

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, May 3, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/05/03

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much. Of course, Mr. Speaker, your constituency is Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, and we all know that some very special people in Alberta come from Barrhead. One of them is my wife, Phyllis, and another one is a special woman who has joined us this afternoon. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mrs. Joyce Shaw.

Many Albertans like to connect to our open and accountable and responsive government through a front-line staff person in our district offices. They appreciate the top-level service that they receive from Albertans like Joyce Shaw, who works for Sustainable Resource Development in the fish and wildlife division office in Barrhead, Alberta. Mrs. Shaw is an expert at answering questions about hunting and fishing and problem wildlife and for sure other areas. She knows who to talk to if a question comes up. That's because she has been providing this service to Albertans for 50 years. On May 1, 1956, Joyce joined the Alberta public service and remains an employee to this day. She is the longest serving employee in the Alberta government. During this time Joyce has provided committed and dedicated service to the people of Alberta.

I see that Mrs. Shaw is standing. The folks that are joining her today are Mr. Milt McKee, a fish and wildlife officer in our Barrhead office; Mrs. Eleanor Frazer, Mrs. Shaw's sister; Mr. Bob Frazer, her brother-in-law; Mr. Harry Barton, her brother; Mrs. Cecile Barton, her sister-in-law; Mr. Val Fischer and Mrs. Doreen Fischer; and Joyce's niece Rhonda Kozak. Mr. Speaker, this is an exceptional, dedicated lady. I see them all rising, and I'd ask the Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Hon. members and to the minister, thank you very much for that kind introduction of a very significant constituent of mine. I just want to add a couple of words to Joyce. She not only has endured 50 years in the public service of the province of Alberta. That is half the history of the province. She is also, however, a very professional person, a very warm person, and a person very much loved by the people I have the privilege of representing. Can you imagine, hon. members – can you imagine? – how much roadkill has crossed her desk in the last 50 years? So, Joyce, well done. And she's continuing to work.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I have three introductions today, and they're seated in the members' gallery, the public gallery, and your gallery. The first is an impressive group of high school students from the 2006 Forum for Young Albertans. They're here from all over the province and are spending this week learning about the

inner workings of the provincial government. Yesterday I had the pleasure of meeting with them to talk about my role as Premier and answer some insightful questions they had about politics in our province.

Second, it's my pleasure to introduce Colin and Lila Eicher. Colin is the owner and CEO of June Warren Publishing, located here in Alberta. They publish, among other publications, *Oilweek* magazine. Colin was also the successful bidder on a lunch with me at NAIT's annual bigwig cruise fundraising event. He and his wife, Lila, and I just enjoyed a terrific meal of egg salad sandwiches. We enjoyed the meal in support of NAIT's education programs.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to introduce Deborah Owrans, her husband, Doug, and their daughter Kristine, who are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. Deborah has been a wonderful addition to the Legislature family over the past years as deputy secretary of cabinet. Her husband, Doug, served as vice-president academic and provost at the University of Alberta. Deborah and Doug will be leaving Alberta this summer as Doug has accepted a position with the University of British Columbia at their Kelowna campus. Their daughter Kristine is off to Carleton University this fall, where she'll pursue a degree in journalism.

I would now ask the Forum for Young Albertans, the Eichers, and the Owrans to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a group of home-educated students from my constituency of Stony Plain. There are seven students accompanied by their leaders Mrs. Ferne Cymbaluk, Mrs. Jolene Burnstad, Mrs. Dawn Sirdar, and Mrs. Janet Sawatzky. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a real honour for me today to introduce 17 dynamic young students from the aging and soon to be replaced Delnorte school in Innisfree. They are accompanied by their teachers, Miss Tiffany Tomkow and Mr. Mike Strom, and by their bus driver, Mr. Barry Feschuk. Out in Innisfree we say that we don't have a lot of students, but quality beats quantity every time. I would ask the students to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Darcie Acton, who resides in the hamlet of Wagner in the Lesser Slave Lake constituency. She is accompanied by her father, Jim Acton, of Edmonton. Darcie is the fund development co-ordinator for Northern Lakes College and a councillor for the MD of Lesser Slave Lake. She is in Edmonton for discussions on postsecondary education and the Northern Alberta Development Council.

Mr. Speaker, Jim Acton has had a distinguished career in government spanning 38 years as the director of operations and construction for Alberta parks and then as the government liaison for international sporting events. He is the founding director of the Alberta Provincial Parks Alumni and was the liaison for former Premier Lougheed at the Sarajevo Winter Olympic Games in 1984. Jim most recently served as one of Alberta's centennial ambassadors.

Mr. Speaker, if I could ask Darcie and Jim Acton, who are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, to stand up, and I would ask the Assembly to give them great applause.

Thank you.

1:40

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

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure and an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 18 of Alberta's brightest and best students. That's right. They're here in the public gallery today. They hail from Lakedell school, and they're accompanied by two teachers, Ms Arlene Jackson and Mr. Rick Southern. I'm just glad that they could visit us today, and I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly John Patrick Day. John Day is a local historian. He is a keen observer of local, provincial, and national politics, and it is also interesting to note that he was also a coach of a rival high school *Reach for the Top* team when you were involved in those competitions. He told me earlier that your teams were always well prepared and very, very competitive. Mr. John Patrick Day is in the public gallery, and I would now ask him to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Continuing Care Standards

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Nearly a year after the Auditor General's scathing report this government finally released their new provincial standards for continuing care. Unfortunately, it appears that Alberta seniors will have to wait even longer for the complete remedy to our province's ailing long-term care system. In fact, legislative changes won't even be made until next spring. My questions are to the Premier. Why is this government releasing standards today but waiting until the spring of 2007 to make any legislative changes?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports can speak to the specifics, but I can say that the significance of the new standards is not just the improvements to accommodation standards. What we will now have is consistency across the system.

I'll have the hon. minister provide the details.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm so pleased that these standards are here today, and I know that everyone in this Assembly must be just as pleased. You're absolutely right. I think that we really need to thank once again the MLA task force, that met with Albertans and met more than once. I think we need to thank the Alberta Senior Citizens' Housing Association, the Long Term Care Association, the operators, the regional health authorities, absolutely everyone who had input into these standards. This is such good news that they're here today. As the member said, it has been a year. It's been a very thoughtful year. It's been a year of hard work. Our staff have worked very hard, and they need to be thanked as

well. As you read through these, hon. member, you will see the goodness that is here for all Albertans in long-term care, in supportive living, and in our lodges. I look forward to any other questions there may be.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us how many of these standards – and there are three different kinds: the health, the accommodation, and the facilities, I think – will be legislated?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it's entirely up to the minister as to whether legislative changes are required, but all facilities and operators are expected to implement these new standards as soon as possible. We will see them implemented either through regulation, policy, or legislation, as I understand it, by April 2007. I'd like to remind the hon. member that you just don't snap your fingers and expect changes to fall from heaven.

Ms Blakeman: You've had a year.

Mr. Klein: It's less than a year, Mr. Speaker, and all of the recommendations will be implemented.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again to the Premier: can he tell us why an independent provincial monitoring and enforcement mechanism was not put in place to ensure compliance with this standard? We've got checkerboarding across the RHAs. Why wasn't it independent and provincial?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, checkerboarding is the wrong term to use because what the report accomplishes is consistency across the system. Relative to the specifics of the questions, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, I think it's really important to recognize that the accommodation standards are going to apply for the very first time to all 400 facilities – to absolutely every facility – whether it is public or privately funded. That alone is key. I think that it's also important to recognize that there will be an accreditation process for every single one of those facilities as well.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: This government's notion that long-term care and aging will be responsible for bankrupting the health care system has resulted in new standards that off-load responsibility to regional health authorities, residents, and their families. Policies to ensure compliance with continuing care health service standards have also become the responsibility of the RHAs. My question would go to the Premier. Given that this government is off-loading responsibility for monitoring compliance with the standards, what additional funding will the RHA be getting to meet these standards?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll take the question under advisement, but I will say that, you know, it's never enough for the opposition. I would ask all hon. members to bring some perspective back to the debate. We do have a younger population than the national average, and our spending on long-term care is higher than the national

average. So funding is not the only answer. Obviously, we need to do a better job, and that was pointed out in the report. The new standards that have been accepted by the minister will go a long way to addressing the concerns that have been raised.

Ms Pastoor: The next question again would be to the Premier. Why is the government off-loading more and more of the costs for continuing care services onto residents and their families? These are the ones that are paying the price.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Finance supplement, but I can tell you that relative to long-term care, the accommodation fees were increased to bring them in line with the cost of providing the service, and that's the only increase there has been. Relative to the specifics of the question, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, very briefly. I think the Health and Wellness estimates were in this House a week ago tomorrow, last Thursday. I'm sure that when those estimates were reviewed by the opposition they noted that there were additional dollars put in the budget for this very reason. In fact, Mr. Speaker, some of the controversial in-year spending went to this area as well. So to talk about off-loading to the RHAs, we have in fact front-loaded changes that are going to be made.

1:50

Ms Pastoor: I probably should have said downloaded.

What is the position of this government that residents in publicly funded centres should receive different levels of health care services than residents that are in privately funded centres? [interjection] I'm sorry. To the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the answer to that question. I'll have the hon. minister respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I realize that this is a question for our Minister of Health and Wellness, but having said that, I would just like to add to what you'd mentioned, hon. member, about the off-loading. In the budget, as our Minister of Finance indicated, we made a significant change in funding for people living in our long-term care facilities. One was the designated assisted living facility. I spoke to that in the estimates. We did add approximately \$5,000 to each resident in that facility to assist with accommodating their care as 80 per cent of the seniors living in care receive subsidy through the government for that care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. leader of the third party.

National Child Care Initiative

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Child care professionals and families with children in Alberta continue to voice their concerns to the Official Opposition regarding the future of daycare in this province. In a meeting with the Minister of Children's Services this week the minister assured me that she would not allow the new federal child care plan to result in rollbacks in the progress that was made through Alberta's five-point plan. To the Minister of Children's Services: can the minister elaborate on how, specifically, she plans on maintaining the financial supports that were achieved

through the five-point plan in light of the cancellation of the previous federal agreement?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. I spent about 15 or 20 minutes with the Liberal opposition critic, as I did with the NDP opposition critic, explaining what was contained in the budget. What I did explain to both of them is that we were getting very little detail at that particular time. We're still looking for more details on the federal budget. I told both of them that I'm meeting with my federal counterpart at the end of the month and hope to ask many, many questions. I did indicate that the budget for last year from the federal government was \$70 million; this year, \$66 million. It's in our budget. We will continue to operate as usual.

Mrs. Mather: To the same minister: given that a recent survey released by Public Interest Alberta indicates that only 37 per cent of Albertans support the new federal Conservative child care plan, is the minister lobbying her federal cousins to extend the previous agreement with Alberta beyond its scheduled cancellation?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't comment on the Public Interest Alberta survey. I can comment on the fact that Albertans overwhelmingly voted for the federal Conservatives in the last election. They took every seat in Alberta. I can tell you, though, that I will continue to lobby on behalf of Albertans when I meet with my federal counterpart at the end of the month.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the minister has commented in this Assembly that Albertans should direct their concerns to Ottawa, can the minister clarify exactly what role she is playing in this whole process?

Mrs. Forsyth: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. As I have indicated in this House on many occasions, once the federal minister was appointed I probably phoned her within 48 hours of her appointment to the position. At that time she didn't have an office or a phone. From there I have followed up with two letters, and I have flown to Ottawa on behalf of Alberta's children and families.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Kelowna Accord on Support for First Nations

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Successive Liberal and Conservative federal governments have repeatedly betrayed Canada's aboriginal peoples. Yesterday's federal budget, which tore up the Kelowna accord, is just another in a long list. As a result, a historic opportunity to close the economic and social divide between aboriginal and nonaboriginal Canadians may be lost. My question is to the Premier. Is the Premier or is he not prepared to stand up for this province's aboriginal peoples by demanding that his federal Conservative cousins in Ottawa reinstate the Kelowna accord?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that the Prime Minister, if backed into a corner, will have the tendency of saying no. Now, I did have the opportunity of speaking with him shortly after he was

elected. He indicated at that time that he has no intention of abiding by the Kelowna accord. Rather, he would bring in his own programs to address the concerns and the needs of Canada's aboriginal people. That is a simple fact of government.

Now, certainly there was concern expressed at the dinner that the new Prime Minister hosted for all the Premiers and the territorial leaders, that he should continue with the Kelowna accord, which I think designated some \$5 billion for various aboriginal programs. He indicated at that time again that he was going to continue with his own programs. So that is the political reality, and we'll have to see how it washes out.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, why is it that this Premier will jump to the barricades at the slightest thought that Ottawa might be after Alberta's resources even if that's an imaginary threat, yet when it comes to a program that could make a tremendous difference for aboriginal people, his criticism is almost nonexistent?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, relative to the first part of the preamble, there is no fear that that will happen with a Conservative government in Ottawa. There would be fear if it were a Liberal or an ND government because all they want is money, money, money. That's all they want: money. They don't want to be accountable; they just want money.

Mr. Speaker, I have stood up, and I have expressed my views on the Kelowna accord, but the Prime Minister will do what his political sense tells him to do.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the federal election is over. Why doesn't the Premier take off the duct tape and stand up for aboriginal people in this province? Now is the time.

Mr. Klein: Pardon me? I don't know what he meant by the duct tape. Is he alluding to Peter MacKay's comments, or he is alluding to Discovery Channel where a person from up north, deemed to be one of Canada's worst handymen, uses duct tape? I don't know.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Canada Pension Plan

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans take a leadership role when it comes to doing the right thing. Short-term pain for long-term gain. This current government came to power by acknowledging the debt and deficit and promising to do the right thing. We have another debt, and it's now time to recognize it and do the right thing again. Albertans' share of the unfunded liability of the Canada pension plan was reported to be \$55 billion by the MLA Committee on Strengthening Alberta's Role in Confederation. This pension debt along with the teachers' \$4.4 billion debt must be addressed. To the Minister of Finance: could she please inform us on the current unfunded liability of the Canada pension plan and what is considered Alberta's share?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, the last actuarial that was done of the Canada pension plan to my knowledge was in 2003. It was an estimate at that time by the actuarial that it was about \$516 billion. Alberta's share would be about 12 per cent of that. However, having said that, this does move, certainly, as the workforce changes and so on. It is also my understanding that there will be another actuarial of that plan done in 2007.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: will this government do the right thing and take a leadership role by giving our notice to opt out of the faulty Canada pension plan?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did have a committee that looked at these things. I'm never stuck in a time warp. I'm willing to look at things on a fairly regular basis if there's a better way and a better plan. At the time that the committee did review it, my understanding is that they didn't advocate it. As I say, Mr. Speaker, this government's fiscal policy is ensuring that we have a strong fiscal position. If there are new arguments to be put forward on an advantage to Albertans and to Alberta to look at a pension plan, we're open to looking at those things.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. Finally, to the same minister: will the government direct our surplus revenue into the heritage savings trust fund, which we could transform into an Alberta pension plan for the benefit of Albertans now and in the future?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have certainly begun the process of renewing and strengthening our heritage fund, which has been a tremendous asset and continues to be a tremendous asset to this province, envied by many provinces in Canada. We began by adding \$1 billion to the heritage fund in the third quarter of last year. We included another billion dollars to that fund in this year's budget. We began inflation-proofing that plan in the previous budget, and we'll continue to do that as we legislatively can.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a growing and vibrant province. We have, as everyone knows, significant pressures on infrastructure, on our schools and health facilities. We'll ensure that the most pressing needs are met in those areas, and we will continue, as our policy clearly states, to save a portion of the surplus.

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

Agricultural Income Stabilization Program

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's federal budget included \$1.5 billion for Canadian farmers, but it comes with a high price tag because the federal agriculture minister says that he's going to scrap the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program, or CAIS, as it is called. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Will our Alberta producers be in limbo while the federal and provincial governments start from square one with a new income stability program?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I too was very concerned about initial reports from the federal government saying that they were going to replace CAIS. We've said all along that CAIS needs to be fixed, that it needs to be revamped, but we certainly didn't want to start from square one, and our producers and our governments don't want to start from square one. So my provincial colleagues and I were on a conference call with Minister Strahl late yesterday, and he did clarify his intention. The federal government does plan to split CAIS into two different programs: one an income stabilization program, one a disaster program. In fact, Alberta has been advocat-

ing that type of change for some time. As far as the income stabilization side is concerned, the minister did talk yesterday about improving and revamping the program. That says to me that the basic principles of the CAIS program are still very sound, very solid, and that's what we're going to be building upon.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I don't care how we label the program. We can call it Fred. We can call it Bob. We could give it a new acronym. We can call it the Canadian revenue agricultural appreciation program if that works. What I really care about is that it's the best thing for the producers and it's long term sustainable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. The budget announcement – and I stress: the budget announcement – also included reference to the new inventory valuations for producers in the CAIS program. What will this mean for the pocketbooks of Alberta producers?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was another element to the federal budget that we were pleased to see. It appears that the federal government is proposing retroactive adjustments to the CAIS program, to the inventory valuations, back to 2003, similar to what we did back in the fall on the retroactive adjustments of the averaging on the reference margins. If that is the case – and we believe it to be – we do have the system in Alberta to make that calculation fairly quickly. We also have the system in Alberta that will be able to do that without a lot of going back to the producers.

I find it interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the federal government is talking about revamping and improving. This is one of the improvements that we have been talking about for some time. In fact, if this turns out to be the route that they're going to take, producers will need to be in CAIS to share in these dollars that are coming from the federal government. It is targeted support, and we support the federal government in this initiative and how they're rolling it out.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, we are in a situation where farmers are in a desperate situation. My final question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development again. How soon will these changes occur, and what role would the provincial government play in bringing them about?

Mr. Horner: Well, as I mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government has made several of these kinds of suggestions, perhaps not in the exact same way that they're rolling out from the federal government as we saw yesterday. The National CAIS Committee is meeting as we speak. They're going to be discussing and crunching the numbers today, tomorrow. The federal minister is actually going to be in our province in the near future. We believe that we'll be able to turn these things around fairly quickly in the calculations, but it will depend on all the provinces coming onside as to how we're going to deliver this and how we're going to move it forward. I believe that all of the provinces are keenly interested in working with the federal minister to make this happen as soon as possible, and we await further details from the federal minister in that regard.

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

Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's sale of surplus ring road lands at fire-sale prices continues. In 1996 this

Progressive Conservative government sold 94 acres of surplus ring road land in southwest Edmonton for \$5,200 per acre to Gerard and Reta Haarsma. We already know that in 1999 the Galfour Development Corporation sold land in the same end of town, which they had purchased from this government for pennies per acre, for more than \$21,000 per acre, an astonishing profit margin. My first question is to the minister of infrastructure. Why is this government continuing to sell taxpayer land for a loss when private developers are able to flip the same land for astonishing profits?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, if the member was actually really interested in finding out what happened on a specific sale, he would give me a chance to look up what exactly happened. You know that we sell hundreds – hundreds – of parcels of land annually. To pick out one parcel and then ask a number of questions about it without giving me the benefit of having a heads-up to the parcel and being able to come forward to the House and present the facts I think certainly indicates that he's really not interested in what happened.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that on the parcel from two days ago, the fact is, as I proved yesterday, we sold that parcel for \$2.8 million.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Lund: For \$2.8 million. The fact is that it was assessed and appraised at \$1.8 million.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why did this government sell 94 acres of land to the Haarsmas for less than half of what the taxpayers paid for it in 1985? Why are you giving that land away?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I hate to have to give the members a bit of a history lesson, but the fact is that back in the '80s land was selling for a very high price. In the mid-90s the price hadn't started to escalate yet. Probably, if that same piece of ground was up for sale today, you'd get more than the \$500,000. I know that that could very well be because the price of land is going up. So to take an apple from 1985 and think that it's going to be the same as an orange in 1996 – it's just ludicrous to think that there's that kind of a comparison.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. What is ludicrous is that the taxpayers have been burned by this Progressive Conservative government.

Again to the same minister: who in the Progressive Conservative government did the appraisal on the 94-acre Haarsma parcel and determined that the land was worth less than half of what the taxpayers paid originally for it?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, when I get a chance to investigate this sale, we will be able to give you all the details, but I suspect that the land was appraised and that it was put up for tender. Mr. Speaker, the fact is that any appraiser we use has got a licence. It's got nothing to do with whether it's a member of the Progressive Conservative Party or any other party.

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

2:10

Workers' Compensation

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's booming economy is no doubt thanks to productive and hard-working Albertans. With a workforce in the millions accidents, very unfortunately, do occur. Therefore, the workers' compensation coverage and the process of handling claims becomes very important to injured workers and their families. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment responsible for WCB matters. I understand that the Minister's Monitoring Committee on Workers' Compensation has completed their report on the implementation of the reform to the workers' compensation plan. What is the status of this report? When will it be publicly released?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Those are very good questions. The Minister's Monitoring Committee on Workers' Compensation was created in February of 2003 basically to oversee the progress made on implementing recommendations from the Friedman and Doerksen report. Of course, the original date of the committee's report was March 2005, but this was extended to February 2006 so improvements could continue to be made in areas where there are ongoing challenges for the Workers' Compensation Board. The committee's report was submitted on time, but it still has to be reviewed, of course, by the full caucus. We would hope to release the report before summer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Given that injured workers suffer very much physically, mentally, and financially and the necessary reforms for the WCB have been identified for years, can the minister inform the Assembly what specific important reform the WCB has implemented?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Originally the Friedman and Doerksen report included, I believe, 59 recommendations, and of course 49 of those 59 recommendations of that absolutely good report have been released. I'll just give you three or four of the ones that are really, really important to the public out there and the people interested in the Workers' Compensation.

The Appeals Commission for workers' compensation, for example, was separated from the Workers' Compensation Board. The Workers' Compensation Board now holds annual meetings, and they're also open to the public. The workers' compensation files are made more accessible to claimants, and one of the most important parts is the reporting to the minister now. A medical panel process was established to resolve conflict on medical opinions, et cetera. So that is very important.

Mr. Speaker, the monitoring committee reviewed the information from the Workers' Compensation Board and the Appeals Commission and agreed that for the vast majority of the recommendations good progress has been made.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Given that a large number of injured workers are too weak in English language knowledge and communication to fight for their

rights, how does the minister ensure that they are not unfairly and unjustly treated in their WCB claims?

Mr. Cardinal: That's a very good question, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the Workers' Compensation Board offers translation services to injured workers. Actually, they also pay for the services. In addition to that, an injured worker can bring their own translator. Also, the Workers' Compensation Board has posters in 14 different languages to explain how you may access workers' compensation if you are injured.

Additionally, through our department we do spend close to \$30 million a year on English as a Second Language. In addition to that, Athabasca University as of September of this year, I believe, is launching English as a Second Language through distance learning.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Highwood.

Provincial Water Supply

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Water, both surface and groundwater, is the lifeblood of the province, and under this government it is declining in both quality and quantity. Growing agricultural, industrial, and population demands are occurring in the absence of an integrated land-use plan and a groundwater inventory. To the Minister of Environment: how long will we wait for an inventory of our groundwater in order to properly manage our water?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the preamble was somewhat vacuous in the fact that what he asserts is not entirely accurate in this context. Our Water for Life strategy, first and foremost, is the most progressive water strategy in North America. Second of all, he is aware that we are doing mapping as we speak. Third of all, the actual mapping that we are doing as part of our Water for Life strategy also takes a look at our lakes and our streams: what the water levels are, what we have to do to improve water management. I can assure all Albertans that that's exactly what we are doing because it is the law to protect our land, air, and water. We're doing it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government is already charging the hydroelectricity industry for water use, when will the minister institute appropriate charges for water across the board?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, you raise a very important point. We will never rule out that option. The reason why: our most progressive strategy, Water for Life, in fact says that we will look at options. But one of those options right now is in the context of conservation. How do we optimize? How do we use proper mechanisms to ensure that our water is going to be there even with some things that we don't have control over such as Mother Nature and during drought periods? What are we doing in water management in terms of off-stream storage and on-stream storage? What are we doing to better optimize? All of those things are options. However, to the hon. member: we believe that conservation and how we use water today is the best approach in terms of going forward as opposed to quite simply saying, "We're going to charge you now." I do believe, though – and the hon. member is aware – that we charge money for water now. It's called treated water, and in fact every city charges as people use it. I will never rule out an option of

potentially charging in the future. Right now my energy is spent on conservation and the best optimization of that valuable resource we have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two-thirds – two-thirds – of all the water allocations in the Athabasca basin are for oil sands. Will you consider charging for water use?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, let me repeat to the hon. member: we believe that conservation practices are important. We also believe that all of the stakeholders have to be at the table. Rather than this company or that company, we are taking a totally regional approach. We are using our watershed councils, part of our Water for Life strategy. We are using our water councils and watershed monitoring. We are working with the cumulative impact people, the cumulative impacts of oil sand development. I can assure this member and all Albertans that 50 years from now I will be able to go and fly-fish in the Athabasca basin, where water is being withdrawn, because we will ecologically protect the basin now, tomorrow, and in the future based on our water strategy.

Municipal Funding

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's rural municipalities are the backbone of this province. It's no secret that Alberta was formed from the hard work of our agricultural community. Recently the government of Alberta announced \$10 million through the targeted investment program in unconditional grants to municipalities that have limited financial resources to work toward long-term sustainability. In my constituency of Highwood there was no funding. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Why are some municipalities receiving financial assistance while others are not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Local governments, especially those that are faced with limited financial resources, require strategic solutions for long-term sustainable growth. The grant eligibility amounts under this targeted investment program are based upon the formulas that were developed by both the AUMA and the AAMD and C and are done in such a way as to identify municipalities of the highest financial need. The targeted investment initiative is really a significant first step as we seek permanent, long-term solutions. I might also add that it is my priority and that of my staff and my department to seek long-term solutions to this problem so that this becomes not an ad hoc annual program but a long-term program that's funded every year.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is to the same minister. Can the minister explain the criteria used to determine the funding levels for urban municipalities?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, this year there was a \$10 million payout in this program; \$5.9 million of that was distributed among approximately a hundred different urban municipalities. There are two areas of funding, the first being full funding. Under full funding we identify municipalities that have less than \$40,000 in per capita

assessment. That is then paid out based on the population so that there is a maximum of \$300 per capita, so the grants range from a low of \$80 to a maximum of \$300. Under partial funding there is a per capita assessment of between \$40,000 and \$45,000, so those municipalities receive between \$40 and \$300 per capita. The primary consideration, though, is that in all cases these municipalities have mill rates that are higher than average, so we've identified that they have a low capacity to generate tax revenue and they're doing their very best with the capacity that they have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is to the same minister. Probably just as important, if not more, can he explain the criteria used to determine funding for the rural municipalities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rural municipalities were done in a very similar manner. The balance of funding of approximately \$3.9 million was distributed among rural municipalities, and the difference there is that an additional factor is added on. In addition to assessment on a per capita basis, there's also an assessment on a per-kilometre basis because, as you know, rural municipalities have varying numbers of kilometres of roads for which they're responsible. The same as the urban municipalities, they again have higher than average mill rates, and their taxes are on average higher. They have a low assessment both on a per capita basis and as a factor based upon the number of roads that they're responsible for.

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

National Child Care Initiative

(continued)

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's federal budget confirmed the very bad news that the bilaterally negotiated federal/provincial child care agreements are being unilaterally killed by Ottawa Conservatives. These agreements are being replaced with a so-called universal child care allowance that will benefit most those who need the support the least while doing little or nothing for lower and middle-income parents in need of quality child care. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Given that today we all know for sure that federal monies in support of Alberta's five-point child care plan are scheduled to evaporate by early next year, is the minister prepared to fight harder, and if so, how, to convince her federal cousins to respect the previously negotiated agreement, that is so important for the future of Alberta's children?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how this minister can fight any harder, honestly, unless I bring my boxing gloves out. I'll reiterate. The federal minister hadn't even been appointed, and 48 hours later we called. She did not even have a phone. She did not have an office. We immediately followed that up with a letter. I then flew to Ottawa to discuss with her my concerns about the child care program. I have since followed that up with a letter. We now have a federal/provincial/territorial meeting on the 29th of this month.

As I've explained in this House, there are many questions that need to be answered. We need to find out about the original hundred

million dollars that was promised to the aboriginals. We need to find out about the hundred million dollars that was for a data strategy. We need to find out more information about the child care and the original discussion about the \$10,000 that was to go to businesses on child care. There are many, many questions. I will continue to lobby on behalf of Albertans and their families as our five-point plan was based on Albertans' needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me ask the minister the same question again. Maybe she can be a little more specific about her answer. What exactly is the minister's action plan now when it comes to convincing her Ottawa cousins to continue funding this vital agreement beyond next March? Will you give us some details?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, he's yelling across the floor about details. I have phoned. I have written. I have flown to Ottawa. I am going again on behalf of Alberta's children and families to lobby on behalf of Albertans in regard to Alberta's five-point plan. I will also be talking to my provincial and territorial counterparts so that we can come together as a group and explain to them that we need more information, and we'd like the original plan that was in the agreement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister seems to have no concrete plan to take any action, will the government and will the minister or will she not at the very least join the five provinces who have already committed to not clawing back provincial tax credits and income support payments from parents eligible for the federal child care allowance?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I spent about 20 minutes yesterday with this hon. member after I got the budget by e-mail. I sat down and explained to him, and I also explained to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. She obviously got it. He didn't. I have told him and made a commitment that there will be no clawbacks.

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

Continuing Care Standards

(continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province's new standards for health in long-term care centres lack consistency across the province. RHAs are delegated the responsibility for filling in the details of policy and for monitoring and enforcement; in effect, a checkerboarding of compliance across the province depending on how much room is left in the RHAs' budgets. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why was funding not provided to the RHAs to ensure equal levels of monitoring and compliance across the province?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, across the province there are unequal resources in communities and unequal numbers of people. What we have is "shall." I should have counted the number of times we say shall in those standards because we say the regional authorities shall do this, shall do some other things particular to ensuring that the patient focus care is given. What I suspect is being missed is that in

the very back part of those standards the Health Quality Council is responsible for the health quality matrix, and they have been granted the right to be as fully operational as a regional health authority. It will be partially their job to ensure that the quality matrix is applied, to make sure that quality care is delivered regardless of whether the regional health authority or other kinds of measures are being undertaken currently to make sure that the job is getting done to the benefit of the patients.

Ms Blakeman: No. Still different.

Again to the same minister: given that the RHAs will be the fox monitoring compliance on their own long-term care henhouses, why wasn't an independent – independent – provincial monitoring and enforcement mechanism put in place to ensure compliance with standards?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in Alberta I think we're uniquely lucky to have two ministers who are accountable for the delivery of both the care standards and the accommodations standards for seniors in long-term care for continuing care. Beyond that, we've identified the quality assurance council as being there to be a watchdog. We've identified through the work that we do through the Health Facilities Review Committee and the initiation of a legislative framework that is much stronger than before on quality delivery and on having quality operational plans and care plans and involvement on behalf of the resident. We have several people that are accountable for delivery of that care that residents or their families or caregivers can appeal to. Beyond that, we have to make sure that families themselves and guardians take some accountability for reporting those incidents that may have been untoward in the delivery of care. So at this stage hold the elected officials accountable, look at these standards as a stronger enforcement, and look over the next year to two years to see if we have improvement. I can assure that you we will.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: what is the minister doing to prevent conflict-of-interest issues from arising with RHA board members who are involved or may be involved with private continuing care delivery?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. We obviously have regional health authorities that are in charge of delivering care through various publicly funded facilities and then going back to examine the care. Well, that is why this year in anticipation of these care standards, in consultation with Dr. John Cowell, who has been delivering a very strong product in the Health Quality Council, we developed a framework and a regulated environment for the Health Quality Council to be an equal partner with regional health authorities. Whether you're in an acute-care setting, in a long-term care setting, in supportive living, whether you're receiving continuing care in any part of the system, they are a form of assessment body that can make sure that we are delivering quality care.

The important thing here is that if we were leaving it exclusively to the purview of a regional health authority, the implied criticism of the hon. member may be valid. But under these circumstances we have yet another body built within the ministry to conduct and follow up on that framework and to make sure that the quality is there regardless of whether it's a publicly funded facility, a not-for-profit facility, or any other facility that receives public funding, Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the patient.

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

Federal Funding for Policing and Security

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the federal Conservatives announced their first budget. A key component was an increase to the law-and-order agenda with what is being hailed as the largest financial infusion in recent history for policing, border security, anticrime measures, and help for victims of crime. Roughly \$1 billion in new money over two years will be spent for approximately 20 initiatives. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Can the minister highlight what areas of public security will benefit from the increased spending?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very encouraged by what we saw in yesterday's federal budget. I think we support any efforts that enhance safety and security for all Canadians, obviously, which includes Albertans. One of the initiatives that will have a direct impact on public safety in our province is the \$161 million that will be injected into federal positions for the RCMP for roughly 100 officers that will be coming to Alberta. These are federal positions, which would include those areas of investigation such as commercial crime, drugs, immigration, passport as well as border patrol, the integrated border enforcement team that they have in southern Alberta.

As well, another \$95 million was added for new transit security for municipalities throughout Canada, which, again, will assist in utilizing systems for terrorist attacks as well as the ability to do some projects regarding emergency preparedness, to respond to emergencies throughout Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to meet with the Hon. Stockwell Day last Friday in Ottawa, and we reviewed some of these issues that came out of yesterday's budget presentation. These are issues that are of concern for all Albertans as well and issues that we don't take lightly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: what does yesterday's announcement mean for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I mentioned, the federal budget will provide an additional 100 RCMP officers that will come to Alberta. These are not front-line officers, as I mentioned. As well, though, we'll have a better understanding of the impact of the federal budget as we get more details and explanations on all of the packages that come out. I can say, however, that the addition of more RCMP officers to tackle growing concerns such as gang violence, gun violence, the illegal importation of guns and drugs into Alberta and into Canada obviously will have an effect. They will become partners with our 5,300 officers that provide policing throughout the province, and we will continue to work with the federal government on any new policing or security initiative for Canada and Alberta.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, in keeping with our discourse on the hundred years of democracy in Alberta, I must apologize. The length today is a little longer than the norm.

In the general election of August 30, 1971, 46.4 per cent of the votes went to the Progressive Conservative Party, which elected 49 of 75 MLAs. The Social Credit Party received 41.1 per cent of the votes and elected 25 MLAs. The Progressive Conservative Party became the fourth party to elect a government in Alberta.

On March 26, 1975, 62.65 per cent of Albertans elected Progressive Conservatives in 69 out of Alberta's 75 seats. The Social Credit Party received 18.17 per cent of the votes and elected four MLAs.

Four years later, on March 14, 1979, voters voted 57.4 per cent Progressive Conservative and elected 74 of 79 MLAs. The Social Credit Party received 19.87 per cent of the votes and elected four MLAs.

On November 2, 1982, 588,485 Albertans gave the Progressive Conservative Party 62.28 per cent of the votes and 75 of 79 seats, the New Democratic Party elected two MLAs with 18.75 per cent of the votes, and 947,644 Albertans cast ballots, the largest number to date.

In the election held on May 8, 1986, only 47.25 per cent of Albertans voted, one of the lowest turnouts in our history. The results gave the Progressive Conservative Party 51.4 per cent of the votes and 61 of 83 seats. The New Democratic Party elected 16 MLAs with 29.22 per cent of the votes.

Less than three years later, on March 20, 1989, Albertans returned to the polls and 44.29 per cent of voters gave the Progressive Conservative Party 59 out of 83 seats. The Liberals received 28.68 per cent of the votes and elected eight MLAs, the New Democratic Party received 26.29 per cent of the votes and elected 16 MLAs, and 53.6 per cent of Alberta voters voted.

In the election held on June 15, 1993, the turnout was 60.21 per cent and 991,472 ballots were cast. The Progressive Conservative Party received 44.49 per cent of the votes and elected 51 of 83 members. The Alberta Liberal Party received 39.73 per cent of the votes and elected 32 MLAs. The New Democratic Party elected no MLAs with 11.01 per cent of the votes. The highest number of candidates to date participated, with 382 candidates.

On March 11, 1997, voter turnout was 53.75 per cent and the Progressive Conservative Party elected 63 MLAs out of 83 with 51.17 per cent of the votes. The Alberta Liberal Party elected 18 MLAs with 32.75 per cent of the votes. Two New Democrats were elected with 8.81 per cent of the votes.

For the first time in Alberta's election history ballots cast surpassed one million, with 1,016,000 voters participating in the election held on March 21, 2001. The Progressive Conservative Party elected 74 MLAs of 83 with 61.91 per cent of the votes, the Alberta Liberal Party elected seven MLAs with 27.33 per cent of the votes, and voter turnout was 53 per cent.

On November 22, 2004, 450 candidates, the largest ever in Alberta's history, contested the election, which saw voter turnout at 44.7 per cent. The Progressive Conservative Party elected 62 MLAs of 83 with 46.8 per cent of those votes, the Alberta Liberal Party elected 16 members with 29.39 per cent of those votes, the New Democratic Party elected four MLAs with 10.2 per cent of those votes, and the Alberta Alliance Party elected one member with 8.7 per cent of those votes. The voter turnout, again, was 44.7 per cent, the lowest ever in the history of Alberta. In one constituency, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, voter turnout was only 26.4 per cent. However, the Progressive Conservative candidate won with 63.2 per cent of those votes.

The electoral score to date: Liberal governments, 4; United Farmers of Alberta governments, 3; Social Credit governments, 9; Progressive Conservative governments, 10.

head: 2:40

Members' Statements

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

Medicine Hat and Lethbridge Centennials

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year on September 1 our province celebrated its centennial anniversary. This year on May 9 two of Alberta's fine cities will also celebrate their 100th birthdays. The year 1906 was when both Lethbridge and Medicine Hat were incorporated as cities in Alberta. Both of these southern Alberta cities have contributed greatly to the province's overall growth. Lethbridge, in fact, is Alberta's fourth most populated city. It is home to the University of Lethbridge, whose construction integrated the building with the surrounding hills. Because of its placement and design, the school is sometimes referred to as a ship in the desert. The city is also home to the High Level Bridge. Completed in 1909, the bridge has the greatest height and length of any bridge of its kind anywhere in the world.

Mr. Speaker, Medicine Hat is also a particularly wonderful city. Most of the city makes up the constituency of Medicine Hat, represented by the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. My own constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat includes the southern and southeastern sections of the city. The city has many great features, one of which is that it has the distinction of being Canada's sunniest city, receiving approximately 2,500 hours of sunshine annually. The city also only gets about 230 millimetres, or just under 10 inches, of moisture every year. It houses more than 100 parks and 85 kilometres of trails, giving the approximately 56,000 residents of Medicine Hat plenty of space to get out and enjoy the city's fair weather.

Medicine Hat also has the lowest property taxes in Canada and is known as Alberta's gas city because of the abundance of natural gas in the area. In fact, only a year after Medicine Hat was incorporated as a city, the famous British writer Rudyard Kipling said: Medicine Hat was born lucky; people in this district seem to have "all hell for a basement." This Alberta city has a rich and interesting history and is a wonderful city with great residents. I'm proud to represent this city and surrounding areas as the region's MLA.

I'd like to wish both Medicine Hat and Lethbridge a happy centennial anniversary.

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

National Mental Health Week

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The first week in May is National Mental Health Week, and I'd like to acknowledge the work done in my constituency and throughout Alberta by the many agencies working to offer support to people living with mental illness. From the Pride Centre volunteers to the part-time person at West Edmonton Seniors to the staff and volunteers from the offices of the Canadian Mental Health Association across Alberta to the hard-working health professionals working in the hospital psych wards and clinics to the many not-for-profit agencies like the Schizophrenia Society, who advocate for research dollars and other support for schizophrenia, and other organizations involved with bipolar, OCD, depression, ADHD, psychosis: thank you to all. You make a difference. You may not see it every day, but your work is helping people to live and cope as best they can.

I need to include other organizations on that list, agencies that exist to offer other services but who develop an expertise in working with people with mental illness: inner-city organizations like the Boyle Street Co-op, the Hope Mission, the Herb Jamieson Centre,

the George Spady Centre, the Sally Ann, HIV Edmonton, and the many projects of the City Centre Church Corporation and indeed the staff of our constituency offices and still others, like those dealing with addictions, drug use, people involved with the correction system, like the John Howard or Elizabeth Fry societies.

Mr. Speaker, I know that I missed many individuals and groups with that short, short list. The point is that lots of people are involved because we want to be, we need to be, and we have to be. Mental illness is all around us. We have not achieved a good mix of community programming to support the deinstitutionalization movement of many decades ago. Government continues to promise concrete plans and assistance and continues to fail to follow through. Meanwhile, the cost of mental health service delivery and the cost to society is very high.

I recently visited Fort McMurray, an extraordinary city with amazing potential and phenomenal growth. They have stress, anxiety, and depression but few counsellors.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Wetaskiwin Centennial

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise in this House and recognize the upcoming centennial anniversary of one of the cities in the constituency of Wetaskiwin-Camrose. Wetaskiwin was first incorporated as a city on May 9, 1906, and at that time the city had a population of roughly 1,650 people. This was two years after electricity was first installed in the city and one year before the CPR built a station in Wetaskiwin, a landmark that still exists today.

Since that time much has changed. Over 11,000 people now call Wetaskiwin home. While much has changed, ties to the past have been well preserved in this city. Wetaskiwin is home to one of the oldest provincial courthouses constructed in Alberta. Dating back to 1907, this structure is an impressive example of turn-of-the-century architecture with carved columns and ornate cornice work. Today this grand old structure is being renovated to be the city's new city hall, a worthy centennial project for this 100-year-old building.

Another remarkable landmark in this city is the Wetaskiwin water tower. Having served the people of Wetaskiwin for 100 years, it is the oldest working water tower in western Canada. It has also recently been refurbished as a provincial centennial project to stand tall and prominent on Wetaskiwin's skyline for another 100 years.

Wetaskiwin is home to the Reynolds-Alberta Museum, an institution which is dedicated to preserving, restoring, and exhibiting mechanical artifacts, bringing to life Alberta's transportation, aviation, agricultural, and mechanical histories.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that Wetaskiwin is also home to the Alberta Central Railway Museum, which re-creates our province's historical railway experiences.

Mr. Speaker, Wetaskiwin is one of Alberta's spectacular rural treasures, exhibiting much of our Alberta history. I invite all members of this Assembly and all Albertans to visit Wetaskiwin on this their special centennial year. Happy 100th birthday, Wetaskiwin.

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

Labour Market Supply

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The woes of the Alberta labour market will only worsen by using temporary foreign workers

and temporary foreign contractors. Temporary foreign workers, without their families and the freedom to move between employers, will not stay in Alberta. They are only a short-term fix for short-sighted employers.

The driving force in our labour market has been very high oil and gas prices. The conventional oil patch has been sucking up workers from other sectors of the economy like some big vacuum truck. When they're paid big bucks for the short term, people will often leave their long-term work. This is what is happening.

Alberta and northeast B.C. have been going crazy in the bush. It is a conventional oil and gas boom that we are in. Contrary to popular mythology we are not in a construction employment boom yet. Labour supply is tight in housing construction because those workers leave to make more money elsewhere.

Counterintuitively, Alberta construction employment was down on a year-to-year basis in five of seven months between September of 2005 and March of 2006. We actually have available workers in most industrial trades but not all. The electricians' hall in Edmonton, for example, has almost 3,000 Alberta tradesmen out of work and ready to work. Many are still available in the rest of Canada. Some trades are in short supply because their skills are also in demand in the conventional oil patch or for short-term plant shutdowns.

Some unions do seek tradesmen from the U.S. because many of their own members would sooner work conventional oil and gas than a CLAC or merit job. These oil sands employers who are crying for temporary foreign workers are those who cannot get help because they will not pay the pensions and other benefits workers want. It is bizarre that some large projects are seeking labour concessions in the face of a tight labour market. It is sad that this Conservative Alberta government is accommodating them.

We still need skilled people soon. We have the people to train: Canada has over a million unemployed youth between 18 and 25; more women want into the trades; 76 per cent of farm family income is off-farm, and most farmers have trade skills and want work; immigrants want to learn. We must ensure that these jobs are for the benefit of Albertans and Canadians. All oil sands work must have some benefit for Alberta. Why just let all the benefit flow out of Alberta?

The Alberta government should cancel its special temporary foreign worker deals in the oil sands and concentrate on training Albertans and Canadians and real immigrants first so that there will be real long-term benefit for Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. R. Miller: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

Bill and Elvie Brown

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great honour to rise today and bring to the attention of this Assembly an approaching milestone in the lives of two very special constituents of mine. The constituency I'm proud to represent is home to thousands of remarkable people but none more so than Bill and Elvie Brown. During their life together they have shown an unmatched devotion to their community, their family, and to each other, and on July 22 they will celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary. They have faced the past seven decades together through good times and bad, through

sickness and health, just as they pledged to do so long ago. Their union has produced two children, 12 grandchildren, and many great-grandchildren. It has touched the lives of countless others who have had the privilege of calling them friends.

Bill and Elvie recently moved from their home in Czar, where they lived for almost 50 years, to the Battle River Lodge in Wainwright. While their location has changed, their dedication to each other has not. It remains as strong today as it was in 1936.

As Bill and Elvie celebrate a milestone achieved by few, they will do so with my sincere congratulations, Mr. Speaker, and best wishes for many more years of health and happiness. In a world where divorce and conflict are all too common, they stand as an example of dedication and devotion that we can all admire and aspire to, and I encourage my colleagues to join me in doing so.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member left 35 seconds on the table there, which really helps overall, considering other members did not.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Provincial Pension Plan

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. As an MLA I enjoy productive discussions on positive ideas that add to the long-term prosperity of our province and to individual Albertans. Mr. Speaker, in the coffee shops, the media, and even in this House here we have numerous discussions about what to do with our resource wealth. In the early '70s the heritage savings trust fund was established as a vehicle to accumulate resource revenues. Fortunately, this fund was there to help Albertans during the difficult time of the 1980s.

Now we need a plan for the future. The current 10 per cent contributions to the faulty Canada pension plan is not in the best interest of Albertans. The Canada pension plan is largely unfunded and fails to provide a respectable retirement.

Mr. Speaker, we should be establishing an Alberta pension plan supplemented by our surplus resource revenues. By combining the surplus royalty revenues and the existing heritage savings trust fund, Albertans would be able to build a pension fund to benefit all Albertans. The new plan would be seamless and totally transferable, offering greater benefits, better security, and flexibility as evidenced by the Robson report, commissioned by this government in 1999. Albertans could take pride in having their own, more equitable Alberta pension fund.

The Alberta pension fund would also create a pool of investment capital available to Albertans and our businesses similar to Quebec's *caisse de dépôt*, which has more than \$133 billion available to Quebecers. An Alberta pension fund would reduce waste by creating a public expectation to save for the future. It is said that every dollar wasted today is 10 less dollars for retirement. The resources of Alberta belong to all Albertans, both those who live here today as well as those who'll live here in the future. By building a fund that belongs to all Albertans, we would be using our resources to the benefit of all Albertans.

In summary, an Alberta pension fund would yield economic and political returns. We need a made-in-Alberta solution to provide a respectable retirement plan for Albertans. Let's give serious consideration to creating an Alberta heritage pension fund.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got a petition from 1,140 residents of Alberta. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to . . . defeat legislation allowing expansion of private, for-profit hospitals in Alberta and permitting doctors to work in both the private and public system, which will drain key resources from the public system . . . [and to] vote against plans that would force Albertans to pay for private health insurance for services that should be covered by medicare.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 382 people which expresses their opposition to the third way now and certainly for the future.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports I'd like to table five copies each of Continuing Care Health Service Standards, Supportive Living Accommodation Standards, Long-Term Care Accommodation Standards with the hope that this sets a new tone for a better and more qualified delivery and monitoring of long-term care and care for Alberta patients wherever they are.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, do you have a tabling?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have tablings in relation to my question earlier today in question period. The first tabling I have is from the *Alberta Gazette* dated June 29, 1996, and this is the 94 acres of land that was sold for \$500,000.

The second tabling I have is also in regard to this sale, and it is a transfer of land from the former public works minister, Stan Woloshyn.

The third tabling I have is an Alberta Registries land titles certificate in regard to this land and the transfer of this parcel of 94 acres for \$500,000 to Gerard Peter Haarsma and Reta B. Haarsma of 199 Street.

The fourth tabling I have is a letter dated May 1, 2006, to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, and this letter outlines the reasons I believe that we need an independent judicial inquiry into the sale of surplus ring road lands in both Edmonton and Calgary.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today the appropriate number of copies of the 2003 and the 2004 vital statistics annual reviews. These reviews summarize all births, marriages, deaths, and stillbirths that occurred in Alberta during those years. Any member wishing to receive copies of these can obtain them from my office.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to table five copies of a memorandum from the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View requesting that Bill 208, Protection of Fundamental Freedoms (Marriage) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, be given early consideration by Committee of the Whole on Monday, May 8, 2006.

The hon. member for Edmonton-Rutherford on a point of order.

Point of Order

Interrupting Members' Statements

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this afternoon during a part of the Routine which we call Members' Statements, there were a number of interjections made by the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs and the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmarr during a member's statement that was being given by the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Now, while I cannot find the specific citation that rules out interjections during Members' Statements, you will know that it is the convention of this House that we not interject during that particular part of the Routine. I certainly can cite in our Standing Orders section 13(4)(b) which states, "When a member is speaking, no person shall . . . interrupt that member, except to raise a point of order." I would submit to you that the two members that I mentioned were in violation of our Standing Orders and the convention of this House by making those interjections during the member's statement, and I would ask that you find that, in fact, there was a point of order.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Anybody else want to participate in this point of order? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the member raising the point of order is correct. We have a convention where we do not interject into other member's statements, so if my insertion of accurate figures into the statement was of any interference, I do apologize.

Rev. Abbott: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to stand and certainly apologize if the member thought that I had made any untoward statements with regard to the member's statement. The fact of the matter is that the Bible clearly says, "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone." As we know, the members on that side of the House do the same thing to us when we stand on our members' statements as well.

The Speaker: Well, that's certainly interesting.

First of all, hon. members, there is no Standing Order pertaining to interjections or heckling during Members' Statements. That has never been the case, never been. What has been said by the chair on numerous occasions is that the chair will not entertain points of order or points of privilege as a result of comments made during Members' Statements. So there's nothing different with Members' Statements than any other part of the Routine.

3:00

The chair would like to caution members that the convention, the rules that are found in all the historical documents that we have, including Standing Orders, pertain to heckling and interjections at all parts of the Routine. It does not single out Members' Statements. The same applies during question period. The same applies during opportunities for members when they're tabling things and when they're giving speeches or raising questions.

I'm greatly encouraged by the interjection from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford because I'm sure that as the whip of his caucus he will now ensure that his members henceforth do not interject at any time during the Routine, in the same way that I'm sure the Deputy Government House Leader along with the government whip have heard that this will be the new decorum in the Assembly led now by the Official Opposition. Starting tomorrow,

we'll see this rule applied. I can't speak on behalf of the third party. They haven't chosen to speak yet today. But I suspect that it will be just so quiet in here tomorrow that it will be remarkable. I would be very surprised if such a thing happened.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Sustainable Resource Development

The Deputy Chair: As per our Standing Orders the first hour will be allocated between the minister and members of the opposition, following which any other member may participate.

The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coutts: Well, thank you. Colleagues, thank you and good afternoon. Mr. Chairman, I rise to move the budget estimates for the Department of Sustainable Resource Development for 2006-2007.

I'm pleased to be here today to talk about our budget, but before I begin, I want to outline what I'll be speaking about today. I will be reviewing the ministry's overarching challenges and priorities for the coming year and how they will be served by our budget for 2006-2007. Then I'll explore several of the key initiatives that will be led by program areas in the year to come.

Before beginning, I'd like to introduce some of my department staff sitting in the members' gallery. I'd ask you to welcome Jamie Curran, my executive assistant; Brad Pickering, my deputy minister, and his executive assistant, Paul Leeder; Stew Churlish, assistant deputy minister for the finance and administration division and senior financial officer; Craig Quintilio, assistant deputy minister for the lands division; Cliff Henderson, assistant deputy minister of our forestry division; Ken Ambrock, our assistant deputy minister of fish and wildlife; a new member of our team, Brian Gifford, chair of the Surface Rights Board and of the Land Compensation Board – Brian is right there in the front row; Brian, just give us a wave so everybody can see you – Morris Seiferling, our assistant deputy minister of sustainable resource and environmental management; Joyce Ingram, executive director of our corporate business support; Dave Bartesko, manager of sustainable resource and environmental management; and Joan McCracken, our assistant director of communications. I see Joan up there as well.

Those are our staff. Those are just a few of the 1,900 dedicated, professional staff who enable Sustainable Resource Development to carry out its business each and every day of the year. These people do great work on behalf of sustaining the province's resources, and in doing so, they improve the quality of life in Alberta today and for Albertans to enjoy.

One example of exceptional effort is, of course, Mrs. Joyce Shaw from our Barrhead office, whom we honoured here today in this Assembly for her 50 years of service to the Alberta government. Perhaps I should say 50 years of service and counting as Joyce continues to help protect Alberta's natural resources for future generations. I'm desperately proud of the work that is being done by Sustainable Resource Development staff, and I commend all the staff for their tremendous efforts and their accomplishments.

Mr. Chairman, people are important to any organization, but to this ministry they are essential. They fulfill a mandate that is far

reaching. As the primary manager of Alberta's wildlife, public lands, and forests, the ministry works with industry, communities, and other stakeholders to provide opportunities that support prosperity.

[Mr. Johnson in the chair]

Simply put, our job is to steward Alberta's natural resources. We work hard to ensure that our resources are managed for the benefit of both present and future generations. In doing so, we must achieve a balance between conservation and development, taking into consideration the economic, social, and environmental values of all Albertans. This is a difficult challenge, made even tougher by the unprecedented level of activity we have had on the land today here in Alberta and the new challenges that we face on the horizon, challenges like upstream gas and oil development, increased oil sands activity, and wind power, which are being added to our existing activities of oil and gas, agriculture, ranching, forestry, and recreational access to public lands.

It is all about the land, Mr. Chairman: how we use it and how we ensure that future generations have the same opportunities to enjoy the land. This is especially important to me personally. I'm from a small town, rural Alberta. I grew up there at a time when everyone believed that we lived in a land of plenty and that it would never end. Today I know better. Yes, we are blessed with abundant natural resources in Alberta, including the land and the resources on and under it. These resources are renewable, but they are not limitless. I believe that we have a responsibility to be stewards of our natural resources to ensure that we can enjoy them in perpetuity. It means placing the highest priority on healthy lands and natural resources for the future to leave this wealth in good shape for the people of tomorrow. It is about stewardship, protecting our natural resource wealth for future generations.

Budget 2006 is all about providing resources to sustain the land. Overall, the ministry's operating budget increases by \$13 million to \$238 million while the capital plan grows \$11 million to \$39 million. The increases include \$5 million this year, part of a \$15 million increase over three years, to fund initiatives to better manage the land. The \$5 million includes \$1 million allocated to land-use framework consultations with Albertans. Those consultations will begin this spring or early summer and include regional and provincial forums as well as public education and awareness programs, that are so important.

The \$5 million increase also includes \$2 million in funding for enhancing land-use planning and partnerships to improve public rangeland and to help us look for opportunities for greater efficiencies in stewardship of the public land base. These efforts will include entering into partnership agreements to develop new tools for the sustainable management of public rangelands, tools that will help us assess riparian health on grazing lands, for instance, and grazing distribution patterns. The work will also include helping public grazing reserve associations to repair the damage caused by recreation and resource development. It will also involve moving into an electronic process for handling oil and gas dispositions, improved disposition and inspection processes, and increased resources for access management planning for the Ghost-Waiparous and Bighorn areas.

Taken together, this \$2 million in increased funding will allow the department to better meet the demands for land-use dispositions and to do the follow-up work needed to ensure that those impacts are reduced and that Alberta lands will be available for the use and the enjoyment of future generations.

3:10

Another \$2 million of the \$5 million budgeted for 2006-2007 will enhance natural resource information for land-use decision-making. The natural resources information project is a multi-year undertaking to update existing data and provide new information on grassland, vegetation, watersheds, forest resources, and land use/access. Once the information is acquired, it will be accessible all across government.

We will also look for information partners with rural municipalities, government ministries, and others to leverage our investment in the data. By doing so, we will provide the foundation for accurate and timely natural resource data needed for informed decision-making. This new information will allow us to move ahead on the provincial grazing reserves program and the grassland vegetation inventory, both of which support the sustainability of rural Alberta. We'll also directly support the sustainable resource and environmental management initiative, that is part of our land-use framework.

While that completes the overview of the major commitments contained in Budget 2006-2007, I will now review the commitments associated with the ministry's three core business areas. They are lands, including rangeland management, dispositions, and management plans; forestry, including timber allocations and controlling wildfires; wildlife, including fisheries and habitat management.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The ministry is also responsible for the Surface Rights Board, the Land Compensation Board, and the Natural Resources Conservation Board. As I mentioned earlier, Brian Gifford, the newly appointed chairman of the Surface Rights Board and the Land Compensation Board, is with us today. I am sure that he appreciates the importance of the land management tasks that are ahead of us. We have a lot of responsibilities in a lot of areas that are important to the present and future of Albertans.

When it comes to lands, which is the first core business, it deals with developing common goals for Alberta's public lands that address multiple stakeholder demands. The ministry has responsibility for 60 per cent of the public land base in Alberta, an area that includes 90 million acres in the green area and 10 million acres in the white area. This land base is under tremendous pressure today: pressure from population growth, from increased economic development, and from people who enjoy the land for recreation activities. These pressures will only increase in the years to come, and the ministry has to be positioned to manage that increased pressure.

Our immediate challenge includes managing increased volumes of disposition applications as well as the increasing complexity of issues on the land base and resolving increased conflicts amongst users. Budget 2006 specifically addresses these pressing challenges. As I have noted, additional resources this year strengthen the department's capacity to process and manage the growing number of dispositions and to have new sources of information to assist decision-making. I want to say that again: to have new sources of information to assist decision-making. That's so important. For example, the \$2 million commitment to improve natural resource information will provide among other things new grassland vegetation information about Alberta's grassland natural region near the Drumheller area. Aerial photography will also be used to upgrade the national forest inventory, the road network, water data, and the Crown's portion of the Alberta vegetation inventory.

Other expenditures of note include \$300,000 to help restore the productive capacity of the provincial grazing reserves and \$100,000 dedicated to a partnership to help halt the spread of noxious weeds from vacant public land.

In forestry the challenges in our second area are no less daunting than those affecting our overall land-use decision-making. The province's forests provide multiple benefits to Albertans thanks to a combination of leading forest management, wildlife protection, and industry practices. We do a great job of sustaining the resource but not without having some hurdles to overcome. For example, wildfires are a continual threat to our forests, we currently face infestations of mountain pine beetles, and the forest industry itself is struggling under global economic pressures that threaten its competitiveness.

Budget 2006 gives us some ammunition to take on these challenges. Our capital budget is part of a \$28 million commitment over four years to upgrade our air tanker bases across the province, improving the safety of our wildfire fighting operations. In addition, we'll put a \$14 million commitment this year as part of a \$42 million allocation over three years to upgrade provincial air tankers themselves, to better protect Albertans and their communities from wildfires. Meanwhile, the ministry's operating budget receives \$2 million for wildfire reinsurance, to help spread out the year-to-year spikes in this cost area. Another \$2 million is budgeted for this year's FireSmart program, to continue our efforts to reduce the threat of property and community losses from wildfires.

Turning to the mountain pine beetle, the ministry's operational budget receives \$2.6 million for beetle work, part of the commitment of \$7.8 million over three years. We want to continue our efforts to help prevent the spread of the pests in Alberta forests. Our policy was and remains: a hundred per cent control of infested trees. The funding for 2006-2007 will be used to continue this work, to conduct aerial surveys to identify infested trees. We'll do ground surveys to locate any new infestations and cut-and-burn activities to get rid of the forest pests.

We will also be hosting a major summit on mountain pine beetle at the end of May. What we'll do is bring together municipalities and specialists in the field to help us attack this forest pest, including representatives from British Columbia, who are partners in this with us. They'll be sharing the valuable lessons that they've learned fighting the beetle on the western side of the Rockies. The funding provided for beetle efforts is money well spent, Mr. Chairman, on the challenge that is both serious and formidable.

The ministry's operating budget for 2006-2007 also allocated \$1.5 million to fund restoration of older cutblocks in need of replanting, to help reassure that we will continue to have an abundance of forest resources for our future. This is part of a three-year commitment to reforestation that we initiated last year. Still with our forests, the budget also commits \$600,000 to promote forest products and market diversification. We feel that this is part of our future as well. This expenditure is part of our continuing effort to ensure that Albertans receive the highest possible value from our forest resources. It is also one part of the overall three-year, \$1.8 million commitment to our value-added strategy designed to enable us to better compete in global markets.

In terms of fish and wildlife, our third core business, Albertans have a deep-seated connection to this wonderful natural resource, just as we have a profound responsibility to sustainably manage fish and wildlife values for future generations. We have key priorities for fish and wildlife management in this year's budget allocations. Among the highest is \$600,000 for grizzly bear research and management, including bear DNA census work to determine our populations. It's a commitment that we made, and that commitment is ongoing.

An additional \$240,000 is to develop and implement the BearSmart program to minimize bear/human conflicts. We're going to be rolling this out across the province very soon this spring, and

we're going to go through our educational partnerships. We'll encourage communities and towns to set standards for safety for residents that live in bear country, to be able to have them learn how they can reduce possible and potential bear attractions.

Work will also include stepping up our bear aversion and bear management efforts, which are so important, that people rely on as well. I recently participated in a bear intercept feeding program, which supplied roadkill feed for bears as an alternative to ranchers' livestock.

The 2006-2007 budget also provides \$25,000 for caribou management. We are committed to working with our departments, industry, and stakeholders to protect and recover woodland caribou and its habitat, and we are taking significant steps to ensure that woodland caribou remain on the provincial landscape. Following up on work done in the past years based on the caribou recovery plan, that means greater protection for caribou. For example, we have established a single Alberta caribou committee to co-ordinate management activities. We've also undertaken innovative programs like the caribou cowboy initiative, that prevents caribou from being hit by vehicles along highway 40. As well, we continue to work closely with industry to protect caribou habitat from harmful industrial encroachment. Efforts include reducing the width of seismic lines, inducing companies to share roads, promoting best practices, and adjusting harvesting sequences.

3:20

Over the past 10 years, Mr. Chairman, industry and government have contributed over half a million dollars a year into managing and monitoring caribou. Our 2006-2007 budget also provides funding to continue our work with the species at risk program, including species assessment, recovery planning, and implementation of recovery plans. Since the year 2000 this area has received over 1 and a half million dollars to help recovery planning and on-the-ground conservation efforts, a work that will continue in 2006 and for wildlife disease and surveillance work as well.

The budget will also allow us to continue our efforts to revitalize Alberta fisheries, including increased recreational opportunities. These are our fish and wildlife numbers for the year ahead at the moment, and if we can do anything to increase allocations, we will.

I've been speaking for some time about the program priorities that we will be able to serve through Budget 2006. Now I'd like to speak about what it will mean in terms of people. Last year we committed to bring 40 additional full-time and seasonal staff. We now have a total of 126 field, fish, and wildlife officers and 10 superintendents. This year we're allocating \$720,000 for 20 seasonal public lands and forest division guardians to work throughout the province to deliver environmental and stewardship messages to the many people who will enjoy recreational land in this province. This commitment is part of the ministry's efforts to foster a strong stewardship ethic amongst Albertans who enjoy the province's natural resources. For example, we have established the public information and outreach branch, which brings together education services from across the ministry to better serve Albertans by providing education about stewardship.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my privilege to be able to speak to this ministry. I'd first of all like to congratulate Mrs. Shaw as well for 50 years of service. I'm not sure if maybe we hired her when she was 15 years old.

Mr. Coutts: Twelve.

Mr. Bonko: Okay. Well, that's even better.

The minister covered a number of areas: land use with oil, gas, agriculture, recreational use. That's pretty much how I want to start my specifics here. This provincial government does prefer to manage the forest by volunteer co-operation between industries, but clearly that's not enough. This government is committed to a massive industrialization strategy, I believe. Unfortunately for the various industries, whether they're forest, mining, oil, gas, perhaps coal, and ranching, there are going to be concerns with how we're able to manage the cumulative impacts. I believe that we're going to be caught in the crossfire there in the struggle for environment and lands and the animals as well, which the minister did mention.

Let's just talk about some of the industry's impacts here. When we drill a well, three kilometres of seismic lines are usually cleared when we're trying to obtain that area for oil and gas business, and then there are permanent structures that are left, which is concerning. At the current rate of disturbance every square kilometre of forest logged results in about 1.8 kilometres of fragmented habitat. This is exactly the habitat that the minister mentioned that he does want to preserve with regard to endangered or threatened species, and we can go on to specifics such as the grizzly bear, which was mentioned, and the Little Smoky caribou herd or, in fact, just the caribou herd itself.

Those are concerns that Albertans have listed and e-mailed and called about, with participation from groups such as the Alberta Wilderness Association or CPAWS. Those committed groups want to ensure that those two listed animals remain on the landscape for a very long time for generations to be able to enjoy in their natural habitat, Mr. Chairman.

If we talk about the grizzly bear, I would commend the minister on his three-year moratorium that was placed upon that. When we're looking for a little bit better information, he has committed to in fact using more monies to do a new DNA study as well as trying to get a handle on exactly the amount of bears. I would certainly like to know, as all Albertans would like to know: do we have an estimated best guess as to what we have out there currently as we're planning for the moratorium for the next three years?

The minister also talked about the fact that he'd like to lessen the amount of bear/human contact. I think that's commendable because one death is too many, but we have to realize that when we're in their territory, we're going to actually have more impacts, and we're going to have more encounters as we try and go to more areas out there. Has the minister considered the bear dogs they use? I believe they're about a \$3,000 price tag and several years for training, but they're apparently well versed, as far as dogs go, with being able to keep humans safe. The same sort of thing with regard to ranching and sheep, the same with bear dogs: to be able to maintain the bear's distance from human contact.

We talk about \$250,000 allocated to the woodland caribou study. I'm not sure how that number, \$250,000, was obtained. Again, I think we need to realize that the whole reason why the caribou in that particular area of Little Smoky are in fact shrinking is because of the intrusion of the oil and the gas or the forestry and/or recreational use, which I'll get to a little bit later.

Some of the specifics I wanted to talk about were perhaps the boreal forest, where there is ongoing development and investment, a hundred billion dollars in announced investment in northern Alberta in the boreal forest. This region provides Alberta with fresh air, it supports the valuable energy and forestry sectors, and it's home to over a hundred thousand Albertans. The government participated in the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. Do the estimates contain any funding to support any recommendations from the Boreal Futures forest study report? One

of the first questions would be: is the minister going to commit to implementing, backed with full funding and legislation? Why is the government not using a strategic model to develop a strategic plan for Alberta's northern landscape? Why would the government not be using fiscal incentives to promote conservation within that region of the boreal forest?

I'd like to go on to forests again with community timber permits. Community timber permits are ideally designed to encourage local economic development and to meet the needs of small, local wood producers. While the local economy and the development of the manufacturing of local wood products in this program is good, it isn't happening. I believe that there are some loopholes. The minister continues to convert community timber permits into commercial timber permits when the permit holder no longer meets the requirements. If the minister is aware of this loophole, when does he intend to in fact fix that particular problem? What is the minister going to do to ensure that microscale operators can continue to operate and play an important role in providing local economic development and supply locally produced products as well as being able to have that economic base? Another concern with regard to that would be: has the minister considered or evaluated the impacts of allowing the transfer of community timber permits to commercial permits in terms of Crown revenue from stumpage fees? Those are some of the specifics on the woodlot.

Going to areas outside of that, burned-out areas as far as reforestation, I'm not sure who actually has the responsibility. As forest fires are now becoming an obvious thing within the province – there are some several hundred that were burning – whose responsibility is it to reforest the burned-out areas? Certainly, there are FMAs, and there are permits held within various communities or within large-scale logging, but whose responsibility is it?

3:30

Let's talk about the development or at least the process with the land-use management. I think we've all got a stake in this, Mr. Minister. I think that you talked about the fact that you're looking for new sources, I believe you said, for decision-making such as perhaps opposition as well. Perhaps that could be an opportunity for an all-party to be able to go and help you design or at least improve upon what you have to start with with the land-use management. The opposition right now does currently have plans – and they're in print in a red book – for land-use management for all of Alberta. I think there could certainly be some suggestions in there that the minister could carry on or could in fact improve upon.

In land-use management there needs to be a real effort with regard to being able to have off-road use. Neighbours of mine, in fact, go south of Calgary to be able to use their ATVs or their quads. That's a long drive, but they don't mind it because they think they get a good weekend out of it. They're able to do some camping and off-road use. But if we set aside areas that are already, in fact, not too valuable for ranching or for farming, agricultural – and I've talked with those at the Alberta Fish and Game Association as to their take on having some specific areas set aside so that they do have it to be able to use at their discretion, say 30 kilometres square with some hills and that. That would be an opportunity for them to be able to have their own area instead of continuing to encroach on some of the habitat areas where they continually are pushed and forced to go because of development. They said that they would certainly be pleased and could support something like that if we did have some designated sites, perhaps in the northern part of the province, some central, and of course down in the south part of the province as well. That would be great to be able to have that.

We talked about how as the minister was growing up on the

farmland, he thought that this could last forever and that as he's gained a little bit more wisdom, he realizes, in fact, that the areas and lands aren't going to last forever with our continued development.

We talked – and, in fact, I brought it up in the past – about roadless areas. Has the minister considered having roadless areas where absolutely no activity would occur? There would be no roads for camping, hiking. It would be roadless, as I said. I used this before with regard to last year's estimates and review of this ministry.

We talked about the Alberta Forest Products Association's survey. I talked about it yesterday, brought it up with regard to some specifics on the questions and how the overall general population doesn't feel that the ministry or the government or, in fact, the industry is doing enough to protect. It is the ministry, the government's responsibility to ensure that the lands remain vital and they remain clean and usable. So, again, would the minister be able to give his take with regard to the survey? There were many specific questions on that, and I'd just like to see if he would be able to speak on that particular piece.

We talked about the pine beetle and their co-ordinated effort with B.C. to be able to talk and try to eradicate it. Well, this has been going on for some time. Have we talked about or even considered bringing in some experts from the U.S. side? I know that they've had this particular pest down there for some time. Have we considered bringing up some experts to be able to talk about where they are with regard to being able to manage this?

There's a joint effort, I believe, between here and B.C. on one of the Willmore areas. There's going to be a combined or at least a joint effort on the burning. We talked about some of the controlled burns before. In fact, the minister in his opening piece talked about how 100 per cent of infected trees will receive treatment such as eradication and burn. That's reactive. We're talking about proactive.

We can't anticipate where these bugs are going to be going, but if we could in fact start taking out some of the older trees, which I believe they're attracted to – I know we've got to, you know, either log them or we've got to cut and burn them. I mean, either way, we've got to ensure that the forest industry, which is a \$4 billion industry and employs 59,000 people, Mr. Minister, remains vital and it remains strong because of all the people that are involved. [interjection] I know that you know that as well. I'm just reminding you of that particular piece.

The fishing derby. We raised that last time, on the lakes. When the thaw would come, you said you would certainly monitor the activity on the lakes as far as the overfishing and the concerns about that. Has the minister come up with any sort of specifics as to the concerns that were raised with the Pigeon Lake fishing derby and the overusage or the overfishing that does occur on that one?

Let's go to some of the efforts on the southeastern Alberta side. We'll talk about the culls on the deer. In fact, the fish and wildlife department had concluded and had done a cull in that area. It was successful, I guess, by their terms, and they called it off early. There are some reports suggesting that perhaps the culls aren't effective. The CWD is out there. Do we actually have an idea right now as to where it's coming from or the effects or where they are? There has been little talk on that particular area as well.

I'd also like to raise one of the concerns from the AWA. They're concerned – it's just rumours right now – about funding for a species at risk program that has been cut due to the administration boondoggle, they're calling it. It means the portion of the \$48.7 million in line 3.0.1 that's endangered species will not be funded. I certainly would like some comments on that. The Alberta Wilderness

Association has stated that they are just entering into a busy summer this season in this type of work, and many consultants, researchers, university students are very anxious to get out in the field and start their careers – hopefully, it'll be long careers – within that particular work. Can the minister explain line 3.0.1, fish and wildlife, on page 406, detail the program level in writing? Specifically, how much money will be going to that thing?

The multiple species at risk program in southern Alberta. There is a report. The last one that was issued came out in June 2004. It's chaired by the Member for West Yellowhead. I don't believe that there has been another report since then. It looks great on paper, but that's as far as it goes. We contacted a number of people in various areas and industry to come up and get together, beef producers, fish and game, but there's not really much that comes out of this except for a report. In fact, I never see anything concrete, you know, to be able to get some of these particular species that they have concerns with listed as threatened.

We've got woodland caribou in here. It's still in fact endangered and on the verge of threatened. We've got the peregrine falcon as well as the grizzly bear. They're all listed in here, but again what good is this report if it doesn't go any further except in writing? I never hear much about this, and I'd like the minister, perhaps, to be able to comment on that particular piece as well.

I've given the minister a couple of specifics. I'll sit down here and see if he'd be able to answer some of those right now, then.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. member opposite for the questions and, first of all, some of the general comments that he began with, certainly about land use and sort of putting out a position from the opposition side about the need for land use. He brought in a number of questions that I certainly would like to have the opportunity to talk about because land use – no matter where I go or where I speak or who I speak to, Albertans really value the land.

The land has given us all the wealth that we have had in this province, Mr. Chairman, not only what's on top of it, whether it's grass or whether it's trees, but what's underneath the ground, the nonrenewable resources that are underneath the ground. All of these things have made Alberta what it is today and the quality of life that we have. I know that the hon. member appreciates that and certainly wants to make sure that those kinds of activities remain but, at the same time, that it's done in a responsible way. Albertans want that too. Albertans value that.

3:40

He mentioned the Alberta Forest Products Association survey that they'd done. I thought it was a very good report that was brought forward by the Alberta Forest Products Association, and I thought it was very noble of them to actually go out and find out what Albertans valued. Albertans certainly did value the fact that they wanted to see the forests sustainable. Secondly, they wanted to see habitat preserved for wildlife. Thirdly, they wanted to make sure that there were provisions and regulations in place to help protect all of that. That is exactly what Sustainable Resource Development wants as well, and that's what we're trying to do on behalf of the people of Alberta.

When I go out and talk about that with the people, I talk to them not only about what we do today but also what we have to prepare for in the future. What we have to prepare for in the future are policies that will deal with a busy landscape, with all the activities that traditionally we have had and will continue to have that preserve

that quality of life but also having to deal with population growth. That population growth is going to change the demographics of the province. How do we deal with that? At the same time you've got industry doing a good job. You've got everybody employed. You've got population growth. Then how do we enjoy ourselves? How do we get into the backcountry? How can we make sure that that backcountry is there for future generations to enjoy as we do today? How do you manage it so that it's not destroyed and that it can be there for future generations?

Part of the framework that we're working on for the future is to take into account all of that busy landscape, the population growth, the expectations when you get into the backcountry and how you manage that, and at the same time look at conservation and preservation so that the Alberta that we see 50 years from now can be somewhat similar to the Alberta that we see today. That's the future, and that's what we're going to be working on. I want to talk about that a little bit more before I end this particular segment.

I want to talk about what's happening today. We have policies in place today that ensure good management of the wildlife, good management of the fish, good management in forestry. Our policy today is to make that sustainable for today. Now, I don't want the hon. member to confuse the land-use framework that's coming forward in the future with the policies that are in place today. While we're developing the land-use framework for the future, it's important that we keep the economic engines running today, so we continue to work on the policies that we have today in terms of making sure that our companies have good management practices, that they have good plans put in place, good cutting sequences, annual allowable cuts that are kept to the companies' standards. We have standards and regulations. We keep the companies' feet to the fire in terms of how they go about and do their work and make sure that the public interest is looked after in terms of management of the forest.

Also, on the public lands side it's about stewardship. Certainly, our grasslands have to be well looked after. Of course, it's all the things that you put in place to make sure that those are going to be there to serve the needs of today but also be preserved for the future.

I want to get to industry for just a moment. Industry itself, oil and gas and forestry, have been working in the northern part of this province for a number of years. They are pushing us to come up with good policies on integrated land management. They're already working on integrated land management, using the same roads to get to a cutblock or to get to a series of well sites. That reduces the footprint on FMAs. It reduces the footprint on public land.

Particularly the oil and gas industry now have the kind of technology that when they go and do seismic lines, they don't have to do the 60-foot lines or the 30-foot lines. They're now down to about two metres, and that reduces the footprint as well. So we're all getting a little bit smarter in terms of integrated land management. Now, what that does: it helps the habitat. That helps preserve the habitat for our grizzly bears, our caribou, and all of those types of things. So industry is taking a very responsible approach to working with us on integrated land management in this busy landscape.

I want to talk about the future of land use in just a moment, but I want to answer some of your questions. You talked about habitat for bears, and you mentioned what the numbers of bears are. Well, we have six or seven zones in the province, and we're continuing with our DNA study. Right now grizzly bear populations can only be estimated, and it's very, very difficult. It takes a long time to get all the DNA census. So in each zone they're pretty well estimated.

Because the estimates in our first set of numbers for each zone are strictly estimates, we want to have a better idea of the numbers, so

we didn't put a moratorium on hunting. We suspended the hunt for three years. The hunt was and could still be in the future a management tool for the numbers of grizzly bears. But let's take a look over the next three years with this DNA study at exactly how many grizzly bears there are across the entire province and not just in individual zones. That decision will be made for the future.

But here's what happens if you suspend a hunt and you have more interaction as our population grows and we get into the backcountry with our style of living or our style of recreation: we have to be more bear smart. We're unveiling a BearSmart program here within the next two weeks. We're going to let the population of Alberta know about how to conduct yourself in the backcountry, some of the things that you should take responsibility for yourself in keeping bears away from humans. When you have a bear/human conflict – it doesn't matter whether it's an automobile or whether it's on a trail or whatever – and our fish and wildlife guys are called, the bear generally loses.

So we as people have got to assume some responsibility. The BearSmart program is going to outline some of those responsibilities: how we keep our food in camp spots and even how to make sure that they're more secure so that the bears can't get to them. The bear gets used to human food. They know where to go find it, and what happens then is that you get into the bear/human conflict, and we would like to stop that.

Now, you talked about the success of the Karelian dogs. The Karelian dogs were a pilot project, part of our initial BearSmart program, and the pilot project was started in the Crowsnest Pass. I got to know those little puppies when they were just secured by the department staff down there in the Crowsnest Pass, in the Blairmore office. That pilot project has worked out really, really well, so we're going to be expanding on the Karelian bear dog as part of our BearSmart program.

The other things: helping communities establish where their trails are, making sure that berry bushes are away from the trails, and again trying to get that distance between bears and humans. The biggest thing, as I said, is to make us as individuals aware of the fact that we have a responsibility as well to make sure that that separation is there. We can't always be relying on the bear to be making that decision because the bear is hungry. They have an insatiable appetite, and they'll go wherever the food is. That's why you see bears crossing back and forth over the Alberta and British Columbia border. It depends on where the food is. So to get back to the numbers, that's another reason why it's very hard to tie down the numbers, and we're really pleased to have the kind of co-operation that we have from British Columbia in trying to tie those down.

The same thing happens with the caribou study. Some of the dollars that we're putting forward is a partnership with industry and our stakeholders to make sure that the habitat is there and that the preservation of the habitat is there for the existence of the caribou, looking after natural predators, like the wolves. Nobody likes to go out there and destroy any wildlife, but when you have one species as a predator to another and that species is in danger, then you have to do something. It's part of our management tool. You have to make sure that the caribou are going to survive.

3:50

The other thing that we're doing, which is a great partnership with industry, is that we've taken a corralled area – it's a very large corralled area – and we're taking the caribou cows that are going to be giving birth this spring, and we've protected them in this corralled area. It was part of a conservation to make sure that the young calves that are coming up will have a survival rate. We and the industry think that that's really, really important for the survival

of the caribou. So they are doing the responsible thing, and it's, again, part of our management.

Conservation of the boreal forest. You were talking a bit about that and looking at a strategic model for the boreal forest. You know, we look at policies. Alberta is only part of the boreal forest. It includes a number of provinces across Canada, and we certainly take our part in looking at the conservation laws and the policies in protection of the boreal forest of not only those other jurisdictions but also what happens, certainly, in our own forests. We look at it as part of our responsibility in responsible forest management. We want to have a healthy forest ecosystem. We know that we have to have a competitive industry, and we know that if that industry thrives, then we've got vibrant communities, and we've got people that have a quality of life. They have schools, they have hospitals, and it's a quality of life that they enjoy. If it's important to Albertans, if it's important to the sustainability of the resource, then it's important for the Department of Sustainable Resource Development.

What we've done is we've recently endorsed a boreal forest framework, which endorses what we believe is sound science and public partnerships to help address the boreal forest challenge. The first partnership under the framework is an agreement with Ducks Unlimited, which I've met with many times, to share expertise on watershed and water preservation because that's part of good habitat. That's part of one of the four corners of the framework that we're looking forward to in the future as well. But we want to share our expertise on those watersheds and, of course, integrated landscape management in the boreal forest.

It's a good point that you brought up that nationally the boreal forest represents 75 per cent of Canada's forests. In Alberta we've got about 10 per cent of that, as I said earlier. We've got foothills, we've got boreal forest, we've got parkland, and we've also got Shield ecosystems in that as well. The campaign is aimed to protect 50 per cent of the national boreal forest and establish Forest Stewardship Council certification for the other 50 per cent of the region. Alberta practices are considered amongst the best, and we're part of the planning standards that are recognized internationally. So the boreal forest is important to us.

The next thing I want to talk about is in terms of making sure that the habitat is preserved – that's kind of the context that you were going in – and also on the viability of the resources. Pine beetle: last year during estimates you talked about an Alberta-made solution. Now, this year you're saying that maybe we should be looking at expertise from somewhere else. Well, we've been doing that for a number of years. When it was first found out that the pine beetle was going to be a problem and it was coming our way, we were working with British Columbia, we were working with Montana, and we were working with Idaho. We know the folks down there. We take best practices from what they have done in the past. We apply them to what we have to deal with today. More importantly, now that the pine beetle is on our border, we have been very proactive in trying to stop it at the border. As a matter of fact, our goal is to take 100 per cent of the trees that are infested and get rid of them.

As a matter of fact, I want to share with the hon. member and the House and actually with all Albertans just a progress report on what we have done to date. We do aerial surveys, and then we do on-the-ground surveys. So far what we've done is we've done them in various regions across the province, and I've got five or six regions here that I just want to bring you up to date on.

In the Kakwa wildland park we have completed our survey. The trees that are to be cut are 283 trees. What we've done so far: we've completed 97 per cent of that control by cutting and burning 275 of those trees.

In the Willmore wilderness park – this is a big area where the beetle is coming over – we're ongoing with our survey. We have 7,480 trees to be cut and burned. At this point in time we have cut and burned 1,820 of those trees, so we have a long way to go there. With this big area of beetle-infested trees, that's where we would like to do the prescribed burns. We would have done that last September, but with the high humidity and the rain that we had during September, it wasn't practical to go in there and burn that area. We were hoping that maybe the cold winter would get rid of them, but we didn't have that cold a winter over there, so we're going to have to look at another opportunity to do a prescribed burn over there to make up the difference on those trees. I'll share this with you a little bit later on this afternoon.

We have the great co-operation of Community Development in going into these parks and identifying and cutting and burning these trees because they see it as a preservation of the other trees that could be infested years down the road.

When it comes to the southern Rockies area, in the Bow Valley we've completed our surveys. Trees to be cut and burned: 315. We're a hundred per cent done there. In Spray Lakes we've completed our surveys. We have identified 909 trees, and a hundred per cent of that has been done at this point in time. In the Oldman area we have completed our surveys, and we have cut and burned 81 out of the 102 trees that have been identified, and although that has been suspended for a short time, we'll have to pick that up in the future. The Crowsnest Pass: the same way. Our survey is completed, and we have identified trees to cut and burn at 1,226, and we've actually cut and burned 1,176 of those trees. In the Peter Lougheed area we have a status of ongoing surveying. We've identified 17 trees, and we will be looking at cutting and burning those 17 trees as well.

So far, the total of trees to be cut and burned is 10,332 and of trees that we have cut and burned is 4,593, so we have a long way to go.

At the next opportunity I will finish off on fishing derbies and . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, the allocated time has run out.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to rise and make some hopefully constructively critical comments in regard to the Sustainable Resource Development budget. I'd like to thank the hon. minister and his staff for coming out with a very extensive group of information in regard to the budget and certainly some degree of clarity that makes my job a lot easier.

Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to look at the budget here in regard to the various categories of core business that the minister has identified: forest protection, forest land resource development, fish and wildlife management, rangeland management, and land-use disposition management. The ministry, of course, uses these classifications, so for my purposes it makes things similarly easy, I guess.

4:00

So, first of all, the issue I'd like to ask some questions about is in regard to wildfires. This is the season where the fire season starts, and unfortunately we already have several hundred hot spots across the province. I guess that this is a perennial question, but I do want to talk about it anyway. You know, clearly, this ministry is in need of significant funds in its planning and operations, and I believe that there is a gap here in the way that wildfire management allocates its funds. Every year it's probably a similar problem. Last year the ministry budgeted \$62 million for its wildfire management program, and then by supplementary estimates that amount was increased last year by 143 per cent up to \$149 million.

Now, of course, I'm not by any means advocating the refusal to grant emergency funds to fight fires and to let these fires rage out of control or anything like that, but I believe that we know from year to year consistently that the wildfire issue is a problem. It's a growing problem due to the increased human use of our wilderness areas, especially in northern Alberta, and the tendency for climate change as well, the drying out of the forests. This past winter was an extraordinarily light year for precipitation, and it continues into the spring. We can see a trend, certainly over the last 10 years or so, that I believe would precipitate the increase to this fund significantly, by at least 50 per cent. We know that, in fact, we're going to end up using it.

It's just good budgeting management practices. It gives us something more to work with. Perhaps we can talk about the wildfire question in more detail if we are in fact allocating those funds during the budget process so that we can look at the details of how we might tackle this problem in a constructive and creative way. Certainly, most of the dollars do go to direct firefighting, and that's necessary, as I said before. But at the same time, I guess, if we saw an accurate number from the beginning, then I think it would help us to employ best practices here during the budget debate every year.

I have a quote here from last year. "If we go over our budget, then we can go to the sustainability fund." This is the minister from last year. Of course, that's true, but I would just like to ask then: why does this ministry consistently underestimate wildfire operation budgets every year? Last year the minister admitted during the debates that "when you take a look at the number of wildfires that we have each year and you look at the \$75 million that we have, that just basically gets us started." Again, that's from last year. By the minister's own admission this budget is grossly insufficient, so why not simply budget properly? That's my comment that I would like to make on that. Obviously, there is yearly variation to the expenses that this program might incur, however fires have consistently been increasing over time.

According to the minister's business plan and his estimate debate comments from last year one of the focuses of the department is education and awareness. However, according to the department's website more fires are caused every year by humans than by natural causes, lightning and such things. While lightning-strike fires might in the end prove more destructive in terms of hectares burnt, there is little that we can do with that one. The fact is that in 2003, which seems to be the latest available data from that site, 661 fires were caused by humans compared to 527 caused by lightning strikes. This to me, Mr. Chairman, suggests that the education program led by the ministry is not entirely successful by any measurable standard.

My question is then: does the minister have more up-to-date data in regard to these incidents? Why is there no data more recent than 2003? As well, I would like to ask if the minister will post this information on the website and give Albertans an indication as to how successful the 2004 wildfire prevention campaign was. This was the last time that concerted effort was being made to educate the public according to the website, and we would like to see some definable measurements as to the success of this expenditure from the budget.

As well, I'd like to ask what the minister is doing to educate people in regard to their responsibilities concerning wildfires. Recently there was a citizen who was fined \$500 for starting a fire on his property that spread to a nearby forest. Five hundred dollars doesn't seem like very much at all, and it doesn't seem like a deterrent otherwise. I would be curious to know if the minister would be raising the amount that individuals are fined for in fact

causing the start of a wildfire. I think that education mixed with deterrence is the combination that we use in the Justice department, and the SRD department would do well to learn from that precedent.

I think the issue that overrides many of these SRD categories – certainly, the wildfire section being no exception – is that we have the encroachment of increased human activity into formerly wild areas. We have to be realistic that the economic performance of this province is largely determined by how we use these resources that were formerly wilderness areas. You know, forestry, oil and gas and energy exploration, and a wide range of other activities in these formerly wild areas are causes of the wildfire increase that we see in combination with change in the climate drying out these northern forests.

I think we can expect reasonably that this trend will continue in terms of lack of precipitation and increased human activity in the wilderness areas. My comment that I've made several times with regard to wildfires and to all of these categories is that we need an integrated approach that will encompass not just the SRD development strategy but that of Energy and that of the Ministry of Environment, agriculture, and other ministries as well so that we are looking at an overriding plan that can be used to see what the province is going to look like in the next 30 to 50 years. As it happens, without an integrated plan it's sort of every person for himself, and the wilderness invariably loses out in that sort of scenario, Mr. Chairman. In regard to wildfires, without an integrated land-use strategy we are just creating the conditions by which more wildfires of greater intensity will be likely to visit us within the next season and coming seasons.

The next category that I have here is in regard to grizzly bears. Last year the minister announced that six biologists and one caribou/grizzly bear manager will conduct important scientific research that will help address the growing pressures faced by Alberta's wildlife population. I would like to ask the minister to update the House as to what research is being undertaken and what results, if any, will be forthcoming.

4:10

As well, I would like to ask if the minister can explain what will be involved in the BearSmart program. I heard something about it here. I think that in regard to identification of and maintaining the integrity of the bear habitat, this is the issue that I find is like the elephant in the room that nobody talks about. We're dealing with not just grizzly bear habitat and management but wolves and caribou and a range of other wildlife that I think serve as indicator species for the overall health of any given ecosystem. Obviously – and this is the unsaid comment that I believe – you know, with the crisis in the grizzly bear population, the caribou population, and now the wolves and whatnot, we're not protecting the ecosystem that all of these organisms require to survive. So the depletion of the eastern slopes natural areas and the failure of this government to protect those areas is the direct reason why there is a problem with the grizzly bear population in the first place. Same with the woodland caribou. The wolves are suddenly having a field day with the woodland caribou because the natural balance of that ecosystem has been almost irreversibly set out of whack by intensive oil and gas operations in those areas.

So we have to obviously face this fact. This idea of ad hoc, sort of fly-by-night solutions to try to save these populations will not go anywhere until we face the fact that the ecosystems have to be protected, the habitats have to be protected for these and all other species in a larger, integrated fashion.

The next topic that I would like to just comment on briefly is in regard to the chronic wasting disease problem that we have mostly

in eastern Alberta. On this topic of CWD, the disease may have devastating effects not only on Alberta's game farmers but also on Alberta's wildlife populations. Government officials have so far assured the public that CWD has not had significant incursions into Alberta's game farms. However, if it does, the results could probably provide the finishing blows to an already embattled industry.

On March 23 of this year during question period the hon. minister again asserted that the key to reducing the incidents of CWD was by "reducing deer density." Again, I realize that there is a problem with the overpopulation of deer in some areas, but I would ask also to beg the question: does the minister not think that the ever-shrinking habitat may be a reason for the increasing incidence of CWD and that further culling the deer herd may not be, in fact, the best approach? Rather, it may be part of a larger approach which includes dedicating more land to native species. Of course, if you have a concentration of a certain species in smaller areas, then the incidence of disease can be more likely.

In order to save a species, the province is considering allowing more of them to be killed. In a specific area along the Saskatchewan border the government is apparently considering changing the hunting quotas. I would be curious to know what the changes will be for the upcoming hunt, including the cull that is precipitated by the spread of CWD in eastern Alberta.

The next category that I have here is in regard to the pine beetle. We would love to have specific information on the 10,000 or so trees that were identified by the minister as being focused on for destruction to try to control the pine beetle infestation. I would like to know some more specific information as well about the intentions of the ministry to control the infestation in the Willmore wilderness area. It seems to be the most prevalent part of the province that has infestation. If controlled burns are going to be utilized here at some point during 2006 to control that, where might those controlled burns be taking place? We'd certainly welcome increased awareness and research on the Rocky Mountain pine beetle infestation, so the minister's comment in regard to a conference that is going to be hosted I guess later this month is welcomed.

We know that the larger issue in regard to the pine beetle being able to move across the border, the Continental Divide, is because of climate change. Cold snaps are just not happening that otherwise would kill the beetle in its larval stage when it reaches our areas, where we traditionally have these very long cold periods. Certainly, we know that this is a manifestation of climate change, a harbinger of much more significant changes to come, I would suggest, Mr. Chairman. I think, again, this is a part of what we need to do: to have an integrated solution or an integrated means by which Environment and Energy and SRD and Agriculture can work together to address these large overriding issues such as climate change. I'd ask the minister if he could perhaps elaborate on that, if climate change specifically has been a topic for interministerial consultation.

The next category that I would like to discuss briefly is concerning softwood lumber. On page 356 of the ministry's business plan strategy 4.2 states that the ministry will "work with International and Intergovernmental Relations and other jurisdictions to resolve the softwood lumber trade dispute." Now that we have a framework agreement negotiated by the federal government, I think it's incumbent upon this ministry as well as others to do some serious critical work as to how this framework agreement will play out to ensure that it benefits our provincial pulp and lumber industry to its greatest potential.

I guess that just to have this framework agreement in place is some reason for cautious optimism. However, the proof is in the

pudding, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, we have to look carefully as to what's going to happen because we saw already for the first negotiated part of this deal that we only ended up with 80 cents to the dollar on the illegal tariffs that were imposed upon our industry across the country. If this is their opening bid and if this is any indication of what sort of goodwill or otherwise that the Americans are going to bring to the table, then I think that we have to be on our guard most strenuously because, of course, the industry that we're talking about here is quite significant for Alberta and employs many tens of thousands of workers across the province.

Thanks.

Mr. Coutts: I want to thank the hon. member for some very astute questions. My answers will probably be a little shorter this time because some of them I have covered or parts of them I have covered, but I'm going to try and deal specifically with some of the questions that you asked.

Before I do, Mr. Chairman, there's another person from Sustainable Resource Development that has joined us in the gallery here. I just want to welcome Lauren Parker from our minister's office to the proceedings this afternoon. She's a young university student, working the summer with us, who is very interested in what happens with her future, and the land-use framework is one of those things that she's really interested in. Lauren, welcome. It's good to see you.

4:20

Regarding budgeting for wildfire, hon. member, things haven't changed since last year. We use our base budgeting to get our contracts set up so that we have everything in place for our wildfire season. You're absolutely right; this particular season we don't have a lot of moisture like we had last year. We didn't have a lot of moisture during the winter. As a matter of fact, these last few weeks we've even seen a lot of not only prairie fires but also forest fires. I think we're up about 150 per cent over last year in the number of forest fires and the amount of hectares that have been burned because of low humidity and the low level of moisture that is in the ground.

We know that we're going to have a very difficult season this year. We are prepared for it. That's what the base budgeting does. We go to the sustainability fund when we need extra funding on an emergency basis. It's something that has worked effectively for us. The reason that it has worked effectively is not that we're underfunding or underbudgeting or undervaluing our forests or our forest fire commitments; we just don't know how much is going to be needed. So for us to come here today with an actual budget figure is pretty well impossible, but with the ability that we have with the emergency fund, the sustainability fund, it really works very, very well. We do have the dollars to make sure that we're set up for the season, that we can have the infrastructure in place for the fire season so that we can protect communities and protect people's lives.

When I talk about preparedness, I also have to mention the fact that we're upgrading. The capital infusion that we get this year and in subsequent years will help us with our air tanker bases, which will provide a better service, as well as re-equipping our fleet of air tankers to make sure that we get out to the fires with the best possible equipment. So we welcome that capital infusion as well as the infrastructure on the ground to make sure that we're more efficient and can get out to those fires as quickly as possible.

With regard to education on the causes of fires you wondered about the latest update and the data that was available and posting that on the web. We'll continue to post on the web when informa-

tion becomes available so that it's made available for Albertans and interested people like yourself. We want to make sure of the education component: again, people taking responsibility for their own backyards, making sure that they don't flick that cigarette onto the ground, making sure that they put out their campfires, making sure that there are burning barrels in municipalities where they live in forested areas, making sure that they abide by fire bans, making sure that when municipalities put fire bans on, we're consistent with their fire bans as well, using proper media outlets like radio and television to let people know about the fire situation and the hazards that are out there.

This last weekend, driving up from the constituency on Saturday night to attend the junior forest wardens annual conference in Leduc, I heard an advertisement on the radio at least five times advising people: "It's a very dry year out there. Please use caution when you're dealing with fire in forested areas. Use caution when you're dealing with your own fire on the dry prairies." That type of thing. It's a resource. It's part of our stewardship. It's a resource that we've got to protect.

The other thing that we do particularly involving communities is our FireSmart program. We continue to get the funds that we need to take that program to communities and to individuals that are close to and live in the forested areas. We're grateful for that because it's a very successful program and we want to continue it. As our forests mature and as we, expanding populations, want to enjoy our forests, we've got to take the measures to protect them as well.

Raising fines is one thing that I hadn't thought of, but it's one of the things that we will look at. Of course, collecting them is another thing, but certainly it's something that we will look at.

Grizzly bears. Have we got the staff in place? Yes. We've been able to maintain the staff that we had last year to continue with the DNA census. We want to make sure that we're dealing with more specifics when dealing with grizzly bears. We also need to make sure that as we go into the future, we have the best science available to make the determination of the estimated number of bears out there and the areas in which they congregate.

I mentioned to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore about the BearSmart program and the education that's required. Yes, people have got to know that bears are in their area, but they also have to know why bears are in their area. Is it because they're leaving garbage out in unprotected garbage bins, or is the landfill not being protected by proper fencing, et cetera? Are there things in the community that bears like to come into because they have this insatiable appetite? Is it all blamed on some of the ecosystem being forested and that type of thing? Last year I had the opportunity to go to the university and talk to a group of people that were doing some bear work. You can't blame the forestry industry for the loss of ecosystem. Even the roads that we travel on, bears come out and eat plants at the side of the road as well. So, again, trying to create that buffer between human and bear conflict. We think that it's a balance we're striving for in the province between our existence and our quality of life and the wildlife, that we like to see, that we like to enjoy, and that people like to have a hunting experience with.

You mentioned the caribou and ad hoc plans. I don't think that they are ad hoc plans. I think the recovery plans that we have in place, that are vetted and looked at by our recovery teams, which have stakeholders from all of the affected areas, are well-planned documents and I believe are very well executed by industry and government and the various stakeholders. We have people in place to check up on those plans, to see how well they're working, and to continue to work on them. Do we do a good enough job communicating that? I would like to think that we do a very good job of communicating that, but, you know, if it's the difference between

going out and seeing a caribou or making sure that your young person gets to soccer, maybe the soccer is more important today, that type of thing. They may listen to the soccer announcement before they'll listen to an announcement on whether or not there are enough caribou out there. But it is an important part of our ecosystem, an important part of our province, and we try to find the balance.

That brings me to chronic wasting disease. This answer is for Edmonton-Decore as well as yourself. You talk about the chronic wasting disease and the actions that we're taking to provide that balance along the Saskatchewan border, right from Lloydminster down to Medicine Hat and south into the Cypress area. The criteria that we use for the cull of the deer in that area is part of a national strategy. It's part of a national surveillance that we're a part of.

You talk about chronic wasting disease: where did it come from? Well, it came from Saskatchewan, and ultimately it came from North Dakota. The disease is spread from infected herds in both of those locations. What we're trying to do in using this national strategy is reduce the herds to reduce the incidence of the disease being spread between the wild deer along the border. We find that the closer to the border we get, the more incidents we have of chronic wasting disease. Again, reducing those herds is part of the national strategy to make sure that we can absolutely stop that disease at the border. We need to stop the infection from coming over into Alberta because if it gets a hold in Alberta like it has got a hold in Saskatchewan, if we're not proactive in getting rid of the diseased animals, it will spread not only to the 400,000 deer that we have in this province, but it will also spread to elk populations. If it spreads to those populations, then it will continue to spread, maybe to our domestic populations as well. So that is our way of managing that particular disease: at the border and keeping it there.

4:30

Pine beetle. Well, yes, I will provide you with the information that I shared with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. Certainly, nature could help us here in this fight by having a colder winter. It hasn't happened. Is that climate change? I don't know, but the fact is that nature has not co-operated with us with minus 40 degrees, so we've got to do everything we can to stop that beetle at the border.

What we need to do – and this is what I was getting at in my previous answer to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, so I'm going to continue. Regarding the pine beetle, it's important that we take those shared best practices that B.C. has learned and that we have learned in this last couple of years and all the advance work that we've done and come up with a strategy on how to get rid of this beetle. That's why we're having the pine beetle summit at the end of May. We're making sure that we have all of the information on the table and that we're being proactive with the information to get rid of this beetle.

It's absolutely necessary that we do a number of things on a number of fronts. It's not just identifying and cutting and burning the trees. We also have to take a look at the threat to a mature pine forest because that's the eventual food for the pine beetles that will be available this fly season when they leave their parent tree and go to other trees. We're looking at strategies like cutting sequences for our forestry companies if they have identified pine beetle in their area, and those cutting sequences will be part of our management plans to make sure that the food source for the pine beetle is taken away but at the same time making sure that those cutting sequences are all part of a good management plan. It takes a lot of work to do that.

On softwood lumber, the framework that is put in place, we will continue to work with the industry to define some of the issues that

they have. When we go into the legal text based around the framework, is it perfect? No, it's not 100 per cent perfect, but there are some things that are very positive about the framework that's put in place on the softwood. Federal governments have gotten together, both Canada and the United States, and they've decided on this framework.

What it means to Alberta, which only has 7 per cent of the exports, is that it gives us seven years and a two-year extension of certainty in softwood. We had a deal that nobody liked – everybody lived with it, and nobody liked it – where there was a countervail duty put on all of the product going across the border. That duty was held in bank accounts in the United States, and that's something that our industry didn't like. Getting 80 per cent of that back plus 10 per cent of it going to market development and things like disaster relief for Katrina: those will be some positive things that will happen for our industry. Industry has always said that they would like to have as much come back to their industry as possible, but leaving 10 per cent of it on the table is certainly something that they knew might have to happen. Certainly, they would want 100 per cent of it.

The idea of an alternative dispute mechanism being put in place is another positive thing. Rather than having the litigation going on over the border that costs millions and millions of dollars, having an alternative dispute mechanism put in place is another positive thing on the softwood framework. Again, I'll just repeat myself by saying that we will work with our industry to make sure that the legal text looks after their interests as well as we go forward.

While I have the floor, Mr. Chairman, I would like to just talk about a couple of things about integrated land management. This kind of goes off to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. We talk about integrated land management for the future. In my previous conversations, I was talking about some of the policies we had right in place today, but when you talk about integrated land management for the future – and I have read your booklet. I have read it. It's a number of chapters of things that have been done and could be looked at and should be looked at, and we have been doing a lot of those things with our sustainable resource environmental management office. We had said in the year 2005 that we would look at a land-use framework. That was announced in the Speech from the Throne in 2005, and in 2006 we expanded on that. We have set up a sustainable resource environmental management office to develop a framework. The framework will be somewhat different because it will be more policy orientated.

Looking towards tomorrow, the document that has been sent over by the Official Opposition, is basically a number of chapters of what could be done. Well, we're going to be more proactive than that, Mr. Chairman. We're going to go out and we're going to talk to Albertans this year, this spring, about their values. What do they see in the land? What do they see in terms of reducing the footprint, making sure that industry could still work, still thrive, still survive and provide good employment for people, but at the same time how can we do it better? How can we come up with integrated land management? We've talked with municipalities. We've talked with the AAMD and C. We've talked to the AUMA. We'll be going out and talking to urban communities about their values as well. What does it take to make a city a great place to live? How can we deal with the urban sprawl? How can we deal with rural sprawl as well? We'll be having a talk with them about their values.

Then we'll be talking about access management. While we're talking about access management, this spring, within the next week, we're going to be unveiling the access management plan for the Ghost-Waiparous. It's just one of many access management plans that we have across this province. You know, there is lots of criticism about what goes on in the backcountry. Certainly, when

you see landscapes that are destroyed and just left for our department to go clean up after or rehabilitate or reclaim, we don't have the resources to do all of that. But, you know, we have 95 per cent of the people that use the backcountry that are really, really good at it, and they like it, and they enjoy it.

I'll get back to access management planning in just a few minutes.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. A couple of items that I want to bring up today with the hon. minister. What I want to talk about is your goal 2, Alberta forest and forest communities' protection from wildfires. I guess what I want to do first of all is compliment the minister and his staff for the FireSmart program, especially in Grande Cache, and now we're doing quite a bit of work in the town of Hinton. Also, I want to compliment your department for the aspect of co-operation with the national park. We've done a lot of work in there, and we've got everybody onside. So I just wanted to note that about your fire protection.

The other aspect that I was looking at is on your goal 4, "Alberta's forests support a competitive and sustainable forest sector." As we're moving along, I would really like to see us look a lot more at the added value. I know a lot of our forest management agreements have got certain clauses and everything in there that state what they have to do. I think we have to be more imaginative now and get more value out of that. We've got to get away from the old adage of hewer of wood and drawer of water. We've got to really make sure that we work on that.

4:40

We also have got to be really concerned and work with communities because when you look at the amount of communities that we have in the forest industry, we've got in the neighbourhood of 50. There are 10 or 12-odd ones that are out there, and that's their main resource, the forest industry, and that's the economic driver, so we've got to really work with them and get some understanding.

I guess the other thing I want to talk about is with your ILM aspects. I know that we've talked a lot about the aspect of integrated management on road systems. I think we've got to be a lot more aggressive with the aspect of the Energy department because in my riding, especially in one area, we've got one road where we've got over 4,000 vehicles a day on that, and that's just an LOC. You know, the average now is about 30-70. Thirty per cent of the road is used by the people that built the road; 70 per cent is by the oil patch. So, you know, it's good that we have that type of usage – I mean, there are road-use agreements and everything – but what I'm saying is that to minimize the footprint in the area, we have to play a stronger role on that, and I would like to see us push that a lot harder.

The third thing I want to talk about: Alberta's forests and forest landscapes support healthy ecosystems and vibrant communities. As we move along and work with the aspect of stewardship, I think we have to get a lot more involved with the aspect of education. We have done that in some areas, but I think we have to get a better understanding and get a lot more people involved, especially our schools so that our young people have an understanding of it. I know that we've done some work on that.

When we come to the mountain pine beetle, I just strongly believe that what we're doing is a good thing. Quite a bit of it is through neglect by our neighbour, by not acting soon enough. I guess we have to really work with the threshold around the aspect of the mountain passes coming into the western part of our province. We have to work with Jasper national park and, of course, Banff national park and work a lot faster and harder on that. I'm just wondering if

we're working with the aspects of the forest companies in the area because at some time we might have to do an accelerated cut plan to make sure that we remove the food source from these beetles that are coming through from our neighbouring province.

The last one that I have is on your goal 5, that I just wanted to talk a bit about and question and get a possible answer on a couple of aspects. As I look at page 406, line 3.0.1, I look at what we had as actual in 2004-05, almost \$40 million. It was \$39,989,000. Then what we had projected for 2005-06 was \$45,970,000. So we're looking at about a \$5,981,000 increase. But then when we move on to 2006-07, we're looking at \$48,743,000, which is only an increase of \$2,733,000 over the previous year.

I guess that with your goal on Alberta's fish and wildlife resources and their habitat – healthy, productive, and sustainable – I come to the aspect of the species-at-risk committee and of the scientific subcommittee. As of the end of 2005 we have enacted already 15 recovery plans. Then when you look at the aspect of species that have been considered to the end of the year 2005, we've looked at 46. So the pressure is on on some of these species, and we've done some great work, and I certainly appreciate the efforts that the Scientific Subcommittee have done because they've done a real great job.

I've got to compliment the perseverance and the understanding of the 19 other groups that are on the Endangered Species Conservation Committee because we've had very good attendance, very good interjections. We've always come to a good plan that we submit to the minister, and then of course he gets back to us and lets us know, and that's how we move on to the recovery plans.

So I guess my bottom line on this aspect is that I'd like to have the minister give us some insight. Looking at those figures on page 406, it's hard to decipher what amount we're going to add in there because, as you know, the pressure is on. I guess the other thing is combining that with your goal 3 and goal 5, to get the message out. I know that one of the hon. members from the other side said that, well, you know, all we do is to paperwork. Well, at least we're showing what we've done. We're the envy of all other provinces because we're moving ahead. We publish those reports every other year. It gives people an understanding of what your department is doing to look at this aspect, and we have the great support of a lot of people.

I guess one thing that I'd really like to compliment your staff on is the western blue flag recovery team. It is a peripheral species, and what transpired in southern Alberta is that we found a few colonies of it. Of course, people were reluctant to get involved. Through the team of people in the south, they got some of the people together and the recovery team.

The other thing that they're doing now: they're not doing them in isolation. They're working with other species that we have to get more information or recovery plans on, so they work together on it. The bottom line that we're finding now is that we're finding other people saying: oh, well, I got this on my property. So they're seeing that we're out there and doing it in a progressive way.

I think we're going to be able to move along a lot better on a lot of these species because the people in the recovery team have proven themselves, shown how they can co-operate with the aspect of the farming or ranching industries so that they can move ahead. They're not getting the aspect where they feel, number one, that we're going to expropriate their land. They're working in co-operation to move ahead on that.

So if you could give me some insight on the aspect of funding on that and then any of the other four items that I mentioned in this, I'd greatly appreciate it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I want to be able to just take a few moments here and provide some answers to the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. Thank you very much for the comments on our staff. It's a difficult job when you're in charge of the entire province of Alberta from border to border to border to border with the amount of staff that we have, but we have excellent staff. They are concerned about fish, wildlife. They're concerned about the forest. They're concerned about the ecosystem. They're concerned about sustainability. It's a balance.

You're absolutely right: I believe our FireSmart program is one of those initiatives that tries to minimize the effect that fire would have not only on communities but also on the forest itself and that ecosystem that you talked about.

4:50

We also are grateful for the co-operation that we get from our national parks. You mentioned two or three things there about the corridors where the pine beetle would come through and corridors, obviously, for wildfires as well. We get great co-operation from our national parks in dealing with disease and fire as well. B.C. certainly has come to the table, and our parks people on the federal side have come to the table as well. We really enjoy that co-operation that we get because we can share best practices, and that helps us come up with the strategy that we have put in place. They're going to be participating in the pine beetle summit as well. So I'm glad you mentioned the parks.

Forest competitiveness, value-added. Certainly, our contract with Forintek helps us build on the value-added component. Industry itself puts a lot of dollars and energy into value-added, but more importantly they are also taking a look at the product that we have in the forest that can adapt to a marketplace. Then we together have to see how we can take and put that into our annual cuts to make sure that we have the product that can fill that marketplace.

We're working also with the Department of Economic Development and tourism to look at opportunities in the world for forest competitiveness. We think that that's going to help make our industry more viable for the future, recognizing the problems that they're having in the competitiveness, with cheaper workforces in other countries, faster growing trees, the fact that we're a long ways away from a port to get some of that export over there, and those types of things. So those are some of the things that we have to deal with.

Your comment on integrated land management, being aggressive there. We know that we have to be aggressive there, but when you're dealing with integrated land management, you have to plan better. There's a lot of economic development happening. You can't be taking different roads to go to different opportunities. We think better planning with communities, better planning with MDs, better planning with the industry and other stakeholders is necessary. You're right: you can take a road that might be suitable for a logging road, and all of a sudden you've got 4,000 or 5,000 vehicles a day going on that road. Then how do you upgrade it, when do you upgrade it, and for what purpose? So that's part of our better planning.

Forest landscapes and education. You're absolutely right: it's needed. It's part of our aggressive plan in trying to let the people know about the biodiversity that's in the forest. We have a biodiversity program that also involves endangered species. We want to continue with the species at risk, and I have to say that we have probably the best example of how to handle endangered species in our province, probably across Canada. We want to make sure that

the work that's being done there continues. Our biodiversity program that we have industry involved with, that we have stakeholders involved with, will also help us continue with that species at risk program and make sure that it continues to be a success.

I want to get back to the wildfire there because you're asking about the increase. The actual increase for wildfire in our base budgeting is a \$2 million increase in the wildfire reinsurance program, plus we've put an extra million dollars – and this is on page 406, that you've made reference to – into funding for manpower costs. Of course, we looked at an increase in transferring equipment and inventory purchases to our operating expense as well. That's to make sure that we've got the proper things in the proper place at the proper time to fight wildfires. It's a better use of the dollars.

Then what we have is a .1 per cent increase for the Hinton Training Centre. I have to say that that training centre just does an excellent job in terms of preparing the people that go out into the forests, put their lives in danger to protect not only the resource but also the communities: everything from helitack operations, who are trained right there at Hinton, as well as our guardians, who are trained there and who will go out and help educate people and provide more of a presence in the backcountry.

Of course, we also have a .1 per cent increase for our junior forest wardens and junior forest rangers in the province because it's the young people we need to invest in to make sure that they're well aware of what's going on in the forest.

So I hope that those kinds of answers are the type of thing that you were looking forward to, and I'll wait for the next one, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to ask the minister some specific questions again that I didn't have probably the chance to ask the first go-around with regard to some of the timber lot questions.

I might as well go through here. Is the minister going to continue to convert community timber permits into commercial timber permits when permit holders, in fact, no longer meet the requirements? If the minister is aware of this loophole, when will he close it up?

The other one was specifically with regard to the interim Métis harvesting agreement. The minister of aboriginal affairs has always said that it's a cross-ministry development with regard to this signing initiative between aboriginal affairs, Sustainable Resource Development, and of course Justice. What, in fact, did your particular ministry have to do with regard to that particular agreement? When we talk about the Alberta Fish and Game Association, those particular members were obviously definitely opposed to that particular piece, so I'm not sure if the agreement was signed after or before consultation had even begun with that group. With this new piece that's going to be going out and new consultations that are going to be taking place, how much is your department going to play in that particular role and how much consultation will be given to, in fact, the Alberta Fish and Game Association organization? That's one of the specifics there.

The other one, just to make sure that I get back to the woodlot piece, is the microscale operators. Are you going to make sure that they continue to play an important role with the economic viability of rural areas and ensure that some of the local suppliers are able to produce and maintain those jobs in that market? In fact, if one of the big producers say that they cannot produce in that area and make a go of it, they want to in fact relocate some of their operations such

as in Hines Creek, will there be some consideration for the local mills to be able to take over some of the FMAs in that area then?

Going on to confined feedlot operations. Out of the 50 staff that the NRCB currently has right now, how many are inspectors for confined feedlots? How many of these staff make unannounced visits just to ensure that the amount that the feedlot originally said they were going to be operating under is in fact checked out in an unannounced inspection to ensure that they are keeping up to what the original permit is for?

Another piece here, then, is the reforestation. How many forest management units and oil and gas operators are actually harvesting more timber than the timber companies? I believe I touched on that somewhat. We talked about how much they do cut out for the seismic lines to be able to put down some of the compressor stations and that. Is that taken into account under the annual allowable cuts for some of the areas there?

So those are some specifics right there. I'll let you answer that, hopefully within the allotted time.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, thank you very much. Now, I've got a couple of things to answer from your previous and certainly from this last little bit that you asked a few questions on. In the time remaining I hope I can get it all done.

Métis harvesting. It is an interim agreement, and our role in that interim agreement is to make sure that we monitor the resource and do the enforcement. There have been some questions around the Métis harvesting. Certainly, when I go to Fish and Game Association dinners and that type of thing, on a regular basis there is some talk about whether the interim agreement would ever be made permanent. The government has gone ahead with an analysis of the interim agreement and, as was announced this last week, is looking at a process by which we can renegotiate. Our role will continue to be in providing information to the renegotiating team about the monitoring and our particular role in making sure that conservation is paramount. So that remains to be seen for the upcoming year, how that renegotiation goes, but we still have an interim agreement, and our role will still be to make sure that we monitor and fulfill the obligations of the interim agreement.

5:00

When it comes to forestry and the permits for smaller operators, there's no doubt that there's some consolidation going on there. There's no doubt that some of the commercial timber permits are made available to some of the smaller operators and the woodlot operators. There is some consolidation going on, and we've tried our best to make sure that we accommodate some consolidation. I know that the hon. Member for West Yellowhead had a number of small operators, and they've consolidated themselves to get some tenure. They think that that's some security for them. We know that in the province we have some very small operators, we have some medium operators, and then we have some very large, corporate operators. It's all part of our forest industry, what makes Alberta a great place to be able to live and certainly to work. If there is a problem, if there is a loophole, we'll certainly check into that, and I will get back to you personally on that one.

Another area that you had earlier talked about with the smaller guys was some secondary manufacturing operations and that type of thing. Certainly, we see a great opportunity in value-added as we pursue that, as I was speaking with the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, a great opportunity for smaller operators to fit into that. We see an excellent opportunity. Of course, the softwood lumber

framework helps deal with the opportunity for secondary manufacturers to thrive in that marketplace as well.

Confined feeding operations. As you know and as I shared with you on a couple of occasions, what we've done is that we've gone through a search for a chair and a CEO for the operations part, for the NRCB, and those announcements will be made very shortly. On the operations side I believe that we have about 52 staff. If that's different, I will also let you know, but the last count that we had across this province dealing with applications, dealing with making sure that the regulations were looked at, dealing with enforcement and that type of thing, and dealing with people that make inquiries and providing education about confined feeding operations – those staff are in place to do that.

In terms of timber use on outlines and that type of thing, as I said, we have a much smaller problem there. Forest companies and oil companies are getting together to make sure that they use all the timber. No longer do they do a cutline and take the timber and burn it at the side of the road. It's too valuable a commodity. So that is being done today.

You talked about fishing derbies, and that's a very good point. We'll now put a licence out for fishing derbies. The small fishing derbies of 25 people or less will have a minimal fee. We want to make sure that it gives us an opportunity to know where a fishing derby is and how big or how small it is. If you get to a larger fishing derby – and they're all going to be made available to Alberta residents – a licence for that will take into consideration the size of the derby. We want to make sure that we give the people information about catch and release. A large fishing derby might be hard on the resource, but that'll give us an idea of whether or not the resources in that lake can actually stand that kind of a fishing derby. It's not to restrict anybody; it's just to give us an opportunity to provide nonprofit groups with the ability to have their fundraiser but at the same time protect the resource.

Particularly, I want to refer to the fishing revitalization, the extra million dollars on page 406 for fishery management revitalization. That's mostly for the walleye initiative that we've put forward. We're taking Alberta eggs and turning them into young fish, and then we're going to be opening up our hatchery in Cold Lake, making sure that we have walleye fisheries available. We're going to try and put together a pilot project in four lakes – Wolf Lake, Pigeon Lake, that you mentioned, Lac Ste. Anne, and Newell Lake – and try a tag system. The walleye is a much sought-after fish. You put the walleye into the lake and it can get fished out very quickly, so we want to make sure that more Albertans get an opportunity to go after this much sought-after fish. Therefore, we're looking at this tag system not to penalize anybody but to give more people an opportunity. It's part of our revitalization.

Now, I believe I've answered all of your questions. I just want to talk about the land-use framework in summing up here. There is \$2 million this year for additional land management activities and, of course, \$2 million for improved land information systems. This will help us set the stage after we do the consultation with Albertans. There's no sense in doing the consultation with Albertans and finding out what their values are if you don't already know what's happening on the land and having sort of an inventory of that. We're going ahead with this very strategic plan so that we know what's happening on the land today and we can adapt it to take into consideration Albertans' values and what we see as policy for the future in dealing with the issue that we talked about earlier of integrated land management, growing populations, access management, and conservation and preservation.

It has to come forward in a complete, sort of global perspective if I can say that. Of course, we're going to have competing interest;

we know that. But as we go forward over the next few years, we think that we've got the dollars in place to deal with a proper land-use framework that will take into account not only what's happening in other jurisdictions but also what's happening on this unique landscape of Alberta, our busy landscape. We want to come up with an Alberta solution to land use in the future.

The Alberta solution is one that is unlike any jurisdiction across Canada or any jurisdiction across the United States. We have high use of oil and gas. The forestry industry is doing very, very well here, and of course the people using the backcountry and access management. So we have to work with our partners to make sure that that goes forward in a positive way, the way that Albertans want, and the policies would be put in place to reflect that.

One of the things that I've mentioned today so many times is partnerships. I was referring to this earlier with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. One of the partnerships that we have that is really starting to take shape is our partnership with the off-highway vehicle community. It is an industry here in Alberta not only in the summertime with ATVs but also in the wintertime with snowmobiles. We're now having industry associations. We've had discussions with the industry to talk about safety for ATVs and doing it in a controlled way, not giving the impression that they can go down the middle of a stream and that being sort of the fun part of it. You even see them coming up with brochures now of ATVs and fathers and sons on a trail, on a managed trail, on a designated trail, and that's what we need to get to. You talked earlier about designated areas. This is what we need to do in terms of access management: make sure that we have people going on trails.

5:10

The industry itself is going to be one of our partners in coming up with access management and trail systems that will work. We have local clubs who are responsible for putting together a lot of the trails that we have in use today, and they have participated heavily in our access management plans. Do they agree on absolutely everything that comes forward? No, because they have had access to the backcountry, and then when you go ahead and designate some trails, they feel like they've been restricted.

You know, as I said earlier, 95 per cent of the people that are out there are very responsible. They've gotten together in their local clubs, and they've put out brochures. They work with our Department of SRD to promote the respect the land initiative. It's an educational initiative that we have. So they work very, very closely with us to let their riders and their membership know that they have to take the responsibility and take the lead on making sure that they watch out for wildlife, that they go into safe areas, that they stay on well-defined trails, that they go across bridges and not through water courses.

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

Agreed to:	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$229,636,000
Capital Investment	\$33,200,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy 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 of the Department of Sustainable Resource Development.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: 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.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases,	\$229,636,000;
capital investment,	\$33,200,000.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the House now stand adjourned until 8 this evening, at which time we'll reconvene in Committee of Supply.

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