabilitation, less than adequate strength training, and increasingly vulnerable to falls and subsequent increased hospital use and health care costs, not to mention premature death. Physiotherapy is an essential medical service that should be funded through the public purse, and it should be seen as what it is: an investment in people, an investment in health and well-being, an investment in their full functioning and contributing to society.

Just a couple more comments, then, Mr. Chairman. I've had a number of letters from persons who care for persons with developmental disabilities increasingly feeling the pinch in relation to salaries that are well below what they can reasonably live on in a dignified way of life. I hope that this government can look at the

crucial role and the vital caring that persons caring for persons with developmental disabilities are playing in our culture and look at a serious review of funding for salaries for those who care for persons with developmental disabilities, a very special service, a very special population.

In relation to Agriculture, Food and Rural Development I had a couple of questions from their supplemental budget that had to do with continued public money sustaining game ranches that have no viable market and the question of public money increasingly going to game ranchers who clearly cannot maintain a reasonable economic balance, in part due only to chronic wasting disease, which has meant the death knell for elk velvet. It has meant increasingly that even the meat market has been threatened.

But quite apart from that, it has never been successful in this country or beyond. It's not clear and never has been from the budgets I've seen – and I'm not sure whether it's in the supplemental budget for the CAIS support program – whether any of this CAIS support money is going to game ranches. That's a serious question for us as a government since we have on behalf of the people of Alberta financially supported game ranching in this province despite the fact that it's threatening wildlife and, potentially, human health with chronic wasting disease.

That's all I have at this time, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll try to keep my comments brief. I'm going to guess at this point that I could go the full 20 minutes; I'm not sure. I might just be the last speaker before this gets voted this evening.

I just wanted to acknowledge that custom would normally dictate that the Finance critic would lead the debate on behalf of the Official Opposition on Bill 51. Last evening when this bill opened in second reading, I chose not to do that, Mr. Chairman. I had a sense of duty to my colleagues in the opposition caucus who had not had an opportunity to speak to the supplementary supply estimates in committee. There were several of them who were here last night particularly for that reason because they had departments that hadn't been addressed at all.

9:30

Just as an example, we had last night the critic for Community Development here, who was hoping to have an opportunity to speak to the \$27 million in supplementary supply that hadn't been addressed yet. We had someone here hoping to speak to the Municipal Affairs supplementary supply of \$138 million and our critic for Seniors and Community Supports hoping to speak to the \$109 million that was being asked for. Unfortunately, despite my efforts to give them as much time as possible, the government chose last night to take advantage of a standing order, Standing Order 61(3), to throttle debate in second on this bill.

It was unfortunate that they chose to take advantage of that. Nevertheless, they did, and it just lent even more credence to the complaints that a number of opposition members have voiced both within the Official Opposition caucus and the third party, and I believe even the member from the Alliance Party has mentioned it as well. That is the very short amount of time that has been dedicated to debating some awfully large numbers. I'll quickly reiterate: six hours in supplementary estimates for \$1.8 billion; \$300 million an hour, or to break it down even closer, \$5 million a minute. Even at that I don't think most Albertans can quite comprehend the amount of money that was being debated in this Assembly and how quickly we were going through it and, in fact, the number of

departments that were receiving no debate at all, Mr. Chairman. So that is a frustration for us.

I'm still sorry, despite the fact that it looks like we're going to manage to conclude debate this evening within the allotted time. I'm disappointed for my colleagues that were here last night who had hoped to have an opportunity to speak to this bill in second reading and never got that. Unfortunately, now they're going to have some questions that may never get asked, and that is a tragedy, I believe, for the people of Alberta, who certainly have every right and every expectation to have an understanding of how and why their dollars, their very hard-earned tax dollars, are being spent.

Mr. Chairman, as to this particular bill, Bill 51, I think that this speaks to a much larger issue. Already, I've only been here for a year, and I find myself using the same arguments that I used in bill debate back in the spring; that is, it seems to me that year after year this government either intentionally or otherwise underestimates the amount of revenue that they're going to take in. I certainly can't say that they don't spend enough because the budget that was passed in the spring was \$26 billion, substantially more than any budget that this House has ever passed before.

Notwithstanding that, here we are only a scant six months later debating Bill 51, which is going to supply the government with another \$1.8 billion on top of the \$26 billion that we approved in the spring. As I said, we're only six months into the year. Lord knows that when we're back here in March and we look at a further supplementary supply bill, which we all know we will because the Premier has already acknowledged that he has committed more than \$7 billion of the expected \$10 billion surplus – so we know for sure that there will be another supplementary bill in the spring. I don't know how big it's going to be. I'm not sure if anybody on the other side of the House would be willing to share that number with me now. I suspect not. But it's going to be big.

It speaks to the much larger problem. Most economists will say that if you've got surpluses year after year after year, you're either not spending enough money or taxing too much. Clearly, one of those two has to be the case here. It would appear to me as if we're spending enough money, so I have to wonder on behalf of all Albertans if we're not taxing too much.

I know that the \$400 rebate program, which is being discussed under Bill 43, is meant in some way to give something back to Albertans, although it's very, very controversial, and several members on the other side have admitted that at least half of the correspondence that they're getting into their offices is against the idea of the rebates. We had one member, the Member for Lethbridge-West, acknowledge that 90 per cent of the correspondence into his office is against the idea of the rebates. So I think that that's clearly not what Albertans are looking for in the way of getting something back.

The Official Opposition has talked for some time now, going back prior to last fall's election, about the idea of eliminating health care premiums for all Albertans. I think that that is something that would give a significant tax break to everybody, and it would be something that would be ongoing. I think that Albertans have a right to expect that.

It's been suggested by some that we can't afford that, and I take exception to that comment. Eight hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars a year is what it would cost this province to eliminate health care premiums for everybody. Clearly, based on the surplus history in this province, that's quite affordable, quite sustainable.

We have had over the last six years, not counting this year, \$22 billion in surplus in this province, and more than \$15 billion of that, Mr. Chairman, has been unbudgeted surplus. What that means is

that at least \$7 billion in the last six years has been budgeted surplus. Every year we budget for a surplus. Every year, including the year 2001 with the 9/11 tragedies in the States, we have managed to have at least a \$1 billion surplus in this province. So, clearly, if the decision was made, if the political will was there to give all Albertans a tax break by permanently immediately eliminating the health care premium tax, we could do that today, and we could sustain it. I think that most Albertans would very much appreciate that.

Bill 51, again, \$1.8 billion in supplementary supply. I'm just going to once again acknowledge the Municipal Affairs minister for his \$138 million that he's asking for in supplementary supply. Every single penny of that is for disaster relief. Mr. Chairman, I would submit to this House that if we're going to have supplementary supply and if we're going to be spending money outside of the budget, that's the sort of thing that I think Albertans expect supplementary supply to be used for. That's the sort of thing that Albertans can understand. Clearly, you can't predict when there's going to be severe flooding, a 100-year flood for the second time in a short period of years in southern Alberta. You can't predict when there's going to be a major forest fire that causes hundreds of millions of dollars of damage. Those are the sorts of things that Albertans understand that the government may need money for outside of the budget process.

Based on the comments that I've seen in the media, based on the letters that I've received in my office, and based on the comments I've had with members of the community on the street in my constituency, clearly Albertans expect the government to be able to come up with a budget plan and stick to it. If we have things like hospitals and schools that are so desperately needed, those should be in the budget. We shouldn't be literally spending every single extra penny as it comes in. Again, I think history would dictate that, by and large, that's the plan that this government has: to spend every single extra penny as it comes out of the ground.

In my estimation – and many agree with me; in fact, the other night when I mentioned this in this House, I saw many heads nodding on the other side of the House – that is no plan at all. Albertans deserve better than a government that simply spends every extra penny as it becomes available. Again, I'm not necessarily disputing the need for hospitals and schools, although I would question whether or not we really need two new hospitals so close together – Sherwood Park and Fort Saskatchewan – when even the Premier of this province has admitted that that was a political decision and that one hospital would have been sufficient.

In fact, it makes me wonder what the reaction of members opposite might have been if the Prime Minister of this country had made some sort of an announcement, let's say – I don't know – a contract to build airplanes, and he had given one contract to one company in Winnipeg and another one to a company in Saskatoon and suggested that the only reason he let two contracts was because it was a political decision. It's just not a good enough reason for the taxpayers of this province.

9:40

My real concern, I suppose, when it comes to the surplus spending is that, again, history dictates that year after year we go through this same process, and what it illustrates to me, as I said, is that there is no plan, although certainly I've suggested before to the members of this government that if they use the word "plan" often enough, perhaps they'll start to believe that they do have one. If you're going to have surpluses year after year after year, not counting this year when the surplus is expected to be \$10 billion or more, we've been averaging about \$4 billion in surplus a year, Mr. Chairman, and there's no realistic reason to expect that that's not going to continue

for a number of years, based on history. If that's the case, then Albertans deserve to know that there is a plan not just for how to have spent this year's \$10 billion surplus. My God, let's start thinking about how we're going to deal with the surplus next year, if it should happen to be \$8 billion or \$10 billion, and in the year '07-08 and in '08-09.

This is an incredible opportunity for Albertans, and it's not good enough just to simply have the Premier flying around the province in a government jet . . . [interjection] It's not a jet. You're right. It's a turboprop, I guess, but it certainly does allow him to smoke.

It's just not good enough to have him flitting about the province in the government turboprop, announcing hundreds of millions of dollars day after day, and then bringing it to the House after the fact in the form of a supplementary bill, and it's already gone. Albertans had no input into that. There's an argument on the other side that every dollar gets passed in the House, but of course we've already talked about the fact that it gets passed in the House at the rate of \$5 million a minute. That's, again, just not good enough for Albertans.

So I would strongly urge all of the members of this House to start thinking about the future of this province and not just the next quarter and how many millions or in this case – we're fortunate this year – how many billions of dollars might be available to spend on some pet project in the next quarter. Let's start talking about the next quarter century or the next two quarter centuries. Let's look at what this province could be if, rather than coming to this House with an appropriation bill every six months that's worth \$2 billion or more, we actually had a plan for how to invest those dollars wisely, if we had a plan for how to make sure that when the oil is gone or when it's not \$60 a barrel any longer or when there's no market for oil anymore and alternative technologies have been advanced and people aren't knocking down our doors to get our oil. Let's have a plan to make sure that all Albertans will continue to benefit from the great opportunity that we have today, as opposed to simply the bricks and mortar, ad hoc spending that we're doing right now.

Another thing I didn't touch on but that certainly causes me concern is that there's an awful lot of money in here – I believe my colleague from Edmonton-Centre mentioned this the other night – for bricks and mortar when it comes to health care and education, hospitals and schools, but very, very, very little in the way of supplementary spending to address the ongoing operation of those facilities, to address staffing, to address sustainability of those facilities to make sure that, you know, they don't end up as boarded-up brick edifices to this government, as we saw happen in the mid-1990s after the so-called Klein revolution, if I can call it that without contravening House rules. I'm not sure. I'm not meaning to name a member, but certainly the media and I think the public refer to it as that.

We ended up with a lot of the government buildings that were constructed in the late '80s and early '90s being literally boarded up, sold off. I'm not sure if they were sold off for a dollar, but they were certainly sold off, many of them, below market value. As a result, I think Alberta taxpayers took a big hit for that. I would hate to see our legacy from this tremendous opportunity that we have today be boarded-up, brick buildings in towns and communities across this province, and that be all we have left to show for the fact that oil was \$60 or \$80 a barrel and natural gas was \$12 or \$13 a gigajoule. It reminds me again of the bumper sticker that many of us sported on the backs of our vehicles in the mid-1980s: "Please, God, let there be another oil boom. I promise not to piss it all away next time." My fear is, Mr. Chairman, that if we're not careful, we're going to find ourselves with that bumper sticker on our cars again. That would be a travesty for all Albertans, and I would hate to see that.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thought that I was seven down the way. I just want to comment a little bit more. I was kind of rushed on a few of the things I wanted to cover before our evening break.

Going back to the plan again, Mr. Chairman, and what we're doing. It seems like this is a classic case where the money is literally burning a hole in our pocket. I'm very concerned that we don't have an actual formula set up for what we will do. It was almost a blessing to have the debt for so many years because we had to be responsible, and we understood that we needed to pay that off.

Mr. R. Miller: That's when they had a plan.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Now that that's paid off, we need to pass a new bill on the percentage that we're going to put into the heritage trust fund. What I'd really like them to understand – and I'll refer back to the Scouts. I was at a youth conference with Scouts a while back, and one of the speakers got up and talked about the importance of restraint. He handed out a package of candy worth \$5 to each of the young men and told them: "Hold this. You can't open it yet." At that point he said, "I'll give each of you the opportunity: you can have the candy, or I'll give you \$20." We were going to be out there for a week. Out of that group of seven or eight kids there were a couple that wanted the candy although it was only worth \$5 and they could have had \$20 to buy it in a week's time. It seems like that's the case that we've got here. We've got \$1.8 billion that could do a lot for our province, yet we won't be patient enough to sit and think and put a plan out on what really would be the best value for those dollars spent.

I just would really urge the government to slow down. I mean, we've done this already, but we're going to have a surplus in the next quarter and the quarter after that, to start putting it away into the heritage trust fund. We talk about inflation-proofing it. Well, it should be at \$50 billion, a hundred billion dollars, not at the \$12 billion, and there's nothing there.

The one area I also want to talk a little bit on and I referred to just for a few minutes is the superb effort that we get from the young people in rural Alberta. They don't always get the curriculum and the opportunities that the bigger cities have, and it's a concern in my area as they try to balance their education funding. It would be great to see, whether you had it in a scholarship fund or something set up for rural schools, that when they achieve such accomplishments as Raymond did in winning the tier 1 football here in the province, they receive some sort of incentive and reward for their hard work and achievements. It would be very pleasing, I think, to many rural areas if we were to recognize more and to reward them with extra funding for curriculum, extracurricular sports, and other areas where they put a great deal of work.

I just want to refer once again to the little town of Warner and not enough kids there in the school. They worked very hard. They've started that girls' hockey school there. It would be a wonderful addition to our province. It would be the gem of Canada, a growing ground for the women's Olympic hockey team. We seem to be missing some of these ideal opportunities. Whether they put in a \$2 million or \$8 million facility, it would be something that we would have for many, many years into the future and look back on with fond memories, as we have with many different institutes that we've started and seen the benefit of as we go.

9:50

There are just so many opportunities. It's hard to believe with

\$1.8 billion what we really could be doing if we were to sit back and have a long, hard debate and put everything on the table and say, "Well, here's all the projects that we're looking at," whether it's highway 63 twinning or the Warner hockey school, and really evaluate them and see where we can benefit Albertans. You know, is it increased research on brain surgery or helping the autistic? There are so many areas that we could, and I feel that we should, be putting these dollars toward. So I once again would say that I wish we'd take caution. We're going to have billions more coming in in the next months, years to come. It would be great to start building up a war chest and really have a priority list on where we want to spend this money.

With that, I'll turn the time over to someone else to share their ideas on where possibly we could be utilizing this \$1.8 billion and that coming in the future.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd be remiss if I didn't bring out the infrastructure shortcomings of Calgary-Varsity, specifically the University of Calgary. The university has made the decision – basically it's been forced to make the decision – to borrow hundreds of millions of dollars for a series of projects, among them the digital library that's going to serve all postsecondary institutions through the SuperNet and the various linkages. The university shouldn't have to be going into further debt to promote postsecondary education.

It concerns me, and here would be an area where I'd like to help out the Minister of Advanced Education. The 80 and a half million dollar figure for postsecondary facilities infrastructure is not going to realize the 15,000 new seats by 2007, which the department has promised, without more investment in postsecondary infrastructure, whether it be at the University of Calgary, Mount Royal, SAIT, NAIT, throughout the province. Unless we get under way with creating the infrastructure to house these extra students, this goal of 15,000 basically a year from now is not going to happen. So I would like to see more spending in that particular area.

The government has recently acknowledged the University of Alberta's purchase of the former Bay building to have a downtown campus, and that's a very worthwhile expenditure. The ministry has also supplied some money to Bow Valley College for its extension, but it's about half of what is required. I would like to see an expanded downtown campus, kind of one-stop shopping. You could have representation from Mount Royal, from the University of Calgary, from the Alberta College of Art and Design, from the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology in that expanded central campus so that from a transportation point of view all services could be centrally located and easier transfers from one area to the other.

My concern is also that if by 2020 we're going to have 60,000 spaces, which are very much in need, we have to see that infrastructure under way. Again, I refer to the cranes as being the example of upcoming infrastructure. They're in very short supply in Calgary. I would like to offer to the Minister of Advanced Education my support for increasing the infrastructure budget. Let's get students into those seats. Let's turn out more postsecondary graduates, and let's give opportunities for high school students to a greater degree to access postsecondary opportunities within this province, whether it be in Calgary, Edmonton, or in satellite campuses throughout.

Thank you very much.

[The clauses of Bill 51 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 47

Alberta Association of Former MLAs Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered on this bill? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, these are mostly housekeeping issues, I believe. It seems to me that this bill requires a clear statement of its purpose, its mission. That would be one thing I would really like to see done and clearly stated.

One of the objectives I'd like to add to the bill, if I may suggest, is to inform students and the public about how government works in Alberta: the machinery, how it operates. That kind of endeavour would be very helpful.

On the matter of elections, which I believe is item 16(1), it says, "Within 3 months of the coming into force of this Act, the Speaker must appoint 7 former MLAs, who shall constitute the Board." Why don't we just have an election based on all the MLAs available in the province and have a board selected out of all MLAs? Just an ordinary election. I don't understand why this has to be appointed by one person. Who does it? Who does the appointment? Let's have an election.

An Hon. Member: The Speaker.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, the Speaker. Let's clarify that if that's the case, and I still would object to that if that's the case.

In terms of the mission statement, I'd like to see a mission statement because I believe it would clarify the role of this group, the Alberta association of former MLAs, and interface to make sure that there's no conflict with other groups in the province such as Rotary, Chambers of Commerce, Lions Club, et cetera, et cetera.

Those are three or four things I'd like to see addressed in this bill. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung previously provided to all members an amendment. I don't know that you've assigned a particular number or letter to it, but it's the one that all members have on their desks, which reads: "All former MLAs are eligible to become members of the Association in accordance with any bylaws of the Association not less than one year after they cease to be MLAs." This was a substitution for section 6(1). At this point there has been no discussion. It was introduced, but it's yet to be debated.

The Chair: Hon. member, sorry to interrupt you, but there is an amendment on the floor, amendment A1.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Just to refresh everyone's memory, A1 was introduced just before we rose and reported the last time this was debated. You all have copies of that. They have been distributed.

Did you want to speak on the amendment?

10:00

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. What we're trying to achieve with this amendment is that you don't automatically become a member of the club, that there has to be at least call it a cooling-off period, a period of separation of at least one year before you qualify for this club. The concern is that there needs to be some sort of distance between being in a role of power and being in a club which may have considerably more power to it than what would first appear in Bill 47. The feeling is that there needs to be that period of separation. You don't slide from being an elected member right into what could be a very powerful association. We suggest that there be a year cooling-off period when a person leaves the department before they can seek a position of influence again with the government. That is the basis of this particular amendment.

I would invite any discussion from other members on the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In addressing the amendment, I can understand that there might be merit for a cooling-off period where there might be personal financial gain as a result of a former position held or where there might be political gain. But this bill states very clearly in section 2 that it is a "non-profit body corporate," and section 3(1) states that it is "non-partisan," so I see no need for any cooling-off period. I've never heard of an alumni association that would institute a cooling-off period of six months. It seems to me that once you're an alumnus, you're an alumnus.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just briefly, I'd like to point out that one of the things that this amendment would do, if it were to be adopted by this House, is set a tremendous example not only for this Assembly but for this province, I believe. We in the Official Opposition have spoken many times very vociferously about the need for a cooling-off period in the public service. Perhaps this Assembly could draw a page from the federal Conservative election campaign handbook, which is calling for an extended cooling-off period not only for MPs but also senior officials in the federal government. This, I believe, would perhaps send a really positive message to the government of the day in Alberta as to the value of having a cooling-off period when ones leaves a position of high authority.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've had the privilege of speaking with the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. It appears from speaking with him that it's all in good intention, but I guess, for the record, I'd like to put a few things on there. I, too, agree with a cooling-off period, but if, in fact, the bill was to say that if an alumni member was not going to be running again, I believe that would be different. I'm very concerned, Mr. Chairman, that this is nothing but a possibility for displaced MLAs from the government to stay closer and receive some added help in travelling around. Nonprofit doesn't mean that it doesn't accept or receive any money and I'm – it seems awfully noisy in here. I just wanted to see what people were talking about.

The Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has the floor.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have great concern that this could possibly be an extension to the government in power in doing work in promoting this government, that the costs to cover expenses in other areas could in fact be covered by taxpayers' money. I would feel much better if, in fact, it was to say that this is at arm's length and that there would be no money received from the government that would entail any tax dollars and that it would only come from actual people that are members of this association. They wouldn't be going to the government saying, "Well, we want to promote this or promote that in this area, this educational program," and say that this is non-profitable.

We have many nonprofit organizations in our country now where 80 per cent of the money raised goes to running those organizations. I think that loses the spirit. I understand that that's not the intent of this, but I have those concerns. I think that it could be amended and covered in there to make sure that this really is a nonprofit organization, that they raise their own money, that there's no appealing to the government or the Speaker's office for funding to promote good government in any way.

I guess, like I say, once again, if they were to say that this was for alumni, that those MLAs aren't going to be coming back – they'd have to have a cooling-off period before they'd want to run again. In my own area I run into this all the time and was confronted by a former MLA asking what I was doing at a function because he thought that I didn't belong there while he was being recognized by the minister. I found that somewhat shocking.

I personally have concerns about, you know, about what will and could happen if, in fact, they have an association now to actually give them . . .

An Hon. Member: Self-promotion.

Mr. Hinman: . . . self-promotion in those areas.

I hope that the intent of this bill is truly what it is and that perhaps we would tighten up a few of the lines to clarify that there will be no money coming from the Speaker's office or any government area. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Yes, hon. Chair. Because we have a number of amendments to discuss, I move that we go to the question at this point.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on the bill.

Dr. Swann: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to suggest another amendment to Bill 47, Alberta Association of Former MLAs Act, that it be amended in section 4(2)(a) by striking out the word "government." I have the appropriate number of copies here.

The Chair: We will refer to the amendment that's being distributed as amendment A2.

Would the Member for Calgary-Mountain View care to proceed?

10:10

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Clearly, one of the key issues for us as members of the Assembly is to build public trust. One of the concerns I and my colleagues have about this bill is that

it may not have gone far enough in building public trust around the formation of this association. Building on the discussions that were earlier expressed, it appears – and it may not be the intent of the bill – that this association can go to government for benefits. I don't think that's an appropriate capacity for this association.

If we want to be seen to be independent and associated amongst ourselves for the purposes of building an understanding and contributing to the public good, to have the appearance that we can then come back to government and be funded again, whether it's for trips or whether it's other activities that we want to undertake, to have the word "government" in there is unfortunate. I think we can accomplish the same goals for what I think are the true purposes of that association without having recourse to government, which may be perceived to be self-interest and not helpful to building the public trust.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose on amendment A2.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I can understand the comments from the hon. member, but section 4(2)(a) addresses some of the ways that the association could give benefit, not get benefit, so that they can "initiate, finance and administer programs and activities relevant to its objects," and of course, that means that it must be nonpartisan, "including programs and activities by government" such as scholarships, for example. If they would like to contribute to scholarships for our pages, for example, they would be able to do that. If they wanted to contribute to scholarships for students in universities run by government, they would be able to do that. I see no problem there at all.

It seems to me that this is being interpreted the wrong way. It's not going to government to get; it's going to government to give, to participate in any programs such as scholarship programs or other types of programs for the public good that the association may want to contribute to, so I would vote against the amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the amendment A2.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll just be very brief. I really believe that this association should not be in any way, shape, or form connected to the government. After all, we are talking about former MLAs, which makes them only ordinary citizens after they've left here. I don't believe that they should be connected to the government.

I believe that the concept is excellent, but if it is so good, then it really should not require public dollars to keep it going. If they want to have scholarships, it's a great idea, but I think two or three good golf tournaments would raise those kinds of dollars without being connected to the government. That's why I would support this amendment to remove "government" from this bill.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner on amendment A2.

Mr. Hinman: Yeah. I'm just not sure what the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose means when he says "they." I take it that "they" is the government and not "they" as the MLAs. I, too, would support this amendment. It's critical that this is nonpartisan. If you're at the Rotary or any other club, they don't have connections with the government. I, too, am very worried where this will lead to and am concerned. I think that we really should look at this

amendment and realize that for the good of the association, being a separate identity from the government the association would be bona fide as a more credible association that's out there really trying to do good, not promoting the current government in power, which it seems to me it has the ability of doing.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've tabled another suggested amendment to Bill 47, Alberta Association of Former MLAs Act. In this case in section 8(1) I'm amending it by striking out "appointed or holding office" and in section 16(3) by striking out "appointed or" after "until their successors in office have been."

The intent of this amendment, these two changes, is that again there could be a perception that if the Alberta government, even in the first instance, is appointing the officers to this organization, there could be a conflict of interest. There could be a perceived benefit to accrue from those who are in government and who immediately leaving government are then appointed to a body that potentially could gain benefits from their association with government.

I would ask you to seriously consider this in the context of building public trust. This is not going to change the ultimate purpose of the organization, but both of these amendments are intended to not only protect the public interest and the public trust but to be seen to be addressing concerns that some of us have about the possibility of abusing this organization for self-gain.

The Chair: Did the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose wish to respond?

Mr. Johnson: Well, thank you for the comments from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I guess it depends upon how much we want to legislate what this organization can do. It was not my intent that we would legislate everything, and the bill leaves it up to the association to include in their bylaws just how their directors are to be engaged, whether they're to be elected or appointed. It seems to me that's as far as I would want to go in terms of dictating or giving guidelines to the association. In other words, there is some flexibility, and it's assumed that the association would address the situation in their bylaws.

Dr. Swann: It may be a misinterpretation on my part, but it appears that the government of the day will appoint the first board of this organization. That's where the conflict of interest is. The members themselves should be electing or identifying their own leadership. You're prescribing that in the existing act.

Mr. Johnson: It is not the government of the day; it's the Speaker of the Legislature. There's quite a difference.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner on amendment A3.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it has been said very clearly. The perception here is very much that this is partisan. Perhaps those on the government side don't see that as partisan, but the public and those on the other side – I just have never known of an organization that's a subcommittee from government that would say, whether it's Rotary or something else, that we're going to have our first president appointed from somewhere else. If these people are joining this association, it only makes sense that those who are

there, just as we elect the Speaker, would elect the president or the chairman of that association. I see no reason for outside interference in appointing who is actually going to lead that association.

The perception here truly is the question of what the motive is. This is what brings all of it into a very, well, questionable area. What is the motive of this? I believe that the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose is doing and wanting to do it on that level, but the way the wording is, it's very much dictated by the Speaker of the day. It just doesn't seem clear, and I would hope that all members would look at this and vote against the Speaker appointing those first members. It just isn't necessary. The MLAs that want to join that have the ability within themselves to nominate and elect their board, and that's where it should be. I really would ask that all members seriously look at this and that we accept this amendment.

10:20

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

An Hon. Member: Okay, be brief.

Ms Pastoor: In your dreams.

The last section of this bill is 17, and it says that "this Act comes into force on Proclamation," which to me means almost immediately when this is being passed. Therefore, this Speaker of the House definitely is the Speaker of the government. I have never in my knowledge known any government, either federal or provincial, that actually has a Speaker elected that doesn't come from the government side of the House. So I find that comment perhaps a little discouraging.

I really don't think that if you have a group of former MLAs who are now ordinary citizens, that because they've had the experience of being MLAs, they are totally incapable of sitting down in a room and electing their own presidents and their own vice-presidents and whoever else they want to go on this board. To have someone appoint them I think is an absolute insult to the people that want to join this organization. I'm not saying that I don't want to join it. I think it's a great concept. What I don't like is the way it's being presented.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on amendment A3.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. If the House in general hasn't seen the direction we're going, we're trying to have a very definite separation, instead of between state and church, in this case between the state and the club, between the government and this club concept. What we're concerned about is that the Speaker basically is the key government representative, and we don't want to see the government or the Speaker meddling in the affairs of a private club because there could be undue influence brought to bear. What we're trying to do is basically cut that umbilical cord, remove the intravenous tube which funnels directly from the government to this club. The two entities need to be separated, and hopefully the importance of that separation and being seen to be separated is as important to the government members as it is to us. It needs to be independent and able to make its own decisions, not appointed ones from some outside government source.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I've been listening to the

members opposite on this particular matter. Clearly, they have a concern with respect to this particular provision. I by no means ascribe to the idea of cutting umbilical cords, but it seems to me appropriate that bylaws can provide for the appointment of the first officers and directors. They can be elected from the people who join if that, in fact, is what the bylaws say. To my knowledge that is what happens with new societies or new companies. Those people who are members of that organization band together, they have an election, and they appoint the first group that are going to manage or direct it.

I think that the point made by the members opposite with respect to this is quite appropriate. It is not necessary that the Speaker appoint the first directors. The bylaws can provide for an election. I must admit that it's not often that I listen to the other side and am convinced by what they have to say, but on this particular matter I do support this amendment.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:24 p.m.]

Ms Blakeman: I'm willing to put forward a motion to shorten the division bells to two minutes, if that's acceptable to the Assembly.

[Unanimous consent granted]

[Two minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Fritz	Oberg
Amery	Haley	Oberle
Blakeman	Hancock	Pastoor
Brown	Hinman	Rogers
Calahasen	Johnston	Stelmach
Chase	Liepert	Stevens
DeLong	Lindsay	Swann
Doerksen	Melchin	Taylor
Flaherty	Miller, R.	VanderBurg

Against the motion:

Danyluk	Knight	Ouellette
Goudreau	Lund	Strang
Griffiths	Magnus	Webber
Johnson		

Totals:	For – 27	Against – 10
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[Motion on amendment A3 carried]

10:30

Ms Pastoor: I don't want to think I'm on a roll, but I'd like to move an amendment to Bill 47 which will be known as A4. I'd like to change 5.1: "The Association is not eligible for grants or other funding from the Government of Alberta or from a Committee or Office of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta."

I think that this amendment is fairly clear in what I'm intending here. Again, it's from our former conversation on the fact that we really have to keep this group of now ordinary, unemployed, perhaps, citizens in a group that wants to do something really, really positive with the knowledge that we have been privileged to learn in

this House, for which we were well paid to learn in this House, and disseminate. Now we can go out and disseminate that with even, if I might say, an altruistic view of how we can share this knowledge with whomever. But we have to do it as a solid group, that we stand alone.

So this is just one more step to keep the division very clear from the group of the former MLAs and the government of the day.

The Chair: Anyone else on amendment A4?

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Chairman, section 14(1) says that "the Association is not an agent of the Government and the directors and employees of the Association are not part of the public service of Alberta." Therefore, the government has no obligation or commitment to this organization. It seems to me that to restrict them in such a way that they cannot even have an office or a room here in Edmonton is going a little bit far and is a little bit picky because I suppose that you could say that that is, you know, government contributing something to their cause.

I vote against this amendment.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again I have to emphasize that we are under scrutiny as never before in the country as government members. The whole question of self-interest, of benefits from association with very powerful positions and friends and connections in government: this will not fly with most of my constituents in terms of the opportunity that it presents for the organization to gain from previous connections with this government and actually receive money from this government. It is not acceptable.

If we believe that the federal government has not been true in honouring its commitment to the public good at this time, we have to believe that we are setting the stage for very similar criticism, very similar abuse if we include the possibility of getting money from this government for former MLAs. It just doesn't wash.

Mr. Hinman: I also would like to talk in favour of this amendment, that it's the perception. Every time this association does something and receives money from the government, it's going to be looked on with a tainted view. In order to be above reproach, I feel that this is a common-sense thing. Again, let's do the right thing and cut ties with the government in funding so that it is clean and that we're raising the money charitably on our own, out doing good works, and not going to the government and saying: "Oh, we've got connections. We can get you something." That's going to be the perception on this.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The members of this House collectively demonstrated their intelligence tonight in passing the last amendment, which clearly separated government influence, whether it be the government itself or the Speaker, from this organization, this club. We are all capable as elected individuals of putting forward good ideas without connecting to the government financial pipeline.

If this organization is to achieve any independent benefits and be a spokesperson for a variety of activities throughout this province, a sort of mentorship group, then it cannot rely on the apron strings of the government. It must be not only independent; it must be perceived to be independent. If there is a financial connection, finance equals influence. Let's cut that influence, potential or

otherwise. Let's remain separate. It should not be funded by the taxpayer's dollar. It should be free of government influence, and that's what this amendment is trying to achieve: independence.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: On the bill, the Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Through the appropriate process of notification of amendments I am moving on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung an amendment to section 3(1)(e). Prior to discussing it, if I could have the page give a copy to the desk and copies to all members, and then we'll give the members a chance to discuss it.

Thank you.

The Chair: We will refer to this amendment as amendment A5. Please proceed, hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The objection that the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung brought in in this particular amendment is to find out how absolutely self-serving the idea of "to protect and promote the interests of former MLAs" is. When we are either defeated or we resign, to a large extent I would hope that we're on our own, that we've broken that connection between the government and the gravy train. This business of "protect and promote": what I'm concerned about is basically that we give sort of a government seal to what I would call the equivalent of Mattel's Ken and Barbie inaction figures. In other words, we're allowing people to maintain that handout. We're still connected to the government either through influence or through financial arrangements.

10:40

This notion of "protect and promote the interests of former MLAs": is that at the expense of the taxpayer? To what extent do we protect and promote our own self-interests? If there has to be a connection to the government to stand up as the shield to protect our former interests, then I believe that we have to stop this train. At some point we have to stand on our own. We have to be reliant. We have a very financially sound pension arrangement. Let the members achieve their own independent standing without protecting and promoting our own self-interests within this club, not at the expense of the people.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess I was offended about the gravy train, and perhaps Members' Services needs to address something if they're on a gravy train over there. We've got crumbs in other places.

I'd like the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose to explain the phrase "to protect and promote the interests of former MLAs." I believe that what he's trying to say there is that if your interest is in zero or net metering for electricity or something else, you might want to promote those things. But the wording there just seems to be offensive, that it's about us. This whole association should be about trying to make Alberta better.

It just seemed to me like we should be striking that because it's in contrast with the first four points on what we're trying to do and build, you know: good spirit amongst all former MLAs, working

with the community, and promoting other people interested in serving in government. So I think I will vote in favour of this amendment, wishing to have it struck, just again on the perception and what we're trying to accomplish here. It seems counterproductive.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Chairman, I think that I don't interpret this the same way as I'm hearing. It's kind of a motherhood statement really: "to protect and promote the interests of former MLAs." I see the interest, for example, as being interested in good parliamentary democracy, things like that. I don't see that it's such a controversial statement at all. It is the same statement that's in the Quebec bill, the Ontario bill, and the B.C. bill. They all have the same thing. I don't really see that it's derogatory in any way.

I'll vote against the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 47 as amended 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.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report bills 47 and 51.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Ms Haley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 51. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 47. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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 the House adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:48 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

