

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 6, 2006**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/03/06

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Boards of Directors Guidelines

502. Mr. MacDonald moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to eliminate patronage appointments and increase openness and accountability of government institutions and agencies by establishing new principles and procedures for recruiting, training, and evaluating boards of directors as outlined by recommendations 1 and 2 of the annual report of the Auditor General of Alberta, 2004-2005.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure at this time to lead off the discussion on Motion 502. Patronage appointments to public boards is this motion. I think it's about time this Legislative Assembly had a debate on this issue, and this certainly follows from the Auditor General's report from last year where there were recommendations made to improve recruiting, evaluating, and training of public boards.

This motion provides the opportunity to point out, number one, the patronage in the appointment process. Do we have a democratic deficit here? Is there sufficient openness? Is there sufficient public oversight? Given the poor system for evaluating and reporting on performance and the potential or real negative impact on the performance of important public boards and agencies, many of which are responsible for significant decisions and considerable amounts of tax dollars, I think that this is an important time to have this debate.

Now, certainly, when we look at the Auditor General's report and we look at how the report ranks or gives priority to its recommendations – there are three categories, of course: key recommendations, other numbered recommendations, and unnumbered recommendations. Both the recommendations we're talking about in this motion are about key recommendations. I have no idea what caught the Auditor General's eye in this matter or, as a matter of fact, the other auditors' that work in the office. The Auditor General's report includes both cross-ministry and ministry-specific recommendations, and since most ministries have established boards or agencies with delegated powers, these recommendations were cross-ministry.

Now, there are a lot of agencies and boards and commissions that have been created by this government. Research indicates, starting with A, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: there's the Northern Alberta Development Council and the Métis Settlement Appeal Tribunal. In Advanced Education, of course, we have a significant number of boards of governors of institutions all over the province that are set up. Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: many different organizations. Children's Services certainly; Community Development; Economic Development. In Finance we've got ATB Financial, the Alberta Insurance Council, the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, the Alberta Securities Commission. In Gaming we have the Alberta Gaming Research Council and the liquor commission. There are lots of boards, Mr. Speaker.

We can look at the necessity or the need to improve public

confidence in the political process, and I would urge all hon. members to consider supporting this Motion 502 if for no other reason than to restore public confidence in the political process. There are many examples of what the federal government has done right and what the federal government has done wrong. One of the things that they have certainly done right is that they have for public circulation a book on appointments. It's a public document. Now, I researched this, and I couldn't find a similar book for this government. I can't find, if it does exist, a comprehensive list of all these agencies, boards, and commissions: who was on them, what they are making, and who appointed them.

Now, perhaps we could even go further than have a book. We could have a website linked directly to the front page of the Alberta government's website, and we could have a list on here so that the public could be confident that they don't need a Progressive Conservative membership to apply for one of these agencies, boards, or commissions. This website could let everyone know what positions are available, how long is the term, the compensation and/or benefits, and also we could find out the vacancies, the listing of those vacancies and if there is to be a competition to fill these vacancies and for how long the competition is open to the public. I think that would be a good first step.

Was there an open competition when we appointed the former Minister of Energy to his patronage job in Washington, DC? I don't think there was an open competition. I don't think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre was aware if there was an open competition. Who knows? With her background in the arts maybe she would have been interested in applying. You never know. It's hard to say. I for one didn't see an open competition when Murray Smith got this job. There was certainly no indication of the salary that would be paid.

Mr. Ouellette: You have to admit that he's doing a hell of a job, though, isn't he?

Mr. MacDonald: I'm sorry, Minister of RAGE; I didn't catch that.

The Deputy Speaker: Through the chair.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, Mr. Smith's compensation package, his accommodation, his expense account: none of this was made public prior to that patronage appointment. The hon. member can roll his eyes if he wishes, but it is a patronage appointment pure and simple. That's all it is. This is a government that a little over a decade ago eliminated all these patronage positions in these sort of foreign capitals.

Ms Blakeman: The offices.

Mr. MacDonald: They closed those offices as a cost-cutting measure.

Now, when we see some hon. members retire from this Assembly, they're not satisfied with their payout. Oh, no. Mr. Smith goes to Washington at the taxpayers' expense, and there's no rhyme or reason as to why that is happening. The hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency may think that there are valid reasons for this patronage appointment, but I can't see any. Sorry. The federal government has a series of embassies and ambassadors and staff in various places around the world, and I would encourage this government to work with that group. In fact, we have the former Minister of Finance in the Progressive Conservative government, Mr. Michael Wilson, going down to Washington to work as our ambassador.

So maybe we could work with him, save a few dollars, and eliminate that patronage position because we still don't know all the details of the selection process. This is where, if we had a website, there could be a lot of people seeing that position open up, understand that the government is going to create that position . . . [Mr. Macdonald's speaking time expired] Boy, I wish I had more time.

8:10

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am also pleased to join in this debate on Motion 502 dealing with patronage tonight. You know, there is a lot that can be said about the staffing of agencies, boards, and committees, but I will keep my comments brief and fairly narrowly focused to enable others to cover the issues as well.

Across Canada there is an astounding number of positions on federal agencies, boards, and commissions that are appointed by the Prime Minister and his cabinet. There are some 2,800 of these positions, and that number does not include Crown corporation appointments, judicial nominations, or appointments to Ottawa's unelected and ineffective Senate. The Official Opposition's Liberal cousins in Ottawa displayed naked cronyism and unadulterated patronage in doling out literally thousands of these positions over the years. A large number of these appointments by ministers and the Prime Minister's office are made without consultation or the advice of the affected agency, board, or commission. Can you believe it? Without consultation with the affected agencies, boards, or commissions.

Many of these appointments are unvetted and completely arbitrary. Far too often plum appointments were used to simply reward loyal Liberal acolytes. These appointments were indicative of the obscene culture of Liberal corruption and entitlement in our nation's capital. In the two weeks leading up to the dissolution of Parliament and the onset of the federal election campaign last fall, during the frantic last days of this disastrous and corrupt Liberal government's prolonged death rattle, Paul Martin handed out a staggering 212 appointments. Let me repeat that: 212 appointments in a mere two weeks. That's not all.

An Hon. Member: That's not all?

Mr. Prins: That's not all. This cornucopia of appointments that were handed out during this two-week span like bite-sized chocolate bars and boxes of Smarties on a Halloween night included lucrative goodies such as a dozen ambassador positions, directorships of large Crown corporations, executive positions in important federal agencies, immigration adjudicators, high-ranking judges to the federal judiciary, high-level promotions within the RCMP, and trustees of national museums.

The sad thing is, Mr. Speaker, that this two-week patronage bender looks almost reasonable compared to the patronage spree that Martin went on between April 14 and May 19 of 2005 when 448 orders in council were hurriedly approved, including more than 300 public-sector appointments. That Trudeau-esque flurry of patronage and pork-barrelling just happened to coincide with the period last spring when Martin's government precariously teetered on the brink of losing the confidence of the House of Commons – 448 orders in council. The Martin Liberals decided not to take any chances and made very sure that they could take care of as many Liberal friends and followers as possible in their potential final days as the ruling party in Ottawa.

Unfortunately, the federal government did not fall on May 19, and

Canadians were forced to endure several more months of Liberal governance, which included more patronage and a very transparent ploy to spend their way to try and buy votes and attempt another election win using an obscene amount of taxpayer dollars, including pre-election spending announcements in excess of \$20 billion in the month of November. Can you imagine \$20 billion of new spending in one month?

Just to add some credibility to what I'm saying and some incredulity to what you are hearing, I'll share a few examples of these appointments. Here are a few of the noteworthy beneficiaries of former Prime Minister Martin's plentiful patronage appointments. I'll just name a few of these, just for the benefit of the Assembly.

Glen Murray, former mayor of Winnipeg and defeated Liberal candidate in the 2004 federal election, appointed as chairman of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy despite the rejection of his appointment by MPs in the House of Commons environment committee. John Harvard, former Liberal MP, appointed Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba. Ironically, he was appointed Manitoba's LG to make way for Glen Murray, who would eventually go on to lose his seat in the 2004 election.

Allan Rock, a former Liberal cabinet minister, appointed Canadian ambassador to the United Nations. Frank McKenna, former Liberal Premier of New Brunswick, appointed ambassador to the United States. Jim Walsh, a former Newfoundland and Labrador Member of the House of Assembly and cabinet minister who headed Martin's leadership campaign in Newfoundland, appointed to the Federal Transportation Safety Board. Yvon Charbonneau, former Liberal MP, appointed ambassador and permanent delegate of Canada to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris. Stan Keyes, former Liberal cabinet minister and one-time chair of the National Liberal Party of Canada caucus, appointed Canadian consul general to New England and Boston. Howard Sapers, former Alberta Liberal MLA, appointed as correctional investigator of Canada.

Karen Kraft Sloan, former Liberal MP, appointed Canadian ambassador for the environment. David Haggard, defeated federal Liberal candidate, appointed chair of the newly created advisory committee on apprenticeship. Robert Fung, prominent long-time Liberal financial supporter, who also happens to be Martin's former college roommate, has been the beneficiary of a plethora of patronage perks over the years.

I'm not even going to touch on the ridiculous partisan patronage appointments that the Martin Liberals have made to the federal judiciary or the undemocratic lifetime appointments to the Senate to reward personal friends, financial contributors, and good soldiers within the Liberal ranks, Mr. Speaker.

The sheer volume and opportunistic timing of Martin's patronage appointments may be sickening but hardly surprising. It was just business as usual for the Liberal Party of Canada. Mr. Martin was just following the well-treaded path of his Liberal brethren Chretien, Turner, and Trudeau, who in the grand Liberal tradition opened the federal appointment troughs for the rest of the partisan Liberal hogs to feed at on their way out of the Prime Minister's office. The level of taint involved in Ottawa's appointment process is stunning. Unfortunately, it even gives a bad name to hogs.

Here are a few of the more infamous patronage appointments made by former Prime Minister Jean Chretien: Roger Simmons, former Liberal Trudeau-era cabinet minister convicted of tax evasion, appointed as consul general in Seattle. David Dingwall, former Liberal cabinet minister, the man who claims he was entitled to his entitlements, appointed president and CEO of the Royal Canadian Mint. We all know how that one turned out. Jim Munson, Prime Minister Chretien's former press secretary, Chretien's last

Senate appointment. Munson joined Percy Downe, Chretien's former Liberal chief of staff in the senate. Alfonso Gagliano, a Chretien cabinet minister of federal sponsorship scandal fame, appointed Canadian ambassador to Denmark.

I could continue for hours, Mr. Speaker, about the long Liberal lineage of questionable patronage appointments. I didn't even get to Trudeau. I said at the outset that I would be brief, so I'll exercise restraint and cede the floor to the next speaker.

Thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we seem to have an urge tonight to enthusiastically coach and help out the person that's recognized to do the speaking. It's really not necessary. If anyone wants to speak, I can certainly put you on my list. Just raise your hand to be recognized, and hopefully we'll get to you.

The next speaker will be the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Debate Continued

Ms Blakeman: Well, Mr. Speaker, if that wasn't the most amazing case of the pot calling the kettle black, I don't know when I last saw it. This is so typical of what's wrong with Alberta. Here we have a motion that's attempting to make things better in Alberta, and what we have is a government backbencher who gets up and whines on for 10 minutes about a defeated federal government. Hello? We're not talking about the feds; we're talking about right here. Did that member contribute to what was happening here in Alberta? Did he have anything positive to say about moving us forward? No. He's going to whine on about the defeated federal government. Well, let's look at what his own people have to say. [interjection] If it's good for the goose, it's good for the gander, honey. Sit tight.

8:20

Here we have a favourite member of this particular Alberta government. That would be Rod Love. In a press release with the *Edmonton Sun* we've got Mr. Rod Love explaining "Alberta's process of holding open competitions with panels of bureaucrats and outside experts vetting the candidates," and he's promoting this to who? That would be the Gomery inquiry, that went across the land. What is Mr. Love quoted as saying? I'm sorry. There's a brief word in here that's an expletive deleted, but bear with me, Mr. Speaker. In quotes, Mr. Love says, "There was too much goddamn cronyism in our own government." Please forgive me. It's a direct quote, and I'm happy to table it.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we just had a discussion earlier, last week, about quoting using unparliamentary language or language that's not fitting to be used in this Assembly.

Ms Blakeman: I understand that. I just wanted to be accurate with the quote, and it's in the quote. I'm happy to table it. I'll get you the copies and table it later this evening.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the hon. member withdrawing that comment? Would you like to withdraw that comment?

Ms Blakeman: It's a quote, but I can withdraw the word in the middle of the quote, and I'm happy to table it so that you can see I was quoting, Mr. Speaker. Thanks very much.

We have this representative of this government not talking about

anything in Alberta but talking about something happening outside of Alberta. You know what, Mr. Speaker? Almost every word that he spoke is absolutely applicable to Alberta today. We've got somebody whining and talking about how there was a government in place for so long, that it was so totally corrupt, that everything was permeated throughout their culture with corruption, and they've been in power how long? Oh, my goodness, this was such an immense amount of time. We should have all been ashamed of how long they sat in power in the federal government. How long was that? Was it 12 years? Oh, my. How long do we have the Conservatives in power here in Alberta? Well, that would be 35 years. That's almost three times as much. Three times as much and, I could venture, three times as corrupt perhaps, Mr. Speaker.

Let's have a little look-see at what our possibilities here are: patronage appointments to government boards and agencies. Mr. Speaker, this was already brought forward by our very own Auditor General not once, not just the most recent Auditor General but a previous one as well, talking about the need for this government to clean up the way it appointed people and to get people in place because they actually knew something about the issues. This is important because these people are supposed to be representing the citizens, and they should be representing the citizens. Frankly, more people in this province did not vote for this government than did vote for this government.

Therefore, to have citizen representation, there surely should be people appointed to these government boards and agencies who are not card-carrying members of the Conservative Party. More of them should not be card-carrying members than are card-carrying members, I would argue. They're also dealing with distribution of money, particularly government grants, so it's very important that this is seen to be open and transparent and accountable, and it is not, Mr. Speaker.

Let's have a look at some of the names. We have our very own gallery of rogues here, Mr. Speaker, and I'm going to be able to go on for as much time as I have here. We've got Mr. Smith, who was a former provincial minister who did not seek re-election in the November 2004 election. What happens to him? No competition. Gosh, gee, he is appointed as the counsellor for the Alberta office in Washington, DC. My colleague for Edmonton-Gold Bar had already commented that this was not an open and tendered job and that, in fact, that very minister had been responsible for cost-cutting measures earlier in which he closed all of these very same trade offices. Now they're reopened, and he's given the plum job in Washington, DC.

How about former Auditor General Peter Valentine? In the spring of 2005 he was appointed as interim head of the Alberta Securities Commission. He currently serves as senior adviser to the CEO and leader of internal audit projects at the Calgary health region authority. Well, my goodness, Mr. Speaker, what goes around comes around, doesn't it? Okay. Let's look at the Calgary regional health authority. In the late 1990s the Calgary regional health authority was run by a number of confidantes of the Premier, including former treasurer Jim Dinning as chairman, former chief of staff Rod Love as communications adviser, and former Executive Council deputy minister Jack Davis as CEO. Very interesting. The pot calling the kettle black again we have here.

How about Mr. Hartley, former VP, communications, for the PC Party association of Alberta, who also served on the regional health authority board there in Calgary? How about Norman "Skip" MacDonald, president of the Premier's constituency association, who was also appointed to the Calgary regional health authority, or perhaps Mr. Libin, who is a lawyer and, I understand, is responsible for some assistance in fundraising, who also served on the Calgary

regional health authority? How about Jack Davis, former Deputy Minister of Executive Council under this current Premier, appointed as president and CEO to the Calgary health region? They've also appointed this same Mr. Davis to a variety of things: president of the Alberta Social Housing Corporation, director of Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation, now known as the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, member of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board advisory committee, member of the Mount Royal College board of governors. My goodness, Mr. Speaker, this is a very long list indeed.

How about Mr. Gary Campbell, a long-time associate of the Premier who currently serves as the vice-president of finance, north, for the governing party's political association, serving on the Ralph Klein foundation and government appointments including the internal audit committee, the board of governors of the Alberta Treasury Branch Financial, and the Alberta Economic Development Authority. He was co-chair for the government's Alberta Tax Review Committee in 1998, also chairman of the government's Business Tax Review Committee in 2000. I bet you're starting to regret doing that, aren't you?

Let's look at Wendy Kinsella, who was the former assistant deputy minister of Alberta labour. She is now appointed or has been to the Capital health authority board. How about chair of NorQuest College board of directors? She's also been a member of the University of Alberta board of governors and a former executive director of the Alberta Human Rights Commission.

We have the previous Member for Calgary-Lougheed, who was appointed as a provincial judge. I'm sure she was very well qualified for it, but I do note she was, immediately upon not running in the last election, appointed as a provincial judge. How about Bob Maskell, the former Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, appointed to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts?

Well, my goodness, Mr. Speaker. Can you imagine all these names, all these close associates, all of them appointed to various influential positions handling money, developing policy? They're supposed to represent the citizens. The distance between them and this governing party is nothing; it's about as wide as a piece of paper.

How about Audrey Luft, a member of the Alberta Economic Development Authority, also a former chair and member of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts? Additionally, Doug Goss, who turns up as a board member of NAIT, turns up as a board member of the Capital health authority, turns up as a member of the Environmental Protection Commission. How about Julian Nowicki, a former Deputy Minister of Executive Council: turns up as chair of Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission? Oh, yes, my friends. We even have a lovely woman named Paula Tyler, a former Deputy Minister for Children's Services, I think, and she turns up as a senior official for mental health services for children, Capital health authority.

There are a number of members, people that are closely associated with the political party from which this governing party comes. So when we talk about whether there's a bias, whether there is a process in place that's open and accountable, there isn't. [interjections] I'm loving this, Mr. Speaker, because every time we get people whining and moaning, and there's the Minister of RAGE yapping away on the other side again. I'm hoping he's going to get up immediately upon my finishing and actually put something on the record instead of just yapping off from the other side. Thank you very much for allowing me to get that out, Mr. Speaker.

Oh, I'm so sorry. How could I have possibly forgotten Bob Westbury, a favourite of this government, who is appointed on the government's behalf to a very long list of boards and different positions?

The Deputy Speaker: I'm not sure. Was the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency the next one wanting to speak on this? Oh, I was mistaken.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and to speak to Motion 502. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for bringing forward this motion as I believe it presents a unique opportunity to prove the old analogy about stones and glass houses.

8:30

I'm sure we all remember the final days of the Liberal Martin government, Mr. Speaker, that tired, decrepit old beast that still managed to shove its snout into the pork barrel for one last apocalyptic feeding frenzy. Let me say that again: that tired, decrepit old beast that still managed to shove its snout into the pork barrel for one last apocalyptic feeding frenzy. What didn't disappear down the throats of departing Liberal MPs was tossed about randomly in every conceivable direction to friends and party contributors.

I was pleased to see my colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka refreshing the collective memory of the opposition with a few examples of what their federal cousins find to be ethical and appropriate behaviour. The cronyism and wastefulness of the federal Liberal juggernaut as it gasped its last was a lasting and eternal testament to the celebration of mediocrity.

I actually wish I had more time at my disposal, Mr. Speaker, but regrettably I'm bound by the orders of this House. If this weren't the case, I might actually have a chance to completely catalogue and recount the extent of corruption and patronage present in every federal Liberal government since the time of Trudeau. Since this amount of time isn't a possibility, I'd like nonetheless to at least scratch the surface in the time I have remaining and mention a few more friends of the federal Liberals that achieved fame, fortune, and power with the mantra: it's who you know at the PMO. Those who kissed the Grits, so to speak, were handsomely rewarded, and ordinary Canadians footed the bill for this unprecedented financial philandering.

Mr. Speaker, as long as there was a Liberal government in power, Canadians could count on an overwhelming majority of Liberal friends filling the upper echelons and cushy cubbyholes of every government organization in sight. Whether they were talking heads or figureheads, they ascended to notoriety mostly on the back of association, not always by virtue of merit or ability.

Last April former Heritage minister Liza Frulla announced the appointment of three individuals to the board of the CBC, for example. One of these was Rai Sahi, a chief executive of Morguard Corp. He had a direct association with Paul Martin in the 1980s for his involvement in a deal to buy a Martin-owned company, Kingsway Transport Group. Let us also look at a couple of appointments made during the same period of time by the former minister of transportation, Jean Lapierre. B.C. businesswoman Kazuko Komatsu, who had donated thousands of dollars to the Liberal Party of Canada, was appointed to the board of directors of the Vancouver Port Authority. Former minister Lapierre also appointed one Michel Crête, a consultant to the Liberal government, to the board of Via Rail. Former Labour and Housing minister Joe Fontana appointed a renowned residential and commercial builder, Alexander Werzberger, who incidentally was a staunch Liberal supporter, to the board of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

What is really amusing, Mr. Speaker, are the comments made at this time about these and other appointments by Mr. Lapierre's spokeswoman, Irene Marcheterre. Ms Marcheterre made a statement

to the effect that those who were appointed were giving a valuable service no matter that they had been giving money to the Liberal Party as well. She also commented that all individuals were qualified. Now, why should this even have to be said? I would think as a taxpayer that those who were appointed to these posts by the federal Liberals would have been considered on the basis of merit. That a staffer would feel the need to justify the appointment with a statement of qualification speaks, in my opinion, directly to the pervasive perception of corruption that surrounded the Liberal Martin government. Ms Marcheterre herself, after making these comments, was implicated in the Gomery investigation for allegedly receiving under-the-table payments along with other Liberals: simply unbelievable but not isolated.

The great statesman Benjamin Franklin once said, "He that lies down with dogs shall rise up with fleas." Now, I'm not saying that the federal Liberal Party was infested with fleas in a literal sense, Mr. Speaker, but I will say that they left pieces of their legacy of patronage scattered far and wide across the country. These individuals caused and, regrettably, continue to cause an itch in the nation's collective sense of decorum.

One must also wonder at the issue of association, Mr. Speaker. The opposition seems to have a rather warm and cozy relationship with their federal cousins. I certainly think that this relationship makes the proposals in Motion 502 . . .

An Hon. Member: Prove it.

Rev. Abbott: Grant Mitchell.

Ms Blakeman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Rev. Abbott: I certainly think that this relationship makes the proposals in Motion 502 rather amusing but also sadly ironic given the track record of the Martin Liberals.

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of order?

Point of Order

False Allegations

Ms Blakeman: Yes, please; 23(h), (i), and (j). The speaker is saying that there's a cozy relationship between the provincial Liberals and the federal Liberals, and there is absolutely no proof to that. I would quote 23(h): "makes allegations against another member"; 23(i), imputing false . . . [interjections]

Hey, you know? [interjections] Order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I can't hear what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is saying with all the background noise.

Hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Continuing on, 23(i) is imputing "false or unavowed motives to another member" and 23(j): using "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." In that one comment he has managed to do all three of those things, and I would ask that he be brought to order on this, please. He's making an assumption here that is simply not true.

Rev. Abbott: If I may respond, Mr. Speaker, 23(h), (i), and (j) – and I would think that the member would know this after the many years she has sat in this House – are referring to situations about another member. I was not referring to any member specifically, but rather I was referring to the Liberal Party as a whole. Of course they're

associated with their federal cousins. They share the same name, and they share many of the same values and beliefs.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there anyone else who wishes to comment on this point of order?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, it seems that there has been a bit of a misunderstanding here because what I understood to be said was with respect to some former members of the Liberal Party in Alberta such as Grant Mitchell and Howard Sapers. Obviously, there is a relationship between some former members and the now extant Liberal government in Ottawa, and I think that's all the hon. member was trying to point out. In that respect, there was some coziness. We're all aware of it. So if we could just move on, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I have to agree with the hon. member. It is a terrible insult to be accused of being in any relationship with the federal Liberals.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I've allowed a lot of leeway in all of the speeches so far tonight as far as relevance goes. Let me read the motion to you. We're debating:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to eliminate patronage appointments and increase openness and accountability of government institutions and agencies by establishing new principles and procedures for recruiting, training, and evaluating boards of directors as outlined by recommendations 1 and 2 of the annual report . . .

I've heard no mention of the annual report in any of the speeches. I've heard no mention of establishing new principles. All I'm hearing is examples of patronage at the provincial and federal levels of government.

If we're going to debate the motion, let's stick to the motion and the principles of it or else we'll be in points of order all night. May we move on, or I will be calling a point of order on relevance on all the speeches from this point on.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Debate Continued

Rev. Abbott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for clearing that up. That will bring us back to the parable about glass houses and stones that shouldn't be thrown. In true Liberal fashion the walls of the former federal House weren't glass. In fact, they were taxpayer-funded Waterford crystal, and the House staff were the homeowner's friends on permanent paid leave. In the end the people of Canada were given sufficient illumination to see through these walls and express their horror at the goings on within, thank goodness.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt in my mind whatsoever that these glass house building plans were distributed far and wide within the Liberal family, including the provincial Liberals, and that's the relevance.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order, Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Hinman: Relevance. You just made the point of talking about it, and he got up, and he hasn't said a single thing with relevance to Motion 502. I'd ask that you would keep your word and print them to point every time that they speak and they're not relevant. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Are you challenging the chair? I want to read to everyone *Beauchesne's* 459: "Relevance is not easy to define." In this case I would have to argue with this particular clause because tonight it seems to be quite easy to define. "In borderline cases the Member should be given the benefit of the doubt, although the Speaker has frequently admonished Members who have strayed in debate." I will be admonishing them when I feel it's necessary to do so or unless someone calls a point of order.

Mr. Hinman: We'll be standing up lots.

The Deputy Speaker: What was that?

Mr. Hinman: I said: I guess we'll be standing up lots unless they change their ways.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar on the motion.

8:40 Debate Continued

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the motion I think what I'm trying to get at here is that the provincial Liberals are also representative of the culture of entitlement that David Dingwall made famous. You see, the opposition has not placed a lot of distance . . .

Mr. Hinman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner on a point of order. What's your citation?

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Hinman: Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). There is no relevance on new principles or procedures, and that's what this motion is about. It's about new principles and procedures for recruiting, training, evaluating of directors as outlined by the recommendations of the Auditor General's report. I don't hear any of that, and I question the relevance of his speech.

Rev. Abbott: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member would simply let me finish the speech, then he would see the relevance as it will all tie in at the end and become a very eloquent piece of literature. But he won't let me finish.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, your citation of (h), (i), and (j) doesn't refer to relevance at all.

Mr. Hinman: How about *Beauchesne's* 469 then? Does that one work any better?

The Deputy Speaker: It's *Beauchesne's* 459, so you quoted the wrong points. As I said before, it's not easy to define, and it's up to the discretion of the Speaker to do that, and I will do that.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar again on the motion.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm trying to get my speech finished here, and I can tell you that if this was the opposition trying to finish a speech, they would be allowed to do so. Now let me get back to the speech.

Debate Continued

Rev. Abbott: The opposition hasn't placed a lot of distance between themselves and their disgraced federal cousins, so it would also seem reasonable to assume that by not vigorously denouncing the behaviour of the Martin regime, they aren't in the best position to comment on the appointment practices of other governments. It would appear that with this motion, they've gone beyond handing out stones. In fact, they're handing out slingshots as well, Mr. Speaker.

I honestly fail to see how any institution or individual could sink to the depths of depravity, greed, and corruption that we as Canadians came to expect from the last federal Liberal government. I also don't see the point in encouraging provincial reforms when they're already being investigated and acted upon. Furthermore, I think the achievements and accomplishments of this government speak for themselves. We have members of all political stripes and members of no political stripes sitting on our various boards and committees, Mr. Speaker. In fact, up to 80 per cent of Albertans are conservative, so it wouldn't surprise me if 80 per cent of our boards' members or makeup were conservative people because that's Alberta.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank once again the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and all the colleagues that have helped me with this speech for bringing forth Motion 502 and giving this Assembly an opportunity to reiterate the litany of shameless Liberal patronage that used to echo down the halls of federal power. As informative an experience as this has been, I'm afraid that I will have to join my colleagues and withhold my support for Motion 502.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the website dictionary.com patronage is explained, and one of the definitions given is

- The power to distribute or appoint people to governmental or political positions.
- The act of distributing or appointing people to such positions.
- The positions so distributed or filled.

Synonyms given on that same website for patronage include pork-barrelling and cronyism. Cronyism itself is defined as favouritism to friends "without regard for their qualifications."

Mr. Speaker, in the early '90s a Premier appointing his barber to head the gaming commission was considered a bad move. It caused his popularity to slip further and accelerated his departure from provincial politics. Fifteen years later this government still makes the same mistakes and doesn't seem to have learned anything. Granted, they may apparently not be receiving the same level of attention or criticism as before or as they should, but that's not an excuse for corruption. Maybe they're not troubled by it much because this government is more secretive, hiding more and more behind FOIP, or the public and/or the media have become desensitized to news of patronage appointments. Unfortunately, this government acts mostly after being exposed or shamed into taking action. This is a sign of fatigue and stagnation. Of course, 35 years of monolithic rule and a tight grip on and addiction to power leads to such outcomes.

What we're suggesting here is for the government to be proactive this one time and clean its house on its own accord before it's forced to. The direction I am taking, Mr. Speaker, is one of appearance. The visual is really bad now, and it needs to change dramatically. The public doesn't trust politicians and has lost faith in this government. This distrust was only magnified or compounded when they

found out what this government is doing: appointing its friends and loyalists to comfortable, nice paying jobs on various boards and commissions. We have a chance today to significantly improve this government's image by alleviating some of the concerns that the public, we in the opposition, and even the Auditor General have with respect to cronyism or patronage appointments.

Motion 502, as presented by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, offers the hon. members across the floor a chance to try to begin to appear to be a little more transparent and forthcoming. If they have nothing to lose or hide, they would all support it. What we are proposing here, to bring it into focus, is to establish principles and procedures for recruiting, training, and evaluating people who are appointed to serve on boards, agencies, commissions, and committees. This is in tandem with the recommendations of the Auditor General in his annual report, 2004-05. We need the best people for these jobs: people with iron-clad, irrefutable qualifications and sound, relevant experience. Someone whose sole value is his or her friendship with or backing of a Tory MLA may not necessarily be the best candidate to fill this vacancy.

Of particular concern and cause for great irritation to me is when a position is created or invented, when it's custom-made to fit a certain applicant. This is unacceptable in our province's second century. If Mr. Harper is trying to clean up government in Ottawa, we should too, right here in Alberta. If the ruling provincial Tories don't do it, Mr. Speaker, we Alberta Liberals will.

Now, I know that people will say that the Auditor General didn't use the word patronage, per se, in his report, but we all know how diplomatic our Auditor General is and that those around him helping edit his releases are ones who pay great attention to their choice of words. The examples are there, and listing them off one by one today will extend this discussion for hours. We've just gone through it, and I think it's not necessary to go further into it.

This government has a chance to start to come clean and avoid embarrassment and scandal. This is the visual or appearance that I'm urging them to take into consideration. The greater benefit, however, is going to be that the citizens of this province will be served by individuals who are competent, trustworthy, and hard-working. These agencies or boards dispense hundreds of millions of public taxpayer dollars and oversee essential and critical services, from health and education to finance, to energy, and environmental protection. You have everything from the Treasury Branches and the Securities Commission to college and university boards of governors, from AADAC and the health regions to persons with developmental disabilities and the Workers' Compensation Board appeals commission, et cetera.

Accountability and trust are missing from the equation, Mr. Speaker, but really can be easily restored if this government chooses to act. I urge everyone to accept our Motion 502 today. Participation on public boards, agencies, and commissions is an important and integral part of our democratic process. Every Albertan with the proper experience and education should be able to apply to fill such a position. The decision should be based on merit and qualification; that is to say, on what you know not who you know in the government caucus or the PC party aristocracy. Thank you, and good luck to you all as you vote on this proposal.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take a little bit of a different angle on this. Quite frankly, I don't have any problem with people in this Assembly naming Mr. Smith or Mr. Westbury or

other people that have taken appointments in Alberta, but when you do the drive-by smear in a motion like this, that's inferring that all of these people on these boards are Tories, are patronage appointments, that's very unfair to literally thousands of Albertans who go to work once a month, once a week, twice a year on the hundreds of boards that make this province the great place that it is.

8:50

We have a motion that says that we're going to do in with this patronage – and the hon. members brought up the connection to Gomery, but there is an absolutely huge difference between that level and the appointments that are in Alberta because hundreds of millions of dollars haven't left with the appointments that these boards and these people look after in Alberta. They spend this money on behalf of Albertans, and the money is accounted for by an officer of this Legislature, the Auditor General, who has also been accused of being a patronage appointment by the opposition in this motion. Mr. Speaker, that's astounding, to a certain degree, that an officer of the Legislature would be included in a motion about patronage appointments.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General is a . . .

Mr. MacDonald: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against Nonmembers

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). Certainly, I would allow the hon. member time to withdraw that comment. We had never on this side of the House said that the Auditor General was involved in any sort of patronage appointment or patronage process. Clearly, if the hon. member had been listening to the debate previous, he would have realized that we were following up on a recommendation from the Auditor General's 2004-2005 report. I would ask now that the hon. member withdraw that statement.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I will not withdraw it. They also used the former Auditor General, Mr. Valentine, as another appointment. So they can check their *Hansard*. I am saying that including all Albertans, including these people, when you're discussing a motion like this, wipes them all with the same brush. They brought these names up, not me. I am more concerned with Mr. and Mrs. Jones who serve on these boards and who serve diligently and faithfully. Yes, some of them are Tories – that's just a fact of life – but lots of them are Liberals, are NDs, are nonpolitical, and the motion and the conversation has been around the fact that: well, this is all bad; it's all dirty.

Mr. Speaker, by and large, rather than name names of people who have been appointed to these boards, give examples of where the boards have done something wrong with taxpayers' money, where these people have improved their way of life or their bank accounts. Like other patronage appointments across the country we can all be compared to other provinces or the federal government, if you'd like. It doesn't serve a lot of good, but the fact is that these people shouldn't be afraid to come forward and volunteer to serve on boards, except to be slashed by the opposition that it's somehow a patronage appointment.

I want to just read the appeal board appointments: candidates will be screened and interviewed based on their qualifications the

applications received; successful candidates will be added to the appeal board roster maintained by the department that provides a list of impartial, qualified individuals willing to serve on appeal boards as required. You know, it doesn't say: good Tories only apply. It says: qualified applicants. I would hate to think that because you do belong to a party at some time that you're ineligible to do extra work for your province and for your community. That just makes no sense.

I have no question that the hon. members' intentions were good, but the way that they approached this is that all boards are patronage, all boards must need more accountability and openness. That is simply not the case, Mr. Speaker.

You're looking nervous.

The Deputy Speaker: You're on a point of order.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, I'm not going to withdraw my statements.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on the point of order?

Well, I don't have the information before me at this particular point based on the alleged point of order, on what these allegations specifically were, but I can tell you from the gist of all the speeches from both sides of the House tonight, names were brought up from federal people and provincial people. I'm sure that all the federal people's names that were brought up that allegedly received a patronage appointment didn't use that position in a negative way or a way that would benefit themselves either. If I'm to rule this on a point of order, I'm going to have to rule everyone that spoke to it so far out of order as well.

Now, I've asked this Assembly several times tonight to stick to the motion that's before us and the merits of the motion rather than resort to making allegations against another member or saying things that would impute false or unavowed motives to another member or as 23(j) says in our Standing Orders, "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

Now, based on the fact that it was likely to create disorder, I could pretty much call every speaker on 23(j) because every speaker created disorder so far tonight in my estimation. I could rule the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster out of order, but to do so, I would have to go back and rule every other speaker out of order because they've all done the same thing.

I'm going to ask one more time if we can move on from here and stick to debating the motion even if that means taking the notes in front of you, those who are left to speak here, and covering them up and picking the motion up out of our Order Paper and looking at it to see what's in there and making up your speech as you go. That is my ruling, that we're going to carry on, and from this point on I'll be calling everything on a point of order.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, as you can see, my speech is not very elaborately written, but it comes from my experience of being on boards.

One of the boards I was on was the Health Facilities Review Committee. That was probably one of the most dedicated groups of people I ever had the privilege to listen to and work with, and I haven't been too terribly involved in politics except for the last five or six years. Most of these people I didn't know. We certainly never approached it from a political point of view. We approached it from a point of view of people that cared very deeply about the health facilities they were in, and I can assure you that they never,

ever felt that it was a patronage appointment. After several months of work there I think they probably felt that they'd been tricked into a very difficult position. They contribute tremendous time to this.

So to suggest that somehow our system doesn't work now or that we need to change it because there's something wrong, Mr. Speaker, I think is unfair.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, are you debating the motion, or are you debating what was previously said?

Mr. Snelgrove: I'm debating the motion, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, I'm confused about that because it sounds like you're debating what was previously said, so please proceed on the motion.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, Mr. Speaker, I shall end the confusion immediately. I would just hope the hon. members of this Assembly choose to deal with the motion in the appropriate way.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to stand and speak to this Motion 502. I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for bringing this motion forward. I think it's a very appropriate one to start this Second Session of the 26th Legislature.

I did not prepare any notes calling kettles black or throwing rocks at glass houses. It didn't even enter my mind. I'm very disappointed that we fell into that, and I was disappointed with the jubilation and the laughter shown by some members when it was brought up.

What I want to speak on tonight is the motion on openness, on accountability, on new principles and procedures. I, too, though, would like to thank the thousands of Albertans who have accepted positions on these boards for the enormous amount of work that they do. To me they're the ones that really are the backbone of our communities and really what make them work. For us to think that someone else does it, I think that we should consider it a little bit more. I've been associated and worked with many of those people that have spent many extra hours dedicated to serving on those boards.

What I wanted to talk on tonight is cleaning up the perception of patronage appointment. I very much know and realize that in the real world if I had to hire someone or was looking for someone to deal with rules and regulations concerning automobiles, I would go to those people who I know and understand.

9:00

The point that I want to talk about is that perhaps we should step back and look at some of those boards that we put in, especially provincial boards, and consider elections again, the ones like the health boards. They served us very well in the past, those that were elected, and it's a great benefit because there was no question who they were loyal to and who they were working for: those people they were elected by. Each member in the House here understands who they're elected by, and what should be first and foremost on our agenda at all times is representing those people.

Some of the other things to look at when we consider the fact of openness and accountability. Accountability is: where are we spending our tax dollars, and what are we doing for the size of

government? It seems like we're often having more boards, more appointments, and that's not serving the best interests of Albertans. So I think that on this part of openness and accountability it would be of value to discuss whether or not we should be electing more boards and whether we need as many boards as we have.

The other part is the new principles and procedures. It's the principles and procedures that govern us and our values and our way of thinking. Certainly, the optics for those people that are watching, it's been very eloquently pointed out tonight, do not look good from a provincial or federal position, and I think that we owe the people that have accepted these things the responsibility of cleaning that up. The Auditor General has said in his reports that we should maybe be doing more due diligence when we bring these people onto the boards. What would help there immensely – at the municipal level when they want to do something, they have to advertise it in the papers, and there's an application and a procedure that they go through. It's been pointed out tonight many times that there are not procedures, and it seems that it's bad optics. That's why people become disjointed from government, saying: "Oh, it doesn't matter. I'm not going to become involved. It's going to happen, and there's nothing we can do about it."

So to bring that back, I say that we should change the procedures, that we should be advertising. We should make those positions known to the public. I like very much the idea of putting it on the web and letting people understand that it's there and that they can and should apply for that job feeling that it is a nonpartisan job and that they are serving the community as a whole. It's not about the individual. It's about the process. We've pointed out many times tonight about the different individuals that have been there, but it's the process of how the individuals got there that has tainted it. So I would hope that what we would be doing – and I would certainly support Motion 502 – is saying: how can we make Alberta better? It's not about who they are or what they know; it's about how we make it better.

To close on accountability, I think that one of the major problems that we suffer in this democracy of Canada and Alberta is that accountability in the private world means that you're held accountable and you'll be removed when you've been shown to not follow what you represented or said you were going to do. That is recall. We could really change things here in the province of Alberta if we were to bring in recall. Then we would be accountable. We could have the elections, and we could be recalled if, in fact, we changed our policies, our thinking, or our procedure.

With that, I'll sit down. I thank you for the opportunity to speak to this motion, and I hope everyone will vote in favour of it.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion before us, Motion 502, I'm pleased to rise and speak to. The motion in essence is simply asking this House to take the two recommendations made by the Auditor General in his report of 2004-2005, recommendations 1 and 2, and implement those recommendations. That's the essence of Motion 502. I want to put on record what these recommendations are before I proceed to comment further in the debate.

Recommendation 1 says:

We recommend that the Deputy Minister of Executive Council update Alberta public sector governance principles and guidance so that they are consistent with current good practices for recruiting, evaluating and training directors.

Now, clearly this recommendation suggests that the guidelines and the principles in place now are out of date, to put it mildly, and that they need to be updated.

Recommendation 2, Mr. Speaker:

We recommend that the guidance include a statement that governing

boards evaluate and report publicly their own performance against both Alberta public sector principles and their own board governance policies.

These recommendations to me are self-evidently attractive propositions, recommendations for action on the part of this Assembly and this government. If there's a disagreement with the substance of the recommendations, that's what I think we should focus our debate on. I'd like to hear hon. members on all sides of the House focus on the substance of these two recommendations and say what they see wrong with them.

There are over 100 corporations, such organizations, in the public sector. After examining the governance of these bodies and boards, the Auditor General, the principal officer of this Assembly, has made these recommendations. I haven't heard a word about whether we have reservations. I don't. I think that these are eminently sensible recommendations and that they must be implemented immediately.

I also believe that these are recommendations made in the context of the Auditor General coming to the conclusion that we do not have in place in this province good governance guidelines. All he can do as an officer of this House is make recommendations, draw our attention to where we are not doing our job well, and then hope that, rather than accusing each other of doing this or doing that, we pay attention to what this gentleman, that we have appointed and who reports to us and is obliged to report to us on an annual basis, tells us needs to be done, where we are falling short of the most current, democratic, accountable, transparent, ethical governance practices.

Now, if members of this House take issue with these recommendations, that should be what we should be spending our time on in this House, not on accusing each other of this. I think it's in the public interest. We are here to serve the public good, and the public good is served if we have ethical governance practices, if there's transparency about the way we make appointments, if those we appoint are accountable to us, accountable to the people of Alberta by reporting on their own decisions and functions on a yearly basis and making those evaluations public. That's what these recommendations are saying.

Now, surely we can point our fingers at Ottawa, at the Liberal government that was, and say: well, it was afflicted by all these unethical practices, a rotten government. But what has that finger pointing to do with us here making a statement that we do take, in fact, the recommendations of the Auditor General of this province seriously? That finger pointing, it seems to me, whether we intend it or not, is taking attention away from the task before us, which is to make the governance of these over 100 public agencies and bodies better than it has been, and in doing that, he suggests what we need to do.

9:10

I implore members of this House to take seriously the work that the Auditor General has done on our behalf and to take action on those. There are interesting parallels, Mr. Speaker, between what these recommendations contain – and I have looked quickly through the Auditor General's report – and what in response to the problems many of the speakers tonight have drawn attention to with respect to the way things have been done in Ottawa in the past and the lack of ethical standards there.

Ed Broadbent, a member of the last Parliament, prepared a report called *Cleaning Up Politics: Demanding Changes in Ethics and Accountability*. Now, if we don't hold ourselves to the highest standards of accountability, if we don't demand of ourselves ethical standards, that are crying for attention, who will? I think it's up to

the electors, then, to make those decisions if we don't pay attention. The Auditor General has done his work, and I think it's an obligation that we pay attention to what he is suggesting we do.

The Broadbent report on ethics and accountability makes seven recommendations, Mr. Speaker. The first one is democratic accountability for MPs, the second is fixed election dates, the third is transparent leadership contests, the fourth is electoral reform, the fifth is about ending unregulated lobbying, and the sixth is about ethical appointments, and that's the one that I want to just read into the record, what he's recommending needs to be done. If we look at what he's recommending and then go back to the recommendation that the Auditor General of the province of Alberta, the officer of the Assembly, has made, we'll see great parallels, overlap. So if we pay attention to the substance, I think we might agree that certain things need to be done, and to be honest to our electors, we ought to act on those recommendations because they make sense.

This is what these recommendations are, Mr. Speaker, as proposed by Mr. Broadbent: that the government of Canada – and here you could substitute the government of our province because, after all, our primary concern at this moment with reference to the special debate on this motion is with the province of Alberta. This is what he was saying about the government of Canada:

That the government of Canada develop skills and competence-related criteria for all government appointments, (including Board Members and senior Officers of Crown Corporations and other government agencies) . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, but under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close debate on Motion 502.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will just draw the attention of the House to number 6 of the recommendations in the Broadbent report.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that bell is not someone ringing this Legislative Assembly looking for a government appointment.

Now, we heard a lot about this motion. It was certainly interesting to listen to the debate as it was, but the Auditor General made this recommendation, not the Official Opposition, and I would encourage all hon. government members to think about that. This is a recommendation – in fact, it's two recommendations, and they're key recommendations from the Auditor General.

There seems to be a problem here, and this motion would go a long way towards fixing that. Now, we can't ignore this. A top Tory, Mr. Rod Love, has said – and it was discussed earlier, Mr. Speaker. This was in the *Edmonton Sun* in February 2006.

Rev. Abbott: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar on a point of order.

Point of Order **Allegations against a Nonmember**

Rev. Abbott: I thought you'd admonished us several times this evening to avoid naming names to try to stop what you'd call a rabble-rousing, that's mentioned in the Standing Orders.

The Deputy Speaker: I admonished everybody for making accusatory remarks and allegations against another member, imputing false or unavowed motives to another member, or using abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder. That's the gist of it. Hon. member and for all hon. members, with the exception of two speeches tonight you're getting back into that area of infringing upon the Standing Orders. If you would like to continue, please complete your summation and stick to the motion.

Debate Continued

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member, there was no point of order there because there was simply no citation.

Mr. Speaker, top government organizers admit that there is too much cronyism in this government. If we vote for this motion tonight, that will hopefully satisfy that individual, for one.

We heard a lot earlier about the previous federal Liberal government. Well, now, Mr. Speaker, this newly elected Conservative government in Ottawa, what is one of the first things that they want to do? It's to establish a public appointments commission to set merit-based requirements for appointments to government boards, commissions, and agencies to ensure that competitions for posts are widely publicized and fairly conducted. Now, that's what this motion is all about, and that was my idea earlier about having a website with all this information on it. That is the purpose of that website. If it's good enough for the Conservatives in Ottawa, I don't know why this government here would be so uncomfortable with that, particularly after the wording from the Auditor General.

The establishment of this public appointments commission certainly would prevent ministerial aides and other political appointees from receiving favoured treatment when applying for public service positions. That's something that I would encourage this government to look at. It's not long ago that one member from one department was chastised for getting money from the taxpayers for not doing any work. That wasn't a federal Liberal appointment. That, Mr. Speaker, was a Progressive Conservative appointment.

Ms Blakeman: No.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, it certainly was.

The only reason why I can say, Mr. Speaker, that government members are upset with Motion 502 is that this government is obsessed with control. This government talks about democracy, but if any independent commission or board or agency actually operates independently enough to criticize the government, it's dissolved or it's changed or it's filled with Tory cronies. Whatever happened to the Alberta community lottery boards? These were a genuine grassroots community organization, but because Tory members, MLAs, weren't getting enough photo ops, they shut the whole program down. They cancelled the board.

Participating on public boards, agencies, and commissions is a really significant part of our democratic process. It should be something that every qualified citizen has an equal chance to be able to do, with appointments being based on merit, not on who you know over in the PC Party office.

This government has directives with impressive sounding principles, but the problem is that these are just window dressing. That's why the Auditor General made these recommendations in 2004-2005. Too often partisanship overrides performance, and the public and the taxpayers suffer. These bodies that we're talking about control hundreds of millions of dollars and deliver or oversee

the most significant public services in our province, from health and education to finance, energy, and environmental management.

9:20

The government bragged about the publicity gained from the mention in the Gomery report about the process used to hire deputy ministers – that was recommendation 12 – but it stops there. These processes don't appear to have carried on into other agencies or commissions or public boards. I would like to see that happen. If we vote to support Motion 502, I think we will have a better province. Certainly, we will have a better government.

In conclusion, I urge all hon. members to support Motion 502. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 502 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:21 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Hinman	Pannu
Elsalhy	MacDonald	Swann
Flaherty	Miller, R.	

Against the motion:

Abbott	Johnston	Rodney
Ady	Knight	Rogers
Amery	Lukaszuk	Snelgrove
Brown	Lund	Stelmach
Calahasen	Magnus	Stevens
Cenaiko	Melchin	Strang
Doerksen	Oberg	VanderBurg
Goudreau	Oberle	Webber
Griffiths	Ouellette	Zwozdesky
Jablonski	Prins	

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 29
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 lost]

head: **Consideration of His Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Johnson moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate February 28: Ms Blakeman]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by stating that I am extremely honoured to have this opportunity to rise today and speak in response to the Speech from the Throne, given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. I would like to thank and

congratulate His Honour on a fine speech and a very fitting speech given the historical significance of the upcoming session.

Mr. Speaker, as Albertans we were all extremely proud to celebrate the centennial of our province in 2005. A century of achievement and success is behind us now. The Speech from the Throne marked the beginning of a renewed commitment to excellence as we enter the first sitting of our second hundred years. The second century will prove to be one of promise and innovation. Recent resource discoveries, a booming economy, and sound fiscal management will assure Alberta's prominence well into the future. Innovation and prudent spending are contributing to a dramatic increase in the quality of life enjoyed by Albertans in the present.

Mr. Speaker, this prosperity has not been without its challenges. There are always obstacles and adversity that threaten to overcome even the best-laid plans. Alberta is a place of extreme diversity. We are a land of vast expanse and vastly different cultures, but despite this diversity we are united in the common goal of a better province for all.

Mr. Speaker, I am both honoured and fortunate to represent the good people of Calgary-East. This constituency is unique in both its location and its diversity. People of all backgrounds are proud to call it home. They face the challenges and adversity with typical Alberta spirit, and typically this government has once again risen to the occasion by addressing many of these important and pressing issues. In the Speech from the Throne we heard of a commitment to new innovations that will continue the momentum of our prosperity, innovations in technology and value-added products, but especially close to my heart was a proposed series of initiatives aimed at increasing the number of skilled immigrants coming to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned previously, Calgary-East is a constituency of great diversity. People from all over the world who came in search of a better life have found just that. Through their perseverance and hard work they have added a valuable piece to the economic fabric of Alberta. Through their varying cultures and ethnicities they have added a giant contribution to the cultural fabric as well.

Alberta is a place of opportunity. We are a place where a person's ultimate potential is limitless. In light of the government's fiscal policies, the economic climate that makes this potential a reality will continue for a long time to come. Calgary especially is facing a boom of unprecedented proportions, Mr. Speaker, and a proportionate lack of skilled labour. Our city is expanding at an astronomical rate. Our population is expanding by over 2 per cent each year. By 2008 we will have a population of 1 million people.

Mr. Speaker, infrastructure is springing up, and jobs are being created faster than they can be filled. There is insufficient domestic skilled labour to meet the demand. In Calgary we desperately need carpenters, plumbers, machinists, and all sorts of tradespeople to accommodate our growth. By making a further commitment to increasing the influx of skilled labour into our province, the government is not only showing great responsibility; it is also providing great opportunity while adding even more to the diversity that has come to make Alberta distinct.

Mr. Speaker, as an immigrant myself I know the challenges and opportunities that are associated with leaving everything you know to start a new life in a strange land. It is a scary and daunting proposition, full of equal parts of hope and uncertainty. Easing this transition and bridging cultural barriers is a vital first step in increasing our workforce. In the speech delivered by His Honour, we heard of a new strategy to streamline the immigration process and make Alberta a prime destination for skilled immigrants.

Many of my constituents found opportunities in Calgary that would have been unattainable in their home countries. My hope is

that with new and innovative strategies they will be joined by countless others. This is more than a creative vision for the present. This is a long-term diversification strategy that will sustain and even increase our economic momentum far into the foreseeable future. Removing barriers to immigration is a key component, a necessary component of a sustainable Alberta, and I am extremely pleased to see the government's proactive stance on this pressing issue.

Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents will also be pleased that more hard-working people will have the same opportunities they had to make a new life in a foreign land. This policy is so natural for this province. We have come back to our roots. As a fledgling province we advertised far and wide for settlers willing to carve a society from a harsh wilderness with basically nothing but determination and hard work. We made it easy for them and offered incentives, and the rest, as they say, is history.

9:40

Mr. Speaker, when we look at what we have today, we do it with the recognition of the immigrants that made it possible. Their achievements were nothing short of amazing. In the span of a few short years they showed the world that hard work and co-operation could make a society that the world would envy, a society where all the prejudices and enmities were set aside for the common good and a good life could be attained by those willing to work hard for it.

Mr. Speaker, we have now come full circle in our thinking. The entire world contributed to the first century of our province. We took in the most adventurous. We attracted the best, the brightest, and the hardest working from every corner of the world, and they built for us a province of which we should all be extremely proud.

We no longer have wilderness to tame or farmland to homestead, but we face challenges in our second century nonetheless. Once again, Mr. Speaker, we need skilled labour, and once again the world has shown its eagerness to lend the minds and the hands of its many different peoples. We have once again made a commitment to invite them in, a policy which will be to the benefit of everyone in this province. Alberta has been blessed with an abundance of natural resources, but left untapped, these resources are worth nothing. Oil is a commodity. It can't build a house, fix a car, or perform surgery; skilled immigrants can. As our prosperity continues to grow, so will the demand for their unique abilities.

In conclusion, as we enter the first session of Alberta's second century, I am extremely pleased at the foresight and commitment of the people of this province shown by this government in His Honour's speech. Just as was the case a hundred years ago, Mr. Speaker, great things are in store for the next hundred years. The people of Calgary-East, like every other Albertan, are extremely enthusiastic about the potential this future holds. They are eager to add their input into the future and pleased that the issues so important to them in the present are being addressed in a clear, concise, and visionary fashion.

Mr. Speaker, by increasing the prevalence of those who would help to build our province with their skills while at the same time fighting those who would try to destroy it with drugs and criminal activities, this government has addressed issues important not only to myself and my constituents but to every citizen in this province. With sound policies such as these I have no doubt that Alberta's prominence will last into the next century. Just as I have held the ideas of those who preceded us as an example, it is my firm belief that the statements presented by His Honour will likewise stand as a long-lasting testament to wisdom and sound policy to our descendants. While the future is not absolute, I have great faith that Alberta is on the right track to sustainable and continuous growth.

It is and will always be a place of unlimited opportunities for everyone, just as it has proved to be for me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to table a quote related to her speech on Motion 502. You can do that at this time.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During the previous motion, Motion 502, I did quote from a particular document. I had promised I would table that document, and I'm happy to do so at this time.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to rise for the second time to give my response to the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne.

Before I get into that too far, I would like to apologize to the constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford on behalf of all members of this Assembly for what I believe was a new low in debate that we sunk to tonight. I would particularly point to the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, who, I believe, Mr. Speaker . . .

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Zwozdesky: I would simply remind the member of citations 23(h), (i), and (j) as well as 459 from *Beauchesne*, which the Speaker admonished members about earlier today. I'm not sure if the hon. member who just spoke was in earshot distance to have heard exactly what it is that you said, but perhaps you could remind everybody at this time.

The Deputy Speaker: On the point of order?

Mr. R. Miller: On the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was simply responding to an interjection from the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: On the point of order, Mr. Speaker. Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j) have been quoted extensively tonight. I think in all cases it was probably quite fuzzy as to whether or not there were any motives imputed to an individual member, but clearly what we have just heard are motives imputed to an individual member. He has mentioned my constituency, and he is trying to speak on behalf of me. I would ask him not to do that. I would ask him to withdraw those comments. If he would like to apologize on behalf of himself and speak for himself, then he can certainly do that, but he cannot speak for this entire Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on the point of order?

Well, obviously, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, your comments did create disorder in this House. During the division I spoke to both House leaders and said that I would be enforcing the rules on the strictest basis to maintain decorum in this House. So I would rule that your comments were out of order because they did cause disruption. Would you wish to withdraw them?

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be happy to withdraw the comment, and I look forward to your continuing to

enforce decorum in the House. That might mean that I would get through my speech without any interjections from the members opposite.

Debate Continued

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, I apologize to the people of Edmonton-Rutherford because I really do believe that the level of debate reached a low in this House tonight. I would like to thank, in particular, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for bringing it back up to the level at which I believe it belongs and which I believe Albertans have a right to expect.

Mr. Speaker, one year ago I congratulated then Prime Minister Martin for having made an absolutely excellent choice in choosing the new Lieutenant Governor. During the previous year, my first year as an MLA, those comments proved to be extremely profound, I think, because I can't imagine another Albertan who would have made a better choice. I was honoured to have had the opportunity to be present at several events where the Lieutenant Governor was involved and particularly honoured to have had him attend an event in my consistency of Edmonton-Rutherford when we honoured 39 wonderful citizens for their contributions to Alberta with the centennial medals. That was certainly a highlight of my first year as an MLA and a highlight of my first year representing the people of Edmonton-Rutherford – amongst many, I must say.

Having had the opportunity to be involved with the royal visit was certainly a highlight. Presenting centennial medallions to centenarians was a highlight. I had 13 centenarians living in Edmonton-Rutherford in the year 2005 and had the extreme pleasure to be able to present each of those with a gold medallion. I think I may have mentioned this previously in the House, but the only consternation I had was the fact that 12 of them were female. I suggested to them that perhaps they were holding out on us and had a secret that they weren't willing to share.

All of the celebrations around September 1 were special. It's unfortunate that the children didn't have the day off school. That's the one reservation that I had. I really think that, you know, given a once in a century opportunity, it's too bad that we didn't give the kids a day off school. Nevertheless, I know I took my children out of school to join in the celebration, and I know many other parents did as well.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, the highlight for me, the number one memory that I take from my first year as an MLA, was having had the honour to represent the people of Edmonton-Rutherford at the RCMP memorial held at the ButteDome in recognition of the Fallen Four. Never have I been so proud to be a Canadian as I was that day, to see row after row, literally sea after sea of men and women in uniform there to honour the four fallen RCMP officers. It was a sight and an experience that I will never forget and, as I say, without question the apex of my year as an MLA.

9:50

In particular, to the speech delivered by the Lieutenant Governor, I found myself one evening last week – and sometimes I wonder if maybe I should get a real life. The Premier referred the other day to the people that reside in this Assembly as not real people. At the time I took some offence, but maybe he's right because I have to say that the other evening I found myself at home, while doing some research for an upcoming bill, listening to the proceedings of this Assembly. With thanks to the Speaker and the Legislative Assembly Office it's available online on the Internet, so I was able to listen to debate while I was doing my research.

I heard a speech given by the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs and another one, a very eloquent speech, I must say, by the

Member for Calgary-Fort. If you were to just listen to those two speeches and not have heard anything else, you would have thought that Alberta was literally Utopia, that everything was as good as it could possibly be right here in Alberta, and that there was absolutely nothing that could be improved upon; it was the very best imaginable. There was another speech given by a colleague to the left, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and in his speech you would have thought that there was nothing good with what's happening in Alberta right now, that everything was in utter chaos, and that we were all doomed to destitution, that it was just as bad as could be imagined. Then, thankfully, somewhere in the middle there was a speech by my colleague from Edmonton-McClung which pointed out that things are very good in Alberta right now but, boy, there are a lot of things that cause us to be concerned. I must say that these are the sorts of things that I hear from the people of Edmonton-Rutherford as I'm travelling through the constituency or knocking on their doors.

There's no question that we live in a time of plenty in this province right now. There is more money than any of us can possibly imagine. There is tremendous opportunity for so many people, and yet, somehow, there's a total disconnect between the wealth and the opportunity and a large segment of our society who are suffering, can't find a job, can't seem to pick themselves up from the situation they find themselves in and share in the wealth and prosperity. I'm not sure why that is, but I think every member of this Assembly should be concerned about it because it sort of defies logic, yet it's a very real situation. We have more food banks in the province right now than we've ever had in communities that have never had a food bank before. I have constituents, even in the relatively well-off constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, who are desperately awaiting the arrival of their rebate cheques so that they can buy groceries to feed their kids.

Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that these two things, health care and the entire issue surrounding the wealth of the province, are going to be the focus of this sitting of the Legislature, and I'm going to spend a little bit of time talking about both of those. In my comments almost a year ago to the day in my maiden speech I compared the maiden speech of my predecessor, Percy Wickman, a former MLA from 1989 through to 2001, to the situation as it was a year ago in Edmonton-Rutherford. I was surprised, quite frankly, and somewhat taken aback at how similar things were from 1989 to 2004, how little things had changed, and in fact how similar the concerns that were being expressed to me as I had campaigned were to the concerns that Percy Wickman had raised in 1989 in his maiden speech. So you can imagine, Mr. Speaker, a year later not much has changed. If it didn't change much in 15 years, it hasn't likely changed in a year, and certainly my experience talking to the people of Rutherford is that it hasn't changed that much.

The two big issues, as I say, that have been identified to me really are health care and issues surrounding the surplus and all of the money that we find in the province right now, and I just want to go back to something that I said in my maiden speech last year because it's so relevant today. It's not an exact quote, but what I touched on was the fact that people were telling me on the campaign trail that what they really want is an ambulance when they need it. They need to know that there's a bed, not a gurney, waiting for them in hospital. They want the elimination of the health care premium tax. They don't want to pay \$500 or \$600 a month for health insurance. They'd like to see the establishment of a wellness fund. They believe in creating a public drug plan and desperately wanted to see improvement in long-term and seniors' care centres. Those words, when I look at them now, a year hence, are certainly prophetic because all of those things are things that we're hearing again today.

Now, the Premier has asked and the health minister has asked for ideas, Mr. Speaker, and I think we've been quite forthcoming with ideas. Unfortunately, they haven't always been received in the spirit in which they were delivered, but I do believe that a number of very good ideas are to be found in the Liberal health care document. In fact, the minister indicated in the House today that several of those are ideas that have been adopted and are currently in the process of being worked on. It would appear that perhaps there were some good ideas in that document after all, despite what the Premier said, so I'd like to congratulate the Liberal opposition caucus and those that worked on the document for having had some foresight when they drafted that document because, in fact, there were some good ideas in there, and there's now finally some acknowledgement from the government that that was the case.

The whole idea of consultation really, I think, needs to have some work on it. The minister has given a month for Albertans to respond to what could conceivably be some major changes – major changes – to the health care system as we know it. People are saying that a month isn't enough, and I would tend to agree. In fact, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the minister said was that people could find a copy of the government's framework policy in their MLA's office, and to this date that is not the case. I've had several people come into my constituency office looking for a copy of this document, and we don't have one. I feel terrible having to tell them that I don't have one. We can certainly print one off the internet and have done so, but that's not the point. If the minister says, "There are copies in your MLA's office; we're sending copies to all MLAs' offices," and people arrive and it's not there, that's . . .

Ms Blakeman: The government looks bad.

Mr. R. Miller: The government does look bad, and in fact, unfortunately, sometimes the local MLA looks bad. It's important. People need to see that document if they're going to be providing . . .

Mr. Magnus: Respond to the Speech from the Throne.

Some Hon. Members: Relevance.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the throne speech allows quite a bit of leeway in what a member can speak on. I'd like to cite for the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill Standing Order 13(4)(b). Were you rising on a point of order, or were you just interrupting?

Mr. Magnus: Just interrupting.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, 13(4)(b) states that no member shall interrupt a member that's speaking unless he's rising on a point of order.

Hon. member, please continue.

10:00

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important, if we're going to tell Albertans that we want their input and then we tell Albertans that a document is going to be available at their MLA's office, that in fact we make sure that that is the case. Now, I understand that today the minister made some representation that it will happen soon, and certainly those constituents of mine that have come looking for more information on exactly what the government's plans might be will be pleased to see that when it takes place.

Now, I know that I'm fast running out of time. I do want to talk

a little bit about the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, in particular, Mr. Speaker. I know that I had a fair amount to say about this earlier, so I won't spend a lot of time on it. I think it's important to note that while we have made a commitment finally to invest a billion dollars into the heritage savings trust fund, there's been some discussion about the fact that we are still taking a billion dollars out before we put the billion dollars back in, so really all we're doing is maintaining the status quo. The fund in 1987 was worth \$12.7 billion and as of the second-quarter update was down to \$12.4 billion. So we can see that in 19 years, really, we've lost the value of that fund. In fact, had it at least been inflation-proofed, it would be nearly \$20 billion today.

Under an Alberta Liberal plan, with the current surplus situation \$3.5 billion would have gone into that plan this year alone. So I think it's important that people see that while it's a good first step, certainly this is a fund that in my mind has been misused and perhaps even abused over the years. It's good that we're finally giving it some recognition.

Now, Mr. Speaker . . . [Mr. Miller's speaking time expired] Mr. Speaker, could you please check the time?

The Deputy Speaker: Your time has elapsed. I checked with the Clerk. Your time has elapsed.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great honour and privilege to rise tonight in response to the Speech from the Throne. Two weeks ago His Honour the Lieutenant Governor opened a new chapter in Alberta's history as one century of achievement was left behind and another was ushered in. Last year was a banner year for our province. It was both a year of closure and a year of new hope. As Albertans wrapped up centennial celebrations across the province, they had many things to be thankful for: a booming energy market, an unprecedented expansion in prosperity and virtually all things, and a sense of the truly unlimited potential held by the future.

I am personally extremely thankful to have been given the chance to represent the constituents of Drayton Valley-Calmar. Our constituency, like any other in the province, faces unique challenges and situations. Alberta is a place of great diversity, and the government must accordingly take great care in its plans and initiatives to ensure that no individual or region is left behind.

One of the biggest issues facing Drayton Valley-Calmar is that of crystal methamphetamine. This is not an issue specific to our constituency, but it is an especially relevant one. The criminals who make these poisons and distribute them to our friends and our children are not only operating in urban centres any more, Mr. Speaker. Drugs have become a rural problem as well, and new strategies must take into account the ever-changing nature of this threat. While meth is a problem that affects all Albertans, Drayton Valley has been hit especially hard as it has become a mecca for meth producers.

In conversations with government personnel in Saskatchewan I have recently learned to my dismay that up to 80 per cent of the meth distributed in that province is being produced in the Drayton Valley area. Now, my constituents are good, decent people, Mr. Speaker. They only want to live their lives and raise their families in peace. They did not ask for this cancer to invade their communities, and they are extremely pleased at the government's announcement of a renewed commitment to continuing and expanding the fight against meth.

In the throne speech we heard of the great steps being taken in the fight against meth and, by extension, the fight against crime in general. The newly established Crystal Meth Task Force, of which

Drayton Valley's mayor, Her Worship Diana McQueen is a member, is up and running, and new initiatives will continue to emerge to find, prosecute, and punish those who manufacture and distribute drugs.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents and every citizen of this province need to be given the tools to fight the proliferation of drugs. They need help in the war on meth and the war on crime in general. They need to be empowered to take back their communities and their homes, and the messages by His Honour inspired great confidence that these goals are well on their way to becoming reality.

A further focus on rural policing was also seen as refreshing news. Crime is not an urban problem; it is an Alberta problem. Given the recent proliferation of drugs and the isolated nature of many rural areas, criminals are now moving their operations to the countryside, that we once considered a safe haven. The tragedy at Mayerthorpe is but one clear example, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely pleased at the awareness and foresight shown by this government in recognizing and addressing this growing problem. My constituents are extremely pleased as well as extremely hopeful that they will once again know the peace and security that they deserve.

By working with police and organizations such as AADAC in augmenting this co-operation with the streamlining of the justice system, criminals will no longer find profit in the manufacture and sale of illicit drugs. They will be made to pay for the pain they inflict on our communities and our loved ones. Mr. Speaker, crime contributes nothing to the betterment of this great province, and I am most pleased to see the exceptional efforts that are being made to exclude it in every way possible from the lives of Albertans.

Another matter of great significance to the people of Drayton Valley-Calmor and every rural constituency is the issue of access to health care. Albertans, rural and urban alike, enjoy one of the best health care systems in the world at the present time. The proposed changes we heard outlined in the throne speech by His Honour will only serve to reinforce and make better what is already an exemplary system. We have all heard that this government is dedicated to reducing wait times and increasing service. I in turn have heard many of my constituents agree wholeheartedly with these proposals. The system we enjoy today is good. Proposed reforms will serve to make it better and more accessible to each and every Albertan regardless of their standing or location.

I was especially pleased with the announcements regarding considered improvements to rural health care, Mr. Speaker. Rural residents often face challenges that are different from those of their urban counterparts. Perhaps the most challenging and difficult to overcome and the most dangerous to health and well-being is the remote nature of many rural constituencies. If a resident of Edmonton were to be involved in a car accident, he or she is never more than a few minutes or blocks away from a hospital. In a rural area an accident or emergency may occur a great distance away from the nearest hospital, meaning that emergency response is of key importance.

Over 200,000 ground ambulance trips occur each year in Alberta, supplied by 450 ambulances and 3,000 ambulance attendants. Many of these life-saving trips occur in remote and rural areas, and while their continued efficient operation is of great importance to the health and well-being of all Albertans, it is especially vital to the safety and continued prosperity of rural residents. I am encouraged with the announcements concerning collaboration between regional health authorities, stakeholders, and government to improve medical delivery. I am also enthusiastic about the principles of the health system being structured to reflect the values held by all Albertans. It is my sincere hope that these discussions will include in their scope ways of streamlining and improving ambulance service as an extension of general health care reform.

The people of my constituency not only rely on ambulance service for their emergent medical needs; they also share with other Albertans the belief that it is in the best interests of everyone to assist the efficient and effective delivery of this service in any way possible. Just recently, Mr. Speaker, I had a meeting with the chief of staff from the Drayton Valley hospital. We had the ambulance service there, and municipal councillors were all there. We talked about ways that we could collaborate and intersperse the ambulance with maybe manning our special care unit and possibly being involved in helping each other with our health care system.

I'm eagerly anticipating the proposed improvements to our health care system that our government has recently put out for consultation. Myself, my colleagues, and the people of Alberta will not only benefit from these changes, but we will also feel secure in the knowledge that their introduction follows careful consideration, long planning, and extensive stakeholder consultation.

This government has long had a reputation for prudence and responsibility in matters concerning the welfare of Albertans, policies which have resulted in the financial and societal prosperity we all enjoy today. Regardless of whether they are applied to reinvestment of resource revenue, environmental protection, or health care improvement, these qualities are manifest in every measure that this government has taken to improve the lives of Albertans.

10:10

This was never more evident as 2005 turned into 2006. As His Honour mentioned in the throne speech, it was the first year in a very long, long time rung in by Albertans that was free from the burden of provincial debt. Mr. Speaker, this party has always believed in balanced budgets, but back in the recession times of the early '80s and due to the Liberals' national energy program we could not keep out of the red. We accumulated debt, as did all governments of all political stripes, but unlike other governments, we dealt with it. Through stakeholder consultation, sound policy, and deliberate action Alberta eliminated the provincial debt, a monumental achievement which gave the citizens of this province an unprecedented climate of financial freedom, one that is not enjoyed by any other jurisdiction in North America.

Mr. Speaker, this is but one example of the way this government approaches every problem. His Honour's speech reaffirmed that this attitude of accountability and desire to improve Alberta will remain at the forefront of every issue considered or decided in this Chamber. Albertans were once again reminded that they not only live in the best place in the world. They were assured that they have working for them a government that is always striving to make it better in every way possible.

I am proud to be a part of this great, progressive momentum, Mr. Speaker, and I can say with enthusiasm that my constituents share wholeheartedly in my excitement. It is truly a great time to be an Albertan.

I thank you, and with that, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Bill 19 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure on behalf of the Minister of Finance, our Deputy Premier, to move second reading of Bill 19, the Appropriation (Supplemen-

tary Supply) Act, 2006, which provides some very necessary and important funds, as explained in the bill itself.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to respond to Bill 19, the supplementary estimates, in second reading. Again, I could probably go back to last year's debate because the arguments are similar. I'm not sure why it is that year after year we see supplementary estimates that are more and more and for more and more departments. In just November of last year we passed \$1.77 billion in supplementary estimates, and here we are, not much more than three months later, with almost that much again, \$1.354 billion. So in a period of only a few months well over \$3 billion in supplementary estimates have been passed.

The Premier himself has acknowledged that most if not all of this year's incredibly big surplus has already been allocated. The whole idea of supplementary estimates of the size that we see and covering the number of departments that we see really does once again draw into question the entire budgeting process and the way that this government treats a budget with such disdain. I acknowledged last year the fact that, literally, within days of the budget being passed, we had ministers openly referring to off-budget spending. Sure enough, that is exactly what happened.

So here we are once again, within three months of having passed supplementary estimates, passing another \$1.35 billion in further money for the government. In a lot of these cases when you look through the supplementary estimates and the money that's being allocated, you really have to wonder (a) why, if it was so important, it wasn't included in the original budget or (b) why it couldn't have waited just a few more weeks for a proper budget. What was the emergency that demanded that this money be expended between November and the end of March, when we would presumably have a new budget to be debated in this House? You know, I'm not going to list every single example, but there are many examples of that in these supplementary estimates, and I think it's a relevant question.

The other thing that certainly comes into play here is the very limited amount of time that the appropriation bill gets when we deal with it in committee. We have what is known as two days of debate, but unfortunately in this House that means an afternoon and an evening, both of which have time restrictions and neither of which allows for proper, detailed inspection of the supplementary estimates department by department. Again last week, when we were dealing with the appropriation supply in committee, probably the vast majority of departments that are requesting extra funds received no time at all, no debate at all, no detailed inspection line by line at all of the request that's being. I think that it is a real flaw in the way that this House does business, that we don't allow more time for the committee to look at these supplementary estimates line by line.

Mr. Elsalhy: No scrutiny.

Mr. R. Miller: My colleague from Edmonton-McClung says, "No scrutiny." I'm not going to say no scrutiny. Certainly we scrutinize, but we don't have the opportunity necessarily to ask the questions, and what that means is that the government doesn't have the opportunity to show openness and accountability, which Albertans deserve. Again, that really is the question when we're talking about only one taxpayer.

Specifically, there is one thing that I would like to point to. I gave a fairly detailed talk on the billion dollars for the heritage fund last week. One of the things that came out of that whole thing – I called it a shell game, and there was some defensive reaction to that on the

part of the government. We've talked a number of times about the fact that we're putting a billion dollars in and taking a billion dollars out or taking out and putting in; I'm not even sure which happens first. But the minister defended that by saying that the legislation requires that return on investment be removed from the heritage savings trust fund and put into general revenue. Mr. Speaker, I checked the legislation, and the minister is absolutely right: that's what it says. Short of what's required as of last year's change in legislation to finally inflation-proof the fund, every penny outside of that and administration costs, every penny that's earned has to be transferred into general revenue.

So the very first question I have is: why haven't we brought forward legislation this spring that would mandate that the return on investment stay in the fund? Why do we have a law that not only allows us to rake the earnings out of the fund but actually tells us that we have to? There may have been a time when Alberta had a large debt when there was an argument for doing that, but certainly in today's fiscal reality I can't see any reason whatsoever why we still have on the books legislation that says that we must take the revenue that's earned by that fund and put it into general revenue. I think that that's a real disservice to the fund and ultimately a disservice to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to draw particular attention to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. Once again – and I hope I don't sound too much like a broken record, but I know I said the same thing last year – this is one ministry where I really don't have an awful lot of problem with the supplementary supply. This is what supplementary supply is supposed to be used for: \$1.25 million for the east-central Alberta disaster recovery program resulting from overland flooding during the month of August last year. That's exactly what supplementary supply is for: an unforeseen expense. Nobody could have seen it coming when we did the original budget in March and April last year. It happens. We have a sustainability fund that's to deal with that sort of thing. That's where the money went. I have absolutely no problem with that, and I commend the minister for, by and large, sticking to his budget.

Another \$6.5 million for the southern Alberta disaster recovery resulting from flooding in September and \$25 million for the floods that happened in southern Alberta in June of last year. Again, if this is the sort of thing that we saw regularly in supplementary supply, Mr. Speaker, the debate would be an awful lot shorter because I wouldn't be able to stand here and complain about that. But when we see other program changes and additions that either (a) don't seem to me to have the urgency that they couldn't have waited for the new budget or (b) came so shortly after last year's budget was passed – in fact, that would indicate that there was some urgency to them in the first place – then why the heck wasn't that in the budget? Let's have some planning and some budgeting that means something to Albertans.

10:20

Now, I just want to talk for a minute about the surplus situation and the fact that right now this government has a law which mandates that it's not allowed to run a deficit. We've seen the government do a very good job of sticking to that even in what I've referred to previously as a difficult year, the year 2001-2002, following 9/11, when the government was required to make some rather drastic adjustments to its budget procedure, sticking to the budget to make sure that they didn't break their own law, and I commend them for that.

What I would like to see is something that would do the same on the other side of the ledger sheet; that is, something that would compel this government to stick to their budget, to not go and

announce billions of dollars here and hundreds of millions of dollars over here after a budget has been passed but live with the document that has been passed by this Legislature until such time as we can deal with another budget document. You know what? Maybe it would be a minibudget, as has been done several times on the federal level. This idea of just ad hoc spending: again, I sincerely believe that that does a disservice to all Albertans.

Now, I know that the Member for Battle River-Wainwright has a motion coming up. Unfortunately, it's far enough down the list that I'm not sure that it'll get debated in this session. I'm hopeful that it does because I would love to hear the debate on that. This motion would call on the government to hold surplus funds in a reserve until such time as the Legislature could deal with them, and I think that's an excellent idea. I really believe that Albertans deserve to have decisions of that magnitude – we're talking billions and billions of dollars – not just debated in the Legislature but those ideas brought forward in the Legislature as opposed to being announced in mid-summer at a government retreat somewhere. That's not the way that Albertans expect their government to operate, and that's not the government that they deserve. I applaud the Member for Battle River-Wainwright for his initiative in bringing that motion forward. I know I'll be supporting it, and I'm quite hopeful that all of the members of this Assembly will because the idea has great merit.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I will cede the floor and allow some other members to take part in this debate. Certainly, as I say, the fact that we're dealing again with supplementary estimates only a short period after it was last done – and, you know, even the billion dollars. Okay. I'm going to back up and reiterate. With even the billion dollars for the heritage savings trust fund, which I'm certainly in favour of, once again I don't understand where the emergency was that that had to be done now and not as part of the budget process that we're going to be dealing with in a couple of weeks. I think that that's just the most glaring example of it.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I will take my seat and allow others to participate in the debate. Thank you.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the Education supplementary supply debate we're looking here at an \$11 million grant to separate and opted-out school boards. I'm not sure exactly how this works. This could be referring to the fact that the province is placing a soft cap on the education property tax rate, and this supplementary supply is to top this off. It would be helpful if I could find out what opted-out school boards means. I'm not clear on that. Maybe the good minister would spend a few minutes educating me on that.

Could he explain what the money is for, in clarification, giving us specifics, and by what process or policy the separate boards receive supplementary supply when the public boards do not?

Mr. Zwozdesky: They do too.

Mr. Flaherty: They do too? Thank you, sir.

What assurance can you give us that these funds were distributed to the boards based on need and not on other matters? That's a question I'd like maybe explained. Why was it not included in the regular budget that was presented last spring?

Mr. Zwozdesky: It was. It was just a transfer.

Mr. Flaherty: It was just a transfer of dollars? Thank you for that.

I'd like to just maybe suggest that the minister could comment or

maybe make a point on: if I could dream, if I had a crystal ball and was able to look ahead, I really would like some approach, in supplementary or brought in through the regular budget process, on the question of hot lunch programs in high-needs areas across the province. I think this would be a feather in the minister's cap. He's a good soul, so maybe he'll look at that. Dreaming again: full-day and junior kindergarten seem to be a concern for many people across the province, especially in Calgary.

Resolve the unfunded liability in teachers' pensions: that seems to be an issue that could be addressed, Mr. Minister, if we had some kind of plan. Even at the teachers' convention this week in Edmonton it was amazing how many teachers seemed to have this on their mind and are concerned about it. Also, I think that at the university on Friday night one of the people in the Faculty of Education was mentioning that, as you well pointed out to us, sir, it's now starting to be a mental thing. People are not looking at education because they don't want this extra burden of paying for a mortgage, that kind of thing, in dealing with their livelihood.

Those are just some very quick comments, and because of the hour and day I'll sit down. Maybe the minister will send me a note or give me some insight into some of the points I raised.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 19, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006. A lot has been said about the ineptness and incompetence that the government has shown year after year in preparing its budgets. Billions of dollars are asked for, sometimes once a year, sometimes more than once a year, to add to the budget approved by this Assembly during its spring session every year. It raises questions about the real value of debating a budget in April and May and then learning six months down the road that the debate we did have during the spring session really was meaningless and that the government didn't find itself bound by the vote that this Assembly itself conducted to approve the budgeted amounts.

With this huge amount – billions of dollars are involved here – we are simply asked to rubber-stamp unbudgeted expenditures. Unbudgeted expenditures are estimates that result from poor projections about what money is needed to deliver programs, to put money into infrastructure projects, or whatever. On the one hand, there is a clear record of incompetence in coming even close to what monies are needed on an annual basis to run the operations and programs that the government is responsible for. On the other hand, we find a very different picture. The revenues are always underestimated by billions of dollars. I guess that because revenues are underestimated, the government presents a budget which also looks sort of the result of disciplined thinking, tight budgeting procedures, saying that every dollar that's budgeted must be accounted for properly, yet within six months that accounting is simply forgotten.

10:30

The supplementary estimates, Bill 19, that we are debating now, is the second bill since November of last year that we are discussing in this House in order to address the failure of the government in the first place to present budget estimates that are close to what in fact is needed to run government programs and finance projects that it proposes to undertake. So the ability of this House, really, to hold government accountable in terms of both its revenue projections and budget estimates is frustrated year after year, as is indicated by the requests that come to us for supplementary estimates.

It's disappointing that a government that has been around for so

many years hasn't learned to prepare budget estimates which would be at least more or less accurate, that would reflect the real needs of the government and the real capacity of the government to fund those needs. One wonders whether it's a question of incompetence or whether it's a matter of a deliberate decision to lowball revenues and then proceed from there, from lowballing of the revenues to presenting budget estimates in April and May that the government knows will be insufficient to meet the government's own obligations. Either way it shows a lack of integrity, a lack of willingness to be honest and transparent with the citizens of Alberta, the taxpayers of Alberta with respect to both the revenue picture and the budgetary estimates that are needed to meet the government's commitments.

The problem with this, in addition to the government's inability to be honest and transparent, is the ad hocery of it all. There can be huge mistakes made when the money is spent in an ad hoc way. Wastage of money often results from ad hoc decisions because ad hoc decisions are made without due deliberation. Not only are they made without due deliberation by the minister; they are made without due deliberation by this House. It is the right of this House to engage in appropriate deliberations with respect to the government's expenditure programs and then engage the government in debate, ask tough questions before voting for or against those estimates. That's why I say that when you have these supplementary estimates, related bills, coming before the House once or twice a year during the same fiscal year, you ask the question: what was the point of spending weeks and weeks and weeks during the budget debate on debating and approving estimates for each department if those approved estimates, those budgetary figures are not to be respected and not to be adhered to?

The question that I have in my mind as the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona is: what role do I have in holding the government to account on this? How do I go back to my constituents and say: "Well, look, I've done my job. The government has responded to it. Next time I've seen improvement, so my work has paid off. I was critical. I did spend some time looking closely at the budgets. The government got some direction from the debate, and the following year there was an improvement." There is no improvement, Mr. Speaker, in the way the government presents its estimates and then comes back for supplementaries.

For the last nine years, that I've been in this House, I've seen the same conduct, the same procedure, the same behaviour of the government: falling short of being able to appropriately estimate its own needs and therefore assign dollars to meet those needs and deliver the goods to Albertans. Very disappointing. It raises concerns about whether or not this government really has the discipline that it takes both to come up with an accurate estimate of the revenue picture and the expenditure picture and then to stick to the decisions made by this Assembly.

This Assembly's decisions ought to have some role in the way government behaves. The government finds that it can take liberties with the decisions made by this House any time it wants to because it can come back and come up with these ad hoc estimates and get them rubber-stamped in this House. I think that's not good enough. That's not, I think, in the best interests of the people of this province who are, after all, responsible for paying the bills and are the owners of the assets from which we draw the revenues to pay these bills.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would close my remarks on Bill 19. Thank you.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the short

amount of time we have left to debate Bill 19, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006. I'd like to add my comment also, I guess, that it's very disappointing to see the lack of discipline in budgeting shown by this government. It seems like there's more interest in: "Well, we'll not worry about getting things down to the nitty-gritty. Later on we'll just run a little supply, and the revenue that we need will come in to our different departments."

It seems like we need legislation not so much prohibiting us from running a deficit but perhaps prohibiting us from spending all of the surplus that comes in. We are in a unique situation once again. In the '80s we had that applicable bumper sticker on what we'd do if we had a second chance, yet it seems like we're going to repeat it.

I'd very much encourage this government in this coming budget to I guess sit down each of the ministers and say: look, let's have our budget come forward, and let's stick to it. In matters of emergency, such as the flooding, we understand, and those are the ones that are coming forward or, for example, the situation with the Solicitor General, realizing that they didn't understand the agreement they had with the Crowsnest Pass area and needing to make amends within a different area in the province.

The most important thing is that we take this opportunity to realize that we have a surplus coming in, that perhaps we need to put in some legislation because of a lack of discipline, that we'll be putting this into the heritage trust fund and, as the other member mentioned earlier, that perhaps we should be passing legislation that we can't take anything out of the heritage trust fund unless it is an emergency. We should be building that. It should be inflation-proof, and we should be looking to the future.

I personally agree with the C.D. Howe report, that we're past sustainability already, that we're in a precarious situation. Everybody can say, "oh, it's not going to happen this time," but if things were to turn around, how would we continue with the budget that we currently have and expanding at such a rapid rate when, in fact, the services are not keeping up with the needs of the people? Yet the bureaucracy and the paperwork seems to be expanding at a very out of control rate.

Basically, I would very much like to see the government – and I'll speak to it again – take a serious look at the upcoming budget and have the discipline to tell the ministers: "Look, this is it for the year. We don't want to be going back to supply." We need to take a closer look. We've been doing it for years. We understand the situations and don't have to wait for an Auditor General's report to say: "Gosh, the seniors are suffering. We need more workers there. We're not running a good ship, and we can do a lot better." I would encourage the ministers, as they're preparing their budgets, to do a good job here in the future.

Thank you.

10:40

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education on behalf of the hon. minister to close?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes. Thank you. I will take a quick moment.

First of all, in response to a couple of comments made by Edmonton-Rutherford: no, this is not some sort of a soft cap. There are a number of points, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, which could answer some of the questions that you asked, that were debated last Wednesday afternoon and last Tuesday evening, so I would encourage you to look there.

It was kind of you to reference the kudos that you did for the Municipal Affairs ministry with respect to disasters, but there are also other good, positive things there that could have been referenced that weren't. I don't think anybody would argue that \$20 million to libraries was important or that the transfer of \$11 million from the opted-out portion to be shared equally amongst public and separate school boards was a bad thing either. There are a number of other needs areas expressed there.

For the sake of time right now I will respond to the questions that the Member for St. Albert asked because all that happened there, Mr. Speaker, is simply that back when we were doing the budgeting a year ago for the '05-06 government year, we targeted so many dollars for the opted-out school boards, which are typically your separate, your Catholic boards, and in fact the number of declared voters for that portion did not match. It was overestimated by \$11 million. All that happens, hon. member, is that that \$11 million goes back into the Alberta school foundation fund. Then it gets redistributed back out to all the supports to share. That's simply what that was.

The other points that you indicated about the unfunded pension liability we've debated here, and I'm sure we'll debate them again.

That basically answers all of that, Mr. Speaker. With that, I would again encourage a positive outcome to the vote on second reading for Bill 19 because these monies are important, they're available now, and we'd like to get them out to the places of need.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a second time]

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been an interesting evening, with a few bumps and grinds along the way. Nonetheless, that is what democracy is all about. On that note, I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:43 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

