

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, December 1, 2005

1:30 p.m.

Date: 05/12/01

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The Deputy Chair of Committees.

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the great pleasure of introducing to you and through you to members of our Assembly Mr. Brent Rathgeber. Mr. Rathgeber served the constituents of Edmonton-Calder in the 25th Legislature. He is currently practising law part-time and is the executive director of the Progressive Contractors Association of Canada. He has now risen in the Speaker's gallery, and I'd like to ask the hon. members of this Assembly to please accord him the traditional warm welcome.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

Mr. Graydon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly today a young lady in your gallery. It's her first visit to question period, and I'm confident that she'll leave at the end of the afternoon impressed with the wonderful decorum in this Assembly. I'd like to ask my wife, Anne Graydon, to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure today to rise and to introduce to you and through you to the House members Mr. Austin Mardon. Austin had quite a scholastic career, but I'm recognizing him today as having been a volunteer with the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta for the last 13 years. He was recently awarded the Alberta centennial award by the Lieutenant Governor for his volunteer and scientific contributions to the province. I see that Austin is standing, and I would like all of us to provide him with the traditional warm welcome here in the Legislature.

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

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two introductions. First, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly my constituent Mr. Randy Sampert of Fort Saskatchewan. Randy is the chairperson of Living Positive, the society for persons living with HIV. This is a coalition of persons living with HIV that provide support to others living with HIV or stricken with AIDS. Today, December 1, 2005, is the 18th annual World AIDS Day as declared by the World Health Organization. Around the world activities are taking place to raise awareness of HIV and its impact on our communities. Randy is seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

I have another introduction. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two Edmontonians, two businesspeople, Mr. Bruce Kinisky and Mr. Mike Grau. Of course, the word Kinisky is synonymous with municipal leadership in the city of Edmonton for many, many years. They are seated in the members' gallery. They were here to talk a bit about labour shortage and, of course, to observe question period. I would ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 48 enthusiastic grade 6 students from the George P. Nicholson elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Carrie Grossman and Mrs. Colleen Reeder, and parent helpers Mrs. Edith Delanghe, Mrs. Susan Smelquist, and Mrs. Debbie Chella. They're here today to attend the School at the Legislature and observe with keen interest and learn about our government. I might also mention that Mrs. Carrie Grossman, in particular, headed up a committee for quite a number of years in the Twin Brooks area of the Edmonton-Whitemud constituency to get George P. Nicholson school built. Now she's teaching at the school, and it's a wonderful thing. I'd ask them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce Mr. Mike Maynes, who is seated in the members' gallery. He is a councillor with the village of Stirling and a social studies teacher at Raymond high school in the Westwind school division. He's presently here on AUMA business. I would ask that Mike rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege today to introduce to you and through you and to recognize a group of individuals in the galleries today who play a key role in the democratic process in the province of Alberta. These are the men and women who work for the members of this Assembly in their constituency offices. The democratic process starts in the constituency, and as the front line in their constituencies these individuals proudly represent all Albertans.

These employees are here today participating in the winter constituency employee information session, which provides them with an opportunity to network with other LAO staff and obtain an overview of numerous programs and services available through the Legislative Assembly Office. Each year the service and contribution of these individuals are celebrated with an employee recognition dinner, which the Speaker will be hosting later this evening. Today over 60 constituency office employees are with us, and I would ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome and recognition of the members of this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this

Assembly a family that's on a very long journey both literally and figuratively. Many of the members may not have met them yet, but their names are certainly familiar. They've echoed around these halls for the last couple of years, actually. They are of course the reason for and the subject of Bill Pr. 4, which passed third reading in this House yesterday. Seated in the members' gallery behind me are Doug and Lisa Rewega, their daughter, Brooklynn, family friend Bruce Sparrow, and Brooklynn's nanny, Jacqueline Babey. I would ask them to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 66 pupils from the grade 6 class at Leo Nickerson elementary school in St. Albert. They are accompanied by their teachers, Mme Sylvie Desjardins, Mr. Dave Power, and Miss Amanda Saïpe, and volunteer parent James Simmers. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because today is World AIDS Day, I'm particularly pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Mr. Michael Daniels, a member of the board of directors of Living Positive, the most important organization housed in my constituency. This organization promotes AIDS awareness, basic human rights, and a positive, dignified, hopeful attitude to HIV-positive individuals in our community. I'd ask Michael to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

head: 1:40

Oral Question Period

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

Securities Commission

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The controversy surrounding the Alberta Securities Commission grows and grows. The investments and savings of countless Albertans are at stake. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Given the statements of a former Alberta Securities Commission manager of investigations, which we provided to the minister earlier today, can she still deny that the former Treasurer, Jim Dinning, interfered in enforcement cases at the Alberta Securities Commission?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, no, I can't confirm that. I appreciate the hon. member bringing these documents to my office about 10 to 1 today. I did have a chance to review them. What I read in the documents – and I'll certainly do a closer appraisal of them – is some rather key words: he was unclear; a third party told another party that another party had said that another party had spoken to a particular person; there may be some suggestion, but this is speculation – and I'm paraphrasing – as the witness's information didn't go that far. I'm sure the hon. member is going to table this in the Legislature, but if he doesn't, I will. Again, a document that is unclear, not sure, and speculation.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm going to ask one of you to table this. No other hon. member in this Assembly is aware of what's going on here.

The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will table that, and I will table court documents that back it up. Thank you.

My question to the Premier: given that a lead investigator for the Alberta Securities Commission says that he had daily contact with then Treasurer Jim Dinning concerning a specific enforcement file, was Mr. Dinning acting entirely on his own, or was he acting on behalf of others?

Mr. Klein: I have no idea. Mr. Speaker, I haven't seen the memo. I was briefed very briefly on the memo. I understand that the matter goes back to 1996-1997, so it's obvious that the Liberals are reaching into the archives on this one. I'll have the Minister of Finance respond.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to put this on the record. It's going to be tabled later. I think hon. members have a right to know what it says. I don't think I'm saying anything that would be out of place. It says:

Apparently Mr. Ryckman told Mr. Swerchuk that Blakey had told Mr. Ryckman that Blakey had spoken to Dinning every day.

There is some basis to say that the Chairman of the panel had prior knowledge of certain aspects of the investigation.

“There is some basis”: that's a person's opinion.

There may be some suggestion that the Provincial Treasurer had suggested a result in the investigation, but that is speculation and this witness's information does not go that far.

That's what the document says.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Finance: is the reason the minister is reluctant to ask former Finance ministers about their involvement in enforcement cases at the Securities Commission because she's afraid that she'll actually find something?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I've answered this question repeatedly in the House. I am not asking former finance ministers either in this House or out of this House such a demeaning question without some actual information that this indeed happened. This document talks about speculation. It talks about: third and fourth parties may have given some information. This is an example – another example – of the tack that has been taken in this House day after day in this session and, I would suggest, in the spring session. Again, if this hon. member thinks that this is solid information with what I just read, then he should reconsider his solid information.

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Previous Ministers

The Speaker: Hon. members, I wish to draw to the attention of all hon. members *Beauchesne 428*. *Beauchesne 428* says “a question . . . must not:” – then I go to (11) – “seek from an ex-Minister information with regard to transactions during that person's term of office.”

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

Securities Commission (continued)

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Finance: has the minister discussed the Alberta Securities Commission issues with former Treasurer Jim Dinning since she assumed the role of Finance Minister?

Mrs. McClellan: Absolutely not.

Dr. Taft: Again to the Minister of Finance: now that there is clear written evidence, including court documents, that former Treasurer Dinning meddled in the Securities Commission, can she deny that other former Treasurers, including Steve West or perhaps former chief of staff Rod Love, may also have interfered with enforcement cases at the Securities Commission?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, again, the same line of questioning, obviously supported by his caucus. Well, I can tell you that on this side of the room and in this government caucus we're accountable. We put information on the table that can be backed up with fact. Mr. Speaker, I would yield to your reading of this relevant passage from *Beauchesne*.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you again. To the Minister of Finance: does the government have any policies in place to prohibit cabinet ministers, MLAs, or government staff from contacting ASC officials about ongoing enforcement investigations?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, all of us take an oath, and I have absolutely no information provided to me by the opposition or from any other source that that oath might have been broken.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly an answer no to the last question.

The success and foundation of a securities regulator is built around perception and trust. The investing public needs to be assured that when violations occur at the securities commission, the perpetrators are punished accordingly. My questions are again to the Minister of Finance. Given that the Minister of Finance has admitted that she knows the punishment handed down to the director of enforcement at the Securities Commission for insider trading, will the minister enlighten the House, be accountable, be transparent and inform the House and the investing public as to what that punishment was?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I have been, I think, open on all of these questions. I was asked yesterday in a scrum as to whether I knew what action had been taken. I don't think I used the word "punishment" but what action had been taken. I said that, yes, I did and that I was satisfied that the action was appropriate. But I also said at that time that what we would all concentrate on is ensuring that this could not, as much as possible ensure that it did not, happen again and, if it did happen, that there were checks and balances in place so that it could be dealt with in a much more expedient manner.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the minister knows the dollar amount made by the director of enforcement through insider trading at the Securities Commission, will the minister enlighten the House and the investing public by telling us just how much he made?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Securities Commission has transmitted this information to the Auditor General. They copied me the information. This is a matter that was under part of the investigation of the Auditor General, and I am responsible for ensuring that the Alberta Securities Commission operates under its legislation and its regulation.

Mr. Speaker, I am assured of that, and where processes can be put in place to better move this forward, I take my responsibility in seeing that that happens. But I will tell you that in the last short time, although this information was sent out some time ago, maybe seven days ago or so, I have been in conversation with the Securities Commission as to whether it would be appropriate for me to release a letter that was sent from the Securities Commission to the Auditor General, and I do not have that answer.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will the minister do the right thing and put in place policies, indeed legislation, that prohibit cabinet ministers, MLAs, or government staff from contacting Alberta Securities Commission officials about enforcement investigations?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll consider that, and I would include opposition members in that.

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

Boards, Commissions, and Agencies

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Whether it's the Alberta Securities Commission, the Labour Relations Board, or the Calgary health authority, the boards and commissions appointed by this government are rife with conflicts of interest, patronage, and political interference. The Auditor General has made numerous recommendations to remedy this appalling situation, but while the Premier promises to adopt them, he fails to act. My question is to the Premier: why has this government let senior officials guilty of flagrant violations of the rules, to use the Auditor General's words, go unpunished?

Mrs. McClellan: There has been action taken.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Minister of Finance pointed out, if he's alluding to the director of enforcement, there was action. I don't know what that actions is, but relative to the . . .

An Hon. Member: Well, find out.

Mr. Klein: I'm supposed to find out, Mr. Speaker. I will find out.

The Speaker: Ignore.

Mr. Klein: Okay. As to the preamble, Mr. Speaker, there is a process that is in place relative to an interview procedure that all appointments to various boards, authorities, commissions, agencies have to go through, and that procedure is followed.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Why has this government failed to implement the Auditor General's recommenda-

tions to end patronage in appointments to government boards and commissions? Can the Premier please tell the House what they are and what he's done about them?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't know of any patronage involved at all. Most boards, authorities, commissions, agencies are volunteer positions. These people are paid in some cases a per diem to cover expenses, but it comes nowhere near what they would lose or what their earning capabilities would be for one day's work in their own professions.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier commit in this House here and now to establish a truly independent panel headed by a judge or retired judge to investigate, report, and make recommendations to clean up the mess of patronage, conflicts of interest, and political interference that characterize the boards and commissions of this government?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I take exception to the statement that there is a mess, that there is patronage. These are hard-working, individual, committed Albertans who want to do something for their province and volunteer to serve on various boards, authorities, commissions, and agencies.

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

Drug Abuse by Children

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parents love and nurture their children. They work hard to see that the needs of their children are met. Nothing is more devastating for a parent than to find out that their child is seriously ill. Being told that your child is abusing drugs can be just as devastating. The first instinct of every parent is to do anything and everything they can to help their child. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Are parents able to access drug testing for their child if they suspect he or she is using drugs?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, yes, they are. Physicians in Alberta can order tests for children, particularly if there's a suspicion of or an allegation of or a concern about amphetamines being present. Physicians must inform the child about the type of test that is being made available. If the physician feels that it is a medically necessary test, then that test will be supported by Alberta Health and Wellness. In a situation where a physician may make a nonmedical notation on the file and say that it is not medically necessary, that type of test shall be supported, if the parent so wishes and the child concedes, by the parents themselves.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: can the minister comment on the merits of using home drug testing kits?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm aware that through the Internet and other means there are number of home testing kits that are available, and I would just provide a caution for parents that there are concerns about the results of those types of tests. The laboratory tests that are certified and are regulated and are monitored through Health and Wellness and through the regional health authorities we would be confident in. But a number of tests may not be accurate. Certain foods, for example, or medications can create false positives in some

tests. So we do caution that drug testing should be left to the health professionals.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister: what assistance is available to parents who are concerned that their son or daughter is using drugs?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, clearly there are a number of programs with AADAC that provide supports and counselling supports. I think that parents are, of course, in the best position to know whether their child's behaviour exhibits any differences which would lead them to believe that soliciting such counselling or such outpatient concern would be available. AADAC has recently opened 24 new detox and residential treatment beds for youth. Frankly, in 2006 with the work that we're doing on the follow-up of Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, there will be mandatory treatment available for children that so require.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, there was a point of order raised with respect to your preamble. We'll deal with it at the end of the question period.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Labour Relations Board

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this Legislature the impartiality of the semijudicial Alberta Labour Relations Board was called into question. Labour has lost confidence in the referee, has lost confidence that there is in any sense a level playing field left. It is clear that employer lawyers, Labour Relations Board officers, and the government have colluded in writing anti-union labour law. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Why did this government allow a management lawyer from the firm of McLennan Ross and board vice-chair Les Wallace to join them in drafting Bill 27 amendments to the Labour Relations Code?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate again that the labour relations issue itself in Alberta is one of the best in North America, and let's keep that in mind. Ninety-nine per cent of all collective agreements – 1,300 collective agreements – have been settled the last two years without any disruption in the system. In addition to that, an independent report came out, in fact, just a couple of days ago, that between Canada and the United States the Labour Relations Board in Alberta is the most transparent of all jurisdictions. So it does work.

In relation to the question itself you know I cannot comment on that. That issue is in front of the courts. I will not comment on anything that may influence the court's decision.

2:00

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: in what way did the minister use Labour Relations Board officers and employer lawyers to create the division 8 declaration, which had the effect of giving a project to the so-called Christian Labour Association, at the Horizon megaproject?

Mr. Cardinal: There again, Mr. Speaker, it's another issue that I will not comment on.

Going back to the Labour Relations Board, Mr. Speaker, there are five vice-chairs, there's one chair, and there are 33 members that sit

on this. The 33 members represent all sectors of the working area: construction, retail, food, utilities, health care, manufacturing, municipal, engineering, public. I mean, I can go on.

Mr. Backs: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: will the minister fire the chair and vice-chairs of the Alberta Labour Relations Board, or is this government prepared to suffer numerous court challenges? The referees are making the rules. Heads must roll for faith to be restored.

Mr. Cardinal: When you look at the whole labour relations issue in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, we're number one. We have a hot economy. In 10 years we're going to have a hundred thousand extra jobs that we can't fill. There are jobs there for everybody. There is no way we should be fighting over issues like this when we can't even find enough people to fill the jobs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Seniors' Property Taxes

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prior to 1993 seniors did not have to pay the educational portion of their property tax assessment. In many cases it is a yearly cost that's unexpected to many seniors who have long since paid off their homes and many of whom are on fixed incomes or pensions. Now that our fiscal house is back in order, we should look at eliminating this tax for seniors. While many seniors are pleased that we froze that levy at 2004 levels, they are hopeful that we will be able to remove this tax entirely. My question is to the hon. Minister of Finance. When will the government be able to eliminate the educational portion of the seniors' property tax bill?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, certainly with the good advice from our minister responsible for seniors and the concerns that seniors felt over a year ago about rising property taxes, this government moved very quickly to freeze that level of tax for seniors, understanding that many seniors are on a fixed income and need predictable information to meet their obligations. In addition to that, we have a tax review occurring – I've mentioned it before – and we will look at this as part of that review. The Minister of Municipal Affairs has been working with a variety of groups on this issue, and he may want to comment on that process.

The Speaker: We'll proceed with the member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will the minister consider eliminating the educational portion of the property tax for seniors living below the poverty line?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, as I said, understanding the concerns that seniors have that are on a fixed income, that are dependent on GISs and CPP and OAS – some CPP, some not – we moved very quickly to ensure that seniors would not face a burden of a higher property tax, the education portion of it, in this very, very robust market that we're experiencing in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, the Minister of Municipal Affairs has done a lot of work in this area, and I would like him to supplement on where that work is proceeding or how.

The Speaker: Sorry. We're going to proceed to the hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Is the minister working with other departments and municipalities to ensure that these property taxes remain affordable for seniors so that they may continue to reside in their own homes as long as it's possible?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has over 1,500 seniors' households in his constituency, and I agree with the sentiment that he has brought forward, that it's very important that we assist seniors with staying in their own homes. That's why this program is so important as we cover the year-to-year increases in the education portion of the property tax for seniors.

Yes, hon. member, we are working closely with municipalities, including Calgary, and in fact one municipality right now – it's the city of Edmonton – has taken the lead. They are following what we are doing, Mr. Speaker, by offering a rebate on the municipal portion of their property tax. I'm hoping other municipalities will follow the same.

I am hoping that the Minister of Municipal Affairs can supplement.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Long-term Care Funding

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are issues around long-term care that this government has failed to address, not to mention the ongoing trials and lawsuits stemming from systemic carelessness and underfunding by this government. Questions need to be asked about how this government cares for Alberta's most frail and vulnerable citizens. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that the Jubilee lodge has received over \$1.5 million in grants from Alberta Health over the past four years in addition to the funding that they received from Capital health, can the minister tell us what those grants were used for?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, through the regional health authorities grants are distributed on the basis of contractual relationships with a variety of providers, and what the type of support was for would depend entirely on the mix of the acuity of the patients that were in any particular facility. There's an administrative component, an hours of care component, and there are other features dependent upon the various individual contracts.

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member opposite knows from her work on the task force on continuing care, there are different definitions in some of the agreements. It's something that we hope to have a common understanding about. So you would find different things with different lodges. On the very specific arrangements that the health authority has with this particular lodge, I can't give specifics at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Can the minister guarantee that this money is being used for resident care and not toward profits?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, for private providers obviously there is a profit motive in the provision of care, so there would be some dollars that would go to the profit. But in terms of work that we've done in expanding hours of care over this past year, there were funds that were very specifically targeted to those hours of care. If there was

a percentage, it might be attributable to an administrative amount, and there may be some more, but the intent of our release of funds to support hours of care is not to increase the profits but, rather, to increase the hours of care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I'm going to totally change what I was going to say. What I would like to ask the minister is: how are we tracking those dollars?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, a good part of those dollars are tracked through the regional health authorities. The audits are available through the regional health authorities. The audit that the Auditor General did on regional health authorities I think was relatively thorough, very thorough in the discussion of particularly 25 facilities. So there's a normal course of events and financial accountability.

For that specific lodge on that specific point I would be very pleased to commit that information to the hon. member following.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Hunting Regulations for Youths

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hunting is a central part of Alberta's aboriginal and settler heritage, and Alberta arguably today still has the best public hunting in the world. I know that all members of the government are committed to preserving this legacy. Prior to 1997 young Albertans 16 and 17 years of age were permitted to hunt without adult supervision. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Why did the government change these rules in 1997?

2:10

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, youth of 16 and 17 years of age prior to 1997 could hunt without direct supervision. Following federal legislation that came into effect in the mid-1990s, licensing became mandatory for firearms possession. It should be recognized that it's firearms possession. That federal licensing requirement actually requires persons under the age of 18 years to be directly supervised by an adult when using the firearm. Therefore, the provincial Wildlife Act was changed to be in compliance with that federal legislation.

Dr. Morton: My first supplemental is to the same minister. Since, surely, it is preferable that our youths spend weekends in the fall in the field and forest rather than in the malls, what does the minister's department do to encourage youth hunters to join the ranks of the hunting community in Alberta?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, youths from the age of 12 to 17 can hunt in Alberta under a residential youth wildlife certificate, and they can hunt a number of different wildlife species with either a firearm or a bow and arrow. As a matter of fact, we have over 5,000 youth registered as hunting in the province, which is up about 184 individuals from last year.

Our staff works very, very closely with educators in schools on hunter education as well as with the WISE foundation, the hunters for tomorrow program, and the Alberta hunter educators association along with conservation education programs. As a matter of fact, they're celebrating their 40th anniversary coming up this spring and they have educated over a million youth. So we have a number of good programs that teach our youth how to hunt responsibly.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, my second supplemental is to the same minister. Since our youth hunters, Mr. Minister, are already required to pass the provincial hunter education test and pass the federal firearms safety test, would you consider restoring the rights that 16- and 17-year-old Albertans enjoyed prior to 1997?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my first answer, Alberta amended the Wildlife Act to be consistent with the federal legislation. That was brought on by requests from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to make sure that we were consistent with the legislation so that it could be enforceable. It's also supported by our fish and wildlife officers so it can be enforceable as well. We have received very few complaints from the public about this issue and particularly the requirements for youth. Right at this moment I have no plans to reopen the legislation. If we did, we'd certainly have to look at the legalities of it. We'd have to do some consultation with both the RCMP and other enforcement agencies as well.

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

Treasury Branch Loans

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Finance. Will the minister please confirm or deny that this government guaranteed a \$50 million loan to Rancher's Beef through the Alberta Treasury Branches?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I can tell this hon. member that I do not get involved with the day-to-day operations or the loan portfolios of the Alberta Treasury Branch. If he has a problem with a loan that the Treasury Branch has given or guaranteed, he should take it to the board of directors.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General holds the minister responsible for Alberta Treasury Branches. Is this government back in the business of picking winners and losers?

Mrs. McClellan: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member followed the Public Accounts discussion around the Alberta Treasury Branches yesterday, he would know very much that Alberta Treasury Branch operates as a commercial entity. I've followed a line of questioning over here in the last days of trying to find out if there was political interference. Mr. Speaker, surely you would not expect or that hon. member would not expect that I would know the transactions that the Alberta Treasury Branch carries out.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I did follow the Public Accounts Committee yesterday.

Given the Auditor General's continuing criticism of Alberta Treasury Branches' questionable lending practices, what assurance can the minister give that the required reforms will actually happen this year?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I invite all hon. members to actually read the Auditor General's report instead of paraphrasing from it. What the Auditor General has indicated is that the Alberta Treasury Branches need to ensure that their corporate lending practices are followed, particularly in their branches. I would point out to this hon. member and all hon. members that if you go to the trouble of reading the Alberta Treasury Branches' latest report, their portfolio is just under \$6 billion and their loan writeoffs are \$23 million. I think even you can do the math.

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

Wait Times for Ophthalmology Services

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I tabled a document from the government's wait-list registry showing that Calgarians wait significantly longer for cataract surgery in private eye clinics than Edmontonians wait for the same surgery in a public facility. These statistics contradict the Premier's claim two days ago that a cataract surgery is quicker in the city of Calgary. No wonder this government can't be trusted as it moves to privatize more health services. A question to the Premier: will the Premier admit that he was wrong in his claims of two days ago and instead acknowledge that Edmontonians enjoy much more timely access to cataract surgery as a result of this health service being delivered mainly in a public facility?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is wrong. Dr. Pannu asked the question: "According to October 2005 stats on the government's wait-list registry, four times as many Calgarians are waiting for cataract eye surgery compared to the number of Edmontonians waiting," then it goes on. Anyway, in response to the question:

I really don't know that to be true, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've talked to people in the private system and people in the public system. Those people in Calgary practising ophthalmology say that services are much quicker in the city of Calgary.

"Those people in Calgary practising ophthalmology say that services are much quicker." I didn't say it. The people said it. I don't know where he gets his figures.

Mr. Speaker, you can't slay the messenger. I am the messenger. He's trying to slay me, and that is wrong.

The Speaker: Okay. We'll go forward then.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is slayed by the figures prepared by his own government.

How can Albertans trust this government's so-called third way privatization blueprint when the Premier ignores the readily available evidence documenting that Calgarians endure by far the longest wait times in the province because cataract surgery in their city is done in private, for-profit clinics?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I go on to say, "I don't know where he gets his figures," but he's explained that. I've since checked this out. In the case of Calgary, where there is choice, some people say: I want a particular doctor. That doctor says: I can't take you right now; you're going to have to wait six months. That so often is the case.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

2:20

Ms Evans: Further, Mr. Speaker, there has been recently an ophthalmological review conducted by a private consultant to the Calgary health authority, who is looking at some of the problems associated with it. In order to be fair to the number of providers, there was a cap on the number of services some were delivering, and if you made a choice to go with a particular provider, you may wait longer. Both Calgary and Capital deliver ophthalmological services through a private/public mix.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister doesn't want to trust, I guess, her own figures here.

My final question to the Premier: given the clear evidence documenting significantly shorter wait times when cataract surgery is done in the public facilities, why doesn't the government abandon its failed strategy of using private, for-profit clinics to do cataract surgery in Calgary?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, you can't compare apples and oranges and bananas and grapefruits and so on. We leave it up to the various health regions as to how they wish to deliver and fund ophthalmology services. In Calgary there are third-party operators who contract with the regional health authority to provide ophthalmology services. The Calgary regional health authority believes that that is the most efficient way of doing things, and that is entirely up to them. It's not up to this member. It's up to the Calgary regional health authority.

The Speaker: We're sure excited over there today, aren't we?

The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

School Construction in Southwest Calgary

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several years ago the minister of infrastructure at the time approved construction of an elementary school in the Calgary-West constituency. The school was to be built on a site known as Battalion park, where a mini-school currently houses children up to grade 3. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. My constituents would like to know why construction has not yet commenced on that school.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, and that is an excellent question. Mr. Speaker, the project was approved on May 4, 2004. What subsequently occurs is that the Calgary school board puts it into the design process. The interesting part about this particular design is that there was methane gas discovered on the particular site where the school was going to be built. We have been working with them now to determine what exactly is the best way to alleviate that methane gas that is occurring on that site. My people have also been working with them in an attempt to allow them to move sites, but for some reason they actually want to keep the site there.

We presently have gone to tender. The tenders closed last Thursday. We'll see what happens when it comes to price, including the methane gas alleviation project that is going on there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental, then, is to the same minister. Given this new information regarding methane gas at the site, can the minister assure my constituents that this particular site is still safe to build a school?

Dr. Oberg: Well, yes, we can, Mr. Speaker. The methane gas management system that is being put in there will certainly alleviate the gas. The issue comes down to cost. This particular site is costing us \$1.2 million more than if it was at another site. There is another site that is available there. However, this is where the co-ordination between the Department of Education, the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, and the Calgary public school system has got to be bang on. The unfortunate part is that \$1.2 million could be spent on this site to alleviate the methane when in reality it could have been put on a different site.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you. My final supplementary to the minister: can the minister assure my constituents that once a determination is made regarding the methane gas, a decision to begin construction will be made immediately so that children in my constituency can go to school in their own neighbourhood and not ride a bus for up to an hour?

Dr. Oberg: Yeah. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. As I stated, the tenders closed on Thursday. We'll now be opening the tenders and determining what company is going to build the school, what kind of system is going to be there. We will see what the price is. I can certainly give full guarantee to the hon. member that this school will be built absolutely as quickly as possible and, hopefully, will be ready in 2007 for those kids to go there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Gaming Technology

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past September the Minister of Gaming attended the Global Gaming Expo in Las Vegas. At that event he met with the Association of Casino Operators, who asked the minister to consider the implementation of something called cashless technology. The minister then directed his department to examine the implementation of cashless technology in Alberta's casinos, which was described in the minister's report on his trip as exciting new technology. My question is for the Minister of Gaming. What exactly is this new cashless technology, and why is he so excited about it?

Mr. Graydon: Well, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't take too much to get me excited, but there we go. The new technology, I guess, would be new to Alberta, but it's certainly not new in the gaming industry in the world. In fact, I believe about 80 per cent of the world's casinos use what's called cashless technology in slot machines. Basically, as opposed to pushing a button and when you win having the machine spit out 20 loonies into the tray under the machine, it prints a piece of paper. You then take that piece of paper, and if you want to play the machine next door, you put it back in, or if you want to cash out and go home, you take that slip of paper to the cashier, take your money and head for home.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the government considering spending millions of dollars on new equipment that will do little other than serve to fatten the bottom line of casino owners?

Mr. Graydon: Part of the problem with technology, Mr. Speaker, is that as machines age, you can't get parts for the old ones. That is something that we know we're going to run into as it comes time to maintain our network, if you will, of machines in casinos. We won't be able to get the parts for the coin mechanism, and we will be relatively forced to implement this paper technology.

Mr. Tougas: Well, since the only real difference between a slot machine and a VLT is in the method of payment, doesn't that make these slots impact into VLTs?

Mr. Graydon: Well, the difference between slots and VLTs is in the

location. The VLTs tend to be in bars and lounges, whereas slot machines are in casinos. True, a VLT does issue a piece of paper which you take up to the operator of the facility when it's time to cash out, so it will make the machines similar in that regard. Basically, a slot machine is in a destination gambling facility, a casino.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Workers' Compensation

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some workers who sustain injuries on the job are deemed by the WCB to be able to return to a minimum wage job. Even if these workers are unable to find a minimum wage job, the WCB subtracts the current minimum wage from the workers' pre-injury salary to determine the earning loss supplement that is paid to the injured workers. Increasing Alberta's minimum wage for the working poor has inadvertently had a negative impact on many injured workers by substantially reducing the earning loss supplement that they receive. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. What can the minister do to help injured workers who have had their earning loss supplement payment cut as a result of an increase in the minimum wage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. Of course, the Workers' Compensation policy requires Workers' Compensation to determine an injured worker's level of employability once they are physically able to return to work. In some cases, of course, workers are only able to resume employment that pays the minimum wage. Workers' Compensation wage top-up benefits pay the injured worker for the difference between what they can now earn and what their wage was before they were injured. The Workers' Compensation Board adjusted the top-up required to reflect the increase in the minimum wage.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the cases where the WCB uses the minimum wage to calculate the earning loss benefit, can the minister ask the WCB to use the minimum wage at the time that the worker sustained the injury rather than the minimum wage of today?

2:30

Mr. Cardinal: No, Mr. Speaker. Raising the minimum wage is the government's response to regular cost-of-living increases. The workers' compensation benefits also increase through cost-of-living adjustments yearly. Of course, the workers' compensation benefits reflect the potential earnings, and as they change, so do the benefits to top it up.

Mr. Pham: The last question is to the same minister. Will the minister ask WCB to pay back the money that they have collected from injured workers as a result of the increase to the minimum wage?

Mr. Cardinal: No, Mr. Speaker.

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

Arts Funding

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In September of this year a proud Alberta-based book publisher was forced to sell to an Ontario company due to the lack of provincial arts funding. This was the fifth book publisher forced to leave the province in the past decade. The Book Publishers Association of Alberta has been lobbying this government for the last eight years for sufficient support, with very little success. My questions are to the Deputy Premier. Why does this government continue to bleed the book publishing sector dry?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, we have some fabulous publishers in this province, and they've accomplished great things: the university press and others that are there.

Actually, this question would be more appropriately posed to the Minister of Community Development, who has the responsibility for arts and culture.

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, in looking at all of our cultural industries in the province of Alberta, we do try our very, very best to do the very best with what we've got. The reality is that we haven't changed our funding for the arts for some number of years. We will be making every effort to try and change that through the budget process. As the hon. member knows, the upcoming budget process is currently under way, and the budget will be tabled in February of next year. He can wait to see then whether or not advocacy in this area has been successful.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the Minister of Community Development: given that Alberta is the wealthiest province in this country, why does our funding for the arts continue to rank among the lowest in the country?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, the proper operation of government requires many priorities to be looked after. We do have extremely high funding per capita in the area of health. We have extremely high per capita funding in the area of education. These are the areas that Albertans feel are their strongest priorities.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Given that years of lobbying the stakeholders have proven unsuccessful, is it the policy of this government to only provide arts funding after a personal meeting with the Premier?

Mr. Mar: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I will call on six members today to participate in Members' Statements, but prior to that, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

The Speaker: First of all, then, the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mrs. Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a gentleman who is no stranger to most of us here. He is our recently retired Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Brian Fjeldheim. Brian is seated in the Speaker's gallery with his wife, Colleen. If I could ask them to stand, please, and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you today four constituents from the busy village of Linden, Alberta, home of the famous Country Cousins Restaurant. They're here today to visit this wonderful building and tour it as well as see how efficiently and smoothly our democracy runs. They are Bruce and Tina Klassen and Dwayne and Jolene Klassen. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some special guests. Today in the members' gallery is my wife, Pauline, my son Lorne and my daughter and her husband, Julia and Trevor VanderVeen. They have just finished their education, about eight and a half years of university each. They're back in Alberta trying to find a job, so we're trying to repatriate them. With them is a friend of ours from Niger, Africa, Miss Jan Disselkoe. She has worked in Sierra Leone for 13 years, then eight years in Niger doing community development. It's our pleasure to have her here today. Would they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Chair of Committees.

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, it's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Jan Marz, the lady who keeps our Deputy Speaker in line. She is seated in the public gallery. I'd ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Family Violence Prevention Month draws to a close, I would like to note that violence is an issue that requires our attention year-round. This coming Tuesday marks the 16th anniversary of the tragic events that took place at l'école Polytechnique in Montreal. In recognition December 6 is the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. On that day I encourage everyone to pause and consider the devastation that violence has on individuals, families, and our society. I encourage Albertans to think about how their communities can support actions to eliminate all forms of violence.

In Alberta we are working very hard to achieve our goal of eliminating family violence, including working with communities at the grassroots level to develop family violence prevention initiatives, providing specialized treatment services for offenders to break the cycle of abuse, training front-line professionals so that they may better respond to incidents of family violence, developing a provincial strategy to prevent sexual violence, increasing the number of provincially funded beds in women's shelters, expanding community outreach services and supports, establishing specialized domestic violence courts for more timely and effective response to family violence cases, developing safe visitation supports for children and families where family violence is an issue, working with aboriginal communities, and implementing education and awareness activities

that encourage Albertans to speak up about family violence.

As the Year of the Veteran and our centennial year draws to a close, reminding us of the great sacrifices of the past, I would like to say that no one loves you more than your family. On December 6 I ask all Albertans to renew their pledge to never commit, condone, or remain silent about any act of violence.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

International Day of Disabled Persons

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and inform the Assembly that December 3 marks the United Nations International Day of Disabled Persons. Events and celebrations will be taking place all over the world, all across this country, and in communities throughout Alberta.

In 1992 the United Nations proclaimed December 3 as International Day of Disabled Persons, and recognition of this day is intended to increase awareness and understanding of persons with disabilities and the issues that impact their lives. Albertans will celebrate International Day of Disabled Persons in a variety of ways including special ceremonies in Edmonton, Calgary, Fort McMurray, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, and even the smaller community of Bow Island.

Awards of excellence will be presented by the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. These awards will be at events in Calgary, Edmonton, and Bow Island. Because December 3 falls on a Saturday this year, the events in Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer will actually be taking place on Friday, December 2.

This year's theme is Nothing About Us Without Us. It is a reminder that the involvement of persons with disabilities in the decisions being made about them is critical. Together we will bring down the barriers – physical, systemic, and attitudinal – that impede their full participation in all aspects of community life.

I encourage all hon. colleagues and all Albertans to join these festivities and celebrate the achievements and acknowledge the aspirations of persons with disabilities. Thank you.

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

2:40 Centennial Salute for Sport and Recreation

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a long and proud tradition of athletic excellence. The skill and enthusiasm that our athletes, coaches, and athletic promoters exhibit on a daily basis has brought international fame and notoriety to our province. In recognition of this and to commemorate Alberta's centennial, the Alberta government and the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation created jointly an award that would acknowledge the efforts and achievements of 100 exceptional Albertans.

The Alberta centennial salute for sport and recreation gives recognition to those administrators, participants, builders, coaches, leaders, officials, and athletes who have made a lasting positive impact on the development of sports in this province. These individuals come from diverse backgrounds. They represent a multitude of different sports and disciplines. Included in their numbers are rodeo stars, Olympic athletes, politicians, and volunteers who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes to promote sports and recreation in their communities. They have one thing in common, an extreme sense of dedication and boundless enthusiasm toward the establishment and promotion of sports and recreational development in Alberta. They have served and continue to serve not only as ambassadors of sport and community but as shining examples of the spirit that has made Alberta great.

Mr. Speaker, these exceptional Albertans will be honoured at the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame & Museum on December 8, where they will receive a centennial salute scroll signed by the Premier and the Minister of Community Development, a centennial pin, and the recognition of the museum. As the government adviser to the ASRPW Foundation I would like to commend all those who will be receiving the award as well as pay tribute to the memory of those who are being recognized posthumously. These 100 exceptional people have touched the lives of all Albertans and are truly the embodiment of the centennial spirit.

Thank you.

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

Brian Fjeldheim

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to pay tribute to a great Albertan known to most of us in the Assembly. Mr. Brian Fjeldheim, who is seated in the Speaker's gallery with his wife, Colleen, recently retired from his position as Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta, a position he held from 1998 to 2005. As Chief Electoral Officer Brian presided over two general elections, a Senate nominee election, and four by-elections, and he served as senior adviser to Alberta's 2002-2003 Electoral Boundaries Commission.

Brian's achievements included in small part the development of a provincial register of electors and the implementation of Elections Alberta's interactive website. His dedication to the office of Chief Electoral Officer, his professionalism, and his service to the citizens of Alberta were commendable, and this Assembly was well served during his tenure. Brian was always passionate about the electoral process, and he took great pride in his office and the staff at Elections Alberta. I know that he'll be missed by many of his colleagues and friends.

I am pleased as an MLA and as chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices to recognize the achievements of Brian Fjeldheim as an officer of the Legislature. It was an honour to work with him, and I would ask all the members of the Assembly to join me in wishing the very best to Brian, Colleen, and their family with their future endeavours.

Thank you.

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

World AIDS Day

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Hebrew Bible prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah were convinced that lament is the key to open action. Today is World AIDS Day, and for us to think about the AIDS pandemic is to engage in a deep, heart-rending lament for the millions who have died from AIDS. Since 1983, 734 people have died from HIV/AIDS in Alberta. The world statistics are overwhelming: 3 million deaths in the past year; that's 60,000 a week. Half of the 40 million people world-wide who are living with HIV/AIDS are women, and more than 2 million are children. Seventy-five per cent of the AIDS pandemic is happening in sub-Saharan Africa.

Statistics often just numb us and prevent us from experiencing the personal loss and tragedy. As a former pastor I have sat at the bedside of individuals who have succumbed to AIDS. I have tried to say words of comfort and encouragement, but in all cases what I have received is much greater: the gift of their courage and their hope. The Hebrew prophets have taught us that lament leads to hope and action. Gordon Brown, the U.K. minister of finance, said that

when there are 30,000 children dying every day and when there are 100 million children not going to school at all in the poorest countries, the need to act is obvious. Stephen Lewis' new book, *Race Against Time*, is a call to action.

In the last two weeks we have been debating the spending of \$1.8 billion on ourselves in Alberta. One point eight billion is enough to establish whole country-wide health care systems in most African countries, providing enough health care professionals and caregivers and pharmaceuticals to beat this disease. Africa needs at least \$22 billion a year just for HIV/AIDS, all of which leads me to question the morality of our excessive spending in Alberta.

The good news is that the world is gradually awakening to the challenge, and thanks to local organizations like Living Positive a lot of awareness is happening about HIV/AIDS. May the lament of today be turned into hope and action tomorrow.

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

Raymond Comets Football Team

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today and recognize the achievement of the Raymond Comets football team in winning their tier 1 provincial championship last Saturday against the number one rated Bev Facey, defeating them a decisive 25-nothing. The Comets' accomplishment was achieved because they demonstrated and drew from many of the attributes that make Alberta, our towns and our people, the success we are today.

First, they not only had a vision; they knew that what the mind could conceive, they would achieve. They were willing to work, to work very hard. They had leaders in their communities that were willing to give of their knowledge and their experience freely. These leaders were their coaches and the parents, who also sacrificed their time and efforts enthusiastically to coach and inspire these young men to be all they could be. Average or even above average was not the goal; it was to be the best they could be.

These young men and their coaches did not come with any excuses. They did not claim that they were from a small school or that they weren't as big or as tall as their opponents. They knew as a team that cohesiveness and harmonious execution is more important than powerful, individual strength and size. They knew the rules were the same for both sides, and they were enthused and excited to participate.

We must look to our youth for an example. The Comets are grateful that there were no rules to exclude them from competing at the tier 1 provincial level. Many may have said that they should not have competed, that their school was just too small. This competition teaches us the importance of rules of inclusion and not exclusion, which allows all people to have the opportunity to compete equally whatever the playing field.

I salute the Raymond Comets, the players, their families, coaches, and the communities for their outstanding achievement, once again showing that bigger does not always mean better.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Page Recognition

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. members, every day and night of the session we're served extremely well by the pages, and on behalf of all the members of the Assembly I get to be Santa Claus today. We want to give each page a small Christmas present to say thank you and wish them, each and every one, a very merry Christmas. I'll ask the Speaker's page, Janiesh Bali, to come and distribute these gifts on our behalf.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two forms of a petition today. I'd like to table a petition by 595 individuals urging the Alberta government to "increase infrastructure development funding for Highway 63."

An Hon. Member: Thank you.

Mr. Martin: You're welcome.

You can thank me again because I'd also like to table on behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood the same petition signed by 570 individuals urging the Alberta government to "increase infrastructure development funding for Highway 63." That brings the total number of signatures to 7,661.

head: 2:50 **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday I will move that written questions 43, 44, and 45 be dealt with that day. There being no additional written questions or motions for returns, there are none to stand and retain their places.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition I'd like to table copies of a memo from James Eamon to William Code concerning operations of the Alberta Securities Commission and a second tabling, which is copies of court documents indicating involvement of the former Treasurer, Mr. Dinning, in the operation of the Alberta Securities Commission.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, those would be the documents that I asked to be tabled?

Ms Blakeman: Those are the documents you requested. Yes, indeed.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition I table the requisite copies of a letter from the leader of the Liberal opposition to the ministers of Children's Services, Health and Wellness, and Education requesting a school meal program for hungry children in Alberta schools.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings, one petitioning the government of Alberta to press the federal government for resumption of talks with the Lubicon Cree in northern Alberta; second, a letter from a constituent calling on the government to give back the provincial education tax exemption to seniors,

raise the annual income maximum to include average seniors, and grandfather property taxes so seniors will not be subjected to market value assessments.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table a letter and the appropriate number of copies from a teacher in Edmonton pointing out that this government needs to move forward with a plan to pay off the unfunded liability of the teachers' pension plan.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I'm tabling first of all the appropriate number of copies of 13 letters from schoolteachers from across Alberta. Again, they are greatly concerned with the unfunded liability of the teachers' pension fund and are urging the government to act quickly to remedy the situation.

The second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Sylvia Scarfe of Edmonton, who is concerned about a three-month delay in the processing of her seniors' dental benefits.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of an open letter sent to me by a coalition of prominent Albertans, including Ian Tyson and Connie Kaldor, asking the province to proclaim the Castle wilderness area a provincial park in honour of Andy Russell and in recognition of the Piikani First Nation.

As well, I have the appropriate amount of copies of a letter from the Lethbridge Family Services board of directors indicating that their agency receives persons with disability funding, but they did not receive an increase in funding this year.

Finally, I have a tabling. This is a statement from the Non-Smokers' Rights Association from January 27, 2003, alleging that a fundraising and lobbying firm, GCI Canada, set up a fake citizens' group called the Smokers' Freedom Society as a front for the two big tobacco companies here in Alberta.

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

Dr. Pannu: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Beth Pierog of Grande Prairie expressing deep concerns about the government's plans for health care privatization and the so-called third way for health care.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise and table the appropriate five copies of information regarding a partner in the firm of McLennan Ross cited in e-mails from the labour board yesterday.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Ouellette, Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency, response to Written Question 33, asked for by Mr. Elsalhy on November 21, 2005; on behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Municipal Affairs, return to order of the Assembly MR 14, MR 15,

and MR 16, all asked for by Mr. MacDonald on behalf of Dr. Taft on April 18, 2005.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 7(5) I would like to inquire of the Government House Leader as to what the government business is that's projected for next week.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There appears to be very little if anything on the Order Paper other than two government motions, and I don't anticipate putting any on.

Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, by way of an historical vignette on this day in 1919 by order in council the town of Peace River was incorporated as a town. Just one little bit of addendum information about the town of Peace River: it is home to Henry Fuller Davis, also known as Twelve Foot Davis. Twelve Foot Davis had a 12-foot land claim in British Columbia during the Caribou Country gold rush, and he was able to mine almost \$30,000 in gold from his land, which he then took to establish a trading post near the town of Peace River. Of course, there is a monument to old Twelve Foot Davis, who made 30,000 bucks at that time mining gold.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on a purported point of order.

Point of Order

Improper Questions

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order concerning the questions put by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. In so doing, I wish to cite *Beauchesne* paragraphs 409(1) and (3) and *Marleau* pages 426 and 427 and our own Standing Order 23(j).

Mr. Speaker, my shorthand skills are extremely limited, so I will attempt to paraphrase the words that were put by the hon. member. He said words to the effect that whether it is the Alberta Securities Commission, the Labour Relations Board, or the Calgary health authority, the boards are "rife with conflicts of interest, patronage, and political interference." The question and particularly the preamble are not only inflammatory and offensive, but they are perhaps injurious to the reputations of those individuals involved with those boards. Not only that, but they are in the nature of an opinion or a statement or a representation. In my respectful submission those particular words offend the good order of the Assembly.

I would like to quote briefly from those authorities which I cited. Paragraph 23 of our Standing Orders says:

A member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that member:

(j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

Beauchesne paragraph 409(1) states as follows: the question in question period

must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate.

Citation 409(3) also states that

the question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be

based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise, and must not suggest its own answer, be argumentative or make representations.

Marleau, page 426, states that

a Member should

- ask a question;
- be brief;
- seek information;
- ask a question that is within the . . . responsibility of the government or the individual Minister addressed

and the question should not

- be a statement, representation, argument or an expression of opinion.

Further, on page 427, the question should not

- make a charge by way of a preamble to a question.

It's my respectful submission, Mr. Speaker, that this question, and particularly the preamble, offends the good order of this Assembly, and it's my respectful submission that the Speaker should call the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to order.

3:00

The Speaker: On this point of order, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I relish this opportunity to talk about this point of order. I would suggest that a lot of the quotes that the member – he must have spent the whole question period doing that, and I appreciate it. I know the hon. member. He does good work in committees. I wish he would continue with that.

My point, Mr. Speaker, is that in this session he may not like the preamble, but it's not really a point of order. We can talk. He mentions patronage. We believe it to be true that there's patronage. He talks about conflict of interest. We believe that that happened in the Securities Commission. He talks about political interference. We believe that that just happened in the Labour Relations Board.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to us that as part of the debate in this Assembly, this has been going on for years and years and years. So I honestly suggest that it's really not a point of order. It's a fact that the member really doesn't like the preamble. Too bad. It's a democracy. We will continue doing our job.

The Speaker: Well, look, if I understood the Government House Leader, there's probably no business on Monday, so let's do something. Okay? Between now and the next time we reconvene, let's all of us take some of these books, and let's read about what the rules of debate are because I think that in the last 12 days I could have ruled out 95 per cent of the questions from all sides of the Assembly. Nobody is free on this. Let me assure you of that. There would have been very, very few questions permitted if all the rules were applied. So in the spirit of harmony as we go through the next several months, let's just try and find these wonderful things to deal with.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

Adjournment of Session

26. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the fall sitting of the First Session of the 26th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

[Motion carried]

head: **Royal Assent**

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend upon the Assembly.

[The Premier and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

The Speaker: Hon. members, while we wait for the arrival of His Honour, you might just be interested in a couple of things here. This year, in 2005, this Assembly dealt with 58 bills. This is only the fourth time since 1971 that the Order Paper has no bills left over on it – only the fourth time – the other times being 1996, 2001, and 2004.

You might also be interested in noting that this year including today we had 53 sitting days including 36 evening sittings.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please. Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

The Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, and the Premier entered the Chamber. His Honour took his place upon the throne]

His Honour: Hon. members, please be seated.

The Speaker: May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly has at its present sittings passed certain bills to which and in the name of the Legislative Assembly I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

The Clerk: Your Honour, the following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed.

- 9 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005
- 15 Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2005
- 43 Alberta Resource Rebate Statutes Amendment Act, 2005
- 44 Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)
- 45 Maternal Tort Liability Act
- 46 Criminal Notoriety Act
- 47 Alberta Association of Former MLAs Act
- 48 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2005
- 49 Police Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)
- 50 Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)
- 51 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2005 (No. 2)
- 52 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)
- 53 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2005
- 54 Alberta Centennial Education Savings Plan Amendment Act, 2005
- 55 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)
- 56 Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)
- 57 Apprenticeship and Industry Training Amendment Act, 2005

58 Alberta Centennial Medal Amendment Act, 2005
Pr. 4 Brooklyn Hannah George Rewega Right of Civil Action Act

[The Lieutenant Governor indicated his assent]

The Clerk: In Her Majesty's name His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor and the Premier left the Chamber]

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Hon. members, just to conclude what I was saying a little earlier, as of December 1 – that's today – 53 days including 36 evening sittings occurred this year. Last year, in 2004, we had 43 days of sittings including 29 evening sittings. This year at the end of the sitting day, Wednesday last night, November 30, we'd been here for

16,899 minutes. In 2004 we were here for 12,246 minutes. The number of hours at the end of sitting day, Wednesday, November 30: we'd been here for 281 hours, 39 minutes. In 2004 this was 204 hours, 6 minutes, but please remember that there was no fall session in 2004.

Hon. Government House Leader, do you wish to await the return of the Premier, or do you wish to proceed?

3:10

Mr. Hancock: I think we can proceed, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the information provided. The only piece that you might have added if you'd wanted to was that three of the four times in which the Order Paper had been completely cleared was under the current House leader. But I digress.

Given that the Order Paper is cleared, Mr. Speaker, I would move, pursuant to Government Motion 26 recently passed, that we do recess the fall sitting and adjourn.

The Speaker: Let me wish you all a safe and happy festive season.

[Motion carried; pursuant to Government Motion 26 the Assembly adjourned at 3:11 p.m.]