

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, April 26, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/04/26

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. From our forests and parkland to our prairies and mountains comes the call of our land. From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity. Grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

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

Mr. Mar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sir, it is a privilege to rise in this Assembly and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two very honoured guests: the ambassador of Croatia, Her Excellency Vesela Mrden Korac, and Mr. Korac, both of whom are in your gallery. The ambassador has represented Croatia to Canada for six months, since November of last year. However, as a career diplomat she is no stranger to our country of Canada. Ambassador Korac was in Canada a decade ago, from 1994 through 1997, as the first Croatian chargé d'affaires to Canada and as a counsellor at the Croatian embassy in Ottawa, and we are happy to welcome her and her husband back to Canada.

Alberta and Croatia have a small trade relationship, and about 10,000 Croatians are living in our province as Albertans. Ambassador Korac is in Alberta today to explore how her country and our province can develop closer and better ties and a more productive relationship in the years ahead.

I ask our guests to rise in your gallery and for the members of this Assembly to give them the warm traditional greeting.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Ducharme: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui j'ai le privilège de présenter en votre nom, à vous et à l'Assemblée, une délégation de Sénateurs français, membres de l'Association interparlementaire Canada-France du Sénat.

Ce matin ces invités spéciaux ont eu l'occasion de rencontrer Dr. Jean-Michel Turc, consul honoraire de la France à Edmonton et président directeur général du Alberta Cancer Board, qui leur a donné une visite guidée du Cross Cancer Institute. Cet après-midi le groupe rencontrera des membres de la communauté francophone et visiteront le Campus Saint-Jean à l'Université de l'Alberta. Demain le groupe ira à Fort McMurray pour visiter les sables bitumineux, et ils termineront leur séjour en Alberta avec des rencontres à Calgary pour discuter des opportunités d'investissements et d'échanges commerciaux entre l'Alberta et la France.

Je suis heureux de vous présenter en premier lieu M. Claude Saunier, Sénateur des Côtes d'Armor, vice-président du groupe interparlementaire France-Canada du Sénat; M. Michel Guerry, Sénateur représentant les Français établis hors de la France; M. Joseph Kergueris, Sénateur du Morbihan, et son épouse, Mme Kergueris; M. Yannick Texier, Sénateur d'Ille-et-Vilaine; M. Matthieu Meissonnier, administrateur du Sénat.

Les accompagnant aujourd'hui sont M. Luc Serot Almeras, consul

général de la France à Vancouver, et la Sénatrice albertaine, l'honorable Claudette Tardif, qui est la vice-présidente de l'Association interparlementaire Canada-France du Sénat.

Je leur demanderais de se lever et d'être reconnus par l'Assemblée. Je vous invite à vous joindre à moi pour leur souhaiter une bienvenue chaleureuse.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to the Assembly a delegation of Senators from France, members of the Canada-France Inter-Parliamentary Association and, specifically, the Senate group.

This morning these special guests had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Jean-Michel Turc, the honorary consul of France in Edmonton and president and CEO of the Alberta Cancer Board, who provided a wonderful tour of the Cross Cancer Institute. This afternoon the group will meet with members of Alberta's francophone community and visit the Campus Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta. Tomorrow the group will travel to Fort McMurray to see the province's oil sands development and then proceed to Calgary to discuss further investment and trade opportunities between Alberta and France.

I am pleased to first introduce Mr. Claude Saunier, Senator of Côtes d'Armor and vice-president of the Canada-France Senate group; Mr. Michel Guerry, Senator for French expatriates; Mr. Joseph Kergueris, Senator of Morbihan, and his spouse, Mrs. Kergueris; Mr. Yannick Texier, Senator of Ille-et-Vilaine; Mr. Matthieu Meissonnier, Senate administrator.

Accompanying them today is Mr. Luc Serot Almeras, consul general of France in Vancouver, and Alberta's own Senator, the Hon. Claudette Tardif, who is the Canadian co-chair of the Canada-France Inter-Parliamentary Association.

I would ask them to please stand and be recognized by the Assembly as I invite the members of the Assembly to join me in extending them a warm welcome. [As submitted]

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

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, hon. members, I have the great pleasure of introducing Dr. David Carter, who is seated in the Speaker's gallery. Dr. Carter served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for 15 years. He was first elected on March 14, 1979, for the constituency of Calgary-Millican and then subsequently for the constituency of Calgary-Egmont in 1982, 1986, and 1989. He served as the ninth Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for seven years, from 1986 to 1993. He was the second ordained clergyman to serve as Speaker. Reverend David Carter now is the minister of St. Margaret's Anglican church, nestled in the Cypress Hills of southern Alberta. He's also a renowned author of such books as *Behind Canadian Barbed Wire*, a story of the prisoner of war camps in Canada after the Second World War. I'd ask members to join with me in welcoming Dr. Carter once again to our Legislature.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are going to have a blast here this afternoon. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly eight members of the Bureau of Learners from Alberta Speakers Team, commonly known as BLAST. BLAST team members are adult learners who have worked hard to improve their

literacy skills. Through the BLAST program they learn to develop their public-speaking abilities so that they can talk about their experiences with others. They then move on to take part in speaking engagements across the province in schools and community groups, sharing their stories of courage and determination. Together they emphasize the importance of literacy and inspire others to take the steps necessary to improve their skills. Literacy is a vital component of Advanced Education's family of programs.

These remarkable individuals are with us today and are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask each BLAST member to stand when I call his or her name. So let's blast off: Jacquie Coulas, Kalvinder Dhillon, Lillian Gallant, Jill Manning, Scott Maslyk, Paul Ruot Galuak, Leonard Duby – and you might remember that Leonard was Alberta's first recipient of the Council of the Federation's literacy award, which was presented last year – and Philip Beakhouse. I'm sure that many of you recognize Philip because he works right here in the Legislature. Philip often shares his successes with his Legislature colleagues, and they celebrate these achievements with him. The BLAST team is joined by Janet Lane, executive director of Literacy Alberta, and Cindy Easton, manager of the literacy help line of Alberta, also with Literacy Alberta. Please join me in extending the warmest welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of our colleague the Minister of Human Resources and Employment I'm delighted to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly 10 staff members from the Department of Human Resources and Employment. They are doing their public service orientation tour. I'd have them stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's very appropriate today that while most Albertans are caught up in the chase for the Stanley Cup, I have a classroom of grade 6 students from Alberta's most famous hockey town. I speak of Viking, Alberta, and the Sutters of course. Joining the 38 students here today are their teachers, Muriel Hill, Debbie Snider, Trudy Josephson, and Anna Rutledge, and their parent helper, Colleen Loveseth. I would ask the students and their teachers to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 35 visitors from St. Mary's high school in Vegreville. Just like the hon. member who introduced Viking as the home of the famous Sutter family, we're known, of course, as the home of the world's largest Easter egg. These fine students are seated in the public gallery. They're accompanied by teachers Mr. Steven Tymko and Ms Shalynn Zakordonski. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House the Propane Gas Association of Canada. We have here several people:

Sharon Lemke, Dan McPhee, Bill Egbert, Leslie Siegman, Rick Evans, Bruce Osborne, Harry James, Wyatt Lund, Jack Osland, and Brian Shaw. I see that they're all standing, and if we could all give them a very warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 46 visitors from Bow Valley College in my constituency of Calgary-Buffalo. These students are from the social studies program at Bow Valley College that is currently studying Canadian government. They are at the Legislature today to get an inside look at the government in action, and I trust that their visit will be a pleasant and informative experience. I had the pleasure of meeting with these students earlier this afternoon. Their intelligent questions and dedication to learning will ensure their success in the future. Travelling with the 46 students are their two teachers, Ms Susan Jolliffe and Jeri Wylie-Smith. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly someone who 25 years ago, when I was first learning how to hang-glide, I literally and figuratively looked up to. Bill Leegsma was flying off mountains while I was on the training hill, and he's making his first visit to the Legislature today. I would ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Nick and Margaret Carter. Nick and Margaret have been active members in their community, and Nick also serves as the Grand Exalted Ruler of Edmonton Elks lodge 11, which is the Edmonton local located in Edmonton-Calder. They have three wonderful children – Michelle, David, and Deborah – and five grandchildren. Nick is also a cancer survivor and is grateful for the facilities like the Cross Cancer Institute. I would now ask that they rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Nutrition Programs in Schools

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week this government shut down a Liberal opposition motion urging for sufficient resources to be made available to feed the tens of thousands of children who go to school hungry every day right here in Alberta. Just the next day the Premier announced his plans to participate in a taxpayer-funded world tour before he retires. In a province as wealthy as Alberta it is shameful – it is shameful – that eliminating child hunger is not a government priority. My question is to the minister of learning. Given that 3,000 children are on the waiting list for a volunteer-run hot lunch program in Edmonton alone, when

will this minister admit that there is a problem with child hunger in this province?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I made it very clear in the House during that particular debate on that motion where we stood on this matter. The fact is that we're providing \$5.3 billion for kindergarten to grade 12 education, and within that envelope there are dollars, flexible dollars, available to school boards to virtually do a lot of these innovative kinds of programs.

I should point out again, in case the hon. member didn't hear it clearly earlier this week, that approximately 70 per cent of school boards throughout the province do provide one form or another of a hot lunch program or a breakfast program or a snack program or some nutritional program in partnership with a community agency. They're very proud of that, and so are the community agencies. So it's not as if these issues are being ignored, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Taft: But they are. There are 3,000 kids in Edmonton on a waiting list.

Again to the same minister: given that almost all other provinces recognize what many studies have shown, that proper nutrition is essential for learning, why did this minister choose to vote against the Liberal opposition's motion to allocate proper resources to remove child hunger in Alberta?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm so grateful for this question because it will give me a chance to remind the opposition leader of what I really said. What I really said was that I could support a motion like this if it had a friendly amendment and if that friendly amendment didn't compel in a mandatory fashion school boards to provide those kinds of programs because they want some flexibility at the local level. They are locally elected to make local decisions. All that he would have to do to gain this minister's support would be to review that word "dedicated" or labelled or targeted funding in his motion, and then we could have that discussion.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like the hon. minister to return to the motion and tell us what wording it is that he thinks compels school boards to deliver this program. He's misreading the whole thing.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I just exactly did that moments ago, but the hon. opposition leader was too engaged trying to tell us why he might support unelecting school boards in the province, and he didn't hear the answer. That's the exchange he was engaged in.

I'll repeat it, and I'll say it more slowly, Mr. Speaker. I said on Monday when the motion came up, and I'll say it again, that this minister could possibly have supported such a motion because we understand the value and the balance required with nutrition and food and clothing and shelter and how, essentially, parents have to provide that but in some cases don't. We could support that – this minister could – if it didn't have the word "dedicated," which translates as labelled or targeted funding. That goes against the grain of flexibility, which school boards are looking for.

Premier's Travel

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's long goodbye has cost this government some cabinet ministers and any semblance of a legislative agenda, and now it looks as though it's going to cost Albertans tens of thousands of dollars. Taxpayers will be sending

the Premier and his Tory entourage on an all expense paid, first-class tour of Russia and China and France and Ukraine. My questions are to the Premier. Given that the Premier will be retiring within weeks of these expensive trips, won't he admit that it is pointless for him personally to be making these contacts?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the last time I looked I'm still the Premier, and as Premier I intend to serve Albertans until the day I walk out the door. I will continue to pursue every opportunity that exists to build on the tremendous success of this province. When the time comes and details are finalized, we will issue news releases that will include itineraries and estimated costs, and those details will be posted on the website for anyone in the world to read.

1:50

I'll be promoting Alberta's oil sands to business interests in France, including investment, technology, and equipment supply. We already have one French company, Total, with very substantial investments in the oil sands. I have announced already that it's my hope that someday we will eradicate cancer. Dr. Turc, who was introduced in this Legislature earlier, will be part of the mission, and I'll be touring cancer research and treatment facilities in France, which I'm told has the best in the world.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier said just yesterday that he'll be taking the minister of learning along as his translator, can't he find a less expensive translator and leave the minister here to do his job?

Mr. Klein: Fine. I don't know if the hon. member can translate Ukrainian. I don't think he can. He doesn't speak Russian. As a matter of fact, he hardly speaks English.

I'm visiting Alberta's sister provinces in Ukraine for the first time since we signed agreements on various areas of co-operation. Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member recalls, the governor of Lviv was here, and we hosted a reception for him. He was here for the centennial celebrations, and of course we signed a protocol of agreement with Lviv. So this is a reciprocal visit, given that governors from those sister provinces have been here. There is one other province, and I can't pronounce the name, but maybe you can.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Ivano-Frankivsk.

Mr. Klein: Right.

The Speaker: And we may get to it in the third one.
The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier just said that part of his agenda is to help find the cure for cancer, why doesn't he use some of the resources for this trip to solve school hunger in Alberta instead? Why don't you do something useful instead?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education already outlined very clearly the policy of this government and the opportunity to give flexibility to school boards, unlike the autocratic, compulsory attitude of the Liberal Party where they want to force everyone to do everything that they want. They want to force everyone to do everything that they want.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health Benefit Design Options Report

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government seems to be the only jurisdiction constantly fearmongering its citizens about the future of the health care system. Canada and the United States are the only places that experienced a baby boom, while Japan and many European countries already have an older population. They are not experiencing the catastrophic scenario of unsustainability that this government is predicting. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that all the evidence already showed that privatization wasn't viable, what was the point of this \$1.5 million exercise with Aon?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, last October when we released the RFP for a contract subsequently managed by Aon, we were looking at an Alberta database, an Alberta model that would look at our growth scenarios, look at the costs, look at the probabilities, and look at the fact, too, on areas where we have a high incidence of costs, like pharmacare, where we have services provided to Canadians that are not necessarily covered under the Canada Health Act in terms of supplementary allied services, look at nonemergent services, look at the continuous care program, look at those elements and see in the future what the aging population would do. We noted in Finance that we didn't have people that were building actuarial models. Although there was the latitude to spend \$1.5 million, about \$1.3 million was spent on the contract.

Ms Blakeman: Again to the same minister: given that competition has proven to drive up costs in the public health care system, and the minister's own framework suggested more co-operation between regional health authorities, is the minister considering accepting Aon's suggestion for increased competition in the public system? How does having the Royal Alex compete with the Misericordia get us anywhere further? It doesn't.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the Aon presentation that today was made to members of all sides of the House, including the hon. member opposite, very clearly articulated that Aon Consulting was not there to do a policy recommendation or a policy review. Somehow in the question there is an implication that that is something that has been recommended by Aon as a policy of this government. It has neither been recommended nor does this particular document become the basis of any policy that we're directing now.

What we are looking at in the policy framework is the kind of regional co-operation and collaboration that should take place, the use and the role of hospitals, the use of community facilities. That's quite separate and apart from the kinds of things that Aon evaluated in their actuarial modelling of issues surrounding mandatory provision of health care insurance, which we have chosen not to implement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again to the same minister: given the concern about containing costs, why isn't the minister implementing public system cost savers like bulk buying pharmaceuticals, including midwifery services under the public insurance plan, specialized surgical centres, or any number of other good ideas we already have?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, for a minute there I thought I heard the hon. member opposite say "specialized surgical centres." I must explore that with her later to find out under what auspices she was considering those because over the past several weeks all I've heard is that the sky is falling.

Mr. Taylor: Go to an ear, nose, and throat specialist and get the problem fixed.

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.
The hon. leader of the third party.

Health Care Costs

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the minister for the briefing – I'll start with that – because it gave us some good stuff to ask questions about. The government has hired Aon at a cost of 1 and a half million dollars, one of the world's largest insurance corporations, to come up with scary scenarios designed to frighten Albertans into believing that we cannot afford to maintain our public health care system. If we take Aon's word for it, we are expected to believe that the entire provincial budget will be consumed by health care by the year 2025. What nonsense. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why should Albertans put any stock in the 20-year financial projections done by Aon, which are based on assumptions generated by the Ministry of Finance, which has underestimated government revenues to the tune of \$41 billion in the last 13 years?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. Provincial Treasurer will supplement my answer. Quite frankly, by looking at the models for private insurance and determining that we would not pursue those models of private insurance, from the perspective of Aon Consulting, who is not itself an insurance company, albeit subsidiaries of that company do insure, they certainly did not come forward with anything that would be a conflict of interest. In fact, they recommended quite the opposite, that we not engage in any of those particular options.

In terms of the assumptions that Finance makes in terms of financial information, to the Treasurer, please.

The Speaker: Perhaps they'll get that in another question.
The hon. member.

2:00

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, that is the government's own number.

This is again to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why should Albertans put any stock in the Aon report which assumes that health spending will increase by 10 per cent a year for the next 20 years when health spending has only gone up at a rate of 5.9 per cent every year since 1993?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that Albertans, including the hon. members opposite, really look at every part of that report and determine what, in fact, they would shoot down in the assumptions in that report. That report looked at a middle-growth scenario, looked at not only the figures from Finance but, in fact, comparisons across the world, looked at their actuarial design. One might say: well, why do they have the expertise to do that? We did a lot of work in framing a request for proposal that would get us an unbiased report on that.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think that if anybody can identify what

was wrong with it – I note that the members that were there and stayed until the very end heard that they looked at a number of the ways that they predicted resource revenues, which in the next 20-year period are presumed by Aon's report to decrease in terms of the valuation of all of the other kinds of costs. So if you look at the fact that they depleted the amounts of monies that were attributable to resource revenue, you can hardly argue that we were using any inflationary factor to try to in fact scare the Alberta public. They used modest assumptions. They followed through with a document that I'd like to see quite specifically what Albertans would say is wrong with their assumptions and wrong with their conclusions.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, why should Albertans accept the cost projections and fearmongering contained in the Aon report when the government has rejected excellent ideas for actually bringing down the costs of health care, such as the NDP's pharmaceutical savings agency that could save us \$75 million a year in the first year?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, I can't resist saying this. This minister has taken more hits than George Chuvalo by the members opposite on both sides of the bench. Quite frankly, this kind of a hit, this kind of fearmongering that they continue to do is because I don't think they have a leg to stand on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Education Issues

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Education mentioned to the Committee of Supply, which due to the two-hour time constraint I was unable to participate in, that program number 3 is up by 6.3 per cent. Of that, \$152 million will address the government's responsibility for the unfunded liability of the Alberta teacher's pension. To the minister: could you please explain both to the citizens of Alberta and the teachers how \$152 million addresses, as you said, "government's responsibility for the unfunded liability of the Alberta teachers' pension plan," which is over \$4 billion?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Certainly, and thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, prior to 1992 the teachers' pension plan was largely underfunded both by the teachers and by government, so in 1992 an agreement was struck whereby the government of Alberta undertook responsibility for two-thirds of the unfunded portion. The funded portion is done on a 50-50 basis. Now, teachers undertook responsibility to pay for one-third. Our share on an annual basis is now going to be \$152 million this year, and it will grow proportionately thereafter. So the exact answer is that the \$152 million that is in the Education budget that was debated and passed yesterday is reflective of our commitment to honour our obligation.

Mr. Hinman: I'll have to do the math. I don't see how that catches up.

To the Premier: will the Premier follow his own legislation to put all surplus revenue to pay off debt or offset debt with a trust fund, as you have with the provincial debt as it comes due, by creating a trust fund for the teachers' pension before implementing new programs and increased spending?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll defer to the hon. Minister of Finance.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, in the financial statements of the government the pension liabilities are below the line, so in fact our commitment to remove debt is met.

Mr. Speaker, there's no question that we are as interested and concerned as anyone about ensuring that we have absolutely no financial obligations in the way of debt. However, I'm proud to say that under this government, this Premier's leadership in sound fiscal management we are prepared to meet all of our obligations in this province.

Mr. Hinman: I don't know how this spending spree will end.

Again to the Minister of Education: will the minister act as fast as possible to address the 50 per cent of Alberta students who do not go on to postsecondary education by implementing a work experience program in high school that addresses the needs of the students as well as the insurance liabilities of the schools and the employers?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of work experience related programs that are really turning in very successful and proud numbers. We work in conjunction with the Ministry of Advanced Education to deliver those. Included in that bevy of options are programs such as RAP, the registered apprenticeship program, and YAP, the youth apprenticeship program. We have a new one now called learner pathways. We have a number of outreach sites that school boards have in place right now where students have that experience, and we have a number of CTS programs as well. I'm grateful for the question. It is an important area, and we are making good progress there.

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

Federal/Provincial Fiscal Relations

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to live in Alberta. Why? Because evidence of a thriving economy is all around us. We have low unemployment, Albertans have new opportunities, and the province leads the country in most economic measurements. We know, however, that this has not gone unnoticed by other parts of the country. Sometimes being the leader makes you susceptible to the envy of others and to those who claim it is unfair. My first question about equalization is to the Premier. How is the provincial government ensuring that other Canadians understand how our province's economic success benefits the rest of the country?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, we can't really ensure that everyone understands, but certainly I've been saying in speeches in . . .

An Hon. Member: In China.

Mr. Klein: No, not in China. They understand. Unlike the Liberals they understand in China. It's their cousins. It's their Liberal cousins in Ontario that don't understand, and I've been in Ontario on numerous occasions to explain that we are a caring and we are a sharing province and we are the largest net contributors to Canada on a per capita basis.

Mr. Speaker, I point out the Canadian Energy Research Institute, and I allude to the report that they released recently indicating that the federal government is the largest recipient – the largest – whether it's a Liberal or a Conservative government, of the tax revenue that

will be generated by Alberta's oil sands between the year 2000 and 2020. According to the report Ottawa will collect some \$51 billion – billion – or 41 per cent, of the estimated \$123 billion in taxes associated with the oil sands facility. Just from oil sands.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Finance. What is this government doing to ensure that Alberta's success is not somehow hobbled by changes to equalization or to transfer payments or to some other program they come up with?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there is and has been concern raised by some groups in the province, and I think this is an area that's not well understood by many. There are people who would tell us that we should just stop our transfer payments to Ottawa. Well, in fact, the government of Alberta does not transfer money to Ottawa. The benefit, as outlined by the Premier in his answer, is gained in Ottawa by taxation, taxation that Albertans pay when they file their federal income tax, which the federal government under the Constitution has the ability to collect.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing I can tell you is that under our Premier's leadership, working with our Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations and certainly the Minister of Finance, we will be in constant contact with our counterparts across Canada and review each of the studies and reports that come forward on this. We will make sure that there is nothing that goes forward that in any way unfairly impacts Alberta.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is also to the Minister of Finance. Can the minister tell this House and all Albertans more details on what is happening in those discussions with her counterparts across the country. How are they trying to get our money?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, I think that what many provinces are saying is that they want a larger amount of money under equalization. Equalization is something that Alberta has been a strong supporter of, a proud supporter of, because what equalization does is it ensures that every province in Canada can offer quality core programs to their people, their constituents. But having said that, we are following this very carefully. We will ensure that the reports are vetted, and we will not support a program that increases payments to provinces based on poor policy developed in those provinces.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Appointment of Chief Judge

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The appointment of a Chief Justice of the Provincial Court of Alberta is important not just to the legal community but to all Albertans. It is absolutely critical that the judiciary operates fairly, openly, and most importantly with complete impartiality from interference from any other entity, especially political influence. Albertans and the legal community have many questions about the process that led to the appointment of Gail Vickery as Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta.

My questions are to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Can the minister tell us what considerations were involved in this appointment process, who made the decision, and what criteria were used in screening and evaluating applicants?

Mr. Stevens: It is an excellent question, and certainly I think that the points raised by the hon. member in his preamble are accurate with respect to the importance of this particular position. The Chief Justice of the Provincial Court of Alberta does have a very important role in our justice system, and it is important that we do a good job and appoint a very, very qualified person, and I'm very pleased to tell you that Judge Gail Vickery is indeed a very qualified individual.

Under our rules, Mr. Speaker, the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court has a seven-year appointment. The retiring Chief Judge is Chief Judge Walter. His term is up in May of this year. Last December, as part of this particular process, I as Justice minister did two things. Firstly, what I did was I said to all Provincial Court judges in the province of Alberta by way of a memo that as a result of Chief Judge Walter's term coming to an end in May, they should, if they were interested, send applications through to the department and that we would receive those.

As part of the process of vetting I asked that a committee be established. Now, this was a completely new process, but I thought it was important that it be done, that a committee be established to vet those applications, not knowing whether there would be one or whether there would be 115 because there are 115 Provincial Court judges. That particular committee, Mr. Speaker – and I'll end with outlining who was on it – comprised the current Chief Judge, the former president of the Law Society of Alberta, the Deputy Minister of the Justice ministry, and the chair and one nonlegal member of the Provincial Nominating Court Committee.

Dr. B. Miller: To the same minister: can the minister tell us if the new Chief Judge's involvement in the Multi-Corp affair was considered along with close personal ties to the Premier? Did the minister or the committee consider if this would interfere with judicial independence?

Mr. Stevens: You know, Mr. Speaker, there are typically two things in life that we all recognize as being certain, and those are death and taxes. But I think that there's a third that we can add, and that is that this Liberal opposition will at every opportunity take an opportunity to impugn the reputation of good people outside of this Assembly in here without the courage to go out there and say those things. I'm particularly distressed because, candidly, I thought that this hon. member is one that stood apart from that, from this particular group.

Let me address the issue of the process. What I asked this particular committee to do was to review the applications and to provide a list of those applicants who were qualified to do the job, and I received that list. Judge Gail Vickery was on that list, and ultimately she was selected from that list.

But allow me to say this, Mr. Speaker. The obligation of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General is to receive this information and to consider that along with other things. I for one had no knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the preamble of this last question, so to the hon. member I can say: it was not a consideration. In fact, I can tell you that Judge Gail Vickery had a reputation before becoming a member of the judiciary of this province that I am envious of, and I had, I'd like to think, a reasonably successful, modest degree of success as a lawyer before coming to this Assembly. She was one fine lawyer, and she's been one fine judge, and we should be thankful that she accepted the position.

Speaker's Ruling Protected Persons

The Speaker: Hon. members, as all hon. members know, the chair has no knowledge of what the nature of a question is that will be forthcoming, but the chair is knowledgeable on the rules of the House and would refer all members to *Beauchesne* 493(1): "All references to judges and courts of justice of the nature of personal attack and censure have always been considered unparliamentary, and the Speaker has always treated them as breaches of order."

The chair did see some movement in anticipation of a point of order – the question was raised, and the answer was provided by the minister – when it went beyond the normal 35 to 45 seconds that we require in anticipation of a perceived point of order.

So, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, please proceed with your third question, recognizing what has just been quoted by the chair with respect to the rules of the House.

Appointment of Chief Judge (continued)

Dr. B. Miller: I'm just concerned about the process. I have a conscience. I represent Albertans.

Will the minister follow the example of his federal cousins and adopt a scrutiny process, like the federal government is following, allowing an all-party inquiry to ensure that judicial independence is not compromised and appointments are not just patronage appointments?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, please sit down. There are two ways of going with a question. One is a very direct way, and the other one is an interesting, behind-the-door way. I think that the hon. member just took the latter approach in the third question. The chair is not going to allow a member of the judiciary to have his or her reputation tarnished in this House in any way, shape, or form.

We're now moving on to the next question. The next question comes from the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

2:20 Native Friendship Centres

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the last census the number of aboriginal people living in urban centres has doubled and in some cases tripled. Today half of all aboriginal people live in cities. Calgary has a vibrant friendship centre which helps aboriginal people make the transition to urban living. The city also has Canada's fourth largest aboriginal population, with 22,000 people. To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: what kind of funding do you provide to native friendship centres in Alberta?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, friendship centres are really vital to Alberta and, most specifically, to aboriginal people because friendship centres are more than a gathering place. They actually help aboriginal Albertans make that transition to urban life. As a result, we do provide some funding to them, approximately \$650,000 annually. However, we have not seen any change in that amount for a long time, and therefore I would encourage those boards to continue to work with me and with their MLAs to ensure that we can continue to receive a little bit more dollars.

Mr. Johnston: To the same minister: given that since the '80s native friendship centres have not received a funding increase from

the province, what plans do you have to provide funds to help these unique organizations?

Ms Calahasen: First of all, Mr. Speaker, we are always looking for ways to be able to work with the friendship centres because they do serve a really good population within the aboriginal community. This year through my department we had an additional \$100,000, which we were able to put to good use. We gave Red Deer Native Friendship Society some money to establish what we call a community liaison contact. The second one was to the High Prairie Native Friendship Centre Society to provide youth programs. The third one that we were working with was the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association itself to assist in project management training for their staff and, as well, Peace River, which is the Nistawoyou friendship centre, to host a spiritual and health gathering.

Mr. Speaker, it's always very difficult for friendship centres because they are dealing with the fastest growing population in Alberta, and that's the aboriginal community. So we're trying to make sure that we do work with them to ensure that we can provide any help that we can to them.

Mr. Johnston: My second supplemental to the same minister: is there any other way that we can support friendship centres by encouraging the development of partnerships that benefit urban aboriginal people?

Ms Calahasen: Well, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. First of all, one of the areas that we've been working on is to facilitate and work with other ministries, such as Children's Services, Economic Development, and Community Development, so that we can begin to see how we can build those partnerships. We have also encouraged the federal government to work with us on the friendship centre area as well as the municipal districts so that we can see the partnerships occur.

We've seen a lot of partnerships start to happen, and we've been encouraging other kinds of partnerships to occur. We've been working with seniors, as I indicated in one of my previous answers, in housing and dealing with urban aboriginal housing as well as the housing that they're having to deal with in these areas where they're located. Mr. Speaker, we're also developing strategies with the AUMA and the AAMD and C so that they can work more effectively with aboriginal people in their neighbouring communities. Of course, the urban aboriginal strategy is another area that we can push. So we've got some strategies which we will continue to work with.

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

Education Funding for Lethbridge

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Education minister boasts of spending \$5.3 billion on education, but Lethbridge's public school board will have to choose which services to cut next year. Yes, cut teachers. We can do without the Minister of Education. We can do without the janitors. Without teachers there is no education. My question is to the minister. What is the Education minister's response to the horrifying funding situation in Lethbridge caused by this inadequate hold-the-line budget?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, Lethbridge public has a budget for the '05-06 government fiscal year of about \$59 million. The budget that we approved yesterday will see their budget rise to about \$59.6

million. I hardly think that that can be interpreted as a cut or a slice or whatever it is that she was saying in the preamble.

Ms Pastoor: Doesn't meet inflation.

How many other school districts are also victims of this hold-the-line budget that doesn't cover the cost of inflation, or is Lethbridge the proverbial canary in the coal mine to assess how deep these cuts can go?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the hon. member asking the question hasn't had a chance to review *Hansard* from yesterday, wherein I outlined all of the increases, but with the permission of the House I'll start all over.

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I'll condense them a little bit. Okay.

First of all, there's an overall increase to the K to 12 education budget of \$330 million. That's 6.7 per cent. That will include increases to all three infrastructure envelopes: school construction, operations and maintenance, and infrastructure maintenance and renewal. That includes increases to transportation, up to \$232 million in total. That includes special needs, an increase of 9.7 per cent, up to \$373 million, and the list goes on, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for referring to and using the word "construction." How much longer will the residents of Lethbridge wait for the much-needed high school as costs continue to rise without even a shovel in the ground?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to be part of an announcement I think it was last September or October wherein we announced to date the single largest project that I'm aware of for a joint project in the hon. member's hometown. I know it was 20-some million dollars, as I recall, and it's a collaborative project which sees a much-needed new high school being built there. I would have thought that the hon. member would have known about that because it was front-page coverage. Specifically, it was \$27.6 million for the west Lethbridge high school new education centre.

Now, we've since corresponded, and I understand that they have some cost escalations. We've looked at those, and things are under control there. We're looking forward to a school opening very soon.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Home Schooling

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that our government has been working to update the home-education regulation. Many parents who home educate their children are already starting to plan for next year and are wondering what the status of it is now. Reflecting inquiries and concern from my constituents, my question today is to the Minister of Education. When will the updated home-education regulation be available for use by parents who educate their children at home?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, as most members here would know, we have a significant enrolment of home-educated students. They work in co-operation with a local co-operating school board. As a result of extensive consultations over the past couple of years we found it necessary to update the current regulation. However, the short answer to the member's question is that the new home-ed

regulation is just about completed in terms of its drafting, and we'll have the new home-ed regulation out very soon. But in the meantime, hon. members and Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that I have extended the current home-ed regulation through to the end of July.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that some caring and dedicated parents who believe in home-education for their children have expressed concerns about student assessments, stating that their children do not necessarily follow the Alberta program of study – and it is true – how, then, does the government know what home-educated Albertan youth are learning and how they're learning it?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, in a nutshell, we and the parents and the co-operating school board and for that matter the students know exactly how they're doing because the whole process starts with the parents sitting down with a co-operating teacher, who is there from the co-operating board, and they design a program specific to that student's needs. There are a variety of programs that can be followed. Thereafter the co-operating teacher visits the student, visits the home – visits the location, in other words – works one-on-one with the child or the student and monitors the progress. Then at the end of the year, depending on which grade level they're at, they have an option of what type of assessment might be done. It's all done in co-operation with skilled and trained professional people. So there's a fairly good method in place now.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that we all expect Alberta youth to go to postsecondary education and career training, facing a really competitive world outside their home environment, how can the government ensure that home-schooled students meet the qualifications for acceptance in postsecondary learning?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. The answer, of course, is this. First of all, it's the responsibility of the home-educating parent to ensure that the track they put their child on yields the particular result that they are seeking. If they're seeking a postsecondary entrance result, there is advice on procedures and policies and guidelines that is available through the co-operating school board. Secondly, it should be noted that many postsecondary institutions don't require specific graduation diplomas to be provided in order to facilitate access to that particular institution. So there are responsibilities there, there is advice there, and there are programs of study routes to be taken which parents should be well advised of.

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

PDD Program Review

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues its lengthy track record of ignoring the needs of vulnerable Albertans and punishing those who challenge bad government policy. Despite the minister's efforts to pretend that cuts to services for people with disabilities are not happening across the province, yesterday's protest and a chorus of letters and e-mails from distressed PDD recipients and their families prove that there's a real funding

problem. But when people have the courage to stand up and speak out in this province, this government responds with bullying and intimidation, with phony financial reviews and phony audits. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Why is it that these types of reviews only happen when people publicly voice concerns that are embarrassing to the government?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I am not bullying and intimidating. I can tell you, by going out to a rally for an hour and speaking with individuals about their concerns, that I was pleased to actually have a lot of hugs from people as I went through and as they gave their stories and shared with me what the real issues are. I was also pleased to be able to let people know that we are reviewing this situation. This review started some time ago. I had mentioned that to you in the Assembly previously. As we had AACL here yesterday, it's a review that is very inclusive. It has stakeholders. It has people from my ministry. Families themselves are a part of this. It will take some time to complete that review. It's an important initiative, and it is taking place. It's not bullying to do a review.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, the point is: given that yesterday the minister said that the problems seemed to be with the community boards, it's not a real review. Isn't that a form of intimidation when people speak out against government policy?

Mrs. Fritz: No. Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question is no.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, how can the minister pretend to be an advocate for disabled Albertans when she responds to their requests for funding with punitive reviews and insufficient funding?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, this review is actually going to be very helpful as we move forward with this change in governance that we have. I think that tonight we're debating this in Committee of the Whole. I'm looking forward to the participation of the community at large, of my ministry as a part of the review. Stay tuned. We'll have the results for you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Government House Leader noted a point of order, but I think I dealt with that purported point of order during question period. Unless there's something pressing, I'm not quite prepared to recognize the hon. Government House Leader with respect to that point. I think it's been dealt with.

Historical Vignette

The Speaker: Hon. members, with respect to an historical vignette let me talk to you about the Privy Council of Canada.

Rev. Abbott: Oh. Timely.

The Speaker: Timely.

Appointments to the Privy Council for Canada are made by the Governor General upon the recommendation of the Prime Minister. All current and former members of the federal cabinet are members of the Privy Council, but the Prime Minister may recommend the appointment of other distinguished Canadians as well. While the Privy Council is constitutionally an executive advisory body, convention has limited the advisory duties to those members who are currently members of the federal cabinet. An appointment to the Privy Council is intended to be a great honour.

A number of Alberta's Premiers have been appointed to the Privy Council, including Arthur L.W. Sifton, who served as Alberta's

Premier from 1910 to 1917. He was appointed to the Privy Council on October 12, 1917. Charles Stewart, who served as Premier from 1917 to 1921, was appointed to the Privy Council on December 29, 1921. However, interestingly enough, both Mr. Sifton and Mr. Stewart received their appointments when they were named to the federal cabinets of Prime Ministers Sir Robert L. Borden and W.L. Mackenzie King respectively. Premier Ernest C. Manning, who served as Premier of Alberta from 1943 to 1968, was appointed to the Privy Council on July 5, 1967. Premier E. Peter Lougheed, who served from 1971 to 1985, was appointed to the Privy Council on April 17, 1982.

All former Alberta MLAs who have eventually been appointed to the federal cabinet have also become members of the Privy Council for Canada, the most recent of which is former MLA Stockwell Day.

Appointments to the Queen's Privy Council for Canada are for life.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Anniversary of Chernobyl Disaster

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This day marks a sad anniversary in the history of the world. Twenty years ago today one of the four reactors at the nuclear power plant at Chernobyl in the Soviet Ukraine exploded, releasing over 50 tonnes of radioactive material into the atmosphere, an amount greater than the combined bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The world first heard of the accident two days later, when Swedish monitoring stations detected the radiation that spread across northern and eastern Europe, contaminating millions of acres of farmlands and forests. Thirty-two people died from the immediate explosion. Dozens more suffered radiation burns. The accident eventually killed 5,000 people from cancer and other radiation-related illnesses and left a legacy of illness, suffering, and shortened lifespans for generations. The last working reactors at Chernobyl were shut down in 2000, and the plant was closed. But the lingering impact continues to confront scientists, health professionals, the nuclear power industry, and international policy.

Mr. Speaker, no one felt the impact of that explosion more keenly than the 300,000 Albertans of Ukrainian heritage, who saw so much of their ancestral homeland devastated, perhaps beyond recall. All Albertans felt the suffering of those affected and the fear that spread with the radiation. Alberta reacted with compassion and generosity, providing financial assistance and medical care at the time and in the years since.

Albertans have continued to open their homes to some of the 3,000 children from the Ukraine and neighbouring Belarus who are sent abroad every summer, when radiation levels are highest. Mrs. Klein visited the Chernobyl museum and paid homage to the victims of the disaster on the Premier's mission to the Ukraine in 2002.

Mr. Speaker, the devastation of Chernobyl has revealed the Alberta heart. On the 20th anniversary we look back with horror and look ahead with the Ukrainian people to a stronger partnership in the future.

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

2:40 Bureau of Learners from Alberta Speakers Team

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Literacy is important, but you don't need to believe me. Believe our guests introduced by the Minister of Advanced Education earlier today. They can blast the

message much more powerfully than I. On March 11 they celebrated a graduation ceremony that I was unable to attend, so I'm delighted that the members of the BLAST team could join us today and be recognized.

Reading and writing are integral to everything we do. Sometimes we take these skills for granted. We forget that without these fundamental capabilities even the smallest tasks can be challenging. These skills are absolutely critical if we are to be successful in work and participate in our communities.

Literacy is essential for continued learning. It provides the foundation for further education and, ultimately, for maximizing one's potential through knowledge. Given the importance of literacy, programs that help and encourage Albertans to improve their literacy skills are vital to our province.

Earlier this afternoon the hon. Minister of Advanced Education introduced the members of the Bureau of Learners from Alberta Speakers Team, or BLAST. Through this program adult learners develop their public speaking abilities and then take part in speaking engagements across the province. Members of the BLAST team share their personal experiences, telling others how they improved their literacy skills and what it means to their lives. Through their stories they inspire others to have the courage and perseverance needed to develop their reading and writing skills, and they remind others of the importance of literacy. Believe me, Mr. Speaker, they are powerful stories of lives changed.

Literacy Alberta is a great organization that works year after year to support and assist learners in their literacy development. It deserves our thanks and our appreciation. The BLAST team deserve our recognition and our admiration for their courage, their achievement, and their willingness to share their experiences with others. All of our guests – Jacquie Coulas, Kalvinder Dhillon, Lillian Gallant, Jill Manning, Scott Maslyk, and Paul Ruot Galuak – deserve great admiration for their achievements and for their willingness to share their journeys with others.

I particularly want to mention Leonard Duby, who you may be aware won the first Council of the Federation literacy award for Alberta last year, and our own Philip Beakhouse, who works in the Legislature Building every day – day in, day out – making it habitable for us to work. Philip overcame a brain tumour, which was finally removed at age 25. He never learned to read or write until now. A friend urged him to join PALS in the mid-1990s, and literacy has changed his life.

Please join me in congratulating Philip, Leonard, and all the members of the BLAST team.

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

Democratic Renewal

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I continue my series of talks on democratic renewal in Alberta. To start, let me share with the hon. members one of the four Alberta Liberal caucus documents collectively called Alberta Horizons, which all state that the time to dream is now, and the place to dream is Alberta. In this particular one the dream is to revive democracy in this province.

Why do we even dream? Dreams are jumping blocks to great achievements. There was the dream which later became Canada. There was the dream which later offered us public, universally available health care. There was the dream that this province could potentially be out of debt one day. Et cetera. But do we stop dreaming if things are better today than they were yesterday? Do we become lazy and complacent and stop thinking about our children's future? The answer, Mr. Speaker, is definitely no.

The Alberta Liberal caucus has a vision for this province's future and the people and policies to take us there. Part of our work focuses on electoral reform. It is noteworthy to highlight the fact that British Columbia, for example, has fixed election dates, something we Alberta Liberals advocate as evident in our private member's bill, Bill 210, calling for just that: fixed election dates.

We also want to increase voter participation. Under an Alberta Liberal government we will ensure that every vote will count. Albertans, Mr. Speaker, will not have to vote strategically ever again.

Furthermore, on the issue of campaign financing we are going to mandate donation limits to restore faith in the electoral process, where people are elected on their merits and with true grassroots support, not bought by special-interest lobbyists and big business.

Other areas we're working on include legislative renewal, restoring government accountability, and improving transparency and access to information.

In essence, Mr. Speaker, we advocate better government with the same virtues valued by Albertans in their daily lives – freedom, fairness, trust, honesty, and hard work – virtues which are unfortunately lacking from this 35-year-old, tired government.

To be continued.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Democratic Renewal

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Horizon's democratic renewal. Yesterday afternoon during the education debate/debacle players and audience members present witnessed the fragility of Alberta's ongoing, one-act democracy.

Under the auspices of this government's staging directions, Standing Orders, the Minister of Education figuratively strolled the stage, soaking up the spotlight without fear of the appearance of an offstage hook from his government's designated deputy drama critic. From time to time he would gaze appealingly into the gallery for the offstage prompts of his forgotten lines. Opposition players' stage entrances were not only hindered by the minister's lengthy soliloquies but were blocked by a backbench chorus not content to discuss their concerns offstage while waiting in the wings.

Fortunately, well prior to the afternoon performance, undaunted by an army of government stagehands led by an ever-expanding troupe of deputy and assistant deputy ministerial stand-ins, the .3 opposition researcher had boldly defied the odds by prearming his critic's role of David to do battle with the government Goliath. Having thoroughly prepared and rehearsed their scripts, the opposition troupe was ready to engage.

Meanwhile, on stage the real fate of billions of Albertans' dollars was being decided at the surreal rate of millions a minute. With the cancellation of the fall legislative theatrical accountability session/season in both 2004 and now again in 2006, is it any wonder that half of the once Alberta democracy subscribers, now barely 50 per cent of eligible voters, feel so disenchanting that they no longer wish to attend or participate in government preorchestrated, first past the post performances?

Democracy in Alberta is desperately calling for a scene change, for new players supported by a visionary script. This is why both the Alberta audience and the media reviewers are applauding and embracing the recently released Alberta Horizons four-pillar policy provincial Liberal blueprint. Economic and environmental ideals are balanced on a broadly inclusive social policy base supported by a

democratically engaging plot line which lays out a sustainably prosperous future for all Albertans.

The curtain is rising.

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

Zaheed Damani

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise today during National Volunteer Week to recognize a very special young Calgarian. Last night at Volunteer Calgary's 10th annual leadership awards, attended by the hon. Minister of Community Development and the chair of Alberta's Youth Secretariat, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, Zaheed Damani was the senior high recipient for the leaders of tomorrow award.

I can think of no better recipient, Mr. Speaker. Zaheed is an incredible example of community leadership and education. He's involved in the advisory panel for the Alberta government's Youth Secretariat as a leader, researcher, and presenter. He is also the province's youth representative on the learning Alberta advanced education learning subcommittee, that guides government direction for postsecondary education. In addition, Zaheed has held other volunteer positions with the Ismaili Muslim community, Boy Scouts, Camp Discovery, Child & Youth Friendly Calgary, Calgary Interfaith Food Bank, and many other organizations at his school within Calgary and in southern Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, it makes me so proud to see such incredible dedication in one individual. When you take a look at his fellow nominees, there is no doubt that Alberta's future is bright.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank Zaheed for his volunteer efforts, and I am sure we will continue to hear great things about his work in the community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Volunteer Calgary Leadership Awards

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to honour the hardworking and dedicated volunteers honoured at last night's Volunteer Calgary's 10th annual leadership awards. Awards were handed out in seven categories, demonstrating the diversity of ways that volunteer Calgarians make an important difference in our community.

Lynne McShane and Connie Cook from the Glenbow Museum were recognized for leadership in volunteer management.

The Mustard Seed storefront 101 was named leader in the community for its successful and innovative volunteer program that advances the mission and goals of the nonprofit organization.

The outstanding efforts of youth who are making a difference in our community were also saluted. Youth award winners were Courtney Leach, Keirstyn Secord, and Zaheed Damani.

Excellence in workplace volunteerism was also recognized by Volunteer Calgary. Southport Dental Care received the gold medal, GWL Realty Advisors received the silver medal, and CIBC Wood Gundy won a bronze award.

For the first time this year there was a new award recognizing pets for the many and varied activities they are involved in that make our community a better place. Charlie, a five-year-old yellow lab/golden retriever assistance dog, was singled out for an award.

Volunteer Calgary's VIP award recognizes the outstanding contributions of individual volunteers. Hattie Boothman from Meals on Wheels received this year's award.

Harold Merrick received this year's heart of Calgary award, which

recognizes individuals who have strong enthusiasm and take responsibility for creating a healthy and caring community through civic participation.

Congratulations to all these award winners and all the nominees for making a difference in our community.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: I'd like to congratulate three members here who just participated in Members' Statements. Might I congratulate the Member for Edmonton-McClung, the Member for Calgary-East, the Member for Calgary-Foothills for knowing the Standing Orders of the House and for abiding by the Standing Orders of the House. But to the hon. Members for Calgary-Varsity, Lac La Biche-St. Paul, and Edmonton-Whitemud, perhaps a review of the Standing Orders might be appropriate. In particular, the chair would like to draw their attention to Standing Order 7(4).

Speaker's Ruling Standing Orders

The Speaker: Now, I am going to make one other comment here today. I have ruled out points of order, and I've ruled out points of privilege with respect to members' statements. Every once in a while something is said in members' statements which, however, does cause some movement by the chair. Today the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity in his member's statement alluded to the Standing Orders of this House and said that they were government Standing Orders of this House.

The chair is a nonpartisan member of this Assembly, and the chair has during the nine years that he has been the chair insisted that all Standing Orders be done by unanimous consent of all members of the House. The Standing Orders are not owned by one section of this House; they are owned by all members of this House. The Standing Orders belong to this Legislative Assembly, not to a particular caucus. That utilization of the truth is inappropriate, and it's wrong because in addition to the orders being the Standing Orders of the House, all House leaders of all parties signed off on them and advised me in no uncertain terms that all of their members supported them. For a member to then stand up and criticize them, the member is only criticizing himself, so one should look in the mirror periodically.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week the hon. Premier promised to table with the House copies of an anticipated letter he alluded to that would come his way from the office of the Ethics Commissioner which would clarify postemployment restrictions as they apply to members of Executive Council under a particular act. On his behalf I'm pleased to table the requisite number of copies of a letter from the office of the Ethics Commissioner, dated April 26, 2006, in that regard. I'll just quickly add that the Premier will also be meeting with the Ethics Commissioner to seek yet further clarification as may be necessary on May 3.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a petition that I received from Barbara Brown, dated April 10, 2006, with approximately 800 signatures from Albertans from the Peace

Country who are concerned not only about the loss of doctors in the Peace Country but also that doctors and nurses are being over-worked. They are urgently requesting attention to this matter.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table 10 letters from family, staff, and residents who are either involved in or dependent upon the continuing care system in this province, expressing their deep concerns about the state of that system. These letters are signed by Fred and Marie Nash, Roger Johnson, L. Howard, Linda Wood Edwards, Bob Peel, C. Isabel Pangrass, Betty and Joe Sparling, Doreen Rennie, Sheila New, and Evelyn Patterson. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table these 10 letters from family, staff, and residents who are dependent on the continuing care system and expressing their deep concerns about how the system is operating. They are Shabantla Devi, Mary Roy,* Marie Bell Tonganis, Geena Mohanan,* Susan Aup,* Leena Prasad, Seema Kumar, Mom Melo, Jocelyn Gerald, and Jane Moorenya.*

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is from an Edmonton-McClung constituent, Ms Sheila Haddad, who is disappointed with the Prime Minister's decision barring the media from ramp ceremonies and not lowering the Canadian flag to honour fallen troops. She, however, commends Alberta on lowering the Canadian flag on the "day of increment."

My second tabling today is 10 letters from families, staff, and residents who are all involved in the long-term care system expressing deep concerns with the way the system is run and the quality of care offered. The names on these letters are Milo Kasala,* Raymond W. Bradley, Grace Johnston, G.M. Staines, Donna Slywka, Debbie Woloshyniuk, Shelley Mathiason,* Arla Stevenson, Esther Eiler, and Donna and Bill Buchanan.

Thank you.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Community Development

The Chair: I'd recognize the hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present the estimates for Community Development for the year 2006-2007. Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of various individuals who make my ministry the success it is. Seated in the members' gallery are Neris Havelock, my executive assistant; Sue Bohaichuk, assistant deputy minister for strategic corporate services; Pam Arnston, executive director of financial services; and Kathryn Weigers, director of communications. I'd ask them to please stand. Please join me in giving them a traditional warm welcome.

Mr. Chairman, my ministry also relies on the commitment of other individuals who are unable to be here today: the Wild Rose Foundation chair, Krishan Joshee; the Alberta Foundation for the Arts chair, Audrey Luft; the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission chief commissioner, Charlach Mackintosh; the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation chair, Orest Korbutt; the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation chair, Irene Nicholson; the Government House Foundation chair, Linda Mackenzie; the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund Advisory Committee chair, the Member for Stony Plain; Fay Orr, my deputy minister, and her executive team; and the entire staff of Community Development.

Mr. Chairman, our operating budget this year is \$242 million. That is just 85 cents out of every \$100 this government will spend on programs this year, yet this small investment has a big impact on those areas that add to and, in some cases, define our quality of life as Albertans. About one-quarter of my budget goes directly to Alberta's communities as grants to libraries, the arts, sport and recreation, volunteer organizations, community museums, and human rights education.

Our foundations and agencies contribute to 260 community-based museums, more than 500 arts groups and about the same number of individual artists, 104 provincial sport and recreation organizations that have a total of 1.2 million members. Tens of thousands of volunteers donate 449 million hours a year to their communities, plus 314 public library service points loan over 30 million items a year to Albertans.

In addition, my ministry directly operates more than 500 parks and protected areas, operates 17 provincial museum historic sites plus the two Jubilee auditoria and the Provincial Archives, sponsors sports, recreation, and competitive games like the Alberta Games and Team Alberta at the Canada Games, provides programs that support and develop volunteerism, and ensures fairness by supporting the Alberta Human Rights Commission and sponsoring the Francophone Secretariat. All this work adds up to a quality of life that builds Alberta pride, which makes Alberta a better place to live, work, and visit, and that has a big impact on our economy.

The impact is significantly higher than our \$240 million investment. My budget helps leverage an annual economic impact of \$3.4 billion a year in cultural activities, \$2.2 billion in sport and recreation, and \$1.3 billion in parks tourism. We cannot take sole credit for this impact, but we are important contributors.

Every grant dollar from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts leverages \$12 in community spending. Every dollar in grants from the Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation leverages \$5 in the community. Communities that host the Alberta Games average a \$3 million impact. The impact of international sporting events is measured in tens of millions. The World Masters Games last year had an impact in Alberta of \$30 million.

3:00

Volunteerism has a major economic and social impact: 19,000 not-for-profit and voluntary organizations in Alberta with 176,000 employees. Albertans volunteer 449 million hours of service a year, equivalent to 234,000 full-time jobs. Alberta-based nonprofit and voluntary organizations have total revenues of \$10 billion. Beyond the money is the impact on our quality of life and reputation.

Provincial parks help keep people healthy and rural economies strong. Libraries support lifelong learning and in small communities are access points to government services. The arts promote innovative thinking, provide avenues for expression, and nurture mental and physical health. Museums and heritage management protect and educate about our history and identity.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

Volunteers are more likely to make charitable donations and to participate in community organizations. Human rights protection and education foster equality, promote inclusion, and reduce discrimination. Physical activity reduces obesity, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers. For youth it also reduces the rates of drug and tobacco use while increasing academic achievement.

Our sports development programs and training facilities are respected across the country and the world. Almost 30 per cent of Canada's medal winners at the 2006 Olympic Winter Games in Turin were from Alberta and another 42 per cent trained here, giving Alberta a stake in 72 per cent of Canada's most recent Olympic medals.

Colleagues, the budget allocated to Community Development may be listed in the estimates as an expense, but we all know that it is an investment.

My budget for 2006-2007 shows a net decrease of \$40.2 million from last year's third-quarter forecast, but the changes are not readily apparent, with some programs ending and new resources added. Several initiatives from last year do not continue in 2006-2007: \$1.7 million for major sporting events in 2005, like the World Masters Games, was one-time funding. The \$2.5 million NHL teams initiative is discontinued. The \$20 million in new library grants was one-time funding that came out of 2005-2006 surplus and is not part of this year's estimates. The \$13.5 million film development program is transferred to Alberta Economic Development.

Considering these reductions, my base budget actually reflects enhanced program funding: \$7.1 million in lottery funding is added to the five lottery funded agencies. That is a 13.4 per cent increase over the previous year. This increase is allocated with an eye to balancing our priorities. Three million dollars is added to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts to support Alberta's creative side; \$2.8 million is added to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation. The \$1.3 million balance is distributed among foundations that support community historic resources, human rights education, and volunteerism.

One million dollars is added to parks to monitor drinking water quality to new and higher standards as well as to operate new interpretive centres in four parks. Built as centennial projects, at a cost of \$17 million, the new interpretive centres will serve visitors to Writing-on-Stone, Lesser Slave Lake, and Dinosaur provincial parks and Cypress Hills interprovincial park. Parks also benefit from a small increase in fees, all of which is dedicated revenue to offset parks maintenance and services.

Six hundred thousand dollars in one-time funds go to showcase Alberta at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC. This is the first time in its 40-year history that the festival is featuring a Canadian province, and about 1 million American tourists, businesspeople, and policy-makers are expected to attend.

At \$59 million our capital spending this year is similar to the funding provided to our lottery funded agencies. The single biggest beneficiaries are visitors to Alberta's parks. The 2004 parks survey shows only 38 per cent of visitors were very satisfied with parks facilities. This budget allocates \$24 million to rebuild visitor facilities as part of a three-year, \$60 million commitment. This investment protects facilities, with an estimated replacement value of \$437 million.

The remaining \$35 million continues our commitment to two centennial projects: \$20 million will expand the tourism and educational potential of the Calgary Zoo, already recognized as one of the world's leading zoos; \$15 million will help build a new home for the Art Gallery of Alberta as a provincial showcase of the best and most inspiring art.

Rural Alberta is also a major beneficiary in this budget. More

than half of the province's public libraries serve communities of fewer than 1,200 people. Libraries in these communities can borrow from libraries across the province to meet almost any information need. For example, Acadia Valley in southeast Alberta has just 512 residents. One in three is a local library member. Those few hundred borrowed over 1,600 titles in just one year. Small-town libraries are also access points for a range of government services online.

Every Albertan lives within 100 kilometres of a provincial park or protected area, and Albertans use them, making 7.5 million visits a year to their provincial parks. An additional 1 million visitors come from out of province. Much of the \$1.3 billion a year generated by parks tourism is spent in rural centres on gas, food, and lodging. This does not include secondary spending on the goods and services that support camping, fishing, and outdoor recreation.

Colleagues, I ask that you approve the estimates for Community Development for 2006-07. This budget features ongoing support for the ministry's core services, small but important and well-allocated increases in priority areas, and judicial investments in parks infrastructure and continuing centennial legacies. With your approval this budget will help sustain the quality of life Albertans enjoy and will start to strengthen priority areas as we head into Alberta's next century.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to move my estimates. I'm ready to accept questions and will answer as many as possible here today. If I'm unable to answer the questions right away, I will respond in writing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I want to begin by commending the minister on his open approach. I and my researcher had the pleasure of meeting with the minister this morning and were very warmly received. It is my belief that the minister, with his experience as party whip, will stand out and stand up for parks. As I indicated in my member's statement when I said that there was a chance to leave either a blot or a mark, I believe this minister is going to leave a mark, and for that I am grateful.

With regard to the parks and protected areas I want to also thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for allowing me to proceed, as I have a travelling engagement later this afternoon. I also want to thank the minister for indicating his willingness to provide written answers. That will go a long way in terms of dealing with the frustration I experienced yesterday at not having a full chance to discuss.

The forecast spending for parks is \$148 million in 2006-2007, which is down from \$165 million in 2005-06; \$1 million to operate four previously announced park interpretive centres in Lesser Slave, Writing-on-Stone, Cypress Hills, and Dinosaur parks, and to monitor water quality. I'm glad that investment is being made. However, \$24 million this year to rebuild parks infrastructure is a bit of a concern because that's less than half. It's down from \$50 million that was dedicated to it in 2005-06. Over the next three years \$60 million is committed for infrastructure. I'm hoping that that figure will be adequate. From personal experience, I've seen how rundown a number of our parks are. The core business of the parks and protected areas division is to preserve, protect, present, and promote the appreciation for Alberta's historical resources, add culture, and provide opportunities for heritage tourism too.

Questions I have with regard to infrastructure, which I'm pleased to receive in writing. Considering that the economic impact of the 8 million visits is \$1.3 billion a year, that means every \$1 investment in the park system pays back about \$9 to the provincial economy.

That being the case, why don't we reinvest more into park infrastructure? We'll get a better return.

While the government press release boasts spending on capital projects, it masks the fact that the total capital spending will be lower in '06-07 than the previous year. Equipment and inventory purchases were down by 21 per cent. This includes all capital purchases under \$5 million and might include such things as vehicles, computers, or park equipment and mobile accommodation. The questions would be: are any of the equipment/inventory purchases going to improve park facilities in smaller parks, such as replacing picnic tables, fire rings, et cetera? This is on page 100, line 5.0.3, of the estimates. Hopefully, some of that money is also going to go to repair the fences around the various sites to keep the intrusion of free-range cattle out.

3:10

Capital investment budgets. Projects greater than \$5 million are down to \$21 million in the '06-07 compared to \$46 million in '05-06. That's on page 101, line 5.0.3, of the estimates. This is still far better than the '04-05 actual, where the total investment was \$7 million. If we can keep heading up in terms of parks and protected areas infrastructure spending, I will support the minister for every appeal he makes for additional funding, provided it's within this budgeting process. I would like to know what parks have requested this money. I kind of think most have, if not all. Where will the money be spent? Is there a capital plan which includes priorities for infrastructure renewal in Alberta parks? I commented about the fact that there were only 45 management plans, but we had over 512 parks and protected areas. I'm looking forward to seeing those plans.

In the area of conservation are there any habitat restoration projects taking place in the Alberta parks? What line item is this addressed in? In my own personal experience at Cataract Creek, Bell Pole was allowed to use the access roads into the park, took out a beautiful aspen parkland campsite to get at its logging. I'm hoping that that has been restored and this might be part of the project.

The most underrepresented natural area in Alberta is the grasslands. If you looked at a map showing the underrepresented area and the private land in Alberta, they virtually overlap. Combine this with an income crisis in the farming industry, and it looks like there may be an opportunity to solve two problems at once by providing economic incentives to protect grasslands on private land. We already have a number of private and public trust organizations being founded to help preserve our land loss. Has the minister considered working with Agriculture, Food and Rural Development to develop policy that works for the conservation of the grasslands and considers the need for farmers to address their income crisis? This might be a buy-back program to encourage farmers to convert marginal areas back to natural grasslands or heritage rangelands, possibly with some organic or sustainable grazing taking place on the range. This could be a win-win for farmers and conservation groups.

With regard to staffing I've frequently complained about the 50 per cent reduction in conservation officers and the effect that that has on both visitor information and parks and protected areas protection. Full-time employment is increasing by two full-time equivalents. Will these staff be in the park areas or somewhere else in the department? This comes from page 107 of the estimates.

Park conservation officers. Throughout the entire province there are 70 permanent conservation officers. An additional 88 will be added in May for the summer season. This is the same number of permanent officers as last year, and the seasonal number is slightly higher. Having spoken to a number of seasonal conservation

officers who would like to have a permanent career in conservation, I hope that there will be an opportunity for these individuals, having demonstrated their abilities season after season, to receive full-time employment. This works out to one staff for every three parks or one staff for every 130 square kilometres. My researcher was hoping that the minister might provide a few staff with binoculars so that they could cover the wide range. Has the minister considered the impact to the rural communities of relying on seasonal employees that are near Alberta's parks; for example, experiment with employees living in the gateway communities near the parks rather than commuting from Edmonton just for the summer season?

Scientists and planners. The previous Community Development minister was unaware that there were caribou living in Alberta's parks, much less doing anything about ensuring that their habitat was properly stewarded. Is there sufficient staff such as biologists to work with SRD to manage endangered species such as the caribou, the swift fox, or the grizzly bear within our parks and protected areas? Are there sufficient planners and project officers in permanent and year-round positions to participate in regional planning exercises and park planning exercises that are vital to the management of park ecosystems?

Other priorities. The minister knows that this is a favourite of mine. We talked about it this morning. Will the minister work to preserve the Castle wilderness? Will the minister work to improve access to information by tabling planning documents, provide money to support the planning processes, complete a thorough economic benefit study of the contribution of Alberta's park system to the economy and indirectly – well, I guess it is directly – the effects it has on our health system? Because healthy people don't end up within the system. If he says that they already have, tell him to send us and the NGOs a copy. The footnote is there, and if you have it, I would love to receive it. Then we could have it in the library because, unfortunately, the latest version we have is 1996. So I would be appreciative of receiving that document and having it tabled and available in the library.

Performance measures. The only performance measure for the parks and protected areas department is camper satisfaction. I talked about visitor dissatisfaction in my questions yesterday. I had a good discussion with the minister today with regard to improving the electronic booking of parks, and I am confident that he will work towards that improvement. Why doesn't the ministry develop a full set of indicators for the ecological health of Alberta parks? Why not evaluate whether people are appreciating nature and understanding the purpose of parks rather than just being satisfied? We need to up the ante. People are very satisfied after visiting West Edmonton Mall or Disneyland, and it doesn't mean that the parks are serving their public purpose. I believe their purpose should be to appreciate and enjoy nature along with conserving our flora and fauna, our ecological integrity. We should focus on parks as places to enjoy the outdoors and conserve nature. This performance measure at this point does not assess that.

Also, one of the sad circumstances is that the conservation officers rarely have the time to interact with the campers, to talk to them about the local flora and fauna. In the majority of our parks we don't have the interpretive guided tours anymore. I know that my wife and I tried to provide information, which was provided to us by the government in terms of maps, posters, and so on, to educate the visitors to our campground in the southern Kananaskis, the provincial campground of Cataract Creek.

Other issues of concern. The Maqua Lake forest recreation area. We've received reports that this area is closed to the public and has been for some time, several years, it appears. I would appreciate knowing why the park is still closed. Are there plans to reopen it?

Given the demand for parks, why aren't we providing access and/or resources to keep these areas open?

Financial questions. What parks does the minister plan on making the \$24 million investment in in the form of infrastructure? The reference pages are 100 and 101 in estimates, line 5.0.3, which I've previously referenced. How do you plan on assessing the need for infrastructure development, and how will the minister prioritize projects to ensure that they are based on the greatest need and not some other criteria? As I mentioned this morning when we discussed with the minister, while I'm extremely pleased that the Canmore Nordic Centre has been polished up – it's a jewel – there are a number of wilderness parks that have not had that same kind of shining. Why is total spending in the parks and protected areas division down by \$17 million? This is a reference to page 115 of the government business plan, expense by core business.

3:20

The Auditor General had no recommendations in the parks and protected areas division.

I wouldn't be surprised, Mr. Minister, if this comes to you as a surprise because you've just taken over your department, but it came as a tremendous surprise to both myself and my researcher. Wal-Mart is now the official marketing sponsor for Alberta's parks information site. This includes a link to Wal-Mart's corporate site. I know that Wal-Mart allows campers to park in their lots, but are we not experiencing internal competition? What is the ministry receiving in exchange for Wal-Mart being the corporate sponsor? Will the minister make all documentation related to the agreement with Wal-Mart as the marketing sponsor public? This would include the RFP for sponsors, all other applicants, a description of what criteria were used to assess and select the sponsors, a description of what support Wal-Mart provides to the Ministry of Community Development. Now, if that Wal-Mart sponsorship will put a conservation officer at the entrance to every park, welcoming them to the park and talking about the special deals in creek aisle 4, then I think it would be a great sponsorship.

Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Chairman, as was indicated by the Member for Calgary-Varsity, we had agreed that I would be responding to him in written form as he had other commitments. So if we can move on to the next speaker, please.

The Chair: Okay. I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. Edmonton-Strathcona, I'll recognize you next.

Dr. Pannu: Sure. That's fine.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my great pleasure to rise and participate in the budget debate on the estimates for Community Development. First of all, I want to thank the hon. minister and his whole staff for preparing and presenting a good overview of the budget. Also, thanks for the efforts and their hard work. It's not easy to answer all the questions in 20 minutes' time or maybe a little less or more. If you can't answer all the questions, please provide them later on in writing, as you already said, but I would like to see them in full detail.

Mr. Chairman, allow me to start from the estimate on page 98, line 2.0.2. The estimate for arts is \$2,268,000, a small decrease from the 2005-06 forecast. Given that your ministry overspent in 2005-06 by \$700,000, why haven't you increased the funding for the arts this year so that you don't overspend? Why hasn't the government made arts funding a real priority yet? How will this money be utilized this

year? Has the new minister met with the arts community yet to hear their concerns regarding funding? Why did the former Minister of Community Development pretend that he tried to get \$40 million for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts? I read it in the newspaper, but now the ministry has changed, and I have to ask the new minister to work on this again because there are lots of stakeholders in the arts sector requesting more money.

I think \$40 million is very reasonable because they are creating I think 3,500 jobs in the arts sector. The Alberta arts sector spent on operations and production in 2004 at least \$120 million. The arts sector adds to the Alberta GDP each year. So the money we are receiving from this sector is not even close to what we are returning to them.

Next I move to the estimates on page 98, line 2.0.4. The estimate for sport and recreation is \$1,439,000, virtually no change from the 2005-06 forecast. Why has the government again chosen to ignore the sport and recreation community in Alberta? The previous minister assured Albertans that sport and recreation funding was a priority for this government. If this is the case, why have you chosen not to increase funding for sport and recreation? How does the new minister plan to promote a healthier, more active population if funding for sport and recreation remains stagnant? What plans does the new minister have for implementing the Alberta sport plan? Will additional funding for the Alberta sport plan come from this line item? What does the minister have to say about the government's disappointing lack of funding to Alberta's sport and recreation community? The former Minister of Community Development responded to my debate in the last budget that we will have a new sport policy in this session as well as a cultural policy, but I haven't seen anything so far.

I move to the estimates on page 98, line 2.0.6. The estimate for the Francophone Secretariat is \$932,000, a 13 per cent increase from the 2005-06 budget. Funding for the Francophone Secretariat has increased substantially over the past few years. Can the minister tell us how the additional funding will be used, and what does the minister hope to accomplish by raising the funding by more than a hundred thousand dollars?

Estimates, page 98, line 2.0.11. The estimate for assistance to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is approximately \$22,080,000, an increase of 16 per cent from the 2005-06 budget. Although this increase is most welcome, it is once again far below what the arts sector requires in this province. Is the minister prepared to work with the arts sector to ensure that their concerns are addressed? Is the minister willing to commit today to making arts funding a real priority for this government in the years to come?

Arts groups have been asking for a substantial increase in funding to support them for years. It has been estimated that the arts contribute approximately \$150 million annually to the economy of this province, yet this government continues to rank among the poorest supporters of the arts in Canada. The point here is – and it is agreed upon by so many stakeholders – why does the Alberta provincial government consistently fail to support the arts when municipal and federal governments recognize the importance of the arts?

Can the minister explain to these artists why they are always underfunded? The previous minister claimed that he did not have caucus support for a substantial increase to arts funding. What is the new minister going to do to change this? It was in the newspaper that the former minister worked hard and tried to convince the caucus for \$40 million, but the revenue department maybe didn't agree with the hon. minister. Now it's up to the new minister to recognize and do something for the arts sector, where so many people are involved, and they've been struggling for a long, long

time. I hear in this Chamber most of the departments sometimes say that they are number one, number two, whatever, in their own department. As far as I know, I was reading one of the articles somewhere that we are behind in arts funding. We are behind the federal funding as well. Numberwise we are number 10 in Canada. Incomewise it's huge revenue coming from this sector. We should focus a little bit more on the arts sector.

3:30

Now I move to page 98, line 2.0.13. The estimate for assistance to the Wild Rose Foundation is \$8.116 million, a 4 per cent increase from the year 2005-06 budget. The funding for this line item saw a minor decrease between 2004-05 and 2005-06. Can the minister tell us why he has increased assistance to the Wild Rose Foundation this year? Will any of this additional money go towards implementing the Auditor General's recommendation in his annual report? Will any of this money be used to further investigate the Applewood grants? Has the minister determined yet who was responsible for providing false or misleading information on the Applewood grant application? When can Albertans expect to see the Applewood money returned to the government, where it belongs? What is the minister doing to ensure that another Applewood does not happen?

The next is on page 111. Under core business 2, goal 3, it states that one of the goals of the government is to provide "financial and consultative support through . . . the Alberta Foundation for the Arts." Why, then, does the Official Opposition continue to hear from the arts sector that this government does not support them? Why does this government continue year after year to disappoint the Alberta arts sector? When will this government stop making false promises and truly support the arts community in this province?

Next I move to strategy 3.4. This is again on page 111, under core business 2, goal 3. The government plans to "introduce an inclusive cultural policy to promote Alberta's cultural, historical and natural heritage." Again, this looks like a hollow strategy. We have been hearing for some time that the government wants to introduce a cultural policy, but there is no action. How can this government develop an inclusive cultural policy when it fails to show sufficient support for the arts and cultural sectors in this province? What can the minister tell us about this government's progress in developing this policy? We were expecting a cultural and sports policy in this session. This is what I was promised by the former Minister of Community Development, and I haven't seen anything so far yet. How long before we see some signs that this policy is in the works? What does the minister expect this policy to look like? Can the minister elaborate on the strategy and tell us specifically how he plans on making this a reality?

In the business plan, page 111, core business 2, goal 3, strategy 3.5, the government is co-ordinating the province's participation "in the 2006 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C., to increase awareness and appreciation of Alberta culture." I'm happy that our artists are going to Washington. We are not against that, but this seems quite hypocritical. Why is the government taking steps to promote Alberta's cultural and arts achievements in foreign countries when it does not even support them here at home? Why doesn't the minister show more of a commitment to the arts and cultural community in Alberta if he's so enthusiastic to promote it elsewhere? Given that the Alberta government consistently ranks among the worst supporters of arts and culture in Canada, what is the logic behind this initiative? What does the minister expect to gain from this initiative? Will this initiative result in greater government support for the arts and culture sector in this province?

In the business plan, page 113, core business 3, goal 4, performance measure 4(a), adult Albertans' perception of how well human

rights are protected in Alberta: last actual, 2004-05, 87.6 per cent; the target for the next three years is 88 per cent. This seems like a pretty low target given the importance of human rights. Does the minister believe that setting a higher standard for visitor satisfaction at provincial parks than for the protection of human rights is appropriate? This government continually repeats how fantastic things are in this province, yet less than 90 per cent of Albertans believe that human rights are protected well in Alberta. Why does the minister aim for only 88 per cent on this performance measure? It would seem appropriate that this performance measure be among the most important in this ministry, yet you have set a relatively low target for the next three years. Even more alarming is that we are falling short on this performance measure. Does the minister agree that 87 per cent is far too low for this particular measure? Has the minister compared this rating to other jurisdictions in Canada to see how Alberta compares? Why doesn't the minister make this initiative a greater priority?

Now I come to the recommendations in the Auditor General's 2004-05 annual report, page 137. "We recommend that The Wild Rose Foundation review the results of our audit into the grants to Applewood Park Community Association and take appropriate action." What updates can the minister provide regarding the Applewood grants? When does the minister expect to have the contested money returned by Applewood? What has the minister done to date to address this recommendation by the Auditor General?

From the Auditor General's 2004-05 annual report, page 142:

We recommend that The Wild Rose Foundation improve its grant systems for the International Development Program by:

- obtaining third party evidence that matching funds exist before approving grants,
- enhancing the review of accountability reports, and
- establishing a way to obtain assurance that grant funds are used as intended.

What progress has Community Development made to date regarding this recommendation?

I again want to repeat that in this article I read in one of the books, it said that the amount of taxes collected from the arts sector in Alberta each year is \$19.6 million. Their revenue from the Alberta lottery fund in 1992-93: \$153,708. I just want to say that the revenue coming from the arts sector is maybe a little more than what we are helping the arts sector with, so we should focus a little bit more on this.

3:40

I mean, that 7 per cent increase this year was the second in the last 16 years. It is not enough. I commend the former Minister of Community Development. He took the initiative, and he started increasing grants to community developments. I commend him for that. After him another minister tried, and I read in the paper that he worked really hard to get \$40 million for the AFA. My humble request, once again, is to the new minister to focus and convince the caucus and give the arts sector a little bit more attention. Forty million dollars is reasonable because if you see the job creation, it's 3,500 jobs created in this sector. They deserve it.

I leave it to you. I don't want to say more than this. Maybe I'll comment a little bit later on. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now I really understand what rapid-fire questioning is all about. I'll certainly give an attempt to address some of them.

One of the questions that the hon. member asked was: why aren't

we spending more on the arts? Hon. member, we've worked with the Alberta Foundation for the Arts to provide an increase of nearly 16 per cent for this coming year. Alberta's arts community has grown at an incredible rate. Recognizing this, the government has allocated an additional \$3 million in funding for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts in this year's budget. The new funding will be allocated to priorities outlined in the foundation's strategic plan and will support existing clients and services in the areas of arts creation and production, arts promotion, arts participation, and art collection and display.

Government support for the arts goes beyond the foundation. For example, an additional \$600,000 will be dedicated to the Alberta program at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, which will feature contemporary Alberta, including artistic expression, ethnic diversity, industry and technological innovation. Also, \$15 million, as I indicated in my opening remarks, will be provided to assist in the creation of the new Art Gallery of Alberta. There are other recent examples that have just taken place: the renovated Jubilee auditoria at a cost of \$72 million. We contributed \$500,000 to Alberta Scene in Ottawa and organized Alberta Tracks at a series of 10 free concerts in 10 Alberta communities, featuring 30 Alberta musical acts.

Mr. Chairman, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts uses a formula to determine the amount of funds allocated for all operating grants to organizations. The foundation has been granting funds to eligible applicants on a fixed budget for approximately 15 years. Based on statistics for the last four fiscal years, applicants have experienced funding that is between 43 per cent and 69 per cent of what they should receive to ensure that they are sustainable. Research has been conducted and presented regarding foundation programs that are subject to the most severe proration. All are prorated. Community support organizations receive the lowest rate, about 30 per cent. The number of applicants to this program has increased by approximately 25 per cent every year for the past three years. So, yes, there are certainly some challenges there and certainly a challenge for this new minister as he starts to work on his upcoming budget that will be forthcoming in a year's time.

You asked questions in regard to the funding of the sport plan. As I indicated in my opening remarks, the Alberta sport plan will benefit from the contribution of \$2.8 million that was put into the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation. The decisions on how these funds will be distributed will be made in the near future by the board, and I can certainly say that a portion of these funds that were allocated there will be used as it was emphasized in the sport plan. While it will not address all the challenges faced by the sport and recreation network in Alberta, it is a promising step in the right direction. I will continue to work towards finding solutions to address other areas of the sport plan.

You asked questions in regard to the increase to the Francophone Secretariat. There was a 13.1 per cent increase in the budget towards the Francophone Secretariat. Seventy thousand dollars of that amount is an increase in projected funding from the government of Canada for francophone-related community projects, and \$38,000 of that amount is an increase for government-wide union-negotiated salary settlements and management compensation adjustments. Basically, the adjustments are there for extra funding arrangements that we make on a sharing basis as we meet with various community groups, francophone groups across the province, where they come in as equal partners, and we get matching dollars from the federal government. So it's an enhancement of services in that way.

You spoke in regard to the targets on human rights. In 2004-2005 nearly 88 per cent of adult Albertans felt that human rights were well protected in Alberta. In setting our targets, hon. member, we use a

three-year average with a 1 per cent stretch allowance factor. We feel that by doing that, we're being realistic and that it is a target that is attainable.

You made remarks in regard to the Auditor General's recommendations regarding the international development program. Following the recommendations that came forward from the Auditor General, an entirely new set of guidelines and accountability requirements has been developed for the program incorporating all of the Auditor General's recommendations. The new guidelines and accountability requirements were developed by department staff and reviewed by an independent agency. The program is reinstated, and funding proposals are now being accepted.

If I may, after he conducted the audit, the Auditor General's recommendations were basically threefold. One is that the foundation should obtain "third party evidence that matching funds exist before approving grants;" two, that the foundation should enhance "the review of accountability reports;" and three, the foundation should establish "a way to obtain assurance that grant funds are used as intended."

Basically, the current status is that the Wild Rose Foundation has incorporated all three of the Auditor General's recommendations into their grants processes as follows. At the application stage organizations that do not produce audited financial statements will now have to obtain third-party evidence that matching funds exist before grants are approved. Two and three: at the accountability stage the foundation has enhanced their review of accountability reports and strengthened their process to be assured that grant funds are used as intended, and initial discussions with the Canadian International Development Agency took place regarding possible on-site verifications. Because the agency does not perform their own project evaluations, it was suggested that the foundation perform their own project reviews or contract the same firm as the agency to complete these project on-site reviews on their behalf. The foundation is currently researching this issue, which will include taking the appropriate budgetary measures in anticipation of these annual on-site verifications.

The new guidelines originated from the review conducted by the foundation with representation from the Canadian International Development Agency and International and Intergovernmental Relations. The foundation then contracted Agriteam Canada, an independent agency, to undertake the final review of the documentation to examine the overall program parameters. On February 2, 2006, the Wild Rose Foundation publicly announced its new guidelines and accountability requirements. Funding proposals are now being accepted.

In the case of what's happening with the Applewood situation, all that I can advise the member is that the file has been forwarded to the Crown's debt collections to recover the funds, and the process is now under way.

Why are we doing the Smithsonian? It's basically to increase tourism and investment opportunities. It's going to provide American decision-makers and policy-makers with an understanding of issues that are important to us such as energy and agriculture, and it will certainly help Albertans make valuable contacts in one of the most powerful cities in the world. Mr. Chairman, this is an incredible opportunity to promote our province to the largest trading partner and enhance our trade relationship, which is already worth \$60 billion. There will also be a variety of long-term benefits from Alberta's participation, including improved relations with the decision-makers in legacy projects, including a music CD and educational materials.

That's all that I have at this moment, Mr. Chairman.

3:50

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak to the 2006-2007 estimates for the Department of Community Development. Let me at the very outset congratulate the new minister for taking on this responsibility. It's indeed an important ministry, in my view. How to come to the conclusion that it's an important ministry is not by looking at the total number of dollars that it spends but the significance of every dollar that it spends in the area of cultural development of communities, parks and recreational areas, arts, human rights. All of these are very, very important areas of activity in which government is involved. It is indeed, in my judgment, a very important portfolio, and I think the minister is up to the task.

I was very pleased to receive an invitation last week from the minister to meet with him. I and my colleague for Edmonton-Calder took the opportunity this morning to have a brief meeting with the minister. I have known the minister for many years in various other contexts. We've been on various committees together, worked together to address matters which are the responsibility of the whole House sometimes. I'm very pleased and looking forward to the opportunity of working with the minister. I know that he has some challenges, and I want to assure him that we'll extend our full support on matters on which we all agree that we need to work together.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I want to just suggest that I'd focus perhaps on the arts and libraries, that area in particular.

Maybe I can start with some simple and specific questions which go back to the Auditor General's report and recommendations with respect to the work that the AG looked at that this department has done in previous years. I have with me some pages from the AG's report for 2004-2005. I want to just read the general sort of recommendations that the AG makes on page 147. It says that the

Ministry of Community Development's Parks and Protected Areas Division contracts out the management of approximately half of the provincial parks and recreation areas to private operators through facility operating agreements . . . we recommend that the Ministry evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the service delivery alternatives for operating parks and protected areas.

That's a very specific recommendation. These are the dollars that we spend and the effectiveness of that expenditure.

Looking at the estimates volume on page 99, I think the minister drew to the attention, I guess, in his previous remarks that the budget for the parks operations – so this is line 5.0.3 – has increased from the forecast for 2005-2006 of 34,871 million to \$37,996 million. It means about a 7 to 8 per cent increase over the year. Now, there is an increase here which on the surface would seem that the step is being taken in the right direction, but in light of the AG's recommendation about evaluating the cost effectiveness of alternatives for parks and protected areas division contracts, I would like to ask the minister two questions. First, given that about half the parks in the province are indeed contracted out, how much of this close to \$38 million is allocated, in fact, to paying for the contracts to provide these services through private contractors? What percentage are they in terms of dollars? You know, of the \$38 million is it \$10 million? Is it \$20 million. How much exactly? What are those amounts?

Secondly, what steps have been taken specifically to follow up on the AG's recommendation to "evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the service delivery alternatives for operating parks and protected areas"? What seems to be hinted at here, as I read this recommendation, is that there's maybe an alternative way of delivering those

services so that we can use the dollars more efficiently and effectively and use them more smartly so that every dollar that we spend takes us farther along the line of providing services and improving their quality than may be the case with contracting out. That's one question.

The second one is a follow-up on the next page, page 148. It has to do with monitoring performance of private contracts.

Parks and Protective Areas staff has been working with the area offices to ensure they obtain adequate documentation to properly monitor operators' performance.

These are the AG's report's words.

The Ministry has developed checklists indicating what documentation is to be obtained from parks operators and we are satisfied that the information is sufficient to monitor performance.

However, we examined the files of 17 park sites and found that some files did not include all the required information, such as visitor statistics, monthly revenue and annual expense reports, and inspection reports. In addition, there was limited evidence of review and analysis of the documentation that was obtained.

The report goes on.

To finish implementing this recommendation, the Ministry needs to have a system to ensure staff consistently complies with the guidelines for collecting and analyzing information from operators.

Obviously the AG's report comes to the conclusion that not in every case the staff did its work. So the system needs to be in place to ensure that this happens. My question to the minister is: will he please look into this question and let me know if there indeed is a new system that has been put in place to comply with this particular recommendation of the Auditor General as indicated in the report of 2004-2005? So these are two questions specific to the Auditor General's report.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity asked a question specific to Wal-Mart's sponsorship of parks programs, and I would request that the minister send the information that's been requested by the Member for Calgary-Varsity my way as well. I would very much be interested in the set of questions related to Wal-Mart's involvement with the parks and recreation programs. So any documents, any information that's available I would welcome having.

A few other specifics here. I note in the business plan on page 115, under Ministry Statement of Operations, the revenues. There is a considerable increase projected here under premiums, fees, and licences. When the minister and myself and my colleague from Edmonton-Calder were meeting this morning, we all agreed that the importance of parks areas, parks and recreation for Albertans, the access to these facilities, facilities in good shape and form, is very, very essential. Most Albertans like to be able to go out on the weekend with families, with children and be able to use these parks. We want to of course not only make these parks available but ensure that they are accessible and affordable to Albertans.

4:00

There is a considerable increase there in the revenues drawn from what I would call user fees or licences and fees. I notice that the 2006-07 estimates are about \$9.385 million compared to the 2005-06 forecast of \$8.4 million, so close to \$1 million extra is estimated to be realized over the next year.

Now, looking at the fiscal plan tables on page 62, I notice that there are hefty increases for provincial camping fees. This is page 62 of the fiscal plan tables. There I notice that provincial camping fees will go up. Backcountry and basic camping fees for the current year, the year just past, have been at anywhere between \$3 and \$17. They'll be jacked up in the new budget to between a range of \$5 and \$20. The considerable increase from \$3 to \$5 at the lowest end is close to about a 60 to 70 per cent increase in the fees, and at the

upper end from \$17 to \$20 is another, I would think, about a 20 per cent increase.

Similarly, in camping services it was up to \$3 in the year just past, and it will go up to \$5, again exactly a 40 per cent increase anticipated in the fees there. Similarly, for group camping and day use the fees have been, during the year just past, in the range of \$25 to \$130 depending upon the size of the group, the amount of space used, I suppose, or whatever. These fees are going to go up at the lower range from \$25 to \$35, close to a 60 per cent increase or more, and at the upper end from \$130 to \$250 minimum, which is a huge increase, close to doubling, close to a 90 or 100 per cent increase in the fees there again.

Similarly for reservations, the fees charged for that, from \$6 up to \$6 plus first night: that was the rate the year just past. It will go up to \$8 plus first night. Again the increase is in the neighbourhood of 35 to 36 per cent.

So huge increases, in my view, that are built into the revenue projections. I want to ask the minister: how is that to be justified if our goal is, in fact, to encourage Albertans to engage more actively in recreation? It's good for health. It's good for family relations and growth and development. Why is it that we are increasing these fees at such punishing rates when we know that such increases are likely to discourage people, not encourage them to make use of these wonderful places we call our parks and recreation areas? So those are some specific questions that I have.

Now, going back to some of the other issues of arts funding, there has been interesting commentary in the wake of the presentation of the budget, Mr. Chairman, on the arts side of the funding for this department in the budget, and I want to perhaps draw attention to this, put on record some of this. I have a sort of statement here from the media, and I think it's worth the minister's notice. Arts leaders are disappointed by a smaller than expected increase in provincial arts funding, and they criticize the provincial government for its shortsightedness with respect to the budget.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts' budget for 2006-07 is \$22.6 million, and the minister I think appropriately drew attention to the fact that this is an increase over the \$19 million last year, but certainly it's far less than what it's reported the former Minister of Community Development in fact asked for, about \$40 million. I think that the former minister's request had the strong support of the arts community across this province. No wonder that the arts community is extremely disappointed with the very small increase that the budget in fact allowed in the area of the arts foundation and the arts in general. It's only the second funding increase, I must note, for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts in 16 years. That is worth noting.

Tom McCabe, the Theatre Calgary president, says as a reaction to what he heard, "It's just shortsighted and it shows a lack of vision in this government." Mr. McCabe is one of those who organized a petition which was received I think by the former Minister of Community Development. From what the reports says, there was support for the former minister's request across the cabinet table, but the proposal got shot down at the Treasury Board. I'm quite surprised by this, and the community representatives in the field of arts activity certainly are not pleased with this.

The increase of \$3 million. Yes, it's an increase, but it is far short of what is needed and "necessary to sustain and increase the arts and culture that this province enjoys," Mr. McCabe said. It is true that the government is spending over \$600,000 to present the cultural wealth and the arts production of this province in Washington, DC, this year as part of the centennial, I suppose, but it's a one-time kind of thing. Although that money is a welcome use of public money to promote interest in our cultural life here through what will be done

in Washington, certainly it's not good enough to provide encouragement and support for the sustained growth in this most valued activity in our communities, from small towns and villages to big cities. There is, I think, a reason for the minister to pay some attention to it, and I urge him to look into this matter and try again this year. I wish him luck on that one.

The entire budget for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is a third of what the horse-racing industry's is. You can make some comparisons because that's where the government's priorities come in. [Dr. Pannu's speaking time expired] Is that it? I'll come back.

Thank you.

4:10

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll attempt to answer some of those questions that came forward.

The hon. member had made reference in regard to the Auditor General's audit report pertaining to the contracting out of park facilities. I can inform the member that the audit recommendations have been fully implemented, a cost-benefit model has been adopted, and the office of the Auditor General will indicate full completion in their report, which will be released in September.

In regard to the monitoring of contractor performance for the parks a new process has been developed for monitoring performance. Satisfactory progress has been recognized by the office of the Auditor General, indicating that it's very positive and encouraging of our results to date. The office of the Auditor General will conduct another audit this fall to determine if their recommendation has been completely implemented.

We spoke briefly in regard to the fee increases in the parks. The new fee schedule provides the flexibility and the incentive to operators to respond to local market conditions, including the ability to offer off-season, mid-week, and other discounts. Camping fees and services have not increased since 1998. Meanwhile, the costs of providing these services have increased significantly over the same period. Contracted operators have requested a fee increase to cover their increasing costs and the increase to the minimum wage that has been implemented.

Under the new fee structure Alberta's provincial campgrounds remain competitively priced relative to neighbouring jurisdictions such as the national parks. Users of Alberta's provincial parks also do not pay any park entry or day-use fees, unlike some of our neighbouring jurisdictions. The changes also encourage contracted operators to reinvest in facility maintenance and development. It will be the operators' responsibility in their best interest to determine fair and competitive camping fees within the limits that have been specified by the department.

We spoke about the special event permit fees. It's to reflect business opportunities associated with the use of the parkland. Criteria are being developed, based on a number of activities and a number of park locations, to reflect the larger fee. Special events organized by the department or by the many friends-of-provincial-parks organizations, for example Parks Day, will continue to be on a no-charge basis. School groups also will continue to not be charged for special events on parkland.

Disposition fees are basically equivalent in most cases to fees being charged by Sustainable Resource Development for the use of general Crown land. A number of these disposition fees have not increased since 1983. Fee increases reflect the considerable increases of providing utilities, water and sewer services, garbage collection, and road maintenance within the parks. I can also point out that there will be no increase in grazing fees for 2006-2007.

The member spoke passionately in regard to the arts. As I had indicated in responding to the previous member, I think I answered quite a bit of them in detail. I won't go through it again. However, as I indicated to that member, it will certainly be a challenge that I'm willing to undertake as we go forward.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise and join the debate on estimates for the Community Development department and to congratulate the new minister on his new posting. I realize that part of what we are doing here is calling upon the new minister to defend work done during his predecessor's watch, and that's not, I'm sure, always the easiest thing to do, to know the mind of the previous minister and know why the decisions were made in the way that they were and precisely, you know, what the thinking was that went into that. Nevertheless, that is the new minister's cross to bear.

So I rise this afternoon really with only one specific question about a line item in this budget, but I hope to engage the minister in a little bit of discussion that's perhaps a little bit more philosophical and forward looking because it's always interesting to be able to have the chance to discuss with a new minister what that minister's vision is for the department that he's taken over and that sort of thing. The specific question first of all because we'll get that one on the record, and then the minister can answer in the House today or answer in writing. It's his choice as far as I'm concerned.

It has to do with line 3.0.1. The estimate for human rights and citizenship is \$4.405 million this year, a small increase of about 4 per cent from the 2005-2006 forecast. On 3.0.2 much the same thing: a small increase in the assistance to the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund from the '05-06 forecast of about \$200,000, from \$1.265 million up to \$1.465 million. The same question, really, on both lines: can the minister explain why there wasn't a greater increase provided for these line items given the importance in general terms, obviously, of protecting human rights in this province, given the satisfaction rating, which we think the minister has set rather low at 88 per cent and which hasn't quite been achieved, even at that point, yet? Can the minister tell us if he plans on increasing the budget or the staff of the Human Rights Commission in the future? Can the minister explain how this mechanism can be made more effective in resolving disputes if more money is not allocated to this important initiative? That's my one question area. If the minister could answer those questions specifically, as I say, either orally or in writing, I'd be very satisfied with that.

Now if I can take the minister back to two areas, really: support for the arts and culture and support for sport and recreation, both of which I think are fairly significant parts of the mandate of the Department of Community Development, and I may spin off a question from there as well. There's been some discussion, some fairly specific questions asked by hon. members before me in those areas and some answers provided already by the minister. I don't know if I can remember the minister's words exactly, but I take him back to one of the answers that he was providing around the budget estimate for sport and recreation, where he indicated that, you know, things are getting a little bit better – these were not his exact words – and it's not what that segment, that sector of society would like, but it's a little better than last year. That sort of thing.

I think we could say the same thing about arts funding too. It's a little bit better than last year, but it's not what the sector wants. It's not what the sector needs. It doesn't address all the years where

there haven't been increases at all or there haven't been sufficient increases, significant enough increases.

I got to thinking as the minister was answering: what would happen, what would the world look like in the Ministry of Community Development if the minister took either one of these areas or, frankly, many areas under the umbrella of his mandate – it could be parks, protected areas, museums, historical sites, whatever – and said, "Next fiscal year we're actually going to choose this one area, this target area, and we're going to bring it up to what the sector says it needs in order to do what it wants to do"? What would that look like?

Let's say we caught up arts and culture for nearly 20 years of funding shortfall. It's been nearly 20 years since they had a significant increase. Yes, I know that the minister will point out that there's a 16 per cent increase this year, but it's not enough. That's 16 per cent more than what was enough in 1987. It doesn't catch them up. The minister acknowledged as well that the sector has been growing and that it's tough for his department to keep up with that.

4:20

What would it look like if you made a concerted effort to keep up with that? I realize, you know, that what I'm arguing here hypothetically is that you pick arts and culture or you pick sports and recreation or you pick some other area of responsibility in your department and you say, "This year we're going to catch them up, and everybody else is going to hurt for another year" or something like that. What would that look like?

I want to spin off from there and get into the minister's head a little bit if I can about the vision and the philosophy that he is going to bring to his new portfolio over the course of this next fiscal year because that will help us understand what his priorities are and, if not to expect, what to hope for in his budget, in his estimates 12 months from now. It will give us some indication as to what to say to stakeholders as well because they talk to us regularly. They talk to us regularly about how the funding just isn't adequate to do the job.

You know, on this side of the House we think that's important because we think that you're dealing with some of the softer stuff that government deals with in the Department of Community Development. You're dealing with things that may create economic activity, and in fact they do create a great deal of economic activity – the minister has acknowledged this himself – but in a more indirect fashion than when you punch a hole in the ground and get some oil out or something like that.

The softer side of the economy if I can call it that, while it may not seem as sexy or as quick to return on investment, often over the long haul returns not only a very respectable economic return on investment but also has a real, positive impact on quality of life in our province. That positive impact on quality of life, especially when you're considering something like arts and culture, can in and of itself be a real attractor for highly skilled, highly talented, highly educated members in good standing, if you will, of the knowledge economy that we need to build in this province for the 21st century. So there are returns to be had from this.

So I'd like to get from the minister, if I could, some philosophical sense of what he sees as important within and underneath the umbrella of his ministry. Perhaps his ministry is too big, or perhaps his ministry is big in the wrong places, small in the wrong places. Perhaps his ministry should be streamlined. I don't know. This is not advice. This is speculation on my part. I'm not going to give the minister advice unless and until – well, no, I'll just say until – I hear some sense from him of what he sees as his vision and his priorities here.

You know, there are things that happen under the umbrella of Community Development that, as an outsider looking in, you might be tempted to say are things that, kind of like on *Sesame Street*, don't necessarily go together: one of these things is not like the others, or all of these things are not like the others. It looks as though the department could be kind of a catch-all for things that couldn't be shoehorned in any other department, you know. You've got arts and culture. You've got sports and recreation. Yes, both are leisure-time activities, and parks and protected areas involve leisure-time activities, so I guess there's the big, broad, vague connection between so much of this. But, really, just because all those things are leisure-time activities, does it take the same sort of expertise to run a world-class, world-leading network of parks and protected areas as it does to oversee the creation of great art and great culture? I would argue that maybe it could, but it probably doesn't have to.

So do we want to continue down the path we're on? Do we want to look at things in a different way? Is it time to spin off sports and recreation into its own ministry? By the way, before anyone on the government side accuses me of trying to make the cabinet bigger and pointing out that that's contradictory to everything we've said about cabinet being too big already, I would suggest that if you're going to create another ministry, you look for one you can get rid of at the same time, one or maybe two, because I think things are a bit bloated. [interjection] I'm not talking about getting rid of your ministry, Mr. Minister, at least not yet.

In fact, what I am suggesting, I guess – and I didn't want to get into the advice giving, so I'll put it as a question. Are there, maybe, mandates and activities in your ministry and in sectors of our society and sectors of our economy that would be better served if we didn't group them under the one ministry because they don't really fit together? I guess I'll leave it at that.

Again, I look forward to the answers that I get from the minister. The specific answers to my specific questions can be delivered orally or in writing, but I would love to hear a little bit of philosophical musing from the minister now if I could.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Currie for his comments and some of his questions. I'll attempt to get a few of them, and those that I happen to miss, I'll follow up on. Many of your questions were similar to the other comments that were made, a little bit, in regard to the shortfall and funding in the arts. I guess that while the previous minister did not get the full proposed funding, we are confident that there will be significant positive impact on the arts sector as a result of the \$3 million in new funding.

In the areas of funding that would go to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts for creation, production, promotion, participation, and selection, 88 per cent of Albertans feel that our arts achievements are important. We have, hon. member, the fourth highest performing acts attendance in the country, so there's certainly a great interest by Albertans in the field of the arts. We are pleased that we have been able to make some progress with the funding needed, and I will commit to continue to work with the arts sectors on their requirements in the future.

I guess I could share the same things when it comes to the sports. One of the first functions that I had the opportunity of attending was the dinner that took place in Calgary a couple of weeks ago to honour the Alberta athletes that participated in the Olympics. Of course, there are various sectors that came forward and had a spokesperson. It was a fairly well-orchestrated and concerted effort

to certainly pass on to the new minister that, yeah, we appreciate the funding that's there, but there could be a little bit that could be done. Their message was not focused at the elite athlete stage, because the federal government takes over that level. Where their concerns were is that they felt that there were maybe opportunities that were lost by other Albertans, where financial restrictions prevented them from developing, you know, their skills, et cetera. I guess we could say the same thing in terms of the arts.

I'm certain that in the next little while I will certainly work hard in terms of being able to meet with the various groups on the arts and the sports side and the wilderness groups, all the things that basically fall within this ministry, to gather a better understanding of their needs and see if we can come up with some kind of plan to be able to address those as we go forward, as we plan into the future years as the budgeting processes come forward.

There was a question in regard to the increase to the funding for human rights. The 16 per cent increase this year certainly represents a significant increase. It'll be utilized to further support community groups and education programs.

We strive to maintain high-quality service through the 48 full-time equivalents that we have in this department. It's something that we don't take lightly and something that we're certainly working towards.

Should we pick one sector and have measures to work on it rather than trying to split up the egg? Well, we use a variety of tools to determine funding requirements for our various quality-of-life sectors. I think the last thing we want to do is to go and pit one against the other. I'm certain that there has to be a balance, and from seeing the correspondence that I've seen come into the office in the short time that I've been there, everyone seems to be going after their slice of the pie. So it's something in terms of being able to set up our funding decisions based on consultations with the stakeholders, to make comparisons with other jurisdictions across the country, and to consider the economic implications on the other sectors.

4:30

A very small portion of our expenditures, less than 4 per cent, goes to internal support. The remainder goes, basically, into direct program services.

I will review the comments that you have shared, the challenges and visioning comments. As I make my way through this ministry, we'll work at getting a better handling and understanding of it as we go forward to being able to provide good services for Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Minister, for your report. I have one issue that I would like to bring to the minister's attention this afternoon, and that relates to a park in the city of Calgary which is a provincial park. It's called Fish Creek provincial park. It's located in the south end of the city of Calgary along the valley of Fish Creek. It's one of the largest urban parks in Canada, in fact one of the largest urban parks in North America.

I know that there's been considerable discussion over the effects of the flooding last year on the park and particularly on the structures which facilitate visitor-oriented facilities, things like pathways and pedestrian bridges. However, I believe that the floods are by and large a natural phenomenon, and if anything, they've helped to maintain some of the riparian habitat in the park.

What I want to raise with the minister this afternoon and bring to his attention are concerns over what I believe is mismanagement of

the park from a natural ecosystem point of view. As the minister is aware, my educational and professional background includes involvement in the biological sciences, and I have a lot of personal knowledge with respect to Fish Creek park. My great-grandparents settled in what is now Fish Creek park over 120 years ago. I grew up in the area which is now the park. I swam and fished in the creek. I hiked over every corner of that park. I shot gophers and pheasants on it. I camped on it. So I have an intimate knowledge of it.

When it was created in 1975, I rejoiced that the natural beauty of Fish Creek park would be preserved for future generations. I've continued to visit the park periodically over those many years throughout my life and to monitor its condition. Unfortunately, there have been a lot of changes in the park, and most of them have been to the detriment of the park.

When it was created in 1975, Fish Creek park was a natural jewel, but sadly over the years the park has changed. While the north slopes still have fine stands of white spruce and there are aspen stands and there are cottonwoods in the riparian habitat along the creek bottom, the native grassland community, which predominates the park, is largely disappearing. It is being replaced by invasive species like brome grass, like the misnamed Canada thistle, and many woody herbs. The loss of this has been the loss of the native prairie ecosystem along with its wildflowers and its attendant native birds.

So many people misguidedly think that neglect of an area or leaving it alone is a way to preserve a natural area. They think that this is the answer to management, that nature left alone will stay static. But a prairie grassland ecosystem is not a static ecosystem unless it has outside forces, and those forces in the past have been the forces of either fire or grazing. Unfortunately, since 1975 Fish Creek park has had the benefit of neither of those forces, and the result has been a degradation of the natural ecosystem. This is a great loss, I would say. I would say, in fact, that there has probably been more ecological damage to Fish Creek park in the 31 years since it was created as a park than in the previous 100 years of ranching by the families in that area.

What I want to do this afternoon is ask the minister whether he will use some small resources to seek the advice of some outside experts, possibly some volunteer experts, into the state of Fish Creek park with respect to its natural ecosystems and whether or not he will take some corrective action to look at this whole issue. Better still, would he be willing to accompany me and one or two plant specialists on a tour of the site of Fish Creek park?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the member for his comments in regard to his concerns regarding Fish Creek park. As you indicated, yes, there was some flooding damage that did occur at Fish Creek park in 2005. I'm informed that the repairs there have commenced and, unfortunately, may take up to three years to complete. It's my understanding that there's going to be \$7.5 million that will be expended in terms of repairing the flood damage that has occurred there.

I thank you for your concerns on the natural ecosystem management, in particular for the comments that you made on the grasslands of the park. I'll certainly take this under advisement and be able to respond back to the member. Having given the description that you gave of as a youngster going through all the nooks and crannies in the park kind of reminded me of having done similar types of things in the parks in the Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency.

Yes, I would certainly be amenable to accepting that invitation to go visit the park with you. Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for this opportunity to participate in the debate on Community Development's estimates. Most of the questions I had already been asked. I appreciate the hon. minister's insight and his promise that answers not readily available today would be coming forward later in writing.

One observation I made, Mr. Chair, is the way the different government departments receive their funding. This observation might not be entirely applicable or fair to this hon. minister because he is newly appointed and he is learning about his ministry and trying to grow in his role, which is great. But, for example, you hear instances of this ministry asking for money, as was mentioned before, and not receiving all of it. You can extrapolate, and you hear, for example, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports asking for money for her programs, and then not all of what she asked for is allowed. It really begs the question: how does that work really? Cabinet should all be one unit. When members of cabinet approach the other members of cabinet for funding or when they approach the standing policy committee for funding, is it a matter of ranking? How are those priorities set? Again, this might not be a specific question to this ministry. It's more of a process question. How is that done?

Community Development, for example, received a 14 per cent decrease this year compared to the 2005-06 forecast. Some things have gone up, some of which I agree with and some of which I don't, and some things have gone down. For example, I noticed that the ministry support services have gone up by about 10 per cent. I typically think that if things go up to match inflation, then that's okay, but when they go up a lot higher than inflation or a lot quicker, then we need clarifications and explanations.

Human rights and citizenship, as was mentioned, had an increase of about 9 per cent, which is fine. Cultural facilities and historical resources went down by about 6 per cent when compared to the '05-06 budget. Again on the positive side, the parks and protected areas have received a 20 per cent increase. My hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity has done a lot of work, sometimes in question period, sometimes in collaboration with the minister, and we hope to take some of that credit. Nevertheless, it is a wonderful direction. But some things have gone up that we question, and some things have gone down.

4:40

Some of those financial questions, Mr. Chair. Think about the ministry support services, for example. When we look at the minister's office itself, the minister's office has received an increase of about 6 per cent. I know that sometimes the argument would be that if you're thinking billions of dollars in general, you know when you look at the entire budget for government, then 6 per cent, which really translates into \$465,000, might not be too much. But, again, it is more than inflation. So why was this increase necessary? How will this additional money be spent? It also sheds light on the pattern. There has been a pattern for the past several years that there is an annual increase in the minister's office budget.

Furthermore, you can take it a step further and look at the deputy minister's office. For that particular situation we are seeing a 9 per cent increase over the '05-06 budget. Again, in dollars it's about \$660,000. What more are we hoping to achieve this year to justify the 9 per cent increase in the deputy minister's office?

I know the comment was made about the size of government. It

is not necessarily only how many cabinet ministers we have; it's also the size of our individual departments. Are they efficient? Is the money being spent on front-line services and front-line staff, or is it mostly for administrative and support services to the minister? I'd rather spend this money outside of the Legislature, outside of the minister's office, and have it allocated to those different programs in the community.

My focus today, Mr. Chairman, is going to be on the cultural facilities and historical resources. The estimates on page 99, line 4.0.4, estimate that historic sites and cultural facilities are going to receive \$9.79 million, which is a 2 per cent decrease from the 2005-06 forecast, so this amount is going down. Furthermore, the 2005-06 forecast is itself \$10.09 million, or 4 per cent more than was budgeted.

Again, many members in this House have made the observation that there is the budget, then there is the forecast for how the budget has changed – is it more, or is it less? – and then there's the estimate for next year. The estimate is 2 per cent less, but the forecast is 4 per cent more. Are we lowballing it intentionally? Hon. minister, why did this department overspend by more than \$300,000 last year? That's the difference between the forecast and the budget. Why didn't the ministry anticipate this extra expense when preparing the budget for last year, and why aren't they preparing for it this year, when they are trying to pass the estimate today?

Also, on the same page, page 99, line 4.0.7, the 2005-06 forecast for acquisition of historical collections is \$1.64 million, which is 64 per cent more than was budgeted in 2005-06. Now, this might be above board, and it might be kosher, but I need to receive clarification from the hon. minister. What was this amount for? What did they buy, basically? What did they end up purchasing?

Furthermore, I want to mention a conversation that I had with a constituent who has a lot of experience in that realm of history and heritage. He made a recommendation, and I promised that I would actually deliver it to the hon. minister in charge. Particularly in reference to community schools that are targeted for closure or that already have been closed, he said that maybe we could look at using community schools which are no longer being utilized for education as historical sites, as archives, as neighbourhood libraries. He even went on to say that some of those schools are, you know, 80 years old, 90 years old, almost the same age as our province, so they are definitely within that definition of being heritage sites or historical sites.

This constituent of mine also went on to suggest that maybe they could be used creatively to support the arts and culture community by allowing them to be used as lofts or studios for artists. We can charge rent. We can charge usage fees. We can also look at the gym and use the gym space for community sports even after the school has been closed, you know, for both adults and children. You can run a playschool, or you can run daycare programs, all that stuff. You can use the stage for performances by different cultural, musical, ethnic groups, use that stage for different performances. You can even look at using the labs for, you know, young and aspiring scientists who want to conduct minor lab experiments. So instead of closing them, they could be under the purview of this hon. minister and used as community focal points, attraction points, libraries, like I mentioned, theatre, art, and so on.

What we will achieve in so doing will be to preserve a historical site; like I mentioned, some of those schools are really old and should be preserved. We are going to preserve green space, and we're also going to allow them to continue to offer a service to the communities in which they are housed. I guess what I'm really saying is that, you know, if a school has to be closed, and that is the decision that was reached by the local school board in consultation

with those parents, then maybe this ministry could acquire that site and preserve it. They can make money from it. They can just keep it for the public benefit instead of, you know, destroying it, tearing it down, and selling it for commercial development, for people to build condominiums, or for a big retail box store to come in and take it over. So that's just a thought. As I promised my constituent, here it is; it's on the record.

[Mr. Webber in the chair]

Estimates, again on page 99, line 4.0.10, estimate that for those cultural facilities and historical resources grants the amount, Mr. Chair, is going to be zero. This is different from what we had in 2004-05 and, indeed, for 2005-06. It was a modest amount; it was about \$1 million. Is this initiative going to be cancelled? That's the question. Can the minister explain why there is no money set aside for cultural facilities and historical resources grants this year? If it's going to be continued, how can we continue it with no dollar allocation? If it's going to be scrapped, why are we doing this? So why is it not sustainable?

Again, a very small expense on page 100, line 4.0.2, which is the estimate for equipment/inventory purchases for the Royal Alberta Museum here in Edmonton. The purchases amount that is allotted is \$150,000. There was no such amount in 2004-05 or in '05-06. So, again, to the hon minister the question would be: how will this money be spent, and what are they hoping to buy for the Royal Alberta Museum?

Mr. Chair, these are just some of my thoughts on Community Development, and I appreciate the time that I was allowed. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Well, we have a new chairman.

I thank the hon. member for the questions. I'll attempt to address some of them. The first one is: why don't we ever get the dollars that we ask for? I guess that's the same question I ask my wife when I go for an increase in my allowance. It's because there's only so much money, I guess, to go around. In all honesty, you can certainly be aware that all of the ministries go with major asks when they bring their budget proposals forward to the Minister of Finance. She has to basically do that balancing act in terms of putting it where Albertans are requesting it. As we know, the major departments that have been receiving the major increases have been Health, Education, Advanced Education, and Infrastructure and Transportation. Of course, everybody's there, but I guess the areas that could make the bigger impact, you know, seem to get the bigger dollars. So it's certainly a challenge for the Minister of Finance.

Yes, our budget decreased due to the elimination of one-time spending, but overall we did see an increase in our budget.

You asked questions in regard to the increases to the ministry support services. The increases that the ministry is experiencing are no different than any of the other ministries across the government of Alberta; mainly, salary settlements have impacted all the ministries. There's been no growth in full-time equivalents in the minister's office or in the deputy minister's office.

4:50

Several of the initiatives from last year do not continue in our budget for 2006-2007. As I had mentioned in my opening comments, there was \$1.7 million for major sporting events in 2005. The World Masters Games was one-time funding. The \$2.5 million in NHL teams initiative is discontinued now, and the \$20 million

that went out to the libraries as a form of grant of last resort is no longer there.

You asked the question regarding the funding of cultural and historical sites. There have been changes because of the centennial initiatives that were there. There was a commitment to the Edmonton 2004 centennial celebrations that took place. There's reallocation of equipment and inventory purchases for exhibit development. There was one-time funding for the heritage resource management information system and definitely anticipated decreases in dedicated revenue from the government of Canada related to the historical places initiative.

Now, in the 2005-2006 budget there was a forecast variance of \$24.1 million increase. That included centennial grants to the Calgary Zoo for the project discovering gateway to the north initiatives of \$15 million, and there was Calgary's Heritage Park Society for the redevelopment of the park at \$9 million. That's where there were some extra dollars that would have shown that we had overspent last year for one-time initiatives.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak this afternoon. I know that some of the subjects that I'm going to speak about have already been mentioned, and I hope that I take a little bit of a different slant that would express some of the frustrations that I may have. First of all, Mr. Chairman, I really want to say that I believe that our parks are our signature for Alberta, and I believe that our parks should be recognized as emeralds of our province for our visitors when they come to Alberta.

When we go into the parks of Alberta, one of the most consistent and common concerns that people have is staffing, staffing not only for the parks' maintenance but also for interpretive centres. I want to refer, Mr. Chairman, to an interview that I once saw that involved the CEO for A & W. The interviewer made comment to the CEO about the success of A & W, and the first question was, "Was the success of A & W because of the root beer?" The CEO says, "No, it's not." He says, "Was the success because of the burgers? Was it the mama burger, the papa burger, the teen burger?" The CEO says, "No, it's not." So he says, "What is the success?" The success, the CEO said, was consistency of the bathrooms, having them clean, that people knew when they came to the restaurant that there would be a standard.

Mr. Chairman, we need to maintain those standards; we need to maintain that consistency. We need to maintain the consistency not only within our own parks but also the parks that are privately run. I'm not sure what the minister's direction is in regard to the allocation of staff, but I question: do you have more staff allocation in the parks?

Mr. Chairman, my next comments have to do with the arts. I very much appreciate the money that has been and is being put into the arts, but I still believe that in a province such as ours there is room to have more support for the arts. I think that the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations made mention of it one time when he talked about: in 200 years, who and what will we be remembered for? It will not be for our GDP, for sure, but it will be for our culture, and part of our culture, of course, is the arts.

Presently we have I believe it's just a little over \$7 million that is given to the foundations. Mr. Chairman, \$3.1 million of that goes to the arts: I believe \$600,000 this year to the Smithsonian, leaving approximately \$2.5 million for the arts. Mr. Chairman, that may seem like a lot of money, but in consideration of all of the arts we have in Alberta and all the potential that we do have, I would like to

see if there could be a little extra allocation in that direction.

One other comment that I'd like to make. You were at an award presentation yesterday that recognized volunteerism. There were 600 people at an award presentation in Calgary for accomplishments and dedication of volunteerism. Volunteerism is the heart of Alberta. Without volunteerism – and I have to speak for rural Alberta – rural Alberta would not look the same. Our arenas, our culture, the support that volunteerism gives to rural Alberta is beyond compare. A lot of our volunteers, to coin a phrase that is being used, are burned out. We do need support for our volunteers, and that support may be in support of structure or in support, I guess, in a lot of different senses. One of the main challenges that volunteers have is trying to support utility costs at the same time as trying to raise funds for projects.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Mr. Chairman, I again want to thank you for the opportunity to say a couple of words. I would very much like to praise the minister for the work and the support that he has given to the directions that I've talked to. If he could just kind of have a little bit of discussion on the comments that I have.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In responding to the parks' full-time equivalents, currently, member, we have 270 provincial parks and provincial recreation areas that have facilities capable of providing revenue. The parks in protected areas are using facility-operating agreements to manage operation of facilities at 200 of these sites, and the operations of the other 70 sites are being managed through a combination of service contracts and department staff. Private-sector operators are responsible for running the facilities and are a key component to our success. We're hoping that with the increases that have been allocated to them in regard to the camping fees that they're allowed to charge, there will be dollars that will allow them to be able to enhance our sites and to possibly provide, you know, services and amenities to the camping public.

On our own full-time equivalents relating to the facilities that we operate, they were increased by eight full-time equivalents this year, and last year there was an increase of 10. I'm really hoping that the improvements that we do to our parks infrastructure over the next few years will certainly help to enhance the camping experience for visitors and Albertans alike. Hopefully, if there are more people that are enjoying that experience, there is the opportunity for extra revenues to come in. As you are aware, a portion of the revenues that do come in are rededicated back to the operation of our parks. So if we're more successful in attracting more users, then there'll certainly be the opportunity of having more dollars to reinvest into our facilities.

5:00

Your comment in regard to volunteers I take wholeheartedly. I come from a background of being a volunteer. It was so nice to see the elderly gentleman that won for the heart of Calgary yesterday. He retired back in 1980 at the age of 65, and he still continues to volunteer to this day. His closing remark last evening was: to all of you people that are retired out there, please take the time to consider volunteering if you haven't done it because it adds to bring a lot of quality of life not only to yourself, but you're able to contribute to your fellow Albertans and neighbours. It was nice to see someone in his 90s, still out there volunteering on a daily basis, come up and put out the challenge to all the retirees that are out there.

I thank you for your comments on the arts funding. I've responded to that.

As I indicated earlier, I'm up to the challenge in terms of working with the various communities to see what we can do in the future. Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be very quick. I have a few questions left.

Hon. minister, I do understand the importance of the Smithsonian folk festival. The government gave them a \$1.5 million or a \$1.7 million grant. I'm not against that, as I said before, but I just want to remind the new minister that one of the very active associations in the southeast consists of 11 leagues. It's the Mill Woods Presidents' Council. The Minister of Education and myself requested the then Minister of Community Development for just a couple of thousand. They actually were celebrating Canada Day as well as centennial day together. At that time the minister said that they didn't have money. I mean, when a festival like this or any other festival outside Alberta comes, then the money in millions comes.

My question is: where did the money come from afterwards? When we asked for just a couple of thousand dollars because they didn't get the money from HRDC – they always get the money from the federal government because they celebrate Canada Day, and 60,000 people come and enjoy their celebration every year. That grant was refused. Now, suddenly millions of dollars come. It's a big question I want to ask the new minister and find out. I mean, this department is to promote community development. If the people who are involved in the community, the leagues, don't get money, this is shameful for the government if we don't help them when they are in need. Normally they don't ask the provincial government for the money, but when they were really in need of some amount, a couple of thousand or \$5,000, at that time the former Minister of Community Development said that they didn't have money. That was my first question.

The second one is about book publishers in Alberta. Some book publishers didn't get a grant from the Alberta government. They had to shut down the business. Then they moved because the big fish eats the small fish. This is what happened, and some of them are moving out of Alberta. What plan does the government have to help them? We want them here because we want all the books published in Alberta. If we really want to promote everything Albertan, we should help them from time to time. I just want to know from the hon. minister what plans we have to stop them from moving from Alberta.

You mentioned, answering my questions, that a 16 per cent grant was given to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. That's wrong. A 16 per cent grant was given for total community development. It's only \$3 million. I think the grant is about a \$3 million increase, which is not 16 per cent because it was \$20 million before. Now it's very close to that. We were asking for \$40 million or something. Please give us a breakdown because Community Development in total includes so many departments like human rights, cultural facilities, historical resources, parks and rec, and everything. If you say 16 per cent for everything, that's right, but that 16 per cent increase is not for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. They are in dire need of money. Lots of stakeholders keep in touch with us, and they are not happy.

You answered my question about the sports plan. I have the sports plan prepared in 2003 by the Alberta government, and it's still lying somewhere. I want to know when this government is going to implement that. The former minister promised that it would be in

this session, the sports plan as well as the cultural plan. I haven't seen anything, and I didn't get a proper answer for that. So please.

Thank you.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, hon. member. You do make the comment in regard to the Smithsonian, the dollars that are being invested there to the tune of \$600,000. We must remember that that is an opportunity, I guess a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that the province of Alberta has been given in terms of being able to showcase itself in terms of being able to attract future tourism and future investments into the province of Alberta.

In regard to the community leagues I'm sad to hear of the funding request last year. I just would reflect it back to the member: was there any thought of maybe making an application through the Minister of Gaming through the community initiatives program? That was something that my community came together on, and we were able to access dollars through that type of funding and put on a party for in the neighbourhood of 10,000 people who joined up in the community of Bonnyville.

Your book publishing comment. I'll take that under advisement. I don't have an answer for you at this point in time.

I will double-check, looking back in *Hansard*, if I misled you with some statistics, and we'll get back to you on that.

The sports plan and the cultural plan. I've seen the briefings on them. As I indicated earlier, there's \$2.8 million that went into the sports funding arena, which I guess could be part of saying that it's a slow implementation to the sports plan, but it's certainly something. That, along with the cultural plan, will be something that I'll be looking at in the near future.

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

5:10

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I ran out of time last time as I was making some comments on the general situation with respect to arts funding in the province. I was comparing what we spend on the Alberta Foundation for the Arts in our budget with what this budget for this year has allocated for the horse-racing industry. There is something wrong with the priorities. That's the point that I was trying to make: \$63 million for horse racing – a massive increase, by the way, from last year – and only \$22.6 million for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. The increase in budget for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is one-quarter of the increase that the horse-racing industry has received, a 10 per cent increase, as the minister pointed out, for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and close to a 40 per cent increase in the funding for the horse-racing industry.

The Stats Canada report in 2005 ranks Alberta, Mr. Chairman, the last when it comes to per capita public funding for the arts among the country's provinces and territories. Even Newfoundland, one of the very poor provinces, pays more in arts funding per capita than the province of Alberta does.

So there is something for the minister to ponder. I know he's new to the ministry, but the responsibility is there, and he has to address these. There are some numbers that need to be looked at.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the questions after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Community Development for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:
 Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$229,798,000
 Capital Investment \$20,749,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.
 The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report the estimates for the Department of Community Development.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Webber: 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, 2007, for the following department.

Community Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$229,798,000; capital investment, \$20,749,000.

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
 The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 this evening when we will reassemble in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:15 p.m.]