

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 11, 2006** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 06/04/11
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two groups of students. First, seated in the public gallery is a group of 25 inquisitive grade 6 students from Annunciation school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Leslie Zydek. I'd ask them to please stand and accept the traditional warm greeting of this House.

Seated in the members' gallery is a group of 39 sharply dressed students from Aurora charter school. They are accompanied by two teachers, Mrs. Vicki Leong and Mr. Jamie Andrews. Mr. Andrews, by the way, is participating in a teacher exchange, and he is visiting us all the way from Australia. Would you please rise and accept the traditional warm greeting of this House?

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a group of bright and intelligent students from Steele Heights junior high school. On April 25 these students will be travelling to Atlanta, Georgia, to compete in the FIRST Lego League World Festival representing the province of Alberta. The team's challenge is to build a completely autonomous Lego robot capable of completing several defined tasks during a two-and-a-half minute competition. The students have designed their robot and as a team will demonstrate its abilities while competing against 64 teams from around the world. We'd like to congratulate them on their achievement in representing our province and wish them the best of luck at their competition. I would now ask that they rise as I call out their names: James Hoffman, Graeme Archibald, Matthew Music, Bradley Matsuba, Paul Gelinias, Ryan Bliemel, Chris O'Donnell, Jesse Squires, teacher Vin Stocking, and parent helpers Darryl Hoffman and Mark Archibald.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions for you today. I would first like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Jack Century. Jack is a petroleum geologist who founded and chaired the environmental geology division of the Canadian Society of Petroleum Geologists in 1990. This is the largest earth science society in Canada and has over 3,500 international members. Jack's main concerns are related to energy sustainability and environmental issues, particularly those of the

Alberta oil sands. He's lived in Calgary for many years and is very welcome to have this opportunity to visit the Legislature. I would now ask Jack to please stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 23 students from the mighty Spruce Avenue elementary school along with Miss Shelly Juhlin, aboriginal commitment coach Mr. Kyle Campiou as well as parent Miss Jennifer Dubois. They are on tour today and having a wonderful time. I would ask them now to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly as well.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly three newly elected student leaders from the University of Alberta Students' Union. They are Samantha Power, president; Dave Cournoyer, vice-president external; and Chris Cunningham, vice-president operations and finance. They are here today to watch the proceedings of the House and to remind the government of its commitment to an affordable and quality postsecondary education system that's accessible to all Albertans. I understand that they're seated in the public gallery. I would now ask these guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Government Accountability

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the federal Conservatives in Ottawa are introducing a bill to improve government accountability and openness, but the Conservative government of Alberta refuses to do the same for the people of this province. Alberta has a system of grants, contracts, and land sales that's out of control, no mechanism to bring it under control, and a taxpayer-funded propaganda bureau to continuously remind citizens to just keep moving, that there's nothing to see here. My questions are to the Deputy Premier. Will she support an all-party legislative committee to make recommendations to strengthen the statutory authority of the Auditor General so that he can follow the money to the end recipients?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there's absolutely no need to do that because the Auditor General today has that authority. The Auditor General in this province is an officer of this Legislature, and he has the authority to follow the money right to the end and, in fact, has done so on a number of occasions. So I think the question is quite redundant.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, he doesn't have the same authority as the federal Auditor General.

Again to the Deputy Premier: given the clear failure of this government to protect whistle-blowers at the Alberta Securities Commission from retribution, when will this government introduce legislated whistle-blower protection for public-sector employees?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, in reference to the Alberta Securities Commission and whistle-blower rulings, that has already been done and has been in place for some time now. As far as an overall government policy we've made it very clear over and over and over

again that no one who brings forward a valid concern will have any adverse repercussions at all.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Deputy Premier: when the feds are cracking down on the lobbying industry, why is this government allowing it to flourish behind closed doors? Why won't she acknowledge a problem exists?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, a rather obtuse question at best. However, whatever he might be referring to, contributions that are made to political parties here are a matter of public record if that's the part he's talking about.

Mr. Taylor: I'm talking about lobbyists.

Mrs. McClellan: People that come to meet ministers in ministers' offices: that's an occurrence. I suppose you could suggest that everyone who passes these doors, whether they come to see the opposition or the government or the third party or the fourth, et cetera, would be a lobbyist. I'm not sure exactly what he's framing the word "lobbyist" around.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that there is no behind closed doors as far as we're concerned. People who come into our offices are met. They usually discuss matters of mutual interest but certainly matters of interest to them, and I would be against anything that would preclude the public from coming and meeting with government to express their interests or their concerns.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

1:40 Rod Love Consulting Inc.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, if it looks like a skeleton and smells like a skeleton and rattles like a skeleton and especially if this government says that it's not a skeleton, then it's probably a skeleton. To the Minister of Finance. Now we learn that Rod Love Consulting billed Alberta Finance a further \$25,022 in 2004-05. Will the minister please tell Albertans if the same loosey-goosey process was used to justify this latest contract?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I've answered questions on this contract at least twice in the House. There was definitely a contract with the minister of the day for specific services, which were performed. I also outlined in this House and I would be pleased to table at an appropriate time the contract policy that I put in place as Minister of Alberta Finance. It's very specific. It's very rigid. I have given the elements of it, but to make it very clear, I would be pleased to table that policy.

Mr. R. Miller: She's already tabled the policy, Mr. Speaker. She should table the contracts.

My question is for the Minister of Energy. Given that 2004 documents show that Rod Love Consulting received 48,625 taxpayer dollars from the Energy ministry, can the minister please tell us what goods and services were received to justify this payment?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, it's a delight to be able to stand. He's absolutely correct: \$48,625 was paid to Rod Love Consulting through the period of April 2003 to March 2004. Those are public documents that we put out in public accounts, available to the

public. It's disclosed. It's open. Nothing hidden for it. This one was for strategic advice that was provided to the department. It has been reviewed by the department. Value has been received for that. It's been appropriately disclosed, and all terms of that contract were fulfilled. All things were very open and accountable to the public.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can you say sponsorship scandal?

To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given that 2004 documents show that Rod Love Consulting received \$8,484 from the Department of Municipal Affairs, can the minister please tell us and all Albertans what goods and services were received to justify this payment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be more than pleased to advise the member. I would like to add that this is no secret document that arrived at this. This is our own public accounts. Public accounts revealed that there was roughly an \$8,000 expenditure to Rod Love Consulting. The individual was contracted to provide facilitation of a day-long workshop between the developers' association of Alberta and municipalities in the development of regulations regarding off-site levies. I understand that the day was very successful, that all the participants were very pleased with the outcome. It ultimately resulted in the development of regulations, that are now in place.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Alexander Forbes Elementary School

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall I asked the Minister of Education if he was aware of the situation at Alexander Forbes elementary school in Grande Prairie. He said that he had met with the parents, and he would undertake to fix the problem. The budget has been introduced, and the schools in Grande Prairie and other parts of the province were left out, Mr. Minister. How long will the 330 students in mouldy 25-year-old portables continue to wait for a more modern school in Grande Prairie, sir?

Mr. Zwodzdesky: Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of speaking with the chair of the parent council just a few days ago and explained to her that as soon as we finished our budget estimates, in a few weeks, I would be getting back to her. So if the hon. member would just stay tuned, we'll be getting along with this new plan, that will be coming forward shortly thereafter. We'll take one project at a time, then, and start addressing the needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the teachers and administrators in Grande Prairie believe they are teaching in the best education system in the world when portables are lacking suitable washrooms and the walls and floors are mouldy, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Zwodzdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think everyone here knows, but in case they don't: we do have the best education system anywhere in Canada. That's the truth. We also have one of the best education systems anywhere in the world. That's a tremendous credit to the

students, the parents, the teachers, and our other education stakeholders. There are situations that occur from time to time, obviously, where some maintenance needs to be done or some replacements or modernizations need to be done. We are putting the plan together right now to ensure that those projects get done on a priority basis. I've indicated publicly, and I'll reiterate it for this hon. member's ears, that Alexander Forbes is absolutely a priority. As soon as we get the money allocated, we will be helping the school board there with that priority.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why was there no funding in the budget to fix the problem? The minister was quoted as saying: I am pursuing it and will solve it soon.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I've just indicated that that's exactly what we're doing. Let's be clear that every school board does receive a significant amount of the now \$81 million for infrastructure, maintenance, and renewal projects, and they also receive a portion of the \$395 million in operational and maintenance funding. From within those envelopes they have some abilities to fund some local projects as well.

Now, we do have a bit of a backlog with respect to modulars and/or portable needs, and they're being built as fast as they can be built. We're getting them out to the highest priority areas on that basis, Mr. Speaker.

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

School Property Taxes

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, for the fifth straight year this Conservative government has broken its promise to freeze provincial school property taxes in absolute dollar terms. Alberta homeowners will on average be facing a school property tax increase of about 2 per cent this year. The raiding of the municipal property tax base by the province continues unabated despite previous promises. To the Minister of Finance: can the minister tell us why, despite the fact the Minister of Municipal Affairs sold a false bill of goods to Alberta's municipal leaders at their annual conference last fall by promising school property tax reductions, this year's budget once again sees a hike of school property taxes?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I absolutely disagree with the hon. member's preamble in its entirety, and I would invite the Minister of Municipal Affairs to answer this.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond. The assertion that a promise was made that there would be a freeze of municipal property taxes this year is completely inaccurate. There was a commitment made a number of years ago which as a result of the events of 9/11 became obsolete. There have been over time some commitments made to try and revert to some form of relief to municipalities. In fact, this year we did succeed in reducing the amount of the increase to only one-half of the new assessment so that municipalities this year were able to retain the tax revenue on half of all the new construction in the past year.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that when I attended the AUMA conference, I clearly heard the Minister of Municipal Affairs indicate that it was at least his intention that the province would vacate or reduce its dependence on the property tax and when I

attended the Alberta school trustees' convention, the learning minister gave an opposite indication, can the Minister of Finance please tell us what the government's long-term plans are for the school property tax?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I think the Minister of Municipal Affairs just answered that very well by saying that the government vacated half of the room of any new growth.

There is a process that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is leading. He has mayors, councillors on a committee that is establishing the roles, responsibilities, and relationships. I made it clear when I spoke at AAMD and C that I wanted to see that work done this summer. Once we establish whose role it is, then we'll establish very clearly whose responsibility it is to fund it. Of course, the third part of that, relationships, is incredibly important to our urban and rural municipalities.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that one minister is telling municipal councillors one thing and another minister is telling school trustees quite a different story, when will the government get its act straight and live up to the promise made five years ago when Dr. Steve West was the Provincial Treasurer?

1:50

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I've just cleared that up I think. I spoke at AAMD and C. My colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs was there. A number, in fact, of my colleagues were at the table. I spoke about the committee that's dealing with roles, responsibilities, and relationships. I said very clearly – and the Minister would support this – that we wanted that work completed by this summer. I have spoken individually to AAMD and C chair, AUMA chair, mayors and told them exactly the same thing, and frankly they concur and are prepared to meet the challenge. We have broken no promises. We are not telling different stories. We are telling exactly the same story, and our municipal leaders will bring us that information.

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

Groundwater and Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been hearing a great deal about the potential of coal-bed methane development as an economic opportunity, but my constituents are also asking questions about the risks this new type of development has for the environment, particularly on our water supplies. They want to know that this government will do everything possible to protect our precious water. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister explain what he is doing to make sure our water is protected while Alberta develops this new energy resource?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member and to the House, obviously this is part of our direction on our Water for Life strategy. First and foremost, the new standards, the newest standards anywhere in North America, that we implemented last week are about protecting not only our land but our air and our water. So no longer do I say: the mother ship. I say: it's the law. I will enforce the law to protect that land, that air, and that water because every Albertan has that right, and that's exactly what we are doing.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: how does the department decide on the baseline testing standard of 600 metres?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I'm not a scientist. Many of you may be surprised that I'm not a scientist. [interjections] It's true. But what we do is that we use the best scientific evidence. What we have been doing is working closely with our scientists and biologists and chemists and also working with a very notable environmental group, the Pembina Institute, who traditionally are not always positive about some of the work that is going on in this province. I want to say that Dr. Mary Griffiths, who is a leading scientist in this area, agrees with the distances that we are doing so that we are ensuring that safe drinking water that the hon. member speaks of.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: what is the Minister of Environment doing himself to make sure that testing takes place?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, first of all, on our Water for Life strategy, we're executing it. Second of all, the \$174 million from the Minister of Finance, which I'll be dealing with in estimates this afternoon, is a critical component of that relative to that testing. Third and foremost, this is a transparent process, where we share the scientific evidence not only with the landowner, but we share it with the public because the public have a right to know, and this government and this ministry are transparent about these important issues.

Methanol Spill in Mitsue Creek

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, on January 18 a tractor-trailer carrying 52,000 litres of methanol used as antifreeze in oil pipelines flipped over and spilled most of its contents into the Mitsue Creek. The attention must now turn to the cleanup of the creek and possibility of contamination of the nearby lake. The government is responsible to act decisively in events of hazardous spills. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. What has been done to ensure that Mitsue Creek is cleaned up and there are no long-term, lasting effects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, thank you. To the hon. member: first and foremost, our environment people have been on-site. We have what is referred to as a SWAT team, which is ultimately a team that we overcommit to and overreact. So, to the hon. member, the approach that we are taking is that we overreact and then pull back resources as opposed to underreacting. So we're overreacting. We're working closely with the stakeholders, and we are taking a very diligent approach to ensure that that lake and that stream and that area are protected well into the future.

Mr. Bonko: To the same minister: given that for the spill at Mitsue Creek Alberta Environment held both the company who owns the hazardous material and the transporter responsible for the cleanup and remediation, can the minister tell us if this is, in fact, the normal operating procedure of Alberta Environment?

Mr. Boutilier: Obviously, the law of Alberta, perhaps the strictest law in all of North America if not in Canada, for certain, number one, is this: the polluter pays. Is there any question about that? The polluter pays, will continue to pay because this resource is owned by all Albertans. Not all Albertans would have to pay; it is the polluter

that will continue to pay. We will continue to enforce that type of regulation because it's the law in protecting the land, air, and water.

Mr. Bonko: Given that for the Mitsue spill both Celanese and Boychuk Trucking, the owner and transporter, were held responsible for the spill, can the minister explain why Imperial Oil was not held responsible along with CN for the Wabamun disaster? Why the difference in policy?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, one of the interesting things about the law in Alberta is that we do investigations. The fact is that the Ministry of Justice – and he may want to supplement – has 13 files of intensive investigation relative to the sad situation that I refer to as an ecological disaster. I can assure the member, I can assure everyone in Alberta that the full extent of the law, both in spirit and in letter, will be followed relative to this ecological disaster.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Groundwater and Coal-bed Methane Drilling

(continued)

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Coal-bed methane development is increasing in my constituency as well and, indeed, throughout much of the province. There are still many questions about the safety of the groundwater and aquifers. In coal-bed methane development a process that requires fracturing, or fracking, the formation to recover gas from the coal seam is being used. My question is to the Minister of Energy. What is being done in the energy industry to ensure that groundwater is being protected due to the fracking process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to first mention that the techniques employed in the coal-bed methane are not at all unlike our shallow and most of our gas drilling that we've done for decades in this province: the same typical drilling rigs that go in and a very structured and rigorous process to ensure that there is protection of all aquifers and all zones in all formations. So you can rely upon the fact we've had a tremendous amount of experience in dealing with fracturing techniques. They have to break apart that zone where the gas is so that it will flow into the well bore and up to the surface. So it's very critical in the design of engineering, which is done year in and year out over the decades, to ensure that they can control any migration of any foreign substance out of that zone to another one. So the freshwater is protected as the requirement of drilling.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is also to the Minister of Energy. Can Albertans be assured that these measures will go far enough to ensure that Albertans and their water supplies are safe and being protected?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the regulations that are put in place are literally designed to do just that. They can take great confidence that they have a regulator in the Energy and Utilities Board that knows and has the basis of knowledge and expertise to be able to ensure the safety of these resources.

I thought I'd mention, though, how that groundwater is protected. When they actually drill through a formation like our aquifers where the water is closer to the surface, it is required that all those wells in the completion be cased or cemented so that there can be no migration of gas into that water from a lower surface to a higher one. There is a very stringent way that they can ensure that the freshwater is also supplied, that there's a surface casing requirement as well. There are additional requirements put in the regulations to ensure that the surface water is not contaminated with drilling and activity and fracturing that's below that level.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is also to the Minister of Energy, and this is relating to the preliminary findings document that was released last summer by the Multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee. It outlines a number of recommendations related to water and coal-bed methane. My question is: when can Albertans expect to see the final report from this committee and the recommendations associated with water and the coal-bed methane development?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, there's been a Multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee that's been hard at work over the past two years in conjunction with our department, the Department of Environment, and the Department of Sustainable Resource Development. Jointly we have been working collaboratively. We have the report in our hands. We're working through the policy questions of that. It's an outstanding report. It will only help improve an already good existing regulatory environment. We do anticipate that this report should be released to the public with our recommendations within the next weeks to the next month.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

2:00 Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1980 the then Minister of Environment wrote a letter to the Premier proposing that the government identify "special interest names" who had received special treatment in the purchasing of lands for the ring road in Edmonton. Perhaps this explains why some companies today, such as Lehigh Portland Cement Limited, are able to flip land before they actually even pay for it. It appears that the Alberta advantage extends to some people more than to others. My questions are to the minister of infrastructure. Is it the policy of this Progressive Conservative government to target special-interest names for land transactions while other Albertans are "dealt with in the usual departmental manner as provided by legislation"?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, it appears that there has been over the last ten days a pattern developing here where the members opposite have dug up something from back in the '80s, 20 years ago, and they don't have the courtesy of giving me ample time to get the information on the land that they're going to ask about. If they're really, really interested in getting answers about what happened, I would urge them to send me the information so I would be prepared.

From the first set of questions, when they dragged the name of Mr. Sheckter through the mud – and I really am opposed to that kind of thing – I remember telling the member that, in fact, we buy a parcel of land, have it subdivided, then return – return – which was in the original agreement. I would like to read to the Assembly and

all others interested the offer to sell. The purchaser, who is the government,

at its sole expense, shall on or before the 31st day of December, A.D. 1987, or sooner if practicably possible, subdivide the Sale Lands from the remainder of the Lands, (which remainder is referred to as the "Remaining Lands"), and the Purchaser shall thereafter, at its expense, transfer the Remaining Lands to the Vendor, who is the person that sold it, in this case Mr. Sheckter, or its nominee.

This is exactly what I told the members, and they're trying to pretend as if we sold it for a dollar, which in fact was in the agreement, and I'll be filing this agreement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This answer had nothing to do with what I asked, the policy question.

Is it the policy of this government to open up the sale of surplus lands purchased for the ring roads here in Edmonton and in Calgary to the general public, or are such lands only reserved for identified special-interest names?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we do advertise it for sale, but as it relates to the issue that they brought up yesterday when they dragged through the mud the name of another prominent citizen in the city of Edmonton, Mr. Gary Campbell, for those parcels of land that we sold to CN and Lehigh Cement, we had two appraisals, and we sold the land to them for the highest of the two. I hope to be able to table that.

Mr. Elsalhy: To the same minister. Given that Lehigh Portland Cement agreed to transfer this land to CN Rail on March 18, 1999, nearly two weeks before it officially purchased it from the government, on March 31, 1999, can the minister explain how this deal was negotiated with the province? Were they guaranteed this land no matter what? Were they assured that they would get it?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, the fact is, as I said earlier, that we sold at the higher of the two appraisals. It's none of our business what the purchaser does with the land.

As a matter of fact, it's rather interesting: a major development in the city of Edmonton, the intermodal, where CN purchased the land so that they could accommodate that major development. An extremely important thing for the city of Edmonton. So I'm really surprised that members representing the city of Edmonton would in fact be pooh-poohing that kind of an agreement because the fact is that it's extremely important for the city of Edmonton.

The Speaker: The chair heard the hon. member indicating that he would be tabling the appropriate documents at the appropriate time?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I will be tabling this document.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Agricultural Income Stabilization Program

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta agriculture producers are frustrated and perplexed. One day they hear that the province and the federal government are coming up with a plan – and I stress – to transform the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program, otherwise known as CAIS. The next day we hear out of Ottawa that the federal government is intent on ditching CAIS and starting over again. My first question is to the

Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, and it is a simple one. What is going on? Will Alberta farmers and ranchers have a CAIS program or not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member, I too obviously was frustrated with the comments that came out of Ottawa last week about the CAIS program because only weeks before that all of the provincial ag ministers and the federal minister did agree to transform CAIS, not to replace it. We don't want to start from scratch and end up at the same point where we are today two years from now. The CAIS program and its principles are sound, and after a very quick survey of our ag community last weekend, we've discovered that our ag community is indeed looking to transform, not to replace.

After my conversations with the federal government and, indeed, with their further communiqué just recently, I think last Friday, it now appears that we're a lot closer than we thought we were in terms of what we're doing. It seems that the federal government may be suggesting that they would fix CAIS and replace that disaster component with a separate program or another option that works. Mr. Speaker, we're not opposed to that. In fact, it's something that we've been advocating for some time.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is again to the same minister. The argument about replacing CAIS or fixing it wouldn't exist if we had a program that worked for Alberta producers. What's broken, and how are you going to fix it?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. We've had a lot of discussion about what we can do to make some changes to CAIS. It is a national program. Alberta has actually been at the forefront of doing some of those changes with the negative-margin discussions that we've had, with the three-year averaging pilot program that we've had, which other provinces are looking at. We've made the commitment that we're going to share the information as to how well that is coming to our producers.

We know that administration is also a serious issue within the program. In fact, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business survey cited administration as the number one cause for concern in the program. The principles around it, the targeted application of the program, are sound. We want to maintain that, but we want to fix it by fixing administration, by trying some new things in the pilot project that we did, by bringing our national partners onside, and by bringing the federal government onside with our changes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is also to the same minister. My question is: what is the minister's plan of action when he's going to meet with the other agriculture ministers and the federal government in June? I mean, what can the producers expect?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the federal government has told us that they're going to be bringing forward some proposals in June. What the producers can expect from the Alberta government is that we're going to stand for what the producers have told us they want to see in that type of a business risk management program. We're not going to abdicate our responsibility to our producers in this province. It won't be just Alberta's voice at the table. All of the other provincial ag ministers are of the same mind as it relates to a

business risk management program. They are all of the same mind when it comes to the fact that ad hocs don't work. We recognize that. It's unfortunate that the current opposition in the federal government hasn't figured that one out yet.

As I said, the federal minister has said that he's bringing forward some proposals on transforming the income stabilization part and replacing the disaster component. We are interested in looking at those proposals, but if they don't fit what Alberta producers want, we may have to review our options at that point in time.

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

2:10 Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A 1995 settlement proposal between the late Joseph Sheckter and the province reveals how land was acquired for the ring road in Edmonton. It appears that taxpayers were the big losers again, while the land speculators and the developers were the big winners. My first question is to the minister of infrastructure. Why is the return of surplus ring road land to Mr. Sheckter in 1989 by the province for \$1 per parcel not mentioned in this settlement proposal from 1995?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, it's rather disheartening that the member is not listening or is incapable of understanding what I read from the agreement dating back to 1987, so I'll read it again more slowly. The purchaser, who is the government,
at its sole expense, shall on or before the 31st day of December, A.D. 1987, or sooner if practicably possible, subdivide the Sale Lands from the remainder of the Lands, (which remainder is referred to as the "Remaining Lands").

That means that whatever we need, we take it, and then we subdivide and give a title to the remainder of the land; that's in this agreement.

And the Purchaser shall thereafter, at its expense, transfer the Remaining Lands to the Vendor, [who is Mr. Sheckter's company], or its nominee.

"Transfer" the land. This is the original agreement.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how many millions of dollars did Triple Five make by buying property and then selling it to the government for the ring road in Edmonton? How many millions of dollars did they make?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, that is totally unrelated to the question that he asked to start with. Once again asking a question – if they're really interested in the answer, they would have given me the detail at least two days ahead so that I could present the answer. But this pattern that has developed: they are not interested in getting the answers. They're trying to make it sound like some individuals are getting special deals, and that's not true.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister should have the settlement proposal in his ministerial binder.

Now, again, in light of the evidence presented by Mr. Sheckter in 1995, will this government start a full, independent judicial inquiry into the purchase of all ring road land and the sale of what was deemed surplus?

Mr. Lund: No.

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

Postsecondary Education Review

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the new Minister of Advanced Education told this House that he expected to receive the reports from the accessibility and tuition affordability reviews in the next few weeks. From that point on these reports are going to disappear down the black hole of the standing policy committee, cabinet, and caucus review process. First, my best wishes to the new minister, and I follow that with a question. Exactly when is the minister going to make public to Alberta's postsecondary students, faculty, and other stakeholders the reports resulting from the postsecondary review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much. It's a very good question despite some of the black hole inferences. As you know, standing policy is a very important process because proposals from Albertans can come there and result in action. Albertans are closer to this government than ever before or anywhere else.

With respect to the question, as I indicated yesterday, I do expect to get the reports, which I really look forward to getting within the next few weeks and scheduling the government's response, to going through the process – standing policy, cabinet, caucus – as quickly as possible. I want to assure the hon. member that nothing is going to disappear down any black holes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: as a new Minister of Advanced Education will he make a clean break with the past and make the reports from the postsecondary review available to student unions and faculty associations at the same time that they are forwarded to the government standing policy committee? If not, why not?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the hon. member does not understand the process. You know, before reports can be released to the public, there has to be an approval process to release them. That starts in standing policy and goes to cabinet and then caucus. So as soon as they're available for distribution to Albertans, we will be providing them.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, given that this review was a public review, why is the minister now saying that this review belongs to the government and not to Albertans? When will he release this report? That's our question. Why is he keeping it a secret?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure about any secrets because I haven't seen any of those reports yet. They are coming in the next few weeks, and we will process them as soon as possible because they deal with issues that are extremely important to students and to all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ownership of Resource Revenues

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the great moments in Alberta's first century was in 1930 and the achievement of the

natural resources transfer act. Since that date every Premier of Alberta from Brownlee on has fiercely protected Alberta's natural resources. My question today is to the Deputy Premier. Will our Premier, who is meeting today in the east to discuss the equalization formula, restate and reinforce Alberta's long-standing policy that not only do the natural resources of Alberta belong to Albertans but also the revenues derived from those resources?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier and Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations are indeed in Montreal today, and they are meeting with the Council of the Federation to discuss a report on fiscal imbalance. There is no question that Alberta and Albertans are proud contributors to Confederation, always have been. But make no mistake: under the Constitution natural resources belong to Albertans, and it will be Albertans that decide how that resource money is used.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the Deputy Premier. After 30 years of equalization the list of have-not provinces continues to grow rather than shrink. This province and this government have had some experience with turning the hand up from the handout. Will the Premier in Ottawa be giving any advice to the other Premiers on how to turn the equalization formula from a handout to a hand-up program?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, there is no question that equalization has not always led to provinces reducing their dependency. In fact, there have been a number of reports written on this very subject, some that suggest that some provinces will take decades to recover from the equalization payments that they've received. Mr. Speaker, you might recall that our Premier was a very strong supporter of Newfoundland receiving a fair share of their natural resources in order for them to reach a level of independence rather than dependency. It has always been our philosophy that you should give a hand up, not a handout.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:20

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the Deputy Premier. What are the government's long-term plans to protect Alberta's resource wealth? [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier has the floor.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of things that you can do, but actually, constitutionally, we do own the resources and have the determination of how they're spent.

I think what's maybe as important in this conversation is to continue to ensure that people across this country understand what this industry in particular means to the rest of Canada. The energy industry actually prepared a report that showed very clearly that the largest tax benefit of this industry in fact goes to Canada, about 41 per cent, higher than what we receive as a province, which is about 36 per cent. The balance of that tax revenue is shared among other provinces. So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that all Canadians understand that every part of this country benefits from the industry and the activity around that industry.

I think, Mr. Speaker, there's no question that most people understand that Alberta contributes more per capita than any other province in Canada, and in fact I think most people understand that

there are only two provinces that are net contributors. What we need to work towards is ensuring that all provinces in this confederation are strong by giving them a hand up, not a handout.

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

Capital Planning Portfolio

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta taxpayers are troubled by this government's excess. My questions are to the Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, capital planning. Given that the majority of, to quote the Minister of Health and Wellness, heavy lifting for infrastructure has been handed back to the ministries of health and education, reducing your department's responsibilities, why does it take two ministers to carry out the job?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question, a question that I think a lot of people will be asking in the future, and I think the answer has to be reflected in the future. There is a huge potential, an awful lot of investment that's going to take place in this province. I believe the Premier had indicated over the past period of time that capital planning was a very necessary and integral part of our future. I think it's an exciting time, and I guess that's why the Premier appointed me as Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation and as minister responsible for capital planning, so that we can put together a solid plan so that all our municipal partners, our school boards, our colleagues, our MLAs know in a predictable way what's going on in the future.

Mr. Chase: Again to the associate minister: how does the minister justify to Alberta taxpayers the cost of his unnecessary political appointment?

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, what you see is what you get, and I think you may not like my answers sometimes. I guess what I would say to people that ask for this: it's a very important portfolio; there is over \$14 billion worth of projected investment in capital over the next three years, over \$4 billion this year alone. Don't you think that requires a little bit more than four-day planning, like most people expect?

Mr. Chase: My final question again to the associate minister, and the minister received this question prior to question period: what would be the full financial benefit for the associate minister, including salary increase, averaging of severance benefit, committee payments, vehicle allowance, and any other monetary benefits for one year?

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, I do want to indicate one thing very clearly. Over 14 years ago, when I ran in a by-election to become a member of this Assembly, I did not know, nor did I care how much an MLA made. What I along with what I hope a lot of MLAs in this Assembly did was to run to try to make a positive difference in this province. When the Premier asked me six days ago to assume this position, the first question out of my mouth was not: how much do I make? To this day I'm only assuming that my stipend will be the same as any other member of cabinet.

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

Supports for Aging in Place

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few concerns have surfaced in my recent talks with the senior groups in my constituency. The government encourages senior Albertans to age in place and to stay in their own homes as long as possible. The costs of living are rising fast, but their incomes are fixed. My questions today are to hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Given that the minister presented her ministry budget last week, what are the new, specific items in your plan to help senior Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like the Member for Calgary-Fort I certainly understand the concerns of seniors, especially those on fixed incomes. I, too, realize the importance, hon. member, of our seniors living in their own homes, staying in their own homes that they've often lived in for many years close to their friends, their families, and their local community centres.

Mr. Speaker, we do have seven programs that are important in this ministry that address the various needs of seniors through the financial or health support needs. One that I would like to mention to you is the Alberta seniors' benefit program. That program supports 142,000 seniors per month. It has a significant budget through the ministry. In fact, it has the highest monthly payment for our seniors and the most generous income threshold for seniors of any provincial program in Canada. So all the programs together in the ministry do assist our seniors in living independently in their own homes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that dental health is a key concern for Alberta's seniors, can the minister advise how she is addressing this important concern?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, that too, Mr. Speaker. We all know that oral health is fundamental to the quality of life and well-being of our seniors, and we did introduce the dental and optical assistance program last year. That program has been so successful that we currently have a take-up of 14,000 seniors per month that are accessing that program.

To address the needs of the oral health of our seniors living in our continuing care centres, which we've heard in the Assembly before, I was pleased to recently approve an \$800,000 pilot program with the leadership of the Alberta Dental Association and College. That mobile dental program will go out to our senior centres, and it will offer reliable, affordable dental services for our seniors in the community. Importantly, too, it will go out to the remote centres and, as well, serve seniors that we know to be shut in in the remote centres. So we're looking forward to measuring and tracking that and seeing if that is assisting in the long-term care centres as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the same minister. My senior constituents also expressed a concern about the rising property taxes on their homes. A big chunk of it is to the school tax. They say that they have been paying taxes all their lives and that they need a break as they don't have any children attending school now. What can the minister do to address this concern of rising property taxes and school taxes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have an established program in the ministry for our seniors, the education property tax assistance for seniors program, and that offers a rebate for increases in the education portion of the seniors' property tax over the 2004 amount. Since the amount that they pay is fixed at the 2004 levels, seniors no longer have to pay any increases in the education portion of their property taxes. It's available – that's important to know – to all senior homeowners regardless of their income. We did have 50,000 seniors access that program in 2005, and it as well assists seniors with what the Member for Calgary-Fort has brought forward to the Assembly today.

Thank you.

2:30 Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'll call on six today to participate in Members' Statements, but first of all just a brief review with respect to some items so that hon. members know about the history of Alberta.

In 1901 the area to be known as Alberta had a population of 73,022 people. Between 1901 and 1905 some 40,000 homesteads were granted for future Albertans, and in 1905 the life expectancy in this province was 53 years of age.

On April 25, 1906, a motion by Calgary Liberal MLA W.H. Cushing to make Calgary the permanent capital of Alberta was defeated by a vote of 16 to 8, and Edmonton was declared the capital.

In 1906 the speed limit within cities in Alberta was 10 miles per hour, and in the rural part of Alberta it was 20 miles per hour.

In August of 1907 the sod for the new Alberta Legislature Building was turned, and in October 1909 Governor General Earl Grey laid the cornerstone for this building.

In 1914, on the eve of World War I, the population of Alberta had surpassed 470,000 people, two-thirds of whom were farmers or farm-related people.

head: Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Challenge North 2006 Conference

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week on April 5 through 7 the Northern Alberta Development Council hosted the Challenge North conference in the town of High Level in my constituency. This conference is held every three years, but this is the first time it was held in such a northern location and in such a small town.

The purpose of the conference was to address the issues many communities in the north are facing, either the challenges of unprecedented growth or the inability to capture growth and development. Northern Albertans gather at the conference to network and share ideas and to listen to some fascinating guest speakers share their thoughts and ideas. Some 215 delegates were in attendance, Mr. Speaker.

Information sessions were designed to help delegates build and expand effective community, industry, and government partnerships. Sessions included information on forming aboriginal partnerships, on education needs, on infrastructure needs, and on a host of other topics.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the chair of the NADC, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, and the entire NADC staff for

the great decision to step away from the norm and to host the conference in the town of High Level. I also want to thank them for a truly great conference, a wonderful opportunity to forward the cause of northern development.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I want to commend everyone in the town of High Level, from the organizers to the town staff to the hotel staff, who once again, as they always do, took it to a new level of excellence and did a great job of showcasing the north.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SAIT Polytechnic

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak on an increasingly important and urgent need for Alberta's continuing economic development and prosperity. It is the development of our human resources, the skills and the expertise of workers in Alberta.

SAIT Polytechnic is embarking on its development of a new state-of-the-art trades and technology complex that will bring Alberta and Albertan learners to a higher level. SAIT plans to double the number of seats it will offer in energy, construction, manufacturing, automation, and transportation. All are industry areas with huge demands for more skilled workers. SAIT plans to meet the demand in this area by offering an additional 2,735 student seats in certificate, diploma, and applied degree programs as well as 5,898 more apprenticeship seats.

With its track record and past achievements I'd strongly suggest that our government support and continue to invest in SAIT. It's public money well spent, an investment with a solid and high return to Alberta.

Last year SAIT selected one of its key partners and allies as recipient of the 2005 president's partnership award. Along with previous recipients such as TransAlta Corporation, Calgary Motor Dealers Association, EnCana Corporation and with its global presence in the energy industry around the world, Nexen Corporation is well known for its leadership in the business community. Nexen, through its president and chief executive, Charlie Fischer, supported nearly \$3 million in scholarships at SAIT.

Late last year Mr. Keith MacPhail, president and CEO of Bonavista Energy Trust, donated \$10 million toward SAIT, and this donation is matched by our government's funding. Yesterday the Enerplus president gave \$5 million to SAIT.

I would like to ask the Assembly to recognize and thank these corporate leaders for the future of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Pat Fredrickson Rita McGregor

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would now like to recognize the outstanding achievements of the two ladies we are celebrating today. These ladies are licensed practical nurses, Pat Fredrickson and Rita McGregor.

Both these women represent the finest in leadership in the nursing profession and have influenced nursing policy provincially and nationally. In fact, Pat Fredrickson was among the health care professionals who received Alberta centennial medals for their exceptional contribution to the community and society.

I join your colleagues in thanking you for the dedication to advance licensed practical nursing, and good luck with your future endeavours.

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

Parks and Protected Areas

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The intent of my member's statement is to challenge the new Minister of Community Development to raise the profile of the parks and protected areas portion of his portfolio.

Since 1994 parks and protected area's infrastructure along with health, education, community services, and seniors, to name just a few, has suffered greatly from this government's neglect. While paying down the \$23 billion debt that the government had accumulated through poor management was eventually accomplished due to the increased global price of oil and gas, in the interval the condition of parks and protected areas deteriorated greatly.

Although the reinvestment in Alberta's photo op, pavement parks such as the Canmore Nordic Centre and a handful of interpretation centres, has mercifully begun again, the wilderness parks and protected areas, the diamonds in the rough, have been at best ignored and at worst deliberately abandoned. Considering the small percentage of land set aside, less than 5 per cent for parks and protected areas, Albertans expect that the government consider these areas sacred and do its utmost to protect and expand them.

Government bills 18 and 23 are heading in the wrong direction when they remove public advisory boards and buffer zone protection. The proposed coal-bed methane intrusion into the Rumsey ecological area as well as an attempt to remove the protected park status of Caribou Mountains provincial park to permit drilling is offensive to hundreds of thousands of Albertan environmental and outdoor enthusiasts.

The new minister has a chance to make either his mark or blot on Alberta's park landscape and personal well-being. Hopefully, the minister will whip up the enthusiasm of his caucus members to protect existing parks from industrial intrusion and to support extending protection to wilderness areas like the Castle Crown by establishing the 1,040 square kilometre Andy Russell I'tai Sah Kòp wilderness park.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Bow Island and District Emergency Services

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 8 I was given the opportunity to present the Alberta emergency service medal to a number of very deserving individuals from the Bow Island and district emergency services. In order to be eligible for the medal, nominees must have worked for at least 12 years in municipal emergency services. The nominees in Bow Island all had numerous years of service, combining for a total of 268 years of volunteer service. Two hundred and sixty-eight years. Giving anywhere from 13 to 42 years of service, each of these individuals has dedicated a great deal of their time and energy in serving their communities.

2:40

Mr. Speaker, the colours of the Alberta emergency service medal represent the qualities that the nominated volunteers and the winners have. The blue on the ribbon represents the province of Alberta while the three white stripes represent good service, loyalty, and conduct. Each of those nominated for the emergency services medal from the Bow Island and district emergency services deserve our appreciation and respect for the volunteer work that they do.

Again I'd like to extend my congratulations to those winners of the medal and to all the nominees. Volunteers need to be recognized for the volunteer work that they do. Without volunteers Alberta would not be the wonderful province that we know and love today.

Mr. Speaker, April 23 to 29 is National Volunteers Week, and I'm proud to have been given this opportunity to discuss a great group of volunteers who have given so much to their communities and to our province generally. They have selflessly dedicated their time and energy, and I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank them for their efforts.

Thank you.

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

Water Management

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the province's much-vaunted Water for Life strategy Albertans should by now have a comprehensive strategy in place to protect Alberta's drinking water. We're still waiting. Recent reports have underlined the urgent need for a strategy to ensure that safe and reliable sources of water are available to all Albertans.

The urgency of the situation extends beyond Alberta's borders as our neighbours have voiced their concerns about the decline in water levels and the quality of rivers flowing to the east, north, and south of our province. It is hypocritical for the government in its Water for Life strategy to stress the importance of water to Albertans and then fall behind in terms of meaningful legislation and regulations governing the industrial use of our water. In some cases the water used by industry is locked away forever in coal seams or down oil wells, never to be recovered again.

The situation is urgent. There should be immediate steps taken to ensure that there is no privatization of Alberta's water, that there are no interbasin transfers of water, and that there is strong and meaningful legislation passed here to protect water from pollution and overuse by industry. Individual household consumers throughout the province must be assured of pure and inexpensive drinking water for their own domestic use. Our province's water must be maintained as a publicly owned resource. We must not allow the private trading of water and not allow the sale of water to other countries, particularly to the United States.

Albertans know the vital importance of water to their continued health and prosperity. It's time for the government to ensure that it's properly protected.

Thank you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by 51 energetic young Albertans from my constituency. Basically, they're petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to "introduce effective and immediate measures to curtail the substantial increase in teenage smoking in Alberta."

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present a petition from 60 residents of central Alberta, from the Mirror, Bashaw, and Alix areas. It says: we the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to introduce effective and immediate measures to curtail the substantial increase in teenage smoking in Alberta as reported by Health Canada that include but are not limited to a tobacco tax increase, legislation to control tobacco sales and marketing, and the legislation to make all workplaces completely smoke free.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on a Standing Order 40 application.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I will move under Standing Order 40 of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly affirm the position that revenue from nonrenewable resources should be excluded from the formula by which federal equalization payments are calculated."

The Speaker: Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

Bill 30
Persons with Developmental Disabilities
Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to move first reading of Bill 30, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006.

This legislation will enhance the way our province administers the persons with developmental disabilities, or PDD, program. Bill 30 proposes that the roles and responsibilities of the PDD Provincial Board be transferred to the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports and that the reporting lines of the PDD community boards be enhanced so that they would report directly to the ministry. This legislation will enable the ministry to better co-ordinate programs that support adults with disabilities, which were placed under the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports in November 2004.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move that Bill 30, the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 31
Health Information Amendment Act, 2006

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move Bill 31, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2006, for first reading.

This legislation will make substantial amendments to the Health Information Act to reflect changing technology and to better assist in the administration of health care spending in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 31, being the Health Information Amendment Act, 2006, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 32
Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce first reading of Bill 32, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act.

This new legislation will not only incorporate much of what was in private member's Bill 201 but will also replace the Human Tissue Gift Act.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 32, being the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not usual that we would table this, but given that the opposition seems to want to play games with the land that was purchased from Mr. Sheckter, I'm filing today five copies of the agreements for four parcels, clearly showing that, in fact, the land that was in excess would be returned to the vendor.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from myself that has been sent to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. The letter responds to the questions he raised yesterday regarding the theft of computer equipment from Children's Services, and I trust that the information in this letter will answer his questions. As I stated in the letter, Albertans can be assured that no client information was stored on the stolen laptops, and at no time was personal information at risk. The police are investigating this incident.

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

2:50

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today, and they all relate to my questions earlier in question period. The first tabling I have is a settlement proposal between Joseph M. Sheckter and the province.

The second tabling I have is a page from the *Alberta Gazette* from 1981 indicating that land in the northeast section of 29-51-24-W4 was sold for a total amount of \$4,394,500, or \$55,000 per acre.

The third tabling I have is a historical title of land, and it indicates that this land changed hands from Robertson Properties to Aristocrat

Holdings and the amounts that this land was bought and sold for are in this historical title.

Now, certainly, this next document is also a certificate of title from the north Alberta land registries district, and this is the southeast quarter of section 8, township 54, range 24, west of the fourth meridian. This is also land that was addressed in question period today.

There is also a certificate of title from the northern Alberta land registries district, and this certifies that the Atlantic Dairy Farm Ltd. and 248290 Alberta Ltd. are owners.

This is a certificate of title indicating that Tigris Holdings Ltd. is now the owner of a one-third interest.

The last tabling that I have is, certainly, an Alberta registries land titles certificate. This is for 4, 24, 51, 25, northeast section, and this indicates, again, that land in 1981 was sold to Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta for \$6.2 million.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today. The first is from Jim Moses, noting that by setting up a pay-for-service system, it's diluting the existing capacity by removing doctors and nurses, et cetera, from the health care system.

The next letter is from Ian Morgan, noting that "foreign qualified immigrant doctors and nurses can be brought to Canadian standards."

A number of suggestions from K.T. Moorthy and S. Moorthy, noting that they need to ban smoking in the workplace and public places; supporting sporting activities by reducing the cost for rental of ice time and playing fields, et cetera; a number of very proactive suggestions.

From John Mathewson, wondering if the Premier is taking into account "potential rising government income that will be produced by the rising population of workers . . . It is critical that Albertans are confident that the numbers are derived fairly as we weight the argument."

The next letter is from Adele McDonald, noting that public health care "has always recognized . . . and managed the balance between services that fell within – and outside – of the public care system."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the proper number of copies of a paper called Equalization Reform: A Fair Deal for Saskatchewan. The paper supports Alberta's position that nonrenewable resources should be excluded from calculation of federal equalization payments.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, each with the requisite five copies. The first tabling is a memorandum dated October 9, 1980, from then minister of environment Jack Cookson to then Premier E.P. Lougheed with respect to Edmonton's and Calgary's RDAs and containing those quotes about special interest names which I used in today's question period. Another sentence of note in that memo talks about purchasing land "quietly, quickly and cleanly."

The second tabling is Alberta Government Services land titles office document number 992086598, showing Lehigh Portland

Cement Limited offering to sell a certain parcel of land to Canadian National Railway Company on March 18, 1999.

My third tabling is also an Alberta Government Services land titles office document, 992086220, showing Lehigh Portland Cement Limited buying that same parcel of land from this government on March 31, 1999, almost two weeks after they had already offered to sell most of it.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, pursuant to the Farm Implement Act the Farm Implement Board 2005-06 Annual Report.

**Speaker's Ruling
Petition Procedure**

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I go to the Standing Order 40 application, just a note with respect to petitions. We do have a standing order with respect to petitions, Standing Order 83(3). In the case of one petition that was filed today by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, it doesn't meet the requirements of that particular standing order, so the petition is being returned. It is an onus of responsibility on members to know what that standing order is.

head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on a Standing Order 40 application.

Federal Equalization Payments

Mr. Mason:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly affirm the position that revenue from nonrenewable resources should be excluded from the formula by which federal equalization payments are calculated.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In order to satisfy you and the House that this in fact is in order, I'd like to make the following comments. First of all, it appears, based on the research that we've been able to do, that there will be no suitable opportunity to raise this in another forum. I think the closest, perhaps, would be the estimates of the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations, but it in no way affords an opportunity for the House to clearly express a position with respect to this matter. So we are unable to find any other opportunity for the House to clearly express its opinion on this very important question.

With respect to urgency, Mr. Speaker, just today the Premiers are meeting in Montreal at the Council of the Federation. Each of these provinces will be arguing in their own self-interest, and we believe that it's important that Alberta's position would be best represented if we could show broad political support for the position that nonrenewable resource revenues ought not to be included in the calculation of equalization payments. We know that the Premier is down there, that it represents a position, as we understand it, of the government, but I'm not aware of any occasion in which the entire House has had an opportunity to express its point of view.

Mr. Speaker, adding to the urgency is the position of the government of Quebec. They have been very clear that they would like to see nonrenewable resources included in the calculation of transfer payments. If that were to happen, of course, it could have a significant impact on Alberta's overall financial position.

We believe that it's important at this point to have this debate and, particularly in light of recent political developments in the province of Alberta, to express the position nationally based on the entire Assembly rather than just the position of the Premier and the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are the arguments. We believe that this is the only and, in fact, the best opportunity to express this position. We also believe that given recent political developments and the negotiations currently taking place in Montreal, it is not only timely but very important to express a clear and united position from the province of Alberta. So I would respectfully request unanimous leave from the Assembly in order to debate this. If that were to be given, we are prepared to commit to only one short speech on the matter, and we would ask other parties to consider the same thing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under a Standing Order 40 application unanimous consent of the Assembly is required in order to give consent.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: As the estimates this afternoon of the Ministry of Environment are coming up, I just want to leave, hon. members, with this short little historical vignette with respect to ministers of Environment.

3:00

There was a Minister of Environment once who actually sat, I believe, in the same chair that the current Minister of Environment is in. The rule of the day said that you had two hours for your estimates, and a minister at that time was given 30 minutes' speaking time. The then Minister of Environment began to verbalize lucidly, not unlike certain other ministers of Environment, and reached the point of 30 minutes in his discourse at which time he concluded in his mind that he was not finished. So he asked the chair to ask for unanimous leave of the House to continue speaking. The House gave the minister unanimous leave. The minister proceeded to go on for another one hour and 30 minutes and completely and totally filibustered his estimates. We arrived at the two-hour time frame in which there was a demand for the vote to be taken, and the vote was taken. But thereafter the House levelled the playing field with that particular Minister of Environment to his woe.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

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

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Environment

The Chair: I'll call the hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to say this afternoon that on such a beautiful Alberta day perhaps I could be asking for unanimous consent that we reconvene out on the lawn of the Legislature, which would be a beautiful thing. I guess that I could try that motion, but it may not be administratively possible. That being the case, joining me today is my huge staff: the Deputy

Minister of Environment, Peter Watson, as well as Laurent Auger, le chef du cabinet. I'm pleased to talk today. It's an honour and a privilege to talk about Environment's business plan for the fiscal year.

Let me begin by walking you through some of the major changes in my ministry's expenditures. There has been an increase of about \$1.7 million for approvals required under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act and the Water Act. We issue these approvals for new activities that might have an adverse impact on the environment, such as oil sands projects or new drinking water systems.

We also have reviewed our program to identify projects with low environmental risk because I do believe that risk assessment is so critical in terms of how we use our energy in the most efficient way possible. For example, we will implement new standards for urban drainage and storm runoff works and temporary water diversions and no longer have to issue approvals for those works. That's a small example of the efficiencies we are building within our ministry. As a result – and I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View would appreciate this – we've been able to reallocate \$600,000 because of that efficient use of our time and energy and money into '06-07 to higher risk approval activities.

We now also require professionals to sign off on the remediation of petroleum storage tank sites. Professional engineers from APEGGA will review these sites to ensure that they are properly cleaned, and we will audit these sites.

We will also continue to be involved in the higher risk sites area. For instance, under the compliance and enforcement categories the educational activities that we have always conducted in this area are now being assigned to the ministry's educational awareness program. Now, this results in a decrease of about \$490,000 in this program. However, I want to stress that we have not reduced any resources for the field inspections and surveillance of the activities. What we are truly looking for are the outcomes that are so important relative to how we spend our money, get the best value for our money and the lowest environmental risk relative to what we're dealing with. This is just another small example.

So we will continue to enforce and take action on those who do not follow our strict environmental legislation, but we also want to educate Albertans to make sound environmental choices. It's almost like the boy and the man who sit on the end of a dock, and the question is: do you give the boy a fish when he's hungry, or do you teach the boy how to fish? Ultimately what we are doing is using our energy in a way so that for generations to come that boy will be able to fish based on the lessons that he has been taught relative to the environment. That's exactly what we're doing. I know that my wife will be very proud of that story that I just told this afternoon.

One other small example of that is monitoring and evaluation. This program area increased by \$1.5 million. You ask me how much? One point five million dollars because we are improving and expanding our information systems for measuring groundwater and other water sources, which are so important on the blue gold that we talk about in this Assembly.

We're also making it easier for Albertans to access information by expanding what we put on our website. We truly believe that information is so critical in terms of the mapping, the geological work that we're doing relative to the information of groundwater aquifers, and how we share that in an open, transparent way with all Albertans. We continue to enhance those procedures and that framework that we have in place within the Ministry of Environment.

The increase of \$200,000 in this program reflects the cost of sharing information with partners such as the Clean Air Strategic

Alliance, CASA, and the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment. Now, in one small area, water operations, I want to say that a decrease of \$900,000 is reflecting savings through an increased use of technology, again for programs that maintain provincially owned water infrastructure such as is often referred to as on-stream storage, but the real word, I think, is more appropriately framed as a dam.

A decrease of half a million dollars was achieved by moving more initiatives into, again, our education program. That's aimed at teaching that boy how to fish as opposed to giving him a fish in terms of the important environmental seeds that we work for into the future.

Also, on an innovation and policy perspective we are increasing \$1.8 million under initiatives of sustainable resource environmental management, which I know that the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development supports, SREMs such as emissions trading systems, a streamlined regulatory system for upstream oil and gas, and better systems for managing contaminated sites.

From a drinking water perspective, we're increasing it by a small amount of \$36,000. This, again, supports the workforce needed for the drinking water branch, which is part of Water for Life. In addition to the workforce increase in this area, we are also devoting about \$1.7 million – you asked me how much; \$1.7 million – in each of the three areas out of our Water for Life budget to help small communities have the support they need to continue to provide safe drinking water. I know that to my colleagues all over this province it's so important to have safe drinking water in our smaller communities as we work collectively with them as partners. Partnership is very important. A partnership is: what can we do for you that you can't do, and what can you do for me that I can't do? Collectively we're using a resource end of Alberta Environment to work toward strengthening that partnership.

I want to say that in reclamation we're decreasing about \$1.2 million, but this \$1.2 reflects the upcoming completion of reclamation work at the Smoky River coal mine. I know, to the hon. members, that the Smoky River coal mine is an important initiative that I think it is very important.

An increase of \$3.7 million supports a number of critical initiatives such as programs that help First Nations. I know, to the hon. minister of aboriginal affairs, that the programs that will help our First Nations and small communities supply clean drinking water and make sure that they have dependable backup systems and maintain healthy aquatic ecosystems are so important.

Again, speeding up completion of flood risk mapping throughout the province is an important initiative.

As well, groundwater mapping throughout the province with a focus in the next two years in central Alberta is a key area where we have been focusing some of our dollars and our infrastructure.

Partners with communities and Albertans to improve watershed conservation through the Alberta Water Council and other partners is another important initiative.

I want to conclude on this point by saying that part of our Water for Life strategy, again, in helping us achieve a very noble goal: we want to improve our water conservation by 30 per cent by the year 2015. I want to say that I know that that goal is being achieved as we speak through our Water for Life strategy.

3:10

On the issue of climate change, of course, we are increasing about \$43,000 to support some of our workforce needs in the critical area. We continue to focus on technology developments, such as the Drake Landing solar community in Okotoks. To the hon. member from Okotoks and High River: I'm looking forward to joining him.

Last week, as you know, he was very successful in getting from the Minister of Environment an additional half a million dollars based on a question that was asked in this House. I want to say that he has actually started quite an incredible trend because everyone now thinks that when they ask a question to the Minister of Environment, they are going to get a half a million dollars. I want to assure you that that is not always the case. But I want to say that this type of initiative, pertaining to the Drake Landing solar community, is an important one when it comes to looking at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and intensity, and I want to applaud the hon. member for his good work working with partners in that community.

I also want to say that we will continue to work with the federal government to influence national and international agreements. In fact, I will be attending later in May in Bonn, Germany, with the federal Minister of Environment, Ms Ambrose, where Canada will be leading the way, and I know that Alberta plays a key role relative to the importance of the plan we have in place.

Did you know that we're the only province in Canada that has a climate change law? No other province in Canada has a climate change law, and I'm very proud to say that it's right here in this province. Just like it's right here in this province: we were the first province in Canada to have a Ministry of Environment, dating back to 1971, for some of the members who may not be aware.

An increase of \$700,000 also reflects a commitment to sharing timely and accurate information about the environment with Albertans and our partners and our stakeholders. We want to ensure that all Albertans are well-informed in a transparent, open process when we come to making the right choices about the environment, and I want to say that that is working very well.

From an integrated resource management perspective, we have an increase of just under a million dollars, reflecting our new environmental response team. Of course, this team is a recommendation of the Environmental Protection Commission, which I established last August as a result of the ecological disaster that took place in Wabamun. Working very closely with the hon. member from the Stony Plain area, I want to say that that is moving ahead on schedule, on time, and, I might add, on budget.

From an intergovernmental relation perspective, we are increasing about \$130,000, that reflects a focus on stronger partnerships, on environmental research with the Department of Innovation and Science, and I had an excellent visit last week with the Alberta Science and Research Authority, where they are doing excellent work with the Ministry of Environment.

I want to continue on and talk about the fact that no matter what it is that we do, we want in this 21st century to move away from labels because labels just simply disenfranchise. They just simply pigeonhole. Basically, a label just simply says: you go in one corner, you come in another corner, and let's come out fighting. Well, I think that is really not a good efficient use of energy, and this budget this year reflects that we are using our money and our dollars in a more efficient way because rather than labelling and rather than disenfranchising Albertans, what we are doing is working in partnership with Albertans. My good friend, who I had breakfast with last Friday morning in Vancouver, Dr. David Suzuki, said that what we want to do is move away from labels. Labels we should keep not for people but for planets.

What it really does more than anything is that it talks about the importance of our education system in terms of teaching that boy how to fish because, ultimately, this is generational. This is a long-term approach. In fact, some of our dollars this year will be reflected in the youth summit. This will be the first-ever Alberta youth summit all across Canada, that's going to be held in Kananaskis in the early months of the fall. In fact, what we will be

doing is we'll be having university students, college kids, kids from high school, but also grade 5 students. The grade 5 students will be there because of the fact that that's where they learn about the important principles of the environment. Again, we're taking those seeds and planting them so we have long-term impact of the money we're investing in education.

From a land perspective and contaminated sites I want to say that this is an important issue relative to the cleanup and the reclaiming of contaminated sites. Our legislation is without question the strongest in this country. My ministry acts immediately where contamination exceeds environmental standards or could cause potential health risks. We use environmental protection orders if deemed appropriate, if needed to ensure that the company cleans up. The polluter will pay because it's the law. We will continue to protect our land, air, and water as we move forward because we have strong Alberta laws. For example, we used environmental protection orders with a company in northern Alberta after tests confirmed that salt runoff from their site was contaminating adjacent property. It's just one small example where the polluter pays for any violation of a law that takes place in the strong Alberta law that we have.

I want to use another example of things that we are doing that I think are so important. Immediately after the spill at Wabamun we issued enforcement orders, which clearly outlined the steps that Canadian National, CN Rail, needed to take to clean out the lake to our strict environmental standards and to keep the public informed on the cleanup status. That's so important. I want to say that I was proud to hire Dr. David Schindler from the University of Alberta, who, as you know, is a leading ecologist, as well as Dr. Ron Goodman, who was the cleanup manager for the *Exxon Valdez*. We took that action in the first 24 hours.

I want to say that I compliment my team of people within the Ministry of Environment, who acted very conscientiously, and the good work that they have done relative to restoring and building back the confidence of the people in the Wabamun area. We are continuing to be involved with our staff. We have an office in Wabamun to ensure that. Residents have questions. I think that's a good investment of Alberta Environment dollars, that this budget is all about. We will continue to hold CN's feet to the fire to ensure that the laws are followed and also to ensure that the lake is restored to its full and best use for its residents.

I want to also for a moment take an opportunity to say as we go forward that, clearly, I believe our Water for Life strategy is perhaps the most progressive piece of public policy that we have in our government. Perhaps I'm biased as the Minister of Environment, but it is forward thinking. Not only are we thinking about down the road; we're also thinking about around the corner. I think that in this 21st century that is the type of public policy that Albertans are expecting on such an important resource as our blue gold.

I want to say that we have a target of a 30 per cent improvement in water efficiency by the year 2015. That means that for the way we use our water today, we have to do an even better job pertaining to the issue of water conservation. To meet this target, we are working with our municipalities and also with industry to measure actual water usage. We are educating Albertans pertaining to water conservation. Again, we're feeding that young boy who is sitting on the dock. We're planting seeds.

I don't know if you are aware, but about 50 years ago there used to be a sign. It was a regulation of government, and it used to say: do not spit. That was the law. There used to be signs saying: do not spit. If you notice, today there are no signs anywhere in Alberta that say: do not spit. The culture and our society have come to understand what is expected of them. In the same context as we go forward with our young grade 5 students, we want to plant the seed

so that from an educational awareness perspective it's not about "do not spit" anymore. It's about what we are doing individually as Albertans in protecting and sustaining our environment today and well into the future.

I want to say today: do we need to start putting signs up? I don't think so because I think Albertans are already there when it comes to the fact of how important the environment is to them in terms of their children and their grandchildren and their way of life. As Minister of Environment responsible for the Water Act I also want to say on the quality of water in Alberta that I will continue to use every fibre of energy in my body to ensure that safe, secure drinking water is top of mind when it comes to the actions we take and in the money reflected in this budget when it comes to the money we expend for protecting our water.

3:20

The tests that are being carried out relative to coal-bed methane drilling will show well water quality. They will show well water production capacity in terms of flows. They will also show the presence or absence of methane gas in the well. What we are doing is developing a rock-solid base of information that we will be able to use. Information is truly power when it comes to the decisions we make pertaining to water usage and water conservation. We have a very open and transparent process that we are using for any landowner anywhere in Alberta. The new standards that we have put in place and the monies that we are expending will force any industry that is doing the drilling to pay for the testing: 100 per cent of that testing will be paid by industry. In fact, any resident who has a concern or even a fear of anything that is going on can relieve those fears because we have a 24-hour hotline at 1-800-222-6514 that any resident anywhere in this province can call at any time and get answers. Of course, Alberta Environment will be there in terms of being able to react quickly to concerns.

It's so important that citizens are also the eyes and ears of Alberta Environment officials. If everyone thinks about it, we all have individual responsibility in dealing with the environment. I think this is an important approach of spreading our wings and our tentacles even further. Again, we may not have to beam up to the mother ship because the tentacles to the mother ship will be to every Albertan, so ultimately we will have all corners of our province covered.

Alberta leads this country when it comes to drinking water programs, and my ministry, I want to say, has just completed the most comprehensive review of its drinking water facilities anywhere in North America. I think those were dollars well spent, and I think the money that will be allocated in this budget this year will also be well spent in terms of securing that blue gold.

I also want to say that last week Dr. David Schindler, who I consider a very good friend, in his report confirms what we are already doing. Water is scarce in Alberta and across the prairies. This is especially important in southern Alberta, which has a long history of drought. I don't know if you would be aware – did you know that 200 years ago the North Saskatchewan actually suffered a major drought in this area? Two hundred years ago there was a major drought right here in the North Saskatchewan River that was unprecedented. So we use the information that Dr. Schindler has provided in this type of forward-thinking reporting, that Alberta Environment welcomes.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my leave. I'm quite prepared to answer any questions from members from all parties in the Assembly this afternoon.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is my privilege to stand and comment on and ask questions about the estimates briefing for the Department of Environment. I thank the hon. minister for his comments and for his attempts to lead the province on environmental issues. I have to acknowledge that this minister has inherited a mess from years of neglect and underfunding, with grossly deficient staff numbers and capacity to measure and take action on issues relating to our environment.

This is the third most vital issue to Albertans, the protection of the environment, which requires significant investment in testing, analyzing the results of the tests, and taking action on the results of the analysis. It has been over a decade since the Department of Environment has been adequately funded to do its job, and the results are showing themselves. With less than 0.5 per cent of the provincial budget there is a profound loss of confidence in the capacity of this Environment department and this Environment minister to carry out the responsibilities of protecting our water, our soil, and our air. Fundamentally, this has impacts on the public health and safety. Clearly, in the area of groundwater alone there has been a serious lack of ability to monitor, to analyze, and to hold industry accountable for the progressive loss of quality and in some cases quantity of water in our groundwater aquifers.

There has been a lack of capacity in the Alberta Environment department to do comprehensive environmental impact assessments. We continue to rely on industry to do their own environmental impact assessments on approval projects. This is clearly a failure of leadership by this government. The lack of investment, the lack of putting the environment first is a failure of vision and the recognition that we cannot sustain any kind of economic activity and health in this province until we invest properly in the environment. Legislation is fine, and we have good legislation. The problem is enforcement. We have no capacity to enforce the good laws that we have. Industry is being called upon to regulate itself. This cannot be sustained. The people of Alberta are increasingly anxious, angry, and demanding a more accountable system.

We have thousands of contaminated sites around the province, and unfortunately there still is no fund which will deal with the cleanup costs. Many of these companies have walked away. They have gone bankrupt or changed ownership, and now the public purse will be on the line again to clean up these messes. This clearly has to be dealt with. The debt that we are leaving to our children is absolutely phenomenal in terms of multibillion dollar cleanup costs because of the failure to establish a cleanup fund in the interests of all Albertans.

The Water for Life policy is a good policy, but it is simply ideas. We need action after three years on this plan. It is simply a plan that needs to be implemented, and funding needs to be provided to allow the watershed groups to do the research, to do the planning, to do the testing, and to carry out the actions needed to protect our water, particularly our watersheds. We will spend billions and billions of dollars, as we are doing again this year, on treating water because we are not protecting the water in the first instance at its watershed level. Now we're seeing signs of that in the groundwater particularly. We must invest in the Water for Life policy and get it going on the ground.

One of the fundamental aspects of investment in sustainable water and other environmental characteristics is an integrated land-use plan. In 15 years this is the third attempt to get an integrated land-use plan in this province. Failure to plan is planning to fail. Without this land-use plan industry is simply going from place to place, project to project, and the regulatory bodies have no capacity to say no because the government has already sold them the land, sold them the subsurface rights. They have to be allowed to go ahead,

then, without serious attempts at a systematic, overall provincial plan that would protect us into the future, protect industry into the future, and protect our fundamental lifeblood, groundwater, into the future.

We have to be able to do cumulative impact assessments. We're still not doing them. The upgraders in the industrial heartland are still going ahead without a proper scientific assessment of the cumulative load on the atmosphere, the cumulative load of pollutants on air quality, water quality, soil quality. There are significant concerns out there. Again, huge investment is needed in the scientific realm of doing cumulative impact assessments in order to make decisions about what is sustainable and what is not sustainable.

Finally, there needs to be funding for meaningful public consultation. When a decision is being made in their locale, whether it's an intensive livestock operation or industrial activity or a refinery site, people have to be meaningfully involved in those decisions, or we're headed for increasing community fracturing and increasing court challenges at a great cost to both communities and the province.

We are looking for serious investment in the Environment department, significant courageous leadership to move this agenda forward, and once again are disappointed at the very small increase in budget that this ministry has to work with. The Water for Life strategy got a \$3.6 million increase this year. How is that going to actually move the series of watershed programs that are needed, that are already being degraded, especially in the South Saskatchewan basin? How are we going to get a handle on some of the overallocations that have already been made in some of these watersheds? These watershed groups have to be adequately funded to do the work, or we're headed for real trouble. So I would appreciate some answers to some of the questions around investing adequately into this ministry, questions around how the integrated land-use plan is going to unfold and what proportion of investment this ministry has to pay into that and is compromised as a result of it.

3:30

You've indicated \$33 million to improve our understanding of groundwater. That's a very important initiative and is long overdue. With the complaints and concerns based on testing that I've heard, we have a major problem in our underground aquifers that we have only begun to address. We also need to do much more in terms of the characterization of volumes and chemistry under surface because of the tremendous number, over 300,000, of wells now in this province, some of which have been there for 75 years and are breaking down and are continuing to show signs that they, too, are contributing to gas migration and to connections between aquifers, with one aquifer polluting another. So we have serious questions around how you're going to address these issues without more funding. We will do all we can on this side to ensure that the pressures are mounting to get this ministry adequate funding to do its job.

There was discussion last fall about interbasin water transfer into the special areas. I hope that the lack of legislation this year to review it reflects a change in culture here, that we cannot continue to take water to people and support unsustainable development in the areas that are drought ridden. We have to bring people to water. It's a question, I guess, also of whether or not this minister has decided against this. I hope he has. I think that would be a progressive decision. We've already had two major interbasin transfers in the province, and with climate change coming, it's clearly going to be an increasing demand for these unsustainable practices.

In relation to climate change I'm hoping the minister will look at enforceable limits and shift away from this intensity target. When the oil and gas industry is burgeoning as it is, there is only one way

that our contribution to climate change is going, and that is through the roof. We have to have building code changes and vehicle emissions testing and a greater commitment to renewable energy. I've spoken with the Energy minister. He doesn't express any interest in renewable energy. I'm hoping the Environment minister will press for more renewable sources of energy. We simply cannot continue on this single-minded approach to fossil fuel extraction.

In relation to the climate change program I'd be interested to know how the minister assesses the impact of the climate change program so far. It's been a number of years since it's been going, and it's been doing some good work but extremely limited because of the very low budget it's working with. We need leadership on this climate change file. We are the richest province in the richest country in the world. We are looking for leadership on climate change.

Another area of concern is holding industry accountable for pollution. The minister has stated several times in the House that he plans to hold industry accountable. Well, that requires much greater investment in testing and monitoring and holding the various industries accountable. We need to see that, and we need more money invested in those areas. Your staff are clearly handicapped by a lack of technology, a lack of manpower to do what is vital to all Albertans.

In terms of emergency preparedness another question I had is: how much money now is coming out of the Environment budget to ensure emergency preparedness, and is it appropriate that no new money is coming in for this extended job that is needed to ensure a prompt and effective response to environmental disasters?

It isn't clear to me how much is going to be spent on this new groundwater testing program. It's been indicated that the industry will pay the shot, but from what I've seen so far of the protocol, I think it's inadequate. Indeed, the most expensive tests have not been included in the protocol, and that is isotope testing. If industry is not going to pick up that tab, then we really don't have an adequate baseline assessment. All we know is whether there's gas or no gas in the water. Without isotope testing we will not know whether new gas that comes in is actually coming from deeper sources or not. So I hope we can get some further scientific review of the protocol before it gets established for May 1 because the chemists who have spoken to me about it feel that it is simply not going to answer the question of what caused a water body to be contaminated if we're simply looking for whether there's gas or no gas. There have to be much more sophisticated testings in the protocol.

In addition, we need to have some funding committed to an independent evaluation of the testing process. I don't see anything in the budget to address the 20 or 25 families whose water has been either lost or contaminated. I don't see anything in the budget to investigate those, and these are extremely expensive investigations. If we don't do a good job on those, we are going to be in serious liability from a public point of view, and these are going to end up in court. My understanding from the chemists is that each one of these isotope tests that's required in some of these complaint problems could be upwards of several thousand dollars. I do think we have to find out more about how you're prepared, within a very limited budget, to address the concerns of these families. It's my understanding that the minister has also guaranteed clean water, potable water for families that have been impacted. I'm waiting to see how that will unfold, but it's clearly yet another stress that hasn't been adequately provided for in this budget.

A question I raised earlier this week is that of the importance of now looking back over five years of coal-bed methane drilling and the potential impacts that these have had on other areas of water, some of them on public lands, some of them on private lands where

no one has actually recognized that their water has changed. A huge investment is going to be needed there as well to assess just what impact this has had on our groundwater.

So with those comments and questions, Mr. Chairman, I'll sit down, and I welcome the responses from the minister.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you very much. You've covered quite a lot of important points, and I certainly agree with them. I want to say that at one point I used to say that I always found myself to be an optimist and not a pessimist, but then I've also been accused of being colour blind. If I could draw an analogy, an optimist always thinks that the light is going to be green, and a pessimist always thinks that the traffic light is going to be red. But you know what? The truly wise person is colour blind to each. I guess that when I was accused of being colour blind, I thought it was inappropriate because optimism and pessimism are really all about labels and really provide no real constructive measure when it comes to the work that we do relative to improving the environment we enjoy.

Relative to renewable energies I want to first comment that you may not be aware, members of the Assembly, but the lights that you see in this very Assembly, the thousands of lights that are here, are in fact an initiative that Alberta Environment worked on with Alberta Infrastructure to ensure that this is renewable energy. Did you know that the lights in here are solar powered? In fact, did you know that 90 per cent of the energy that the Alberta government buildings use is by renewable energies? I think that statement in itself speaks for the actions that the government is taking when it comes to renewable energies. I know that all members in the front row and in the back rows and all across this side of the government certainly agree with the important initiatives of renewable energies.

I might also say on a personal note that I'm looking forward to constructing and erecting solar panels on my cottage this summer. In fact, I have to reposition the cottage a bit to make sure that I get the most intensive part of the sun that is coming in. But, again, that is a personal responsibility that Albertans are demonstrating each and every day when it comes to environment protection and sustaining and enjoying what we've been blessed with.

3:40

If I could for a moment, the hon. member did talk about the idea of the dollars that we have in terms of saying that it didn't go up as much as others. That is true, and I recognize that. But I think it's equally important to recognize that as we go forward, we also have to talk about what we have put in place in terms of feeding that boy that's on the wharf because what we have done is establish watershed councils. They are out there being our eyes and our ears. They are doing things. And you know what? A tribute to them for the little funds that we do dedicate to them, it's absolutely incredible the value that we get in return. So often it is believed that if you spend a lot of money, you should be getting great value.

In the dollars that we spend with our water councils across Alberta as part of our Water for Life strategy, the watershed councils are providing, if I could use the term – it is absolutely priceless. It is truly priceless in terms of the value they are providing to us and our ministry in terms of their excellent efforts relative to the issue of watershed monitoring as well as the work that they do on the water councils that we have established as part of our Water for Life strategy across Alberta.

I also want to take a moment to say that climate change and the renewable energies that we have undertaken as a government is a commitment that has been ongoing for the last few years. The

reason behind that is that it's everyone's business, and it makes good sense, and I say sense, s-e-n-s-e, and cents, c-e-n-t-s. I think that reflects the value of Albertans. They want to ensure that their government dollars and their own personal dollars are used in a way that is efficient, that is an effective manner relative to protecting the environment but also in terms of their individual needs.

So as I talk from a personal perspective about this summer; in fact, investing money in solar panels to put on the roof. The solar panels that I'm going to be constructing I think are a small example of the way Albertans think. I'm looking forward, in fact, to never getting a bill from any utility company or any water company because I'm going to be able to heat the water and provide the lighting because of renewable energy from the solar panels.

I ask each and every one of you to put up your hand if, in fact, you have renewable and you've taken that initiative as a personal responsibility. If you haven't, that's okay. I'm not here to say that that's not good, but think about it. Think about it this year. Being a Bob Vila and getting out there and picking up, you know, and constructing is actually healthy. It makes you forget about politics, and it actually talks about more important values in life, and that is the renewable energies that the hon. member has talked about.

I can only say: judge me by my actions, not by my words. The actions that this minister is taking and the personal actions I am taking, I can assure you, are towards those long-term sustainability efforts in terms of protecting and sustaining our environment and also, I might add, in helping financially because financially we're more efficient when we're using the solars and the renewable energies that we invest in.

An Hon. Member: What about your Smart Car?

Mr. Boutilier: The Smart Car is just another small example. Do you know how much it costs to fill up a Smart Car?

An Hon. Member: How much does it cost?

Mr. Boutilier: It costs \$9. And you know what? In actual fact my wife and I have an SUV. In the middle of winter in Fort McMurray, when we're in the middle of the snow . . . [interjections] It's true. Do you know what? That costs \$68 to fill, but I tell that I have a great degree of pleasure knowing that it costs \$9. I was saying that it makes good sense, s-e-n-s-e, but it makes good cents for my own wallet, c-e-n-t-s, because of the fact that we are using our dollars in an efficient manner. I think that is what makes good sense.

So as we go forward on some of the initiatives, the \$170 million that is reflected in this budget, in our three-year business plan, is specifically for the important questions the hon. member has asked when it comes to water infrastructure, when it comes to not only just simply taking ideas but taking those ideas and putting them into action, and that's exactly what we are doing with the \$170 million.

The hon. member has mentioned also an important point – and the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development may want to comment on this as well – on the issue of an integrated land management perspective. I believe truly that the more proactive thinking this government shows rather than thinking in silos – the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, the Minister of Energy, and the Minister of Environment are collectively working together rather than thinking that it's one ministry or the other. The land, the air, and the water cover all ministries in one way or the other. It may impact Health. It may impact Infrastructure. It may impact Sustainable Resource Development. But what's most important is that we are making efficient use of our energy. We are using our energy in a positive way, and I think that that is really what is so important.

If I could just use another example of how we are pooling our energy together. It's on the cumulative impacts. It is so critically important today. In fact, just the other day I was speaking with industry relative to water needs, in terms of inflow needs. I, of course, have been speaking with Dr. Schindler, who is a wonderful independent adviser from the University of Alberta. I truly have always welcomed his advice and his experience and also the science that he provides. Actually, I'm looking forward in the next couple of weeks to being with Dr. Schindler as we visit what I call out in the trenches at Lake Wabamun, seeing first-hand the scientific work we're doing, the monitoring we're doing, the evaluating we're doing to ensure safe, secure drinking water.

From a cumulative impact perspective I want to say that as we continue to see certainly in my own backyard, the oil sands capital of the world, Fort McMurray – let me assure the hon. member and all hon. members that on cumulative impacts, first and foremost, number one, the Athabasca basin will always be protected so that I can answer to my grandson 50 years from now that when his grandfather was Minister of Environment, we did the right thing, took the right actions, had the right laws and the proper regulations in place to ensure that 50 years from now we can sit out there and fly-fish on the Athabasca River and that the basin has been protected.

We use a science base to be able to determine that, and I can assure you that in my discussion with industry that basin will be protected – that is my own backyard – just like all the basins in this province will be protected because that is the value. If we eliminate the political rhetoric and the platitudes and get to the value, every single Albertan wants to ensure that the basins we enjoy in this province, that we've been blessed with, will be protected and will be sustained. They will be. We are taking action to ensure that they will be.

From a cumulative impact perspective I am working closely with all of the stakeholders both environmental and industry, the CEMA group, which is the cumulative environmental impact group, that is of course situated in northern Alberta with the oil sands development. We are working with them on the integrated land management perspective. We are working with them in terms of the issue of water inflow needs.

I might say that sometimes it comes to a reality that there is never agreement, and that's where Alberta Environment believes in a consensus base, just like the CASA approach that we've taken in the past, but we also believe that it's so important as we work forward from a consensus-based approach that the inflow needs that we will provide to industry, who require water for the development of the oil sands, will never ever compromise that value that Albertans have; that is, protecting and securing ecologically the basin of the Athabasca.

The real issue is about optimization, and that fits so nicely into our Water for Life strategy. It's about: what can we do better? You know, that really reflects a value that Albertans have. We have an attitude in Alberta that we can always do better, and I believe that the goal set out by the Water for Life strategy, that by 2015 we will have a 30 per cent improvement in our water usage, is so critical. The reason I say that is that that is exactly the value and the principle that I am imploring upon industry in terms of the full optimization and usage of what water, in fact, is taken out of the river, how it is conserved, how it is recycled, how it is put back into the river.

For instance, in terms of critical points: when there are droughts, how are we better going to use our water? It's a very good question, and that question is exactly what I'm working with all our stakeholders on. If there is a drought, the bottom line is that there will come times when industry will not be allowed to take water out of

the river because the value we have and that Albertans share with us is this: we will not compromise the ecological and the biological value of that basin. So we will not damage it.

3:50

Do we have other options? Absolutely. First of all, it would seem to make good sense that industries work with each other, that industry work with the Ministry of Environment when it comes to conservation and optimization; for instance, things such as perhaps even an off-stream storage area, a reservoir so that in drought periods we can in fact capture the advantage of thinking ahead. But not just with the Ministry of Environment. I'm expecting every industry to be working collaboratively. In fact, maybe it makes sense that rather than building five off-stream storage units that would be of benefit, maybe there only needs to be one in terms of what can be done by that collaboration of working together.

I have an expectation, and it's a value that's reflected in Albertans' way of thinking, and that is optimization when it comes to water conservation. We are using that type of direction in our Water for Life strategy, and in terms of industry I will continue to hold their feet to the fire relative to the actions that they take regarding optimization, regarding conservation to ensure that we are thinking collectively together rather than independently.

We are looking for that interdependence among the users of our water. Great examples of that are in southern Alberta. I think the province of Alberta perhaps has the greatest reputation for water management over the last 100 years. Certainly, if you go and look at what's taking place south of the international border, you'll quickly learn what things are being done, that perhaps they are following – not perhaps, they are following – many of the actions we have taken in the last 100 years. There is no question that Albertans are experts when it comes to water management, and I'm proud as the Minister of Environment to be associated with so many Albertans that are water experts.

Industry needs to understand and fully comprehend that there is an expectation of them from a cumulative impact approach that they will work collectively with each other, that they will work and follow the regulations of this Environment ministry. We will use our stakeholder group. Again, we have a consensus-based cumulative impact committee in Fort McMurray. There have been areas where there has not been agreement, and that's where I as Minister of Environment will instruct what the law will be relative to the strong Water Act that we have in this province. That actually is taking place as we speak, today. I might add that I am putting, shall I say, very, very strong directives to industry in terms of that optimization of our water.

I look forward in the months and years ahead to being able to say that, one, we have protected our basins. We will always protect our basins, and no industry anywhere will ever damage our basins. That's a value that Albertans share and, I know, support in terms of the direction that our Water for Life strategy has been taking.

Cumulative impacts is something for which we will continue to use all of our resources from all corners of our province. There is no political border for water, there is no political border for land, and there is no political border for air. We need to be looking broader than silos, and that's exactly what our ministry is doing. We don't have silos in the Ministry of Environment, and I might say that at this time in this place there are more integrated approaches taking place with the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development, with the Ministry of Health, with the Ministry of Energy than ever before when it comes to these important initiatives that we are taking forward. SREM is just one small example of that type of approach that we are taking.

I do have some more information that I'd like to talk about, that the hon. member has brought up, which I think are important points, and I thank him for them because it allows me the opportunity to talk about some of the things that we're doing; for instance, our strategy for sustainability in the government of Alberta initiative. As we look at safe, secure drinking water, we also want to look at healthy aquatic ecosystems. We want to ensure that quality water supplies for our economy as well as for the basin are there long into the future, so we have a variety of programs. For instance, a major initiative in '06-07 is that we're developing a drinking water abatement program. That's where we're developing a program to support smaller rural centres and First Nation settlements to lower the risks associated with supplying safe drinking water through remote monitoring, operating training, and backup systems.

This also supports the rural development strategy, that the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright is so familiar with. I'm so pleased to say today that he now chairs the Standing Policy Committee on Energy and Sustainable Development. I was not aware, but did you know that the hon. member, in fact, has an honours in environmental science? I was quite shocked to learn that. He has assured me that he is not educated beyond his own intelligence, so that is very important as well.

Mr. Chairman, I want to say that as we go forward in '06-07, we will spend on both operating and capital over \$10 million just on this small drinking water abatement program. We also want to continue to support our waterworks operators to implement a source to tap a multibarrier approach to improve the safety and security of our water delivery system through our approved facilities. This includes providing abatement and operation support to assist these facilities and completing the development of an alternate lab accreditation program to reduce operating costs while maintaining safety.

Also, we want to sustain the quality of life in Alberta's healthy aquatic ecosystems. We're developing a new test technique and tools for defining, monitoring, and assessing water. It also talks about the quality and health of the aquatic ecosystem, enhancing our knowledge required to assess the ecosystem's cumulative impacts of development. We also continue to work closely with our partners, with the Alberta Water Council system, part of our Water for Life strategy.

The Water Council, I might say, hasn't been mentioned here, and actually I haven't received a question. To the members across the way: maybe a question will come in the future because I would welcome the opportunity to talk about the great work by the Water Council but also relative to our provincial wetland policy. I have not heard anyone talk a lot about wetland policy. Wetlands are, of course, an important part of our system relative to our environment in the future. So maybe in the weeks ahead we'll be hearing about wetlands. That's so important, the wetland policy relative to the good work that the Alberta Water Council is carrying out for me.

I also want to talk about the reduction of risk and liabilities from flooding. As you know, in terms of the three top issues this ministry has dealt with in the last year, two of them were dealing with the Wabamun spill as well as the flooding down in southern Alberta. I want to say that I'm very proud of our people in the Ministry of Environment, very proud of the partnerships they have and the capacity they have in working with local officials at the municipal order of government. That, collectively, is why we don't need sometimes as much money as you would think. What we're doing is pooling our resources together. Ultimately, Albertans, who own and enjoy this beautiful resource, don't charge us to do things because they are the eyes and ears of the capacity that we have. I want every single person in this province to bear some of their individual environmental responsibility because ultimately, then, it

doesn't cost the taxpayers money because they're doing some of the work for us. So that's very important as we go forward.

I want to talk about the values of reusing and recycling; that is so important as well. I might add that for any of you who would like a free recycling container, please feel free to contact my office as we have these wonderful educational tools regarding the recycling containers that educate young people about recycling, reusing, being able to take plastics, aluminum, as well as glass so that they're recycled in a proper order.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you as well to the Minister of Environment for presenting his budget for this year to this Assembly. I would like to make both some general and specific comments in regard to this year's budget, and certainly the minister can feel free to answer me in writing or verbally or both. I would appreciate either interaction.

I'm very interested in this ministry, as many Albertans are across this province. I just wanted to remind this Assembly briefly what the core reason or business of the Ministry of Environment is and then, perhaps, use that as the framework by which I can apply some constructive criticism. The core businesses of the Ministry of Environment are to assure environmental quality in the province, make sure that Alberta's environment is clean and safe, receive effective and efficient services in regard to environmental issues, share environmental management and stewardship, and work with others to safeguard the environment.

4:00

Now, my most general criticism of this year's budget echoes, perhaps, what I had mentioned last year but even more emphatically so, that this budget as a whole is woefully inadequate to meet any or all of these needs in a realistic and honest manner. So we continue on for another year, Mr. Chairman, I think with lots of interesting ideas concerning the protection and enhancement of our physical environment but with very little means by which to enforce, to regulate, to monitor, to police the very intense impacts that we have on our natural environment here in the province of Alberta in 2006 and 2007. We are in the midst of an unprecedented amount of economic and industrial growth from the tip to the toe of this province, east to west. There has never been such economic investment and industrial development, resources extraction, population increase, infrastructure building, yet here we are again with pretty much the same number of a budget for the Department of Environment.

I know that the minister has told me that he has pushed hard to increase this budget, but then it really, I think, speaks to me to the lack of value that this government puts on the ability of this department to monitor and to regulate and to protect our environment that he has been refused, and in fact we end up with the same numbers that we had last year: considering inflation, really a reduced number for this ministry.

We see specific increases in some small areas. Certainly, the Water for Life initiative is an example of where we do see some investment. I'm encouraged by that in some small way, minus the fact that we haven't seen a concrete sort of plan coming out yet.

In regard to monitoring and enforcement and, as I said, this policing aspect of this ministry's duties I really, really have grave concerns. I think what we saw last year in Wabamun is indicative of that, and I know that what's come of that – and I'm encouraged by it to some small degree again – is the environmental SWAT team,

for lack of a better word, which has been promised. I await to see the results of that. I certainly was encouraged by some of the parameters that were set out to implement that early response emergency team. Hopefully, we can see something better for there.

I'm thinking of other things that would be similar to \$143 million for the whole of the Environment budget. You know, I'm thinking about the South Edmonton Common interchange, which was considerably more than that. To compare the two, perhaps, is slightly unfair, but I think it gives us an indication, Mr. Chairman, of where our priorities are in regard to budgeting the resources of this province. For us to spend considerably more on one overpass system, albeit a very interesting and undoubtedly complicated one to negotiate once it's finished, and for that to exceed by half the entire Environment budget I think tells us that we have a problem in regard to environmental protection.

I beg to differ with the minister. I think that in 50 years from now we still have time to change and to reform ourselves. Reform might be an interesting word echoing through here in the next 12 months or so. I think that we need to do something now, and with each opportunity that slips away from environmental protection, the sadder and the poorer we leave this place for the next generations.

Perhaps more disconcerting than this small sum the government has allocated to the ministry, that basically ensures that all other ministries can function, is the fact that the Minister of Environment's business plan is written in such a way as to seemingly place principle responsibility for all matters environment related, be they preservation, reclamation, stewardship, et cetera, upon the citizens of Alberta and, by proxy, the industry that our citizens of Alberta are engaged in. It goes back to some criticism that I often remark on here in this room, and that is that the basic responsibility of the government is not being realized here. We are meant to be regulating and to be providing some framework by which industry and individuals can operate in this province. We are doing a disservice to both industry and individuals and the environment by not enforcing that regulation in a reasonable way through this House.

The much-lauded Water for Life strategy and many other documents and performance plans that come out from this government seem to lay the principle responsibility of care for our environment on the individuals in this society, the regular folks. While that might be proved useful to some degree, I think that it abdicates some fundamental responsibility that will only lead to disastrous consequences.

While it is, of course, every citizen's duty to do all they can to minimize their own personal environmental impact, we as a New Democrat caucus find it curious that not once is industry actually named in this business plan. The rather broadly inclusive and completely nonspecific term "stakeholders" is used, which I'm getting a bit tired of – when you overuse a word in a nonspecific way, it loses its value – which one could assume refers to industry as well as average citizens. Continued emphasis on shared environmental goals, stewardship programs, endowments, educating the public and whatnot all results in the overall impression that anything wrong with the environment in Alberta is the problem of the individual. I would once again say, Mr. Chairperson, that this is a very dangerous strategy on which to base an environment policy.

The Auditor General's findings would seem to support this, for the last eight years – I suppose it was the preceding Auditor General – recommending that the minister obtain sufficient financial security to ensure conservation and reclamation of industrial sites. We need to heed the Auditor General's concerns about this for eight years. I think that's time slipping by, not doing something that is very important to this province. Currently no sufficient security is sought for large land-disturbing industries like coal and oil, natural gas, and

the taxpayers, regular people, are left footing the bill for reclamation projects that are otherwise abandoned by industry.

So I would ask the minister: please, would he be finally addressing the recommendations of the Auditor General regarding financial security for land disturbances? Will he table a specific plan and enforcement policy that might back up this policy? Second of all, must the Auditor General be the one to point out these inadequacies for another eight or 10 years or so while the minister speaks in a very generalized way about local watershed stewards and allows industry's methane to leak out of the citizens' water taps in CBM situations? I would certainly like to see some specific answer on that. Would the minister as well push to have financial security legislation updated before all remaining oil and coal sites are drilled?

Specific to the budget, Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask why it is that this government manages to spend outside the budget in just about every other ministry except this one. The Minister of Environment is either much more efficient, I suppose, with his spending, we could say, or this government is simply thrifty and not thoughtless where the environment is concerned and refuses to give this ministry any more money than the tiny little amount that it allocates every spring. Does the minister care to comment on the fact that his ministry is actually losing money this year? His overall budget has only increased by 1.5 per cent while inflation, according to Statistics Canada, which is a very low number – I would suggest it's higher – is at least 2.8 per cent. I would say that here in Alberta it's closer to 3 or 3 and a bit.

Enforcement. As I said before, specific now, monitoring and enforcement are very important in all ministries but perhaps more so for Environment. Without proper monitoring and enforcement, this ministry is rendering ineffective and unproductive whatever good intentions it might be putting forward in paper or verbally.

The assuring the environmental quality program has its budget increased by \$2.9 million, an increase of 3 per cent, barely above inflation. How can this minister justify the 6 per cent decrease in compliance and enforcement and the 13 per cent increase in approvals after a year that has seen so much activity and so much crisis? I think that those two numbers tell us a lot of what we need to know about the problems of this ministry: a decrease in compliance and an increase in approvals. I find that to be very troubling.

4:10

The citizens in Rosebud can light their well water on fire, and they're trucking water into ranches in the area because the cattle refuse to drink from the streams and from well water. Meanwhile, the events at Wabamun last summer are labelled an accident or an environmental disaster, which he likes to say verbally. In the ministry business plan it's just called an incident. If we're going to call it an ecodisaster, we're going to have to devote some funds to rehabilitating the lake and make sure that we see the results of the investigation on CN coming out in a reasonable time. We've been hearing for the last six months or more since CN was raided, and we haven't seen any of that information at all. I think I probably have more information and have released it in regard to CN's activities than this ministry has, and we need to see if CN is in fact culpable for the full disaster on this lake. The part of justice that we like to hear from the Tory side is timeliness in judicial process, and I think that we are behind the times in regard to the prosecution of the perpetrators of the Wabamun disaster.

Given that the citizens in the area surrounding Wabamun went for days without even being told they were being exposed to a toxic spill, it's even more shocking. It's outrageous that the ministry has seen to cut its reclamation and emergency preparedness budget by 25 per cent according to this budget. I find that to be unbelievable.

How can the minister justify this decrease? What possibly could be said to warrant the decrease in a budget meant for reclamation and for emergencies?

Is the Water for Life's sizable increase in the budget for this year indicative of an attempt to actually address some of these issues? I would like to see if perhaps we're moving from one place to another in order to address what is obviously a gaping hole in enforcement and reclamation and emergency preparedness.

The ministry's business plan likes to use verbs such as assist and recommend and work with and develop and implement, restrict, fine, punish, and any of the other verbs that might indicate that the ministry has some weight to throw around, but we don't see any real sign of that. I'm saying that fine, punish, restrict, and implement are things that we might like to see more of and less of this sort of work with, recommend, develop and whatnot because you do have to have the teeth behind the regulation that you put forward as considered to be important. Rather than endless platitudes and stated commitments to ensure high-quality environment, will the minister please actually commit to be pushing toward some change in this ministry: stricter emission standards, harsher penalties, quicker action in emergencies.

In regard to the goal to increase the use of renewables and alternative energy generation in reality we only see 1.2 per cent of energy generated in Alberta from renewable and alternate resources, and I would like to ask the minister, then, what he's going to do to change this. Why are the targets so low in years to come: 2.5 and 3 per cent respectively for the next two years?

Climate change. The climate change program budget only increased by 1 per cent between last year's budget and this year, and I would like to know why the ministry is not making any serious commitment on the question of climate change. We are seeing now from even the very most conservative circles that climate change is in fact upon us, and the main contributor to this climate change is human activity producing carbon dioxide into the environment.

As we develop our oil sands in northern Alberta, we will become one of the very largest, if not the largest, single source of CO₂ not just in North America but in the entire world. We need to do something about it. This is not acceptable. We're heading down a dead-end road that is only going to lead us to necessitate emergency change further down and lay that upon our next generations of people. Really, it's irresponsible to do that. We can spend the money now. We have the capacity to do some bridging into other forms of energy and to promote conservation. Really, there is no magic silver bullet that's going to save us from using hydrocarbons and to something else at this point in time. We can wax poetic about scientists saving the day, the 12th hour, the 11th hour, but really the main means that we have at our disposal right now is conservation, and we're not supporting conservation in any realistic way here in this province right now. It's a shame. It really is.

You can realize efficiencies in regard to electricity use that would not necessitate building new power plants or running these big 500 kV lines down to southern Alberta, which were mostly for export anyway. There are lots and lots of ways to produce electricity on a local level and to conserve the energy that we are using so that we don't even need those things. Once we set up the infrastructure that uses a coal-based system or a combination, we're stuck with that for a long time afterwards. Really, it's a dead end. We need to be supplying a system that is increasing its renewable factor and that does not continue to give people the illusion that they can consume energy with impunity. It's irresponsible to do so, and it goes against any best principle for change.

This whole \$3.6 million for our climate change program is not nearly enough. Considering the potential severity of consequences

of ignoring climate change, \$3.6 million really is just for public relations, as far as I can see. All of the intensity targets that we've set to suggest that we're actually doing something, again, are just simply for communications – otherwise known as propaganda – purposes.

What is being done in regard to the Clean Air Strategic Alliance regarding the capture of waste heat as an alternative source of energy? Cogeneration and all of the efficiencies that can be realized from an energy-producing province could revolutionize our energy production in this province, yet I see very little being done to encourage that sort of behaviour.

I just have a few more budget things that kind of pop out here to me. I would like the minister, please, to explain the massive increase in last year's expenditures related to intergovernmental relationships and partnerships and explain why none of that additional money is needed this year.

Number two, the ministry's business plan shows that stakeholder satisfaction with ministry programs is very, very poor: 55 per cent. First of all, who are these stakeholders? How has this number been generated? What's the minister proposing to do to address such public dismay with this ministry's performance?

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. member, first of all, for recognizing our efficiency within the Ministry of Environment. He did say that our ministry is obviously efficient. Certainly, that is correct. We are efficient, and we'll continue to be efficient.

I want to say, though, that enforcement issues that the hon. member talked about are very important. It seems like some of the repeating comments this afternoon – and I understand – are more about: well, your budget only increased a small amount. Really, I want to share with you that I believe that the Ministry of Environment's budget, in terms of value, is worth billions of dollars because we have Albertans each and every day out there doing a lot of the work for us so that we can concentrate our time and effort on ensuring that Albertans are following the law through strong enforcement principles, where we have dollars allocated for enforcement to ensure that the law is being followed.

I thank Albertans as a whole because they are our eyes and our ears. They are the ones that are carrying out so much of the work be it on watershed councils or be it on our water councils. I want to say that I believe truly that our budget is worth billions and billions of dollars based on the good work and the excellent work of Albertans each and every day, many of the Albertans that give us our jobs in terms of the elected positions that we have. It's truly Albertans that are doing some of the great work for us through water councils, through watershed councils, through cumulative impact associations and stakeholders.

I think that that is important to recognize and to indicate so that any comments today saying that there's perhaps not enough money – sure, just like the way we run our household: would we like to have more money in our budget? Yes, we would. On the other side of it: do we have our neighbours help us to build a fence? Do we have our other neighbours help us to build a roof or repair a roof? Yes, we do. So it may not be reflected in the budget. Maybe it's simply perhaps a pizza and some Coke afterwards that determines that we got real value for working in association with each other. Let's not lose sight of what makes Alberta great. It's Albertans' energy, harnessing that energy. I know that our Ministry of Environment, in fact, harnesses that energy when it comes to getting

good work and, in fact, demonstrating that good work each and every day.

4:20

Pertaining to the issue of climate change I'm very proud to say that I was the only provincial Minister of Environment in all of Canada to speak at the United Nations to 189 countries in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In fact, I was invited to speak because of the initiatives and the green energy that we have demonstrated, the fact that 90 per cent of our green energy is in fact provided in the provincial buildings across the province – even the lights, as I mentioned earlier, that are in this room today – also because of the technologies and the innovation that we have. Clearly, we're going to be able to share the science and innovation and technologies that we have with the rest of the world because of our forward thinking. In actual fact, we will even have better long-term sustainable results in our energy efficiency because of the fact of that technology.

What are we doing? We're bringing in good people, bright minds, so that that technology that is not even created – did you know that the solutions five years from now have not even been created yet? What we are doing is creating an environment through such areas as the Alberta Research Council, our Climate Change Central board, the area boards, and the Minister of Innovation and Science: all of these collective energies we are using and tapping into.

For instance, did you know that, in actual fact, there are nine ministries that are carrying out duties relative to our Water for Life strategy? Not just one, Alberta environment protection, but nine ministries. Water, air, and land are impacting so many ministries when it comes to the good work that is taking place. I think it's important to recognize that we are not pigeonholing this just simply into one ministry. That's why I say that my ministry is truly worth billions of dollars because of the many partnerships that we've developed relative to educating and promoting best practices when it comes to such things as water used, for instance, for crops and livestock. We're also working with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development when it comes to so many best practices that we could use from an agricultural perspective. We also are working closely with the Alberta Water Council to develop strategies to help meet these important targets that I've set out. So let's not lose sight of the important initiatives that we're working with relative to the good work that we are doing.

I think it's also important to recognize that we are spending more than \$10 million on climate change through the Climate Change Central board and the work of the other ministries. You may not be aware, but the Climate Change Central board is the only climate change board in all of Canada, once again a first for Alberta. I think it reflects again our forward thinking. I want to compliment our Premier because it was about eight or nine years ago – in fact, I had the honour at the time of being the chairman – when the Premier asked to play a role in formulating Climate Change Central. I want to say that that forward thinking – well before others and the buzzword of climate change was out there – by our government and the actions and the direction from our Premier demonstrated that, in actual fact, we are not only out in front; we're around the corner when it comes to the proactive approach we're taking, when it comes to such important issues as climate change and in terms of the actions we are taking. So I don't want to lose sight of the important fact that over \$10 million is actually being carried out.

When it comes to emission standards, our emission standards in the province of Alberta without question are the highest standards and are leading North America. How many other ministers in terms of other provinces can stand up and say that relative to what we're doing?

Let me give you an example of that. We have taken some huge steps when it comes to keeping toxins out of the air. Our action plan includes cutting mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants in half. I ask you: by how much? By 50 per cent by the year 2010. This is a reduction of about 1,200 kilograms. You asked me how much? Twelve hundred kilograms annually. That's a substantial amount when it comes to what we're doing. We also are requiring a reduction in nitrous oxide emissions by 50 per cent by the year 2025. That's a reduction from 140,000 tonnes to 60,000 tonnes per year. Did you know that we require a two-thirds reduction in sulphur dioxide emissions by 2025? That's a reduction from 180,000 tonnes to 65,000 tonnes. The mercury emissions regulation that, of course, I talked about in this House when I received some questions from the hon. member earlier during this session, the fact that we now require industry to design and install a mercury control program in their plants by the year 2010 – that's four years from now – is certainly proactive, looking outside the windshield down the highway as opposed to looking in the rear-view mirror. It's so important for us to be looking to the future in terms of protecting the environment. That's exactly what we are doing. I want to say that they are just small examples of some of the things that we're doing.

I also want to say that relative to the issue of Wabamun there is no question – I just received a note that I have to move my estimates. I will move my estimates at the appropriate time, but I appreciate the wonderful reminder because we work as a team when it comes to important initiatives.

I would like to continue on. [interjections] Would you like me to carry on? Would you like me to ask for unanimous consent? I would like to ask for unanimous consent to carry on for the next period of time because I have so much to say.

The Chair: You still have 10 minutes.

Mr. Boutilier: I still have 10 minutes. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, then, I will continue on.

I want to talk about approvals for a moment because the hon. member asked some very good points relative to the approvals and compliance numbers that, in fact, we have. I want to say today that the approvals and the compliance that we carry out within the province of Alberta are so important.

I want to say that the more money we spend on issues such as those in the speech I made earlier, there is no increase or decrease in compliance because we've moved our money to focus in on sweeps. I don't know if you're aware of what that means, but in order to move forward, what we try to do is more education to ensure companies do what they need to do. But we are not afraid of enforcing the strong Alberta laws that we have because the strong Alberta laws are something that Albertans expect of us. From an enforcement perspective it's so important as we go forward that the enforcement efforts we are taking are strong, are direct, are transparent, and that we communicate with all Albertans relative to the work we are doing there. We'll continue to do that because of the important value that Albertans place on that type of initiative.

I want to say that it's a common goal in each of the sectors that we work with on a very frequent basis, as we work collectively together, that we want to ensure things such as building an excellent program for launching public awareness when it comes to education campaigns, stewardship campaigns, programs for paint and construction and demolition waste, the organics in packaging and printed material.

When's the last time any of you were to a Future Shop? It is my dream that we will have a conservation strategy that when you go to a Future Shop to buy a headset or an iPod, you won't need a chainsaw to open the package. In fact, did you know that 140,000

accidents actually take place every holiday season, Christmas season, because when people are opening the packaging, it is so strong and it's so encased with plastics that there are 140,000 injuries that take place? So rather than requiring this incredible, incredible waste of plastic and paper, I believe in a conservation strategy that forces small business or big business to in fact not have packages.

4:30

In fact, what do you think of this? When you go to the grocery store to shop in the next while, bring your own actual shopping bag with you rather than using and wasting the plastics that they provide to you. Bring your own bag with you. Okay? Show individual responsibility. Albertans are doing it, and I applaud those Albertans that are doing it. How many in here bring a bag with you when you go to buy your groceries? Well, I do, and others do. I've seen the hon. members from Calgary and from down in Cypress-Medicine Hat. They are taking that action. Again, it doesn't need to be a government regulation. You can do it by your own individual action. These types of examples are, I think, really important.

Now, I want to say that the hon. member also talked about reclamation. We have a very aggressive plan when it comes to reclamation. We are responding to the recommendations of the Auditor General. Security is in place, and I want to say that we take the recommendation seriously. We will continue to work with industry and environmental stakeholders relative to this important issue, when it comes to that of reclamation, and that's exactly what we are doing.

Pertaining to stakeholders, including industry, NGOs, citizens, and other levels of government, our job is to provide oversight and to ensure that the environmental outcomes are met. We are the regulatory backstop. It's like a baseball game. You need a backstop there, but ultimately the players are each and every one of us. Industry, NGOs – all citizens are involved. I want to assure the hon. member and all members of the Assembly that all Albertans can be assured that the Alberta environment protection ministry is the backstop when it comes to regulatory backstopping the laws that we have, and I will continue to be that backstop because I believe that we need to continue to work collectively together.

Let me just say, Mr. Chairman, that my ministry is without question in the billions of dollars. I thank the Albertans that give us our job, and I'm sure all members will join me in thanking Albertans for providing the work and for the individual responsibility that they take. Many of them actually volunteer to sit on a watershed council, to sit on a water council, to sit on a cumulative impact, to sit on a variety of committees that are so important in doing the work of Alberta Environment. Is there a lot of money associated with that volunteerism? No, there's not because that is truly, just like MasterCard, priceless. I want to say that as Minister of Environment that's how I view their work each and every day and that priceless effort that they put in because of their commitment to the environmental principles that I've talked about.

Mr. Chairman, I want to say today that the questions that have been asked are important questions. They're good questions. I want to say that we'll continue to enforce those principles that we have in protecting and sustaining for the long-term benefit of all Albertans 50 years and a hundred years from now.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, share enthusiasm for the environment, as does the minister and the other members that

have spoken here and as most Albertans do. It is exciting, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the minister at this time regarding his portfolio.

One of the things that I'd have to say is that we are bringing all Albertans together, Alberta businesses, and the environment. We are a family, and if we don't realize that, we're going to die because we need to sustain all three in order to enjoy the prosperous and good times that we have here.

We very much need to find a balance between energy and the environment, and I appreciate that the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Environment are showing more co-operation and having the desire to work together. Being a long-time scouter, I've always believed that it is our stewardship to use our resources wisely. If we don't leave the province in better shape than what we found it in, then it's: shame on us and what are we doing?

Our forefathers had a time when they struggled through the Dirty Thirties, and we saw the land erosion and the problems that went forth. Innovation and the people of Alberta overcame that. Once again we're in a time where we're destroying much of our environment, and we need to take a step back to see how we want to do it. To quote from a speech that Mr. Manning recently gave to many of you, he said: the environmental impact of energy extraction in a province built on oil and gas wealth needs to be addressed. I feel that we are doing that, but we have a lot more that we need to do in order to reach that challenge.

Perhaps the biggest challenge that we face as a province is because of the prosperity that we're enjoying, and too often we don't look after the bounty. A number of times I've gone into the mountains to a pristine, unique place, and people are wanting to chop down trees or do other things because they say: well, nobody else gets here. But in no time the footprint of human invasion destroys that environment, so we want to put it high on the list. So I ask the question: what can and should we do as Albertans for the environment?

I would like to start off with some environmental initiatives. We just currently filled the Alberta furnace replacement program. That initiative was filled, and the people of Alberta responded I think more overwhelmingly than the ministry expected, and that was shut down, saying: well, we've reached that.

I'd like to talk about some other initiatives that we should and could be doing. I very much appreciate the different communities throughout the province that are wanting to put in environmental, I guess, communities and the money that the government has put in there, but I ask the question: is a half million dollar grant the proper way to go at that? Or should we be putting in business tax credits or property tax reductions that would have people want to develop and reap the benefits but not have to put in the dollars? Too often when government is the one who is putting the initiative forward, it's not necessarily the best – well, what would I say? – free enterprise that takes place, but they're being driven very much by the different programs that are put out there. So perhaps if the minister would consider looking at more tax incentives like we use in the oil and gas industry to bring on those initiatives, it would be a benefit.

There are many areas where we could have green power, whether that's solar, wind, hydro, geothermal, biomass reactors, or even thermal biomass reactors, that take a huge capital expense to put up, yet there are no tax incentives or even a dropping of tax in order to bring that investment into the province at a greater and more amiable rate than we are at the current time. So I would encourage the minister to look at the different initiatives that we could do.

Some other ones. There are some very unique and – well, what would I say? – excellent toilets. When Australia was faced with the Olympics down there, they designed a new two-flush toilet that is

slowly starting to come into the province. What could we do if we were to give a tax credit of \$100 a year to a family that wanted to install the two-flush toilet or, for example, that new Banff area that's going to collect their rainwater and use that for flushing their toilets? There are many, many good ideas out there, yet there's no initiative or no incentive other than our own personal ones to do that. There are many Albertans that are doing that, but let's inspire them to reach greater heights and to quicken the pace of our turnover by putting some initiatives there where they are rewarded more than just by the personal aspect.

I want to speak for a minute and read a quote. When one first reads it, it's almost offensive, but it says, "The best thing that could happen to the environment is free-market capitalism." That was by Robert F. Kennedy Jr., not the source you'd think it would come from.

I'd like to refer for a minute to my area down in Waterton national park. It's a very beautiful, pristine area there. The ranchers were being driven out by people who wanted to go in and put up cabins in other areas. I had many of them come to me and say, "Well, Paul, you've got to do something to stop this. I said: "Well, it's a free market. What can we possibly do?" I more recently had those developers come to me, and they're concerned. They said: "Paul, you've got to stop this. We can't afford to buy the land for development because now the conservation groups are coming down and spending more money than we can for development." That is the free market. If, in fact, it is so near and dear to Albertans, allow them to put the money in there and protect our property. They will do as they're doing in my riding down in the Waterton area.

4:40

There are a few other areas that I wanted to go into. We've spoken a lot about water, but I'll touch base on it just for a little bit here today. The Water for Life strategy, to my understanding, is three years old now, I believe, and it was said there in the intent of going out mapping and having inventory and testing the groundwater and aquifers throughout the province. One of the most alarming things that's come out in this last week – and you're saying that it's law now – is this water well testing if, in fact, we're going to have any development for the coal-bed methane or anything else.

I asked the minister: do you realize that we have many underground waterways and aquifers that are larger than just a quarter section or 600 metres? Many landowners have talked to me and are concerned about this. They say: "You know what? They're going to drill a mile away, but I know that that aquifer I pull my water out of goes out that distance, one mile away." Yet we're saying that, oh, it isn't going to affect you because the science says that 600 metres is a good distance.

I put it to this House that it isn't a good distance, and there are many waterways that go for miles, underground streams that flow. The farmers and ranchers are tapped into those streams, and we need to have a much broader view. We need to go forward and actually do this mapping that we've been talking about and not protect it for a 600-metre region around a home.

We need to go forward. We need to do the entire mapping. We need to do the testing, the isotopes, and know what's down there to prevent a disaster in the future. An ounce of prevention is better than a pound or a billion dollars' worth of cure after.

I'm very concerned about that, and I hope that we can readdress this temporary 600-metre law that's been passed and that the EUB is facing, but it's not sufficient. Science tells us that these underground aquifers are much larger, and we need to look at that. I hope that the minister will take note and be able to act on that.

There are other areas when it comes to water. He's referred several times to flooding this spring, and the damage that's done by

that flooding is enormous. It's caused a lot of problems throughout Alberta, but we also have to look at it from the other side. We lost a lot of opportunity when that water went down and left the province on its way to the ocean. I would ask the minister again: how many environmental assessments have been done? Is the off-stream storage and dams that could be put in place for 20 years down the road there, and are we ready to act upon them?

If an international agreement is reached for the Milk River, have we got our house in order to act promptly and quickly on that opportunity to place water storage on that river? I hope that we do and that the minister could update us on that and let us know. All across the province I would ask that we would be doing that and enhance the studies if they're not done so that we are prepared at a moment's notice when the opportunity is there.

Other initiatives when it comes to damming of the water and using it for the production of agricultural produce. Irrigation continues to grow in my area in the south. It's definitely the breadbasket of Alberta with the diversity of products that are produced down there, but one of the ongoing challenges that we're faced with is updating many of the old canal structures and realizing that as you're wanting to reach that goal, buried pipelines are a much better and more efficient delivery of water. Not only that, if we were to take the initiative to put in some larger pipelines, there's a lot of head or pressure that could be developed that would dramatically reduce the amount of energy that we need to irrigate our lands if we use the initiative and look and do the engineering to capture that energy and use it.

Another area that I'd like to switch to is the flaring of gas wells. It's been an ongoing problem. I've spoken of it in the past. We do have the ability. Because that gas is just being flared, you could easily bring in compressors and have those companies compress that, put it into tankers, and use it in other parts of the province. It seems wrong that we can just flare it and it's gone and that there's no value to it.

Another area of concern. I guess I should start this by saying: what environmental regulations could we adjust in the province that would be a benefit to our environment as well as to business and take some of the competitive angles out? Two or three areas. One is that our pooling system currently often puts two companies into competition to see who can get the gas out of the ground quicker, and they sometimes use as much as 25, 35 per cent of the energy in order to suck it out because it's to their economic benefit but not necessarily to the province's. Whether we could look at some regulations to do that from an environmental point perhaps would be a benefit.

Also, the environmental impact of all the pipelines that cross our property. If Environment would say that pipelines are intrusive and we don't want that many, perhaps we could look at passing an environmental law where they have to get together and co-ordinate the use of fewer pipelines rather than so many that are currently being used. Another area that we'd like to see is basically, like I say, with the pooling, to somehow adjust it so that the competition isn't there to try and take it from the neighbour or the competition before they get in and have time to drill a well and capture that.

The other area I'd like to switch to is electrical production. There's an enormous opportunity to produce electricity, whether that's with a small windmill at someone's home or out on the farm, whether we use solar energy or other areas, but there's no incentive there from the government, whether it's tax credits or something else, to put that in there other than the fact of people wanting to be self-sufficient, which is an inherent trait with Albertans. Perhaps we could go back, and one of the most important things to do would be to look at zero-based metering again for both industry and home-

owners, that would be a benefit, in order to increase the production of electricity throughout the province.

I realize here, as I'm looking at my notes, that another area that I missed on initiatives is that there are a growing number of Albertans that are actually drilling down 100, 200 feet for thermal heat in order to heat their homes. Actually, a few people have contacted me wanting to disconnect their gas lines to their house because they're using geothermal heat to warm their homes at a cost of between \$5,000 and \$12,000. Is that another area where we could look at perhaps some incentives to reduce the necessity of natural gas for many things that we have in our homes?

Another concern that I have is the geologists and the mapping that has gone on across the province for the fossil fuels is just immense, and the amount of seismic work and all of those things that we have, yet we haven't started to scratch the surface on doing that for water assessment, which you've talked so much about and is so near and dear to you. I wonder if there isn't some way, possibly, as these drilling processes continue, especially with coal-bed methane, that they need to report the different aquifers as they're drilling and as they strike and go through a water zone. My understanding is that it would be easy for them to document and to perhaps assist Environment in doing a lot of the assessments going on there.

You've spoken passionately about innovation and the abilities that we have, and I'm very much in tune with you on that. What can we do and what can we discover here in Alberta that we can share with the rest of the world? One of those is coal generation of electricity. We have an immense amount. We could bring in a lot of research, and to have zero emission I believe is achievable and something that we should look at with coal gasification, with CO₂ sequestration, and inject them down into the different areas in order to increase the production of oil.

Perhaps the biggest and most important point – and you've brought this out – is: what can we do and what technology can we share with the rest of the world? I'm still very much concerned with the 500-plus coal-generation plants that China is wanting to come forward with in the next 10 years. If we don't do the research and develop that here, there's very little chance that they're going to do it over there. We live in a prosperous land. We have the revenue and the ability to do it, and I would encourage the Minister of Energy to continue working with the Minister of Innovation and Science to get perks and ideas that would aid the industry in developing that so that we could have clean-coal production of electricity, that would benefit all of us, not just here in Alberta but around the world.

4:50

Perhaps, in closing, I would just encourage the minister to realize that he very much has the opportunity to protect the environment as he works with the different ministries. As you said, there are nine other ministers that you're working with. Our environment is our most important asset. Human nature in the past has been to use and move on, but we don't have new places to move to. We were the last frontier. We're developing it here. We have an abundance of resource, but let's balance the two. Let's make sure that this is something that will benefit not only us at the current time but future generations so that they can look back and see the stewardship that we used for the benefit and the protection of the next generation.

With that, I'll wait to hear from the minister. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much. I certainly agree with a lot of what the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner has said. I couldn't agree with him more in terms of the examples of Climate

Change Central where we had a furnace retrofit program where \$300 was offered as an incentive. If you had an old furnace that was in fact emitting and was inefficient, we offered \$300 as a tax incentive that citizens could then apply for. Not only have we broadened that, but we've expanded it now to washing machines, for the efficient use of water. I don't know if you're aware, but for those of you that do your laundry, there are more efficient washing machines today.

I want to commit to the hon. member, as well, that we will continue to look for innovative fiscal tools so that we'll be sustainable well into the future. In fact, it's where citizens recognize that it's good sense for them in terms of the operation and the usage of the resource we have, but it's also good for the government because it makes the Alberta environment a better place. I believe that when we talk about climate change, when we talk about fiscal instruments, that is so important for us.

[Ms Pastoor in the chair]

I believe we need to continue to focus on best practices. So what are the best practices? In fact, if I were to go around to every member of this Assembly and ask what are the best environmental practices that we carry out each and every day, I know that one of them is simply this: I get into my little Smart Car and I drive to work. There's even a better smart practice than that, and that's walk to work or bike to work. I think we all know that. Certainly, that's a long way to go from driving an SUV to get to work in terms of what that cost is on a daily basis.

Now, I also want to talk, for example, about the initiatives that we've taken. I want to say to the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster that I'm going to be visiting his constituency later on this evening. I've had the honour of visiting down in the Milk River area. Lakeland College is where they're actually using new, innovative alternative energy solutions because of biodiesel. That's where they're able to take a waste stream and turn it into the biodiesel that is being used now. I want to compliment the ideas that the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster had, and I'm looking forward to visiting the students at Lakeland College later tonight. I also want to say that it's a real tribute to the students who have shown their typical ingenuity where they're taking this potential waste stream, but it also provides a cleaner energy solution, and that's exactly what the hon. member has been talking about.

What are the best practices that we can demonstrate? Of course, Albertans have been so innovative and entrepreneurial. One of the weaknesses we had in our furnace program was that when we retrofitted their furnace or they decided to replace it with a new furnace, what happened was that they took the old furnace and put it in their garage and actually used it for another energy source. I guess one of the flaws of our program was that we had to make sure that it was completely retrofitted and wasn't used in an inefficient way to heat your garage. So we've got to perhaps strengthen our public policy. But that's the entrepreneurial spirit that Albertans have in terms of best practices.

I want to say that as we have moved to so many important initiatives from a broad range of water management tools and techniques, we will continue to use our resources available in a variety of ways when it comes to flood risk avoidance and warning. We also are developing, of course, regulatory and nonregulatory tools and incentives to encourage, support, and reward good environmental performance. We're also developing and implementing a third-party contracting program to support and assist the minister's efforts to review major projects. We're also providing a review and a process to increase capacity to continuously improve

and integrate the regulatory regime, including clarifying approval requirements, streamlining it, and evaluating and streamlining reporting requirements, that are so important to us.

But it's really important, in response to the recommendations of the Environmental Protection Commission, to build ministry capacity in terms of supporting all hazards, environment incident planning, which the hon. member has mentioned, and response systems throughout the province and improve business continuity regarding planning and preparedness in partnership with Emergency Management Alberta and the other government stakeholder agencies. I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is responsible for Emergency Management Alberta, which is so important, but I want to say that collectively we're working together with all of our energies so that we get the best result and the best outcome in serving Albertans. I can assure members of this Assembly that that's exactly what we are doing.

I don't know if you are aware, but actually for the washing machine rebate program we had over 3,000 citizens from Alberta that applied – in southern Alberta, central Alberta, and northern Alberta – and actually had their washing machines retrofitted. As much as that may seem small, just think of the water that we have saved from a conservation perspective. So you may not be aware, but we had over 3,000 that in fact applied and were successful in being able to take advantage of this instrument.

Mr. Lund: How does the program work?

Mr. Boutilier: The way the program works is that you apply on our website. If you go to Climate Change Central and energy solutions, you see that if you want to go ahead and retrofit your washing machine or retrofit your furnace, you can apply. Of course, what I'm encouraged by is that we actually have more applications than we have money. So, obviously, having, as the hon. member talked about, different fiscal instruments that we can use to incent I think makes so much sense and is no cost to the government because what we're really encouraging is best practices, that is so important.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The hon. member did talk about flaring. I don't know if you are aware, but CASA, the Clean Air Strategic Alliance – I want you to be aware, to the hon. member, that we had over a 62 per cent reduction in flaring. I want to let you know that that is so important. In fact, I want to let the hon. member know that we're going to increase that number even higher in the future because flaring reductions are the good work of Albertans coming together, working together to get the desired environmental outcomes. So we've had a 62 per cent reduction in flaring, which I think is a tribute to Albertans who have worked on this consensus-based model.

I also want to say that for the furnace rebate we had over 1,700 applications and, in fact, spent almost half a million dollars relative to that. But I'd like to enlarge that, and I'd like to engage even more Albertans because they truly are best practices.

So what we have been doing is investigating by investing significant dollars in research into so many areas. I'm looking forward, I want to say, to the fact that this province will be the first province in all of North America, the first state for those in America, when it comes to a CO₂ pipeline, a pipeline that will take something that has been determined to be not good, in fact is contributing to global warming because it's really simply humanly made, the CO₂ from our car or whatever. I want to take all of that CO₂ that is harming our climate, global warming, and I want to put it into something good. So I want to take all of the CO₂ – I want to capture

it and store it – and use the CO₂ for enhanced oil recovery, put it to something good.

5:00

I want to be able to do that in a way that we will have a pipeline network all over our province so that this pipeline, I am convinced, will in fact surpass the Kyoto targets that were established by perhaps a flawed public policy example. I do want to let you know that I believe that it is so important as we go forward that we will surpass the Kyoto targets, and we'll do it because of the innovation and the technology that we have in this province. I want to say that the hon. member talked about that we're going to export that technology and that smartness all across the world. Albertans will have a reputation as being the leaders because this province will not only be, as the Minister of Energy often talks about, the energy capital of Canada; we will become the environmental capital of North America in terms of our leadership and innovation that we are going forward with so that we will share it with countries like China, that has 300 coal generating plants coming forward.

We're going to be doing it in a way that, clearly, even the new Minister of Government Services – I know that he's shaking his head in agreement with the Minister of Energy when it comes to these environmental practices. I want to thank him for his good work as the former chair of the standing policy committee because many of those initiatives on mercury regulation that we have put in are the strongest standards in the country, and they're right here in the province of Alberta.

Now, I know that often the media don't in fact talk about those types of good, positive, proactive measures. In fact, it's really interesting. You may not be aware, but this week when we announced the standard on water in terms of what we're doing, did you know that as much as there have been lots of concerns in the past months about water, which I think are legitimate and important, what is really important is that it seems like this good news and the positive stories about what Alberta is doing, reflecting the value of Albertans, is not being seen on the front page of the newspaper or as the lead news story? If it's not bad news, then it's not necessarily news.

I'll tell you that I will stand on the highest mountaintop of this province to talk about the excellent work of Albertans, the excellent work of their practices, and the excellent work that we continue to do as a government in protecting this environment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Before I recognize the next speaker, would the minister like to move his estimates?

Mr. Boutilier: It would be my pleasure to move the estimates of the Ministry of Environment.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the hon. minister. I can tell and so can everyone in this House that this minister is passionate about the environment, absolutely. It reflects in his tone of voice. It reflects in his spirit. It also reflects in his answers to all the questions that were asked so far. If anything, he definitely tries to understand his department, and he's representing it quite adequately.

I have just a few points, and I realize, looking at the clock, that I might not receive a full or comprehensive answer, but I'll get them on the record. I would appreciate it if the hon. minister reviews *Hansard* and then possibly responds in writing.

This is quite an important ministry, of course, and as mentioned by the speakers before me and by the hon. minister himself, it deserves more attention, and it deserves more recognition, and it needs to be empowered more. I noted, and so did my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, that the budget for this particular ministry only receives .5 per cent of the total provincial budget. For an important ministry like this one I think that this is an estimate, an allocation that needs revisiting. This is quite low. As was mentioned before, it needs to at least be quadrupled from this current level to have any decent effect on the environmental affairs of this province.

Now, over this past week there was a lot of talk about government size and about, you know, restructuring and how things could be done better and so on. I'm of the belief that the two departments, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, did not need to be split when it happened and that maybe one area of streamlining and consolidation and saving taxpayers' money would be to bring them back together into one. Really, some of the work is shared. It could be run centrally by consolidating both departments. That's a comment on sort of the budget angle of things.

My main focus today, Mr. Chairman, would be around water. Many people talk about water as the greatest resource and how it's more important to our lives and the lives of our offspring, our children and grandchildren, than things like oil and gas, for example. I'm not taking away from oil and gas, and I'm not belittling those other resources, but basically water, in my opinion, is the utmost resource.

Recently my caucus colleagues and I went up to Fort McMurray, where this hon. minister comes from, and we had wonderful visits with the constituents there. Water was brought up two or three times in discussions with the locals not in terms of, you know, the quality of the drinking water and so on, but basically some of the residents – and I'm sure that this is a concern that the hon. minister shares – were concerned about water usage for industry and how the oil sands projects, huge revenue-generating opportunities for this province, are also placing a bit of pressure or some strain on our water system, for the water that they draw out of the Athabasca River is never put back. Now, I know that there's an argument that these oil companies recycle some of that water. I agree, but they recycle it for their own purposes. They recycle it internally, and it is never put back into the water source where it came from. So it is, in a way, water that is lost. It never comes back.

Another area is about reclamation and restoration of oil sands land. We received a tour of Albion sands, and we were also shown a video and a slide show of how land is reclaimed. I must admit that it was eye opening. It was really amazing. However, one concern I have as a layman – I'm not a scientist, but as a layman. You remove the top layer of land, which is sort of the cultivated component, you set it aside, and you store it. Then what you do is that you excavate, you remove the oil sands, and you process them. Then you have the sand that's left in that tailings pond at the end and some water. This land is sort of restored back by putting the sand back and then replacing that top layer.

The question I have is basically a question of volume. If you've taken, let's say, 10 cubic meters out and now you're putting 7 cubic meters back in, the elevation of this land is lower than it was originally. I would ask the hon. minister if he's considering all this new research about land fillers. There is technology out there now that talks about land fillers. They're inert substances that are totally innocuous and are put back to restore the volume of the land. Why would this be important? Well, first, over time if the topographic and the geographic image, or map if you will, of those lands is changing, the least we can do is restore it to as near natural a state as possible.

I would use the parallel of having mountains and valleys. Mountains are there for a reason. People look at them as sort of anchors, and I'm not only referring to them from the Biblical sense. From a topographic definition they are there for a reason, and basically it's for seismic control. It's for, you know, different reasons pertaining to the environment. So I would urge the minister to consider the use of land fillers to restore the height or the elevation of those lands after they have been excavated.

Water. Back to that main issue, water being the main resource. We've heard over the past few weeks some complaints or some cautions about exporting water outside of this province. You've heard this from scientists. You've heard it from, you know, citizens groups. You've heard it from noted Albertans – the hon. Peter Lougheed as one example – saying that maybe we should be thinking twice before we export any drop of water outside of this province. I know that the minister is definitely aware of this and is considering all the different aspects of something like this, but it was worth putting on the record that there is definitely mounting opposition to exporting our water when the resource is dwindling, and it is disappearing.

5:10

If I we're going to sell water, my approach or my advice would be to sell a finished product, the bottled water, the commercial retail type of water, and you sell it at a premium. If you ask me, Mr. Chairman, I would charge more for a barrel of water than we do for a barrel of oil. We're using water to make oil. Oil is not more important. If we're selling water to the U.S. or whomever, we would sell it at a premium in a finished-product format. We're not going to truck it in the raw format to whomever uses it. You know what? They might end up selling it back to us as bottled water, which really defies any sense from a business standpoint.

It was also mentioned about conducting a total inventory: surface water, deep aquifer, rivers, well water, the whole bit. I definitely support this, and I look at it as a snapshot, a picture of where we're at today. Then we can use it as a benchmark against which we measure where we're at tomorrow and a year from now and 10 years from now. There are technologies out there which might not be as expensive as people would think. You can take satellite imagery. They call it piercing satellite imagery, which basically pierces the layers of earth, and it tells you how much water and where.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoon, I must now put the

following questions after considering the business plan and the proposed estimates for the Department of Environment for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$142,091,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$1,000,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that we rise and report the vote on the estimates of the Ministry of Environment and seek leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, '07, for the following department.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$142,091,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,000,000.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and reconvene this evening at 8 o'clock in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:14 p.m.]