

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, May 15, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/05/15

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As we begin our deliberations in this sitting of the Legislature, we ask for the insight we need to do our work for the benefit of our province and its people and to the benefit of our country. Amen.

Hon. members and to all in the galleries, I invite all to participate in the language of your choice in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Well, Mr. Lorieau, as we thank you for your service to the Legislature so far this spring, we want you now to go home and rest for the next couple of days to be at your absolute best Wednesday night.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Mar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sir, it is a privilege to rise in this Assembly and to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two honoured guests who are seated in your gallery. The ambassador of the Republic of Korea, His Excellency Sung-joon Yim, and his minister-counsellor, Soontaik Hwang, are both here this afternoon. Although the ambassador has visited Alberta before, this is his first official visit to our province.

Korea is Alberta's fifth-largest trading partner and a very important source of tourism, investment, and immigration. Alberta's office in Seoul, the capital, was created in 1998, and our very first twinning arrangement happened between the province of Alberta and Gangwon province in 1974. It is our oldest twinning arrangement.

Tomorrow His Excellency will visit Alberta's north, going to travel to see the oil sands, and also he is going to take part in the Alberta-Gangwon Technology Forum in Banff later this week. I ask this House to give Ambassador Yim and his minister-counsellor a warm Alberta welcome, and I ask that they rise and receive our warm welcome.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf

I would like to introduce to you and through you 22 grade 6 students from Legal school, which is located in the Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock constituency. They are accompanied this afternoon by teacher Jason Paik and parent helpers Julie Keane, Tammy St. Jean, Robyn Witter, and Lorraine Zilinski. I would like to ask them to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature 53 very special guests from Win Ferguson school. They are accompanied today by teachers Ms Faust and Mrs. Simpson, parent helpers Mr. and Mrs. Wheat, Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Middleton, Mr. Bowes, Mrs. Hagen, and Mrs. Noyen. They're all seated in the public gallery and I would ask them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to introduce to you and through to members of this Assembly a group of 42 visitors from Glen Avon school in St. Paul. They are seated in the visitors' gallery and are accompanied by teachers and teacher helpers Miss Amy Charter, Mrs. Brandi Jean, Ms Janice Foster, Mrs. Sherri Piquette, and Mr. Dave Doonanco. If I could get them to stand, please, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Rev. Abbott: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 22 visitors from Thorsby high school. They're seated in the members' gallery, and they are led by teachers and group leaders Kim Van Steenis, Tracy Blood, Sam Kobeluck, and Mrs. Karen Marr. These are not only Alberta's brightest and best students; they're also Alberta's best Oiler fans. I would ask them to all rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a talented, young, and very bright fellow that we've hired in our office this summer as our STEP student. His name is Brendan Kane. He's a SAIT journalism student in his second year, and we obviously didn't hold that against him because we did hire him. He's accompanied by my assistant, the best in the building, Carmen Frebrowski. I'd ask both of them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Jessica Wagenvoort, who's my STEP student for Edmonton-Mill Woods. Jessica is currently entering the third year of the bachelor of arts in political science, history and economics, at The King's University. She plays soccer on their team, and her plans are to pursue law school and a career in international law. I'd ask Jessica to rise and please receive the warm and traditional welcome from the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you today a person well known to this Assembly, Mr. Oscar Lacombe, a former Sergeant-at-Arms, also a decorated veteran of the Korean War, and well known for his righteous challenge to the federal fire arms registry, which evidently is going to die a well-deserved death this week in Ottawa. Please stand and be recognized, Mr. Lacombe.

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

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Wanda Dennelly and Karin Campbell from the Public Affairs office, assigned to Sustainable Resource Development, both working on public lands and the land-use framework policy for the province and helping our department with that. I believe they're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely pleased this afternoon to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some very special visitors from the Netherlands. We have a group of five that are here today on a Rotary International group-study exchange. They're in Alberta for a month to visit various government, industrial, and professional offices, and I'd like to take just a minute to introduce them all and then ask them to stand. They are in the members' gallery above me. First, we have team member Hanneke van Weert, who is an addictions counsellor with Novadic-Kentron. We have Jennifer Lebon, who represents Diesel. I mistakenly took that to mean engines, and it is in fact a brand of clothing. We have Mark Bankers representing ABN AMRO Bank, rather appropriate with that last name, and team member Martijn Lanenga representing NedTrain. He is an engineering and management science technologist. Joining them is a Rotarian team leader, Jeanne Pullens, who founded the Rotary Club of Houston, and that was some 15 years ago. As well, we have three members from the Rotary Club of Edmonton South: Ihor Kruk, Hank Hendricks, and Wayne Cameron. I would ask them all to stand as well and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you a young nephew of mine. It's his first time in the Legislature, and he's here this afternoon to observe what his uncle is doing in the House. So I would like Lionel Gauthier to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Freedom of Information Legislation

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Noxious. That's the word used

by a top expert in government secrecy when asked to describe this government's Bill 20 proposal to further limit Albertans' access to government documents. This Conservative government seems hell-bent to ram through legislation this week to make Canada's most secretive government even more tight lipped. My first question is to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us who benefits besides himself and the front bench from restricting public access to ministerial briefings?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I explained last week that there is no way the opposition is going to get this briefing book. They will use it for purely political purposes. Purely political. I very seldom refer to it. As a matter of fact, I get my briefing notes here. But there are some sensitive pieces of information that were put together by the administration.

Relative to the FOIP legislation, you know, we've received over 3,000 FOIP requests. That's since 2004 and 2005. Ninety-four per cent were completed by government public bodies within 60 days or less. That is commendable. That's pretty impressive given the number of requests we get and the complexity of those requests and understanding that most of them come from the opposition. One criticism . . .

The Speaker: Hello? With due respect let's move on.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is then to the Minister of Government Services, who's responsible for the FOIP administration. Is this minister proud of the fact that his first major piece of legislation as a minister is being described as noxious by a top expert in the field of government secrecy?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's clear that we all believe in the democratic process. You know, we've debated this bill in this House this session for six or seven hours. I think we have three more hours to go. I think that's enough.

Dr. Taft: That speaks for everything, doesn't it, Mr. Speaker?

Well, to the same minister: will the minister justify his decision to put the interests of 24 cabinet ministers ahead of those of 3 million Albertans?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, we'll have three more hours of debate this week in the Legislature. We'll have lots of time to talk about those facts and other important parts of this bill.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last few months thousands of Albertans have gathered at town hall meetings across Alberta to voice concerns over coal-bed methane development. Some residents, such as Dale Zimmerman of Wetaskiwin, are struggling to get by after their once normal water wells are suddenly containing high levels of methane and have lost considerable volume. Last week after the release of the final report of the coal-bed methane advisory committee the Minister of Environment dismissed the real and valid concerns of these thousands of Albertans as fearmongering. To the Minister of Environment: given the importance of many of the coal-bed methane report recommendations to all Albertans, what are the timelines for implementing these important recommendations? Completion dates.

Mr. Boutilier: First of all, a couple of points that the hon. member has raised. One, in the Alberta Liberal opposition release they say – and I will table this at the appropriate time – “This report contains some excellent recommendations.” I thank him for that. Also in the report it says that perhaps if the minister didn’t dismiss, he would take the time to listen to Mr. Zimmerman’s concern.

I just want to remind this Assembly that about a month and a half ago, in fact, I met with Mr. Zimmerman, and I invited the hon. member to join me. We listened to his concerns. We have acted on his concerns. I might also say that we brought in leading experts to deal with some of the issues that he has raised, and I’m very proud to say that we’ll continue to listen to concerns and deal with the facts of the matter.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit to establishing a public committee, including independent scientists, to investigate specific and cumulative impacts in the Horseshoe Canyon formation around coal-bed methane for the last five years?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I want to say to all members of this Assembly that that is exactly what we have been doing in the past in terms of looking at what the impact is, working with concerns of citizens, using independent experts from the university, such as I mentioned relative to Mr. Zimmerman, and we’re going to continue to do that because it’s that important to this government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What will the minister do to ensure that residents with concerns about groundwater, including Dale Zimmerman, 10 months later still waiting for responses, meaningful responses, will be heard and that immediate action will be taken to ensure safe water for these people?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the fact that this member brought up in this House concerns – I met this gentleman with the hon. member. It is really not entirely complete when the member says, “waiting 10 months later,” when he knows very well that I met with the gentleman for over two hours with my experts and with him in attendance. I think it’s really important to us to forget about the politics. Something more important to me is the facts, the scientific, independent evidence. That’s exactly what this ministry does today, tomorrow, and well into the future in terms of securing the water for the people of Alberta, that we all value.

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

Apprenticeship Training

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We’re told – and we spend a good deal of time in this Legislature talking about this – that we have a shortage of skilled labour in this province, and the numbers of people going into the apprenticeship program certainly indicate an attempt to deal with it, but are we succeeding? To the Minister of Advanced Education: I wonder if the minister can tell me how many apprentices were registered in Alberta last year in comparison with the number registered in 2002.

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I don’t know that I’ve got those numbers in front of me, so I will endeavour to provide him with a written

response, but I do know that in the last two weeks it went from 49,000 to 50,000.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

1:50

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: since it takes three to four years to make journeyman from the start of one’s apprenticeship, out of the thousands of apprentices registered in 2002 – and I’ll give the minister the opportunity to get back to me again if need be – how many graduated, obtaining their apprenticeship? In other words, how many journeymen did we obtain last year?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, again I will respond in exactly the same way because I don’t have those figures in front of me. I want to be accurate for the hon. member, so I will give him a written response.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. I wonder if I can get one other response from the minister. How many apprenticeships were cancelled in 2002, 2003, and 2004?

Mr. Herard: I will endeavour to respond to that, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Just a second, hon. member. Is the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks free for a second? Would you mind just checking on that young lady who just about fell? I’d really appreciate it. Thank you.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Health Care Funding for Rural Areas

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Among the many health issues the government has ignored while it played around with dead-end privatization schemes is rural access to health care services. Many rural communities are experiencing a crisis as they are unable to obtain or to retain physician services. One Alberta town, being Bashaw, has gone so far as to levy a special tax in order to support their local physician. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Does the minister believe that it is appropriate and correct for the residential taxpayers of Bashaw to be paying to support and subsidize a physician in their town, or can she offer a solution which is more in keeping with her responsibilities?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, having been raised in a rural community, I can well appreciate the sentiments of residents who chose, in the face of an opportunity to either lose a physician or retain a physician, the choice that their council and perhaps some of the residents certainly supported, to provide some tax dollars in support of living expenses. The sheer fact remains that a doctor who has to be by himself pay for a receptionist and all the other clinical expenses under the currently negotiated trilateral agreement for funding doctors, is not likely to earn sufficient funds to support a family in a smaller community where there are not as many acute care services delivered. So we have been attempting with our rural physician action plan to help and to broaden that net of primary care delivery so that we can serve the residents in circumstances like this. But

where local councils have that discretion and make that choice, we have no rule against it, nor should we.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Then I'll ask the minister: why should local taxpayers have to subsidize doctors in order to retain those services in small communities? Why doesn't the government make sure that small communities do have physicians?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, in Alberta our salaries for physicians, if you look at the Canadian Institute for Health Information, are in excess, on average, of \$340,000 per year. In Quebec, for example, they are about \$188,000 and, in fact, capped. So our dollars for doctors under our trilateral agreement are significant. Physicians who feel that that isn't sufficient – in this case a physician with a young family who wants to stay in Bashaw has identified to his community that it's not possible with the limited amount of exposure there. We are going to work on an aggressive workforce strategy to try and catch in the net the issues for smaller communities. But this government nor any other, I suggest, could promise to have a physician in every town. It's simply not practical, nor is it possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister admit that it is the responsibility of the provincial government and Alberta Health and Wellness to make sure that small towns and rural areas have appropriate medical care and not local ratepayers?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we're doing our level best and, in fact, are identified as a very strong provider of care on the Canadian scene with all of the work that we've done and the capacity we've had to deliver better quality care in a more expedient fashion. We are working on a rural physician action plan, this year adding 14 physicians in another unprecedented move by adding more funding in this year's budget for universities to take in more resident physicians. We're increasing that capacity. Once again, it is not our job to tell local communities how to spend their money, nor is it our job to interfere with that local decision-making.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Traffic Surveillance Cameras

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary Police Commission has stated that since deploying 44 red-light cameras at sites with high collision rates in 2001, the number of right-angle injury collisions at those intersections has been reduced by 47 per cent. The police service also conducted a trial by enabling the existing speed-monitoring capability within the red-light cameras, and at one intersection alone the trial identified an average of 400 offenders a week travelling in excess of 100 kilometres per hour in a 70-kilometre zone. Studies show that the risk of involvement in casualty collisions doubles with each five-kilometre increase of speed over 60 K per hour. My question is to the Solicitor General. In view of these startling statistics, will the government commit to increasing funding support for more red-light cameras in Alberta's cities and towns?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member's question is very good in the fact that technology has a critical role to play in a number of industries throughout Alberta but, as well, in policing. The red-light camera, the statistics that the member mentions, has really provided safer intersections in the testing period. In both Calgary and Edmonton they've been utilizing red-light cameras now for more than five to six years, and we've seen a reduction in serious collisions as well as fatalities at these intersections, a marked decrease. It's a proven fact that we can save lives as well as being able to provide those individuals that do go through red lights with a ticket and the opportunity to go to court. So the government has a strong record in supporting this, and we'll continue to support those decisions that are made by municipal police services.

Dr. Brown: To the same minister: will the minister allocate more enforcement resources to photoradar enforcement?

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, the main focus of photoradar is traffic safety. It's about ensuring that we can educate drivers but, as well, issuing summonses for those that fail or refuse to follow speed limits. We have seen a marked decrease in the number of photoradar tickets since its real inception in Alberta from 9 per cent of drivers in the province of Alberta to now about 2 per cent of drivers. So we've seen a marked decrease, and obviously the education program is working.

Dr. Brown: A further supplemental is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Will the minister commit to moving forward with the use of photoradar on provincial highways, including the Deerfoot Trail in Calgary?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, the policy currently is that we do not allow photoradar on our highways. The public consultation that we have seen so far indicates that the public is not in favour of having them on the highway. Of course, part of the difficulty is that a person could be speeding on the highway, and with photoradar you probably don't know about it for at least two weeks. We're more interested in using radar where, in fact, an officer then stops the vehicle, gives the ticket, and they get demerit points, whereas if it's photoradar, they do not. As far as the Deerfoot is concerned, that is in the city of Calgary. The province does not have jurisdiction on that stretch on highway 2.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Federal Child Care Benefit

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite Alberta's immense wealth there are approximately 9,000 families with children in this province who receive income support. Many of these families require access to affordable child care services, but the recent cancellation of the federal/provincial child care agreement leaves very little help for parents struggling to keep up with high fees. To the Minister of Children's Services: has the minister consulted with the Minister of Human Resources and Employment to determine the effect that the new \$100 federal child care benefit will have on Alberta families receiving social assistance?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I have. As I explained to the hon. member about two weeks ago when I sat down with her, Alberta won't be clawing back any of the benefits. My hon. colleague may want to supplement.

2:00

Mr. Cardinal: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a really important area, and it's a real high-needs area. Therefore, Alberta provides many, many supports on top of the basic rates we provide. Supports include money for babysitting, special diet allowances. These are supplementary benefits, among the best in Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: what plan does the minister have for families on income support to ensure that they are able to receive the full benefit of the new \$100 allowance?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, again, that is one area that's really high needs, and we're really sensitive in that particular area. I've given directions to my staff already to assess the situation, assess all the new federal programs announced, assess what programs we have to offer here in Alberta, and determine where adjustments could be made. I'd like to thank the opposition member again for that question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister commit today to joining the governments of Saskatchewan and Ontario and agree to not claw back the new federal funding from families on income support?

Mr. Cardinal: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've agreed to this already, that we will not be clawing back any of the benefits.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Monitoring for Health Program

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents have come to me with concerns about costs and provisions of diabetic treatment supplies. Now, I understand that more people are eligible to receive help managing their diabetes under the monitoring for health program. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister outline how this program can assist more people with diabetes while funding for the program has apparently not increased?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in September 2003 funding for the Alberta monitoring program was assigned to the Canadian Diabetes Association, and it was increased significantly. In fact, we increased that to a budget of about \$9 million annually. The program is intended to assist some 40,000 low-income people to access those supports so that they might be able to supplement their income sufficiently in order to look after the costly supplies that are needed for diabetics. The project was not intended, though, to fund all of the supplies. These supplies include blood glucose strips, injection supplies, lancets, and pump infusion sets. People who are insulin dependent receive about \$550 per year and with the oral medication about \$250 a year. So it is noteworthy that it is an expensive program, but to date there have been fewer people subscribe to the program than we originally thought would subscribe.

Mr. Johnson: My only supplemental is to the same minister. Could the minister indicate if there are plans to further increase funding for this program?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in light of the increase that has been identified for the number of people that will be receiving support for Alberta health care insurance premiums, raising those thresholds so that more can be a part of it, we are planning to announce some increase in those thresholds so that, in fact, instead of having a little less than 20,000 people in support and receiving support through the program, we can increase those support levels, increase those thresholds, and ultimately hit closer to that target of some 40,000 people that will receive support for their supplies. So it will be imminent that we will make those announcements, and I hope we'll be able to help considerably more people with the cost of diabetic supplies.

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

Lottery-funded Grant Presentation Cheques

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Gaming minister put an end to Tory MLAs signing their names on lottery cheques. The minister stated that partisan cheque presentations using lottery funds will not be going on any further. The minister went on to say that the Official Opposition should check out its site and that we would be surprised at one of the pictures. We e-mailed the department for clarification, but it went unreturned. My question is to the Minister of Gaming. Can the minister tell us which picture he was referring to and on which website he saw an opposition member presenting lottery money, not charity money? They are two different things, my dear hon. minister.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Graydon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, there is still some confusion even after my supplementary answer last week, obviously, when I said that MLAs shouldn't be signing the bottom of the cheque to make it appear as though the cheque was coming out of their account and not the government account. I've been trying to avoid embarrassing the member opposite whose website the photo is on, but unfortunately I guess I'm forced into telling the Assembly and the member opposite that if they would check the website of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, they would find a photo of a cheque being presented to the Afton School Parent Advisory Council. It's a \$125,000 community facility enhancement cheque. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, I'll be tabling an appropriate number of copies of that photo at the end of this session. Clearly on the photo is the Alberta lotteries logo.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: given that the only cheque presentation on our website involves charity or personal cheque presentation, will the minister take back the statement and apologize right now?

Mr. Graydon: Are you telling me, Mr. Speaker, that the \$125,000

to the Afton School Parent Advisory Council came from the hon. member's personal account? [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister . . .

Some Hon. Members: Answer the question.

Mr. Agnihotri: I will find out about that.

Will the minister commit to getting better research from his staff because I confirmed from the present 16 MLAs that they didn't have any?

Mr. Elsalhy: This is false.

Mr. Agnihotri: This is totally false. I again request you to apologize because you don't have any evidence. If you have any evidence, please table it right now.

Mr. Graydon: As mentioned, I will table the appropriate number of copies of the photograph at the appropriate time in this afternoon's session.

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

Alberta/B.C. Economic Agreement

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta recently signed an historic agreement with the province of British Columbia to reduce barriers to trade, investment, and labour mobility between our two provinces. This partnership gives businesses and workers in both provinces greater access to a larger range of opportunities. In addition to this agreement a special memorandum of understanding was signed covering postsecondary education. My first question today is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Many students in the province today struggle to get accepted into a postsecondary program in Alberta because of the increasing demand for these spaces. Will the new agreement make it even harder for students to be accepted into a postsecondary program in Alberta's learning system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, this is good news all around because this agreement creates an economic region second only to Ontario, and the way that the economy is going in both British Columbia and Alberta, look out Ontario. This agreement will make it easier for students to be accepted into Alberta's postsecondary learning program and vice versa. One of the main purposes of this agreement is to improve the accessibility of each province's postsecondary programs to students in Alberta and British Columbia.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also directed to the Minister of Advanced Education. How will this partnership with B.C. support entrepreneurs wanting to start up companies in Alberta who can't find skilled labour?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, both Alberta and British Columbia

currently face low unemployment, shortages in the skilled trades, and lots of entrepreneurial opportunities in a booming economy. This agreement will allow an entrepreneur in British Columbia to start a company in Alberta knowing full well that the rules are going to be the same here as they are there, so the same requirements, for example the same credentials, will be accepted on both sides. As we know, small business is the engine of the economy. This will make it easier to grow even more.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

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

2:10 Physician Supply in Rural Alberta

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to fail rural communities with their health concerns and doctor retention issues. It's not about funding; it's about training doctors. The government's current approach to workforce planning is insufficient now and will be totally inadequate in the future. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. When will the minister release a detailed five-year plan on increasing the spaces allocated for educating and training doctors in Alberta's universities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question because, in fact, we have a meeting scheduled tomorrow morning with the minister of health to discuss exactly that.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, but when do we get the plan?

To the minister of health: given that the minister recognizes that there is a shortage of health professionals in rural Alberta, why was there no increase in funding for the rural physician action plan in this year's budget?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there were a number of ways that we increased funding that would benefit rural Alberta. For example, we had \$35 million in last year's budget for primary care networks. We have \$70 million in this year's budget. Our hope is that with another 14 – and we've expanded to 14 primary care networks now – raising the numbers to some 28 across the province, we'll have a wider net of health care professionals that will work in teams that will help support not only urban communities but rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, the other part of the equation, of course, is the work that we're doing to prepare health care professionals that are not physician related that deal with the supports for long-term care, the nursing supports, licensed practical nurses. If you talk to some of the regional health authorities, for example in Calgary, their anticipation is that we will be fine until the year 2010, but after that, for the broader net across Alberta it's clear that we have to do more as the boomers move towards retirement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: can the minister explain how health care in Alberta is equitable when the good people of Bashaw are paying income tax, health care premiums, and a share of natural resource revenue and now they have to pay a \$68 per year tax to retain their only physician?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, as I explained earlier, there are two sides

to this issue. The one issue is where we have a trilateral agreement that compensates physicians on a fee-for-service basis, and without an acute-care hospital where there's long-term care in that community, the fact remains and the fact is that there are simply not sufficient procedures to compensate a doctor at the level at which he wishes to earn.

The second part and a very fundamental truth, however, is that if a local community chooses to undertake a service and supplement a service in order to retain that service in a community, we should not try to stop that discretion. It happens many times where local communities pay more to keep a school in function so that that school can continue to serve community capacity and needs. So although communities in many cases have been part of the recruitment process for health care professionals and have chosen to put their own tax dollars there, you cannot argue that this province funds insufficiently its physicians because, in fact, we're at the top of the scale.

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

Tuition Fee Policy

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Advanced Education has been tying himself in knots trying to justify removing tuition policy from legislation, where it's subject to the public scrutiny of this Legislature, to regulation, where future decisions would be made behind closed doors at the whim of the cabinet. The minister can go on arguing as long as he wants, but the fact remains that democratic oversight on tuition policy will be replaced with a secretive and undemocratic process. My question to the minister: if the tuition policy is good enough to be put in regulation, approved behind the closed doors of the cabinet room, why is the tuition policy not good enough to be included in the legislation that is openly debated on the floor of this Legislature?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be careful not to talk about the legislation itself because it is on the Order Paper, but I will acknowledge the concerns of students. That's why our government paid a tuition increase for students last fall and this fall, saving them \$87 million in preparation for this.

I'll make the hon. member the same offer I made to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. I offered him a spot at the consultation table, and I offer the same thing to you.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why is the minister refusing to listen to every student organization in the province which is calling on the government to keep tuition policy in legislation so that it can't be changed at the whim of the minister or his cabinet?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'm not refusing. In fact, I'm meeting with them this afternoon. You seem to have got there first.

With respect to the process, the hon. member knows that you can't pass an OC in cabinet without doing consultation. I'm offering him a seat at that consultation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why is this government sandbagging the work of its own postsecondary

steering committee and the work of the subcommittee on transforming the postsecondary system, which nowhere recommends that tuition fee policy increases be made by cabinet decision rather than by this Legislature?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the consultation process that will in fact form the regulations is a very extensive process, and I invite the hon. member to be part of it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Alberta/Montana Relations

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we know that relations between Canada and the United States have been strained over issues like BSE, softwood lumber, and emerging issues, like water. I understand that the federal government is responsible for resolving these kinds of international issues, but my first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. What does Alberta as a province hope to accomplish through its relationship with Montana by working outside the federal diplomatic process?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has had a formal relationship with the state of Montana since 1986. This was long before issues of BSE and heightened border security arose. We've worked well with the state of Montana for the last 20 years co-ordinating things like agriculture and transportation, tourism, trade and investment, the environment, including water. In fact, there is an international joint commission that's been in place since 1909 to deal with transborder water issues between the two jurisdictions.

When issues arise between Canada and the United States, we think that our good relationship between the province and the state of Montana can influence federal negotiations and decisions. Last week Alberta and Montana both agreed to train together in support of each other's emergency response. As an example, we agreed to work on transportation issues to encourage the flow of people and trade across the border. Also, Mr. Speaker, the consul general for the United States, Mr. Naim Ahmed from Calgary, was in attendance as well as the Canadian consul general representing Canada based in Denver, the hon. Michael Fine. Both of those individuals will take the nature of the discussions held between Alberta and Montana back to their respective federal governments.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister: given that border security is one of those issues decided by the U.S. government, not the state of Montana, what kinds of actions can Alberta take through its relationship with Montana, if any, to influence that decision?

Mr. Mar: We do know, Mr. Speaker, that the legislation has already been passed by the U.S. Congress, so we recognize that a U.S. government decision has been cleared to require passports or some other form of identification to enter a U.S. jurisdiction. We're hoping that our two jurisdictions, Montana and Alberta, might be able to have some influence on the timeline for implementation. We believe, between the two of us, that more time is required to estimate the economic impact of this decision and perhaps lengthen it so that people will be ready.

2:20

As an example, Mr. Speaker, the U.S. consul general indicated that the number of people who use a passport to clear U.S. customs at the Calgary International Airport is about 70 per cent, but the number of people who have a passport to clear customs at Sweetgrass, Montana, is only about 30 per cent. With the introduction of the requirement to have a passport or secure document at land crossings of the U.S. border to be implemented by January 1, 2008, we believe that more time is required to ensure that the 70 per cent of people who don't have a passport will in fact be ready for it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. My last question is to the Minister of Environment. Given that there is somewhat of a dispute between Montana and Alberta relating to the use of water in the Milk and St. Mary rivers, can the minister tell us how the province is working with Montana to determine a solution?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations has mentioned, we are working very closely with our neighbours to the south. We have an incredible long history of almost 100 years. I want to say as Minister of Environment responsible for water that, clearly, Albertans are viewed in North America as excellent managers of water. I applaud Albertans for their work over the past 100 years. We continue to work with our neighbours to the south; in fact, right now the IJC, the International Joint Commission, that the minister previously had mentioned. We are asking for consultative feedback from residents in both Montana and Alberta. That's what's happening. We will continue in terms of conservation and collaboration because I think that at the end of the day this important resource we've been blessed with is far too valuable to do anything but work together.

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

Water Quality Monitoring

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta needs to learn from other governments' botched water strategies where the lack of government planning and monitoring led to dangerous results in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, and Walkerton, Ontario. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Given that the money allocated in Budget 2006 for water and wastewater management doesn't even address the water infrastructure backlog, let alone address current needs, how can Albertans be confident in their water supply?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, since the Water for Life strategy has been adopted, the government of Alberta has taken that as a very serious issue. Of course, this year \$54 million was allocated to water/wastewater projects. As well, we know that in the agreement that we signed with the federal government – some \$88 million from us, \$88 million from the federal government, and \$88 million from the municipalities – some 55 per cent of that money has to be spent on projects that are green. Water and wastewater management are a part of those.

As far as the testing of the quality of drinking water to make sure that it's absolutely safe, Mr. Speaker, we are promoting the regional

type of projects. One of the big reasons for that is so that we can build water treatment plants that are efficient because you get some economies of scale, but also it's very critical that we have people operating those that are qualified. So to build a number of small stand alones, we believe that there's more danger of having some problems with the management of the plant.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Finance. Will the minister admit that Alberta's infrastructure deficit is in fact downloaded provincial debt?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me see. We have a 13 and a half billion dollar capital plan, triple any other province in Canada. We've added additional Water for Life funds in each of the last two years. We continue to support our municipalities. I would remind the hon. member of the \$3 billion commitment to municipalities that's being paid to them by their request over five years. There's a municipal sponsorship program. I lose track of exactly the amount of that one. Are we downloading? We're downloading a fair amount of money.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Three billion dollars with lack of planning isn't going far enough.

To the Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, capital planning: has the minister considered adopting the Alberta Liberal plan that would see 25 per cent of all surpluses go into an endowed capital account that would responsibly deal with water treatment and other infrastructure shortcomings now and into the future?

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to be able to work with the Minister of Finance, who has outlined exactly the amounts of money and the programs that are currently in place. As we go forward beyond the three-year business plans, we've got billions more dollars to identify and how those programs will work and how we'll pass on the money and continue to work with our municipalities.

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

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recent reports indicate that there are a record number of mountain pine beetle-infested trees in our province this year, nearly 15,000. The mountain pine beetle has devastated the B.C. forest industry and a large number of communities that depend on this industry. Now the mountain pine beetle is threatening Alberta's forests more than it ever has. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is his department doing to get the mountain pine beetle out of our forests?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. We've said in this House many times that all along the mountains there are pine beetles and they are a serious threat to our forests. We've pursued a very aggressive strategy since they were first detected in Alberta in 2002.

We survey our forests both in the air and on the ground. We continue to cut and burn our infested trees, and we do prescribed burns in particular areas, strategic locations where we have a large infestation of pine beetles. The department, in addition to that strategy, has also asked the industry to review their harvesting sequences in their already approved plans and to focus on removing mature forests that might be threatened by the pine beetle. This aggressive, comprehensive strategy to fight the mountain pine beetle strives to meet the methods of our industry as well as the needs of our communities that depend on that industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. Has his department learned anything from the B.C. government on how to effectively control this pest?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, we are indeed fortunate to have British Columbia as such a strong and experienced partner and an ally in battling this particular disease. At the recent Alberta/British Columbia joint cabinet meeting we renewed our commitment with British Columbia at that time to work together on our shared border. We're doing a very aggressive plan on both sides of the border to stop the beetle at that border. We target areas where the mountain pine beetle will most likely come across into Alberta. Again, we cut and we burn those infested trees in those areas. It's important that we continue to work with British Columbia to ensure that there is a ban on barked wood coming across the border into Alberta to reduce the beetles travelling into Alberta in that way as well. We're taking a very proactive approach in working with British Columbia, and we're going to be making sure that we do everything to limit the spread of the mountain pine beetle into our mature pine forests.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. How will the government deal with the potential impact of the mountain pine beetle on the softwood lumber framework?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. It is a question that the industry has brought to our attention, but it is too soon to say how the softwood framework might affect the challenges that we have with the mountain pine beetle. Our focus right now is on trying to prevent the beetle from spreading to the mature forests, as we said. We have met with the industry, and we all recognize that there are details to be ironed out in addressing and finalizing the framework as it's presented. We are concerned about the potential threat that will bring to Albertans as we bring forward the negotiations under the framework, and we will work closely with all our partners to make sure that the realities of our day-to-day forest industry like out-of-control beetles are considered in finalizing those details under that framework.

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

2:30 Alberta/Montana Electricity Transmission Line

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Promoters of major new electricity generation projects in Alberta want greater access to U.S. electricity markets as a prerequisite before they invest here in

Alberta in the construction of more power plants. Export power lines benefit the generators at the expense of consumers here in Alberta. The first new export power line planned is now through a public process, and that line will be constructed between Lethbridge and Montana. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Is the Montana/Alberta tie-line licensed as a utility here in Alberta?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the Montana/Alberta tie-line is a merchant line. It's a private-sector application. To build, they have to go through all the regulatory processes to have that line approved just as any other utility company would have to. It'll be up to those making the contracts to see if it's viable.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: is the Montana/Alberta tie-line a merchant line? Is it licensed as a merchant line, or is it licensed as a utility here in the province of Alberta? Yes or no?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the specific licence application in front of me. I'd be happy to get that and report back in due course.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Energy: given that electricity ratepayers will pay the cost now for additional transmission capacity that is to be constructed between Lake Wabamun and southern Alberta, will any electricity transmitted between these points after the new transmission capacity is developed be exported on the Alberta/Montana tie-line?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the application for this 500 kV line between Wabamun down to the Calgary area is to strengthen our grid for delivery of electricity to our residents, our businesses here in Alberta. It is in the primary needs application, that it was to strengthen our own grid, not anything to do with export.

That said, I do want to say, though, that we do already have a couple of interconnections, one through British Columbia and one through Saskatchewan. They're limited in scope. You can effectively already transport electricity through to British Columbia through to United States. That happens already. But it acts as greater stabilization to have access to more electricity, other plants in other jurisdictions that will help stabilize even our own market and would be to our benefit.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of six to participate, but today just a little further information with respect to the democratic history of Alberta. While the length of time between Alberta's 26 elections varies, the overall average length of time is 3.95 years, almost right on the four-year mark.

The longest period between elections is five years, two months, and three days, the time between the election held June 19, 1930, and the election held August 22, 1935. The second longest time is four years, 11 months, and 10 days, the time between the elections held July 18, 1921, and June 28, 1926. The shortest time between elections is two years, 10 months, and 12 days, the time between the elections held May 8, 1986, and March 20, 1989. The second shortest time is two years, 10 months, and 24 days, the time between the elections of August 5, 1952, and June 29, 1955. Nine elections

were held after four years since the previous election and 12 have been held in the third year.

To repeat, the overall length of time between elections in our history is 3.95 years.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Marigold Library System

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and recognize the 25th anniversary of the Marigold library system. This system links libraries over a wide area, with member communities stretching throughout south central Alberta, including my constituency. Linked together, libraries can act as deposits of information for a much larger number of people than live in the immediate area around the library.

Since the creation of the Marigold library system there have been many changes in how they do business, and one of the main drivers of this change is technology. When this system was first implemented, microfiche was the tool most used in libraries. As new technology became available, libraries have become more connected, first through telephone or computers which linked to a system-wide reference and interlibrary loan system between the member libraries.

Not only the technology has changed the way the Marigold library system operates. New partnerships have also opened up broader horizons for rural libraries. Since 1999 Marigold has had a partnership with Northern Lights library system and Yellowhead library system, and this collaboration is referred to as the Regional Automation Consortium, or TRAC. Since that time, more regions have joined the partnership, and this level of interconnectedness allowed for the creation of the Alberta library card. With this a cardholder from Hinton could walk into a library in Edmonton and borrow materials.

In 2003 the Peace library system joined TRAC, which meant that the members were able to share books from over two-thirds of the province. Further improvements have led to other changes such as cardholders being able to access the system from home to check out books and have them delivered to their home library.

Over the past 25 years there have been a great many changes in technology, and this has greatly affected libraries in our province. The completion of the SuperNet means that rural libraries will be able to offer even more services to their members, and the possibilities are endless.

Mr. Speaker, when people communicate and co-operate, the sky is the limit. I would ask all members to join me in marking the 25th anniversary of the Marigold library system.

Native Prairie Grasslands

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's grasslands constitute a tremendously important part of Alberta's natural heritage. They're home to over 1,100 diverse species of fauna and flora, including characteristic species such as the prickly pear cactus, the western diamond-back rattlesnake, the pronghorn antelope, and the burrowing owl. Unfortunately, human development has led to the loss or degradation of much of our native mixed-grass and shortgrass prairie, causing many species to become threatened or even extinct.

Recently the energy company EnCana has proposed a project which could see as many as 1,275 new gas wells drilled in the national wildlife refuge portion of the Suffield military base in southeastern Alberta. While not completely free from human

impact, the refuge still contains much of its natural beauty and integrity as a native grasslands area.

The EnCana proposal has the potential to cause further degradation of the area. While the wells, once in place, may have a small footprint on the environment, a larger danger lies in the cumulative impact of drilling and servicing and associated pipelines, roads, and trails. This cumulative effect could be very damaging to the grasslands and threaten the tremendous biodiversity and the uniquely aesthetic nature of this area.

I want to commend Lieutenant Colonel Drew, the base commander of CFB Suffield, for recognizing the unique nature of the refuge and its fauna and flora and for his efforts in safeguarding the area. I believe that we as Albertans must take action to protect the last remnants of our native prairie grasslands, and I would encourage all concerned Albertans to make their views known to the panel established by the federal Environment minister to review this drilling project.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Asian Heritage Month

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May is Asian Heritage Month, and I rise with great pleasure today to recognize the rich culture and important contributions of the Asian community in our province. There are over 250,000 people from Asian backgrounds in Alberta, and the Asian community has been an important part of our province for its entire existence, over 100 years. From the business community to the academic world to the cultural sector there has always a vibrancy and dynamic feeling that the Asian community shares with the rest of the province.

2:40

The events celebrating Asian Heritage Month throughout Alberta demonstrate the diversity and energy of this community's contributions. In Calgary photo exhibits, a film festival, a writers' showcase, and concerts will highlight the amazing experiences of Asian artists. In Edmonton art exhibits, a book launch, an international martial arts championship, and a spring garden festival will showcase the diversity of Asian culture.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is proud of its multicultural heritage and the strength of its diversity. Albertans from all cultural backgrounds working together have made Alberta what it is today, a rich and unique province with opportunities for all. Asian Heritage Month provides communities with another opportunity to work together to make cross-cultural connections and recognize the value of our cultural diversity.

I encourage all MLAs and all Albertans to celebrate Asian Heritage Month. Thank you.

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

Diversity in Alberta

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to focus on an Alberta that is coming of age socially, politically, and spiritually. It is becoming a cliché to speak of our diversity, yet it is this breadth of our people that is the strength of the new Alberta. Alberta is coming to reflect the pluralism that makes our country a microcosm of planet Earth.

Politically Alberta is coming of age. As a new Prime Minister from Alberta gets used to governing Canada as a whole, the rest of Canada is learning that Alberta does not march in lockstep. We have

many voices and viewpoints. Child care is an example. While Ottawa now wants to get out of the field, other Albertans are determined to have a voice in the choice the new government offers. We are becoming mature enough to recognize that to question and challenge is not disloyal for choices that grow out of debate and scrutiny will be more enduring.

Spiritually we are coming of age. In my riding I've been part of discussions where Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, and Jews have shared our deepest concerns and admitted that it doesn't matter what we call God. That is truly a miracle. A century ago it was hard to get Christian denominations to talk. The Hebrew name for God, I am what I am, is one we cannot escape. Every time we make an I-am statement, we either affirm our source or take the name in vain. Let us make our I-ams not statements of individual ego but recognition of belonging to a larger whole. When we do that, we will reflect not only diversity but our divine splendour. Then we will truly have come of age.

Thank you.

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

Anthony Henday Drive

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans depend upon modern freeways for commerce, recreation, and commuting. That's why the new sections of Anthony Henday Drive are such a boon to the city of Edmonton. But my constituents have raised serious questions about the downside of this freeway.

Albertans in southeast Edmonton living next to the drive are angry and frustrated because the road runs less than a hundred feet away from some houses without true noise or safety barriers. They anticipate that their property values may fall because of increasing noise levels and air pollution from passing vehicles. More importantly, they are concerned for the safety of their children and pets. With vehicles zooming by at freeway speeds, children living near this road will be at risk every single day, yet the government has no plans despite requests from Edmonton city council to create earthen berms or barriers that could dramatically lower the risk to children while protecting property values and the quality of life of southeast Edmonton residents.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my constituents in Edmonton-Ellerslie and, indeed, on behalf of all Edmontonians living near Anthony Henday Drive, I call upon this government to do the right thing and reconsider their position. The investment required to make the residential areas bordering Anthony Henday Drive safe and protected from noise and dust is well worth it.

Thank you.

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

Bullying Prevention Campaign

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last June government launched a three-year province-wide bullying prevention program. This campaign encouraged children to learn how to handle bullying through the S-team heroes game at teamheroes.ca. I'm excited to say that this website recorded over 1 million visits in less than a year, a remarkable achievement. Parents can also learn more about the bullying prevention program through a web resource called bullyfreealberta.ca.

We are expanding on the S-team heroes work through a new campaign that encourages 12- to 18-year-olds to stand up and stop bullying. Bullying can stop in less than 10 seconds, Mr. Speaker, when someone intervenes on behalf of the victim. Youth can visit

b-free.ca for practical tips and advice on how to stand up and stop bullying in a positive way. We're also trying to encourage youth to talk to their parents or a trusted adult.

In conjunction with the new campaign, Mr. Speaker, government has launched a toll-free 24-hour provincial helpline for youth who are struggling with bullying. The number is 888-456-2323. Adults can also call this number for help and support with bullying. I'm confident that we're on the right track here, but we still have a long way to go.

Making bullying history requires the combined efforts of government, community, school boards, teachers, parents, and students. Schools can play an integral role in preventing bullying and are making a difference. This is one of many reasons Alberta is recognized internationally for its outstanding and caring education system. Alberta has also been recognized nationally by bullying prevention experts and is a leader on this issue, Mr. Speaker. Parent link centres have also played an important role in this work by ensuring that parents have the tools they need to help their children deal with bullying situations. I commend all those who have taken part in this very successful campaign and encourage all Albertans to do their part to end bullying in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice being given this time, it's my pleasure to introduce a petition signed by 23 students from St. Joe's school in Calgary. The petition calls for concerted government action to address the reported rise in teen smoking in Alberta, and not only do they offer their criticism; they also offer us some possible solutions: a tobacco tax increase, legislation to control tobacco sales and marketing, and legislation to make all workplaces completely smoke free.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to give oral notice of three motions, the first of which is with respect to the Standing Orders of this Assembly and a package of edits and important updates, corrections, standardizations, and so on, put together by the Speaker's office and his staff, for which we are very grateful. It goes as follows. Be it resolved that

The Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, denoted as being effective April 11, 2005, be repealed in their entirety and the Standing Orders tabled in the Assembly on May 15, 2006, and distributed to members be substituted in their place.

The revised Standing Orders come into effect on the first day of the next sitting of the Assembly following the adjournment of the 2006 spring sitting.

The second motion will read as follows.

Be it resolved that:

- (1) A Select Special Personal Information Protection Act Review Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be appointed to review the Personal Information Protection Act as provided in section 63(1) of that act consisting of the following members, namely Mrs. Ady, chair; Mr. Goudreau, deputy chair; Mr. Backs; Mr. Johnston; Mr. Liepert; Mr. Lindsay; Mr. Loughheed; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Martin; Mr. Rodney; and Mr. Snelgrove.
- (2) The chair and members of the committee shall be paid in

accordance with the schedule of category A committees provided in the most recent Members' Services Committee allowances order.

- (3) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair.
- (4) In carrying out its duties, the committee may travel throughout Alberta and undertake a process of consultation with all interested Albertans.
- (5) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may with the concurrence of the head of the department utilize the services of the public service employed in that department or the staff employed by the Assembly or the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.
- (6) The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned.
- (7) The committee must submit its report, including any proposed amendments to the act, within 18 months after beginning its review.
- (8) When its work has been completed, the committee must report to the Assembly if it is sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

2:50

Finally, Mr. Speaker, my third motion is as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee and recommend that Mr. Lorne R. Gibson be appointed as Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 43

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two reports to table. First, I would like to table five copies of the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the 2004 provincial enumeration and the November 22, 2004, provincial general election of the 26th Legislative Assembly.

Secondly, I would like to table five copies of the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Senate nominee election, Monday, November 22, 2004.

Copies of both were previously distributed to all MLAs.
Thank you.

Mr. Graydon: I'd like to table five copies of a photograph referred to in question period earlier today.

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is raising a point of order on the Minister of Gaming's tabling of a picture?

Ms Blakeman: Yes.

The Speaker: We'll deal with it later. I just wanted to know that that's exactly what it is.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of four of the many letters I've received from concerned citizens of Alberta voicing serious concerns with the proposed third-way health care system. The first letter is signed by six individuals. They are R. Seamans, V. Brennen, E. Roy, M. Fichter, E. Morrissey, and J. Dunkle. The remaining letters are from Stan Nykiel, Jonathan Hyatt, and Tim Cambridge.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the required number of copies of the Cuisine & Concours d'Elegance program from the Meals on Wheels fundraising gala that took place at the Roundup Centre in Calgary last Saturday evening. Calgary's Meals on Wheels delivers not only nutritious meals to over a thousand individuals each day but provides dignity, companionship, and security, allowing primarily fixed-income seniors to remain in their homes and therefore out of expensive institutional care. Hopefully, the Alberta government will recognize and financially support this now 41-year-old voluntary program that has outgrown its current facility.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table here today. The first is from Carl Ulrich from Edmonton. He says that Bill 20 is a step backwards and that one of the reasons the public has such little faith in elected officials is because of the lack of transparency.

I also have a letter from William Dascavich. He recently visited a senior in a health care facility in Edmonton. He was impressed by the high standard of accommodation but was very disturbed by the lack of staff and the resulting distress that this causes residents.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three letters to table today. They are all from people who are deeply disturbed by Bill 208 and who wish to voice their opposition. They're from Rheanna Sand of Edmonton, Rod McConnell, also of Edmonton, and Paul Sereda from Calgary. They each feel that Bill 208 would not protect human rights but would legislate and legalize discrimination.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have eight tablings today, and they're all regarding questions that we've asked over this past session in the direction of the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation on the Calgary and Edmonton utility corridors or the ring roads. The first tabling is dated December 2, 1982, and again it is regarding the Calgary and Edmonton transportation and utility corridors.

The second tabling is also from Alberta Environment, and it's a memo dated February 25, 1983. The subject is again the Edmonton transportation and utility corridor.

The third tabling I have is dated September 18, 1981. It's a memorandum again from Alberta Environment to the hon. Premier of the day from the Minister of Environment, and it is on the Calgary and Edmonton corridor land purchases.

The next tabling I have is from September 18, 1981, and it's from the Minister of Environment again to the chairperson of the members' priorities committee. It is on the Calgary and Edmonton corridor land purchases. [interjection] Yes, hon. member, 1981.

The next tabling I have is from January 5, 1983, and it is from the Minister of Environment to the chairman, again, of the finance, priorities and coordination committee, and its subject is the northeast energy corridor land purchases.

The next tabling I have is dated October 9, 1980, and it is from the Minister of Environment to the president of the Executive Council, the hon. Premier of the time, and the subject again is the Edmonton and Calgary RDA purchases and special warrants.

The next to last tabling I have is also from the Minister of Environment, dated November 23, 1981. Again the subject is the Edmonton transportation and utility corridor.

The last tabling is from Alberta Executive Council, dated September 10, 1985, and the subject is the Edmonton-Calgary restricted development area land purchase, and this indicates that the finance, priorities and co-ordination committee authorized the minister of public works, supply, and services to "proceed to purchase a one acre parcel of land in the Edmonton Restricted Development Area from Northwestern Utilities Ltd. for approximately \$650,000." I don't know whether there was an oil well or a gas well on that property or not.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two letters to table today, both on Bill 208. The first one is from Dr. Alan Rimer and Mrs. Shirley Rimer. They state that they are ashamed of what they call the close-minded approach to issues and people contained in Bill 208.

The second letter is from Mr. Peter Pratt, who also objects to Bill 208, and says that if a marriage commissioner feels that his or her job conflicts with their conscience, the right thing for them to do is to resign their position.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table five copies of a document signed by 69 persons in my riding of Edmonton-Glenora protesting the Alberta government's plan for third-way health care reforms.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings this afternoon, the first being the program from the second annual Stop and Smell the Flowers, a fundraiser held on Saturday evening for the Edmonton region of the Canadian Mental Health Association. They do work in partnership with other community agencies "to educate about mental health and illness, to advocate for better conditions in the community and to help . . . build strong supports for community life." Speaking that evening were the president of the board, Abigail Parrish-Craig; their executive

director, Bill Hofmeyer; and a mother of a son who suffers from a mental illness and has benefited from their programs, Cathy Ashton. Several thousand dollars were raised to benefit the charity.

As well, I have the appropriate number of copies of a rather heart-wrenching e-mail that was sent to members of the opposition from a Rodney Rea, a resident of Edmonton. Both he and his girlfriend, Beatrice, are clients of the AISH program, and he raises several concerns about the inadequacies of that program.

The third one, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of e-mail correspondence that I referred to during the supply estimates for the Department of Finance last week. These are written by an insurance industry expert by the name of Susan Saksida in Ontario. She is raising concerns about the Alberta special broker and the fact that perhaps several million dollars, even tens of millions of dollars, may be slipping through the hands of Alberta Finance every year in uncollected insurance tax.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is the chair's pleasure today to table with the Assembly copies of the revised Standing Orders. As the hon. Government House Leader indicated when he gave oral notice of the motion, these Standing Orders will take effect at the next sitting of the Assembly following the adjournment of the spring sitting.

These revised Standing Orders have been discussed by government House leaders for nearly three years. They modernize the language used in the Standing Orders to bring them in line with the language used in the *Revised Statutes of Alberta*. They do not make any substantive changes, but members should be aware that the editing process means that certain Standing Orders have been renumbered.

After tabling this, I'm going to ask the pages to distribute copies of these revisions to all members in the House. If the Assembly should approve them, they will be put in the standard format in green binders in time for the next sitting of the Assembly following the adjournment of the spring sitting.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Minister Zwodzesky, Government House Leader, a report dated May 11, 2006, entitled Number of Times Closure/Time Allocation Used by the Alberta Government during the Past Five Years, prepared by the office of the Government House Leader.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Special Areas Act the special areas trust account financial statements, December 31, 2005.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on the point of order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is referring to the tabling that I believe the Minister of Gaming made. If it's the same one that I took off the same website, we're talking about the same thing. I haven't been able to see exactly what the minister did table, but I'm assuming that it's the same picture. The citations that I'm using here are 23(h), (i), and (j).

In fact, the situation was such that the school asked if the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark would do a cheque presentation because they had been successful in receiving lottery money through the

grant program that falls under the minister's ministry. The school contacted the government for the cheque, the actual cheque to be presented, and was told that protocol dictates that it had to be a government member who came out with the cheque. They offered the Edmonton caucus chairperson, who is the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. The school wanted their local MLA, and they were dissatisfied with the government's lack of co-operation, so the students created an outsized cheque for them to use, with some help from the staff there. The school asked the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to present the students' cheque so that they could have the benefit of a ceremony that all of the school could participate in.

I note that the signature on the cheque is not the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark's, so once again under 23(h), (i), and (j) there was a statement made that is false and a motive made that is incorrect. This is not a government cheque that appears in the photograph. It is a student project that had been done. I suppose that the minister could take pride that the logo was fairly well duplicated, but it was certainly not either the actual cheque nor the official photo of cheque that the government sends out as the school was so clearly told that only government members are allowed to do this. Opposition members are specifically excluded from this.

We have a situation where the minister alleged that the cheque was a government cheque. It is not, Mr. Speaker. That's under 23(h).

Under 23(i) he imputed a false motive, that the member was attempting to put himself forward as a government member, I suppose, and claim that he was putting forward this cheque and that he indeed had signed it. That is absolutely, 100 per cent, totally, flat-out wrong. Again, the language that was used in the question and follow-up and that culminated with the tabling has certainly created disorder, and I hope that this can be alleviated.

I believe that I have shown that the allegations from the minister are false, that the information given was inaccurate, and I'd ask that he please withdraw his statements and apologize to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who did exactly as his school asked him to do.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just reviewing 23(h), (i), and (j), which are the three citations mentioned by the hon. member. Unfortunately, I don't have the benefit of the Blues to check verbatim what was said or what was not said in the spirit of the debate that occurred earlier today, nor have I yet seen the tabling, so I cannot comment on that. However, I would comment on whether or not there were allegations as such appropriated. I would simply say that the issue seems to be that a reasonable facsimile was provided which, according to what I've just heard, may or may not have borne the official logo used by one of our government-approved lottery programs. Whether it was the real cheque or a facsimile is sometimes not abundantly evident in a photo reproduction. So we would have to wait and see if, in fact, what has just been presented by the Opposition House Leader is the exact version of events as we understand them.

I wouldn't suggest that there were any allegations or unavowed motives either as I would indicate. I don't think that under (j) there was any "abusive or insulting language" used in the exchange, at least not from our side, nor do I think that there was any ensuing disorder, perhaps a bit of a disruption. I don't personally see that any of the standing orders were breached. However, I will yield my position to the hon. Speaker for his comments in this regard.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark going to get involved in this, or are we all going to have spokesmen on behalf of everybody? These are points of order respecting the member.

Mr. Tougas: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to confirm that everything from the Member for Edmonton-Centre is true. The cheque was . . . [interjections] Do you mind? Do you mind? Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, they asked that I present a cheque to them. They were denied because the government told them that only government members can give out these cheques, so they decided that since I helped them fill out the forms and I was their MLA, they'd ask me to come and make a presentation. This is nothing like the cheque presentations . . .

An Hon. Member: You could've said no.

Mr. Tougas: Do you mind?

This is nothing like the cheque presentations that the government does with the big cardboard cheque. This was done by the school. It's as simple as that, Mr. Speaker. I mean, there was . . . [interjections] Do you mind?

I presented a cheque that the school gave me because the government denied the opportunity to do the cheque presentation, which is exactly the point we've been making, Mr. Speaker. It was a gesture by the school. I'm certainly not going to tell them: oh, no, I can't do that sort of thing. They wanted me to do it. The government insisted on sending a government member to do it. The parents said: we don't want a government member; we want our MLA. That's why it happened. It's as simple as that.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, do you still want to get involved?

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes, very briefly, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(j) I actually beg to differ with the hon. Government House Leader because it did in fact create disorder in the House. The minister was responding to a question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, yet he chose to target the Edmonton-Meadowlark MLA and basically accuse him – you know, I don't have the Blues in front of me – of being a liar and of practising something that he doesn't preach. So it did in fact create disorder in this House. There was a lot of noise and a lot of interjections back and forth. We feel that this point of order actually is a valid one. The hon. minister should get his facts right.

Thank you.

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

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The argument that the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark just gave is the exact same thing that we face all the time. We have our constituents coming to us saying: "We would like you as our MLA to present this cheque. We're very glad that the Alberta government has decided to fund our playground or whatever through Alberta lotteries, and we would like our local MLA to present the cheque." Sometimes MLAs agree to do that. The very thing that he said he's facing is the very thing that they're accusing us of doing all the time. He could've just said no. If he didn't want to present the cheque, he should have said: "No, we don't believe in that. We don't want to do that. We don't want to

present the cheque.” Instead he went and he presented the cheque.

Mr. Speaker, I’ll say on the record what I said earlier: if it looks like a duck, if it walks like a duck, if it quacks like a duck, then it’s a duck. So he should just admit that he presented the cheque and did the very thing that they’re saying shouldn’t be done.

3:10

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency on this point of order.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we’re actually debating here on an object that was never ever said. I sit right beside this hon. member. I don’t have the Blues in front of me, but he actually didn’t accuse anybody of doing anything. He just mentioned that there was a cheque presented from both sides – there’s a picture of the logo on it – but he never at any time made any accusations to try to dispute that that hon. member did anything wrong whatsoever. All he was doing was saying that that hon. member as the MLA presented a cheque exactly the same as the hon. member – we should say a mock-up cheque. It wasn’t a real cheque that he presented, and it’s not real cheques that we present. He never ever once accused the hon. member of signing that cheque either. If you look in the Blues, I’m sure that it doesn’t state that he signed it.

Anyway, an MLA is an MLA, and I respect the hon. member for that, for wanting to look after his constituents and present whatever it is that the government can supply to his constituents. I respect him for wanting to look after his constituents.

The Speaker: Are there any others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you very much. I just want to do a little bit of a historical reference on what’s happening today.

The Speaker: But we’ll deal with citations today and everything?

Mr. Chase: Exactly.

The Speaker: Right. Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Chase: In Public Accounts, Mr. Speaker, I asked the question: is holding large, government prop cheques with government members’ signatures on the bottom ethical? The Minister of Gaming indicated that it wasn’t, and his reply was noted by the Auditor General.

There is an extremely large difference with a six-foot by two-foot government prop cheque with a member’s signature on it indicating that the money apparently came out of that government member’s bank account. There is quite a difference between a child’s poster with no member’s signature on it and what this government has been putting forward as their money.

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can’t resist.

The Speaker: We are on a point of order, please.

Mr. Hancock: Yes. I will speak to the point of order.

We have in this province a wonderful program called the community facility enhancement program. Under that program, which has a nominal division of funds so that it’s fair across the province so that every community can participate, communities get together and

raise money and then apply for matching grants under the CFEP program. Those matching grants more often than not, I would assume, although I haven’t done the research, are granted because people can comply with that program by doing good things in their community, creating community facilities.

Those monies come out of the lottery fund. The cheques come out of the lottery fund, and they come out of the lottery fund with the lottery fund logo on them. Sometimes there are cheque presentations, and that is a wonderful thing because what it does is provide an opportunity for an elected member to go to that community organization . . .

Mr. R. Miller: A government-elected member. Make the distinction.

Mr. Hancock: A member of the opposition just yelled, “a government-elected member.” I’m glad that he did because that was the point I was very much going to get to. I wasn’t here when that program was set up, but I understand that in the course of discussion when that program was set up, all members of the House were offered the opportunity to do that, and the Liberal opposition at the time said no, that they would not participate. They would not go to their local organizations and volunteers who do good work in their community and say thank you and deliver the cheque.

Now, if they’ve changed their minds, that would be a wonderful thing. Perhaps they’ve changed their minds. But that’s what happened when it was set up. That’s the practice now. I as a member of the government and I as an MLA, a representative of the people, like to go to community organizations whether they’re in my constituency or in my city or otherwise and say: thank you for the good work that you do. There is nothing amoral about taking a mock cheque.

Now, the minister indicated, I think, at Public Accounts, although I wasn’t there, but he certainly reiterated in the House that he didn’t think it was appropriate for the MLA’s signature to appear on that mock cheque, and I quite agree with him on that. But I didn’t hear him in this House accuse the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark of signing the cheque or having his name on it. What I heard him say, which was very clear from the document he tabled, was that the hon. member was standing there at a presentation of a mock cheque with the lottery fund logo on it saying thank you, presumably, to people in the community who are doing good work to build our community. That’s what he should be doing. That’s what we should be doing because we should be encouraging the community to get involved and build the community. That’s what the CFEP program is all about, and we shouldn’t be making a fuss about cheque presentations because it’s just a way of saying thank you to community volunteers, and that’s what should be done.

The Speaker: There was a citation there somewhere, was there not?

Mr. Hancock: The citation that the hon. member was referring to was 23(h), (i), and (j). How can you create disorder, Mr. Speaker, if what you’re doing is referring to an action which an hon. member did, which was quite an appropriate action, and just talking about tabling a picture to show that that was done?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on this point with a citation, please.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, 23(h), (i), and (j). I would just like to inquire as to whether or not the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud would be willing to table this agreement that he’s

referring to. Lord knows how long ago it may have been or if it even exists. Certainly, I believe he indicated that he wasn't even here then, so we know that it goes back many, many, many years.

Often government members accuse members on this side of the House of going back too far. I don't know how far back he's going, but clearly there's a willingness on the part of members of today's opposition to have the opportunity, the same opportunity that is extended to government members, to present those cheques. Really, the crux of this matter is that the opportunities – and, Mr. Speaker, you are one who always talks about the fact that MLAs are all equal in this House. What we're learning here very clearly by the reaction from the government members is that MLAs are not all equal in this House. Some MLAs, unfortunately, are more equal than others.

The Speaker: Okay. Anybody else?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: What question is there to be called?

Well, in this most useful exchange in the debate this afternoon with respect to this, I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre for raising the point of order, and I do thank the Minister of Gaming for tabling the document, which is a picture. It's not very clear to me, but I think I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark in the picture. I see a great big cheque, at least a facsimile of something that says \$125,000 on it. There seem to be some logos on it, and there seem to be some names on it. It seems to be at least three feet by a couple of feet, and there are a bunch of happy-looking faces there.

All right. The thing had to deal with 23(h), (i), and (j). First of all, 23(h) says, "Makes allegations against another member," (i) says, "Imputes false or unavowed motives to another member," and (j) says, "Uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

So here is exactly what was said on the replay. Okay? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Gaming minister put an end to Tory MLAs signing their names on lottery cheques. The minister stated that partisan cheque presentations using lottery funds will not be going on any further. The minister went on to say that the Official Opposition should check out its site, and that we would be surprised at one of the pictures. We e-mailed the department for clarification, but it went unreturned. My question is to the Minister of Gaming. Can the minister tell us which picture he was referring to and on which website he saw an opposition member presenting lottery money, not charity money? They are two different things, my dear hon. minister.

That sounds filled with a lot of nice salutations: "My dear hon. minister." That's polite.

The Speaker then said, "The hon. minister," everybody being polite, of Gaming.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, there is still some confusion even after my supplementary answer of last week, obviously, when I said that MLAs shouldn't be signing the bottom of the cheque to make it appear as though the cheque was coming out of their account and not the government account. I've been trying to avoid embarrassing the member opposite whose website the photo is on but, unfortunately, I guess I'm forced into telling the Assembly and the member opposite that if they would check the website of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, they would find a photo of a cheque being presented to the Afton school parent advisory council.

Okay. So far everything seems to be as it is.

It's a \$125,000 community facility enhancement cheque . . . I'll be tabling an appropriate number of copies of that photo at the end of this session. Clearly on the photo is the Alberta Lottery logo.

Well, unless this photo has been doctored up, it seems to have the logo on it.

3:20

Then the Speaker said, "The hon. member." The hon. member said, "Thank you." Then there were interjections. The Speaker said, "The hon. member has the floor." The hon. member said to the same minister:

Given that the only cheque presentation on our website involves charity or personal cheque presentation, will the minister take back the statement and apologize right now?

"Involves charity or personal cheque presentation." So the hon. minister says, "Are you telling me, Mr. Speaker, that the \$125,000 to the Afton school parent advisory council came from the hon. member's personal account?" Then the hon. member said, "To the same minister: will the minister commit . . ." An hon. member then interjected, "Answer the question." The hon. member says:

I will find out about that, but will the minister commit to getting better research from his staff because I confirmed from the present 16 MLAs that they didn't have any?

Then an unidentified hon. member said, "This is false." Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie said:

This is totally false. I again request you to apologize because you don't have any evidence. If you have any evidence, please table it right now.

The hon. Minister of Gaming says:

As mentioned, I will table the appropriate number of copies of the photograph at the appropriate time in this afternoon's session.

Then we got into a tabling, and then we got into a point of order.

So 23(h): "Makes allegations against another member." I'm struggling with that one. Under 23(i): "Imputes false or unavowed motives to another member." Again, I'm struggling with that one. Under 23(j): "Uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." As a matter of fact, I think that the purpose of this whole debate the last 10 minutes actually was pretty positive and not negative at all. There's a feeling of love in the room.

Let me make a couple of comments. I'm going to quote from *Beauchesne* 494.

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

Well, I'm not sure how many different accounts we've got here today, but we've certainly got a couple of interpretations.

Let's just clarify another thing. There was a lot of talk here about a member's signature on these cheques. I should, I guess, confess to the House that in a previous life I was the minister who created the community facility enhancement program, and the rules were determined as a result of conversations that I did have with everybody. This was a long time ago, quite frankly before anybody in this House was here.

Mr. Lund: No. I was there.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation was a member at the time. He doesn't have to stand up and attest to what I'm saying to be correct.

But the versions of various facts provided here this afternoon actually do hit the target. Offers were made, and rejections were provided to the then minister at that time, but that does go back in time. Never at any time, to the knowledge of this particular person, did any MLA ever have a signature on any cheque, certainly a

facsimile of a name but not their signature. Their name was on the cheque. That probably continues through to today. There was the name of the person but not his handwritten signature. That was never permitted, and that was never allowed.

Now, what the situation today is: one can only attest that that same thing applies. But there were definitely members' names on the cheques until, I guess, the hon. Minister of Gaming declared in the last few days that that would be discontinued other than the name of the Premier and the minister. However, that's a policy decision that members can work out for themselves. The question here today has to do with Standing Orders. The bottom line is that we've had an exchange. Members have provided their questions.

There's one other thing, too, that one could just probably mention at a certain point in time: one should always be careful of the question one asks. The response given may not be necessarily what the hon. member asking the question wants to get.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, May 11, it is my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, and 32.

[Motion carried]

Royalty Review Consultations

Q17. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What groups or individuals did the Ministry of Energy consult with in its latest royalty review?

[Debate adjourned May 8: Mr. R. Miller speaking]

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I recall, when we adjourned debate on Written Question 17 last Monday, the government had declined to share with this Assembly and all Albertans which groups or individuals the Ministry of Energy had consulted with in its latest royalty review. I believe I was speaking to the fact that as I travel across this province, this is an issue that arises more and more often. In fact, at a charity casino that I worked for the Ermineskin Community League last night, it was the hot topic of discussion once the Oilers playoff hockey game was over. Many members of the community league that were there volunteering were asking me whether or not, in fact, the Alberta government is realizing its full share of royalty revenue through the royalty program. I would have been very pleased had I been able to share with those community volunteers which individuals the Ministry of Energy was consulting or had consulted in their most recent review, but unfortunately I had to tell them that the minister has chosen not to share that information with us. So I would like at this time to express my deep disappointment at that.

Thank you.

[Written Question 17 lost]

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

Royalty Review Consultations

Q18. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What consultations, studies, research, or other information gathering exercises did the Ministry of Energy conduct in relation to its latest royalty review?

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, we found out through the course of debate on the previous written question that the minister doesn't know what has been done and what has not been done. I'm very, very disappointed to learn from the minister that he thinks the royalty review is an ongoing process and that there isn't a latest royalty review. Well, I don't know what exactly the department has done with the information. It's obvious that there is some confusion on that side of the House. We only have to look at the recent budget, the business plans for this year, 2006, Strengthening Today, Securing Tomorrow, and we can see in the business plan for the three years 2006-09 for the Department of Energy that one of the challenges – it's listed as not an opportunity but a significant challenge – is "Fair Share, Changing Prices and Economics." It states in here:

The department will continue to review its royalty regimes, considering new price and economic conditions, to ensure they capture both a fair share of profits for Albertans while also attracting the investment needed to sustain future energy development and government revenues.

Now, that indicates to me that there certainly is a review of royalty regimes. I suppose we could say that we are looking at a continuous royalty review, but there are reports made. They are referred to in other government publications, yet for whatever reason the hon. minister is reluctant to release them. I don't know why, Mr. Speaker. It could be shame. It could be guilt. It could be a combination of both. I was as surprised as the members from the community league that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had been talking about because there is a lot of talk that there is not enough royalty being collected at this time by this government. Whether we look at the royalty holidays or the tax credits that are provided, that's the perception with the citizens who own the resource.

3:30

Now, certainly when we consider that as a percentage the amount of royalties that we're collecting is going down, the government isn't even meeting its own business targets. [interjection] Yes, that's true, hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. It's true. The target is that the range as a percentage would be between 23 and 24 per cent on an annual basis of the value of the total production should be collected in royalties, but this year – and I'm disappointed; I'm really disappointed in this minister because I think he can do a lot better – it's 19 per cent. Yes, it's 19 per cent.

Those extra millions of dollars we could find any number of uses for. Certainly, I think that if we were collecting those sorts of royalties, there wouldn't be any cuts in teaching positions, not only in Edmonton public but across the province. [interjection] Yes, there are, hon. minister, significant cuts across the province in education, through teachers. We can even have teachers or small class sizes, but we can't have both. So maybe the money could be used there. Maybe the money could be saved, and we could build up the heritage savings trust fund into a significant investment pool. That would be a good idea.

The consultations that have been done on these royalty reviews, the studies, the research, and other information-gathering exercises, would certainly help us with our research if the minister would provide that. The minister has promised. In fact, in this Assembly

last week the minister promised. This is, Mr. Speaker, what the minister said, “We’re going through some of that right now, and those documents will be provided in due course.” This is in *Alberta Hansard*, page 1366, May 8, 2006.

Well, in budget estimates the minister also promised me some information on royalties and royalty structures. I’m still waiting. The minister promised me last year and promised the research staff information. Still waiting. Meanwhile, we’re collecting less in royalties. The value of the resource goes up. Profits, certainly, for the energy companies are going up, way up, but the amount of royalties that we’re collecting as a percentage is going down.

Now, who are we consulting with? How often are we consulting with them? Whose numbers are we using? Which portions of the resource are we collecting royalties on and which are we not? For instance, if we were to receive the information with Written Question 18, we could ascertain how much royalty is being paid on pentane-plus, how much is on butane, how much is on ethane if anything. These by-products of the natural gas production, what royalty are we paying on those? Should we perhaps be changing the bitumen royalty? Should we be looking at perhaps changing the royalty regime to enhance heavy oil development in Peace River?

Maybe the answers lie in a response to Written Question 18. I would encourage the minister, if we’re going to be open and if we’re going to be transparent and if we have nothing to hide, to give us this information and also to provide to us the authors of this information and tell us exactly whose production figures we use when we calculate the royalty structure in this province and the amount of money that goes to the treasury. Is it CAPP’s production figures? Is it production figures from the EUB? I know that they do a production audit. I’ve yet to see it. I’m not holding my breath to see it because I don’t think that I’m going to be allowed to see it because, I’m sorry, we’re not open and we’re not transparent.

Why would we use other people’s production figures and not the Department of Energy’s? Does that indicate to me that this new electronic system is not working as well as had been anticipated? This idea that people are going to volunteer accurate production data and that we can calculate our resources from that, is that system not working? Am I to conclude, particularly with Written Question 17, with that response, that perhaps those systems are not working? Certainly, the Auditor General has had some questions in the past about the integrity of this system. But we are now into electronic reporting, and perhaps the reason why this government is so shy, so reluctant to provide this information is because they know that it would cause significant interest with the public, and the public would come to the conclusion that: oh, my, this government after 35 years is not managing our resources the way we thought they were.

They started off very well by starting the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, but now we see that we would have to put an immediate \$5 billion infusion of cash into it just to inflation-proof it, to bring it up to an amount over \$19 billion. If we had been collecting the royalties that we should have been collecting over the years, that fund would be worth significantly more than even \$19 billion. We don’t know unless the government through the Department of Energy will provide to us through Written Question 18 the information that we are asking. Who is advising this government on their royalty structure? Whose interests are being served here? Is it the citizens that own the resource or the energy companies?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Let’s find out what’s going to happen with this question. Okay? Let’s hear from the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Written Question 18. A

similar kind of wording, a different request, to Written Question 17. We are going to reject the question. The problem is that a lot of these questions that come forward are so generic. If you even wished to provide some information from the latest royalty review, whatever that is, I don’t know where that starts and stops.

I don’t know if it’s specific to one instance. For example, we are specifically looking at the Alberta royalty tax credit. So is that the latest royalty review? We’re also looking at the deep gas royalty program that we have. Is that the latest royalty review? Is it on an oil sands kind of a question? Is it on natural gas? Is it on conventional or unconventional? What date did it start? When he wrote the question, do we get into that date or is it today’s date?

I actually don’t even know how to answer the question if I wanted to give all the information that he asked. So, in that vein, we have said that what we will supply in due course – as we’ve gone through this, as we’ve had some third-party documents or otherwise that have come forward, we’re quite happy to see that he’s provided the information. I won’t know even if that would have supplied the answer to this question.

Therefore, it’s in that vein. It’s not having anything worried about trying to hide. We go through and publish our business plans. We have, as he’s mentioned, quite a bit of discussion on royalties, a three-year extrapolation of what royalties would be collected.

He’s also gone into a whole bunch more detail that gets outside the purview of his question, so as he’s gone into his own discussion, it gets broader and broader and broader. I’m not certain that he’d have enough time ever in his lifetime to go through every piece of paper or that we’d have the time to find every piece of paper that he ever might contemplate or dream of or think of. But we would be willing, quite frankly, if he’d be a little more precise, narrowing the discussion so that we’re not trying to interpret. It would be very helpful and constructive if he would narrow the phrasing of the question to be more precise so that we actually knew what he was trying to find out.

3:40

Saying “consultations, studies, research, or other information gathering exercises,” well, just the other day I suspect that we’ve had discussions with my colleagues on this, so that was a gathering exercise. I gathered some information on royalties, so is that the information? I didn’t know that we were supposed to keep minutes of everything that was going on. I might be at it just as he mentioned. He could be out talking with his constituents or stakeholders or otherwise, and they might give you some information on royalties. Is that the latest review they’re referring to? I didn’t – sorry; I apologize – take minutes of that dinner meeting or whatever that one was.

In all seriousness, though, we will provide if we’ve had some consultations. There have been a few in the past. I have undertaken and said that we’d supply those documents to the House. We’re going through those right now, and I’d be happy to see that in the not-too-distant future the members of this House will have that information.

But because of the vagueness of the question – really, I’d say impossible to actually interpret what is being asked as to what specific information is being requested other than please do a memory dump of everything you can ever, possibly find on the topic – in that vein, we’re going to reject Written Question 18.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some consternation as to why this particular question was rejected. I do understand that the hon. minister has some trouble with the language.

Certainly, considering what's been going on in these past few months in regard to discussions on royalty review, I think that we can at least come to an agreement as to what the parameters of this question are suggesting. The parameters are: where are we going with the royalty regime in this province, and how are we going to get there? I expect the hon. minister to be exercising due diligence in this regard, and I don't doubt that he has been, in fact, working very hard on this issue because it's one of the most pressing, important issues that we have before us, Mr. Speaker, in regard to the future financing of this fine province of ours.

We have the perhaps somewhat precarious position in that we are financing more and more of the functions of this Legislature and of the province through our energy resource revenues, and this is not necessarily the way we want it to be. Certainly, some greater degree of economic diversity would be in order, but considering that the boom is here and away we go, we have to grapple with this energy royalty issue in the most wide-ranging but the most honest way possible.

We know that we can project ahead into the next couple of years and realize that the price is not going to go down significantly, and if it does, in fact, we can build measures that can accommodate for that too. As I have mentioned previously in this House, and I will again, there is a way by which we can use a progressive system to increase royalty rates based on the windfall revenues that energy companies are enjoying. As the windfall revenues increase, then modestly and very carefully our royalty rates can increase somewhat as well. This is a way to capture literally billions of dollars, Mr. Speaker, that we are in fact effectively losing in this province over these weeks and months and last few years certainly.

Average Albertans, of which I consider myself one, are starting to speak about this more and more often. It's an issue that has been on the back of a lot of people's minds for quite an extended period of time because we know that the resources are finite, and we know that the royalty level that we set, which is not a taxation level at all, is the piece of the pie, so to speak, that we are taking for what's ours.

The resource is ours, and it's not unreasonable to review it. I certainly know that the hon. minister is reviewing it as we speak. We'd like to be able to review those materials so the owners or the shareholders, otherwise known as the whole population of Alberta, get to make an intelligent decision about where their revenues are going to go. We're not suggesting some sort of regime that will kill the industry and send the rigs and heavy oil and tar sands machines packing off to somewhere else. We're just looking for what is a fair share for Albertans here in this province. I don't think that's unreasonable. Considering the billions and billions of dollars that are at stake, I don't think it's unreasonable that that discussion should take place in the public realm as much as possible.

So while my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar might have used some language that's too broad for the minister's liking, then certainly I would ask him to perhaps narrow the parameters and give us something to work with. Certainly, my own position as a critic for the Energy ministry is to be just that but in the most constructive way possible. I certainly don't want to be cavalier about the criticisms that I choose to make. Rather, I would choose to build a constructive argument that is going to work in everyone's favour. I think that's the sort of democracy that we should aspire to exercise here in this House. Certainly, as time goes on and majorities get slimmer and things change hands, this is the way that we have to do business. We see it being quite successfully done in other levels of government. Minority governments are becoming more common federally, and who knows what we have in store with our own provincial legislative system?

So working together in a collaborative way and hammering out

compromises with the information put before us in an honest and logical way is the way to do business, and I think that Albertans expect nothing less.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Listening to the previous member speaking and talking about working in a collaborative way, I couldn't help but rise to speak to this particular written question because, precisely, this is a mechanism. Written questions are a mechanism under our Standing Orders and under the way that we do business here to allow for specific things which require more detail or more information than one might expect in Oral Question Period to be asked for and, perhaps, answered through the written question process.

But one does have to be precise about the question because if it's used as a fishing expedition, if the question is not phrased properly, there is no good way to answer it because, in effect, by voting the question, there is an order of the Legislature for a return. So it is not collaborative. It's not in the minister's determination as to what he or she is to bring to the House. By voting in favour of a written question, it's an order of the House to return certain information. If the question is not precise as to the information that's being asked for, if the parameters cannot be determined, then the question cannot be accepted. Over and over again in this House we've debated the acceptance of a question, and often ministers have come forward with amendments to try to clarify precisely what it is that they should be ordered to deliver to the House.

I would agree with the hon. member that we ought to have a collaborative process. A collaborative process would be an opposition or government member who wants information approaching a minister and saying, either in writing or through a meeting, "This is the type of information I need to have in order to do my job, in order to talk to my constituents, in order to go out and consult with stakeholders," to ask for that kind of information and perhaps work out the nature of the question that could be framed if, in fact, there's a disagreement as to what information could be provided, to work out the nature of the question so that it could be brought to the House and there could be, in fact, an order of the House returning that information.

When you have questions framed with such broad parameters that are not specific to the details, what it shows is two things: one, the member is using it for a political purpose rather than the purpose that is intended, which is an opportunity to get required information; two, they're not operating collaboratively. They're not working to narrow down the focus or to determine precisely what they're trying to do, so it's not a collaborative process.

3:50

I would agree with the hon. member opposite that there should be a collaborative process, that as legislators we should be working together in the interests of all Albertans. That means that every member of this Legislature should be able to get access to the information they need to do their job. They should be able to get access to the information they need so that they can critique a minister, so that they can critique a policy, but they can't do that by abusing the processes of the House, which is what happens when you write a question which is so broad in its parameters that it cannot actually be answered and, therefore, a minister has to stand and reject it and then be accused of not wanting to give up information, which in most cases is not the situation at all. In my experience most ministers would be happy to provide the information if it didn't

mean shutting down the whole order of that department for a period of time to find exactly, precisely the information that's being required. The Minister of Energy, I think, identified that quite clearly.

If the parameters are too broad, then the question is: are you talking about a conversation I had? Are you talking about casual consultations? Are you talking about things that happened in caucus? Are you talking about things that have happened? Written questions could be used a lot more effectively in this House if people paid attention to what their value was or what their purpose was and then worked the questions so that they asked for specific information which, in fact, could be responded to.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wasn't planning to speak on this, but some members have got me up. You know, I always get a kick out of the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, the former House leader and deputy House leader. I remember him saying: just ask, and we'll give you whatever you want. Well, I've been around this place for a long time, and the only things they give you are the things that they know are not going to embarrass the government. That's the reality.

When you ask a question like this, the minister can say: well, it's too vague. If you ask a specific one, they'd say, "Well, it's too specific; there are third-party people here we can't deal with," and the rest of it. This is a government that's going to tighten up the FOIP Act. You can't get the information this way. You can't get the information through FOIP. It's going to be harder and harder. They're just closing it off in all directions.

The hon. Minister of Energy knows precisely what this question is driving at. We have very low royalty rates – everybody knows it – compared to Alaska and compared to Norway, and that's costing money for the taxpayers, who own this. At the same time we're going to give to some of these same companies the lowest corporate tax rate. So we want to know why this is happening. Who are you talking to?

The minister could be very specific. I'm sure it's not a person in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview or constituents that are talking to the Minister of Energy; it's energy companies. The minister certainly should say: "Well, these are the people in industry that we're talking to. These are what we're coming to." At least then we'd have some idea why we have these low royalty rates. I'm sure there's not a balance of people here. They're not talking to people from labour. They're not talking to farmers. They're not talking to ordinary citizens. The Minister of Energy is well aware that this is political dynamite.

You can say to these questions: they're too vague. I've heard here earlier on that questions are too specific. I don't know how you'd ever word questions, to come back to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, that they would ever accept. Then if we try to do it through FOIP, we know that we run into difficulties there, and it's going to be even harder. So how do you ever get answers out of this government?

It's not as easy as working collaboratively and saying: gee, Mr. Minister, can you give me this information that might be embarrassing for the government? "I'd be glad to do it with you." I've been around here too long to know that little game, Mr. Speaker, but it's a nice thought. It's a nice thought.

I think, Mr. Speaker, the point that's trying to be made here is very clearly the old saying: he who pays the piper calls the tune. We know where the Conservative donations, the money is coming from. We want to know. Is that the reason? Is it the reason that these people sit down with the minister, the Premier, or whoever else, and they say: "This would be nice if we got another royalty tax break.

We're hardly making it here. We're poverty stricken. Can you do a little better job in terms of giving us more money because we're going to invest all this money in Alberta?" I know enough about the global economy, and that's not even the case. The minister knows that when we compare what's happening in Alaska, when we compare what's happening in Norway, the people who own the royalty, the people of Alberta, are being taken for a ride.

Sure, we have all sorts of money flowing in right now, but as pointed out by the previous speakers, there could be more. There should be more. Then we could be doing other things or at least putting it in the heritage trust fund for down the way.

So I think that the minister, you know, is very clever in saying that it's too vague, but I'd be interested in what sort of question you could ever get that they would answer because I've hardly ever seen it in this Legislature. It's not through FOIP. It's not through here. Maybe he can give us a course on what questions he will accept that will tell us which oil companies he's talked to in the last little while, why the royalty rates are so low. He knows exactly what we're driving at, what the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is driving at with these questions, and he doesn't want to answer the questions. It's as simple as that. You can make all sorts of excuses, and that's what they are, Mr. Speaker. They're excuses.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, first off, again I have to express my disappointment in the minister and my astonishment that he would accuse us of being vague through the wording of this written question. We only have to look at the business plan of this department, the Department of Energy, if we want to talk about being vague. We're talking directly about the royalties here. This could mean anything. Strategy 1.1, "Continue to review the department's royalty regimes, mineral taxes, rentals and bonuses, and recommend changes needed to address changing economic circumstances and opportunities." Well, that's vague. That's vague. That could mean any number of things.

What we are asking for are the reports and not limited to – but, again, if the minister would read his own department's budget, he would clearly see that there are quite a number of outfits tracking the forecasts of natural gas prices. The majority of the royalties that we're collecting at the moment in this province are from natural gas. That royalty structure depends on the price of natural gas in the North American market.

So we're not asking for anything vague here. We're asking for the forecasters' reports, from Wood Mackenzie to Groppe, Long & Littell to Purvin & Gertz to PIRA and RSEG, and these forecasts are in the Henry hub prices. We were talking about this last week. How exactly do the Henry hub prices compare to the Alberta reference price? Are there reports done on this, or are these forecasters like Rod Love and those other hired consultants, where they're giving you verbal advice? Yeah. This may be why we're not getting any of this information. It's because it's provided on a verbal basis. There's no invoicing. It's just: here, talk to me sometime, even if it's long distance or by voice mail, and we're still going to pay you. Maybe that's the reluctance of this minister to answer Written Question 18. Clearly, there are companies that are providing information, and the minister for whatever reason is reluctant to share this with the citizens, who own the resource. Again, I must express my disappointment.

Now, the performance measures. We talked before about the fact that we're only going to get 19 per cent in total on a percentage of

the value of production in royalties. We know it should be considerably higher, and the minister knows it should be considerably higher. But, again, we're looking at the Crown revenue share. This is on page 148 of the business plan. Sharing the profits from resource development: the Crown revenue share, or the "portion of industry's annual net operating revenue that is paid to the Crown as royalty." Now, the source for this information is again from CAPP, Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. Surely, that can be provided through this written question, and that is not vague.

This is not a fishing expedition. One day we're told: "Oh, that's too complicated for question period. We have to do it through Written Questions." Then when the written questions come up in the Assembly on Monday afternoons: "Oh, no, this is not suitable. It should be done through another forum." This has got nothing to do with political purposes, and if it did, one could argue from this side of the House that by being vague like this, like the descriptions that are provided in the Department of Energy's business plans, then it's certainly being done for political purposes, and that has been reflected by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in his remarks.

4:00

I take exception, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, that this question as it's worded is abusing the process of the House. I just find that incredible, that the hon. member would think that Written Question 18 is abusing the process of the House because again we were told: "Oh, no. If you're seeking details of that nature, do it through a written question." I don't know how many times we have been told that, and we're doing that. You can't have it both ways, hon. member.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview talked about royalties in Alaska and Norway. Well, if we could receive the information that we're requesting through this, we could see how Alberta compares with the royalty structure in the lower 48 states. The hon. member was quite accurate about Alaska and about Norway, but what about the lower 48 states? Has anyone done a recent comparison in that department in regard to the royalty structure in Colorado, Oklahoma, Louisiana, or Texas? Now, perhaps if we haven't done it, we should, but I'm confident it has been done.

I'm confident that we're not collecting enough in royalties in this province with the prices as high as they are. The current royalty structure may have been very effective in 1992, '93, and '94, but with oil at \$70 American a barrel and natural gas at \$7 a gigajoule for the North American market, that's a whole new marketplace – a whole new marketplace – and the minister knows it. To reject this question is to reject the concerns and the complaints of thousands upon thousands of citizens of this province who own the resource and want a thorough public review of the royalty structure now that market prices for these resources are so high.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say that I'm very, very disappointed in this government. I'm very disappointed in this minister. If our royalty structure at these prices is so sound and so fair, why use this lame excuse to prevent this information from being provided through this Assembly to the citizens who own the resource?

Thank you.

[Written Question 18 lost]

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

Mr. Lund: Try again.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. I will try again, hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Natural Gas Well Applications

Q19. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 how many applications received by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to drill natural gas wells in Alberta were rejected?

Mr. MacDonald: Now, we know that drilling is going on in this province at a frantic pace. We know why. But there are concerns being raised by landowners about the process. Many landowners, regardless of whether they live on the edge of the city, for instance in southeast Calgary, or on acreages surrounding large metropolitan areas have concerns. If we were to receive the answer through this question, we would see exactly how many applications received by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to drill natural gas wells in Alberta were rejected and why they were rejected. Were they just too close to built-up areas? Was there a potential for sour gas leaks if the well was successfully drilled and went into production, either through the drilling process or the installation of the production facility or the operation of the production facility? Would there be the potential for a sour gas leak?

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Now, we need to restore confidence with the landowners in the regulatory process that is at the EUB. Certainly, when we look at Compton and the controversy around those well applications, the right thing was finally done, and those wells just southeast of the city of Calgary are no longer going to be drilled. How many other examples were there and why?

Whenever we look at the potential for sour gas, is the compliance record of the operator considered in the drilling application? If the application was to be rejected, would the compliance record of the operator be part of the decision?

Now, if we look at some of the directives that the EUB uses and the Department of Energy obviously considers and if we look at, say, directive 056, for instance, which is going to be used for the regulation of the drilling of coal-bed methane wells, and if we look at the violations of that directive by companies, there were a lot of violations. There was noncompliance. Some of it was major; some of it was minor. Not many people have followed that with the recent release of the MAC report, but certainly I read those compliance violations, and I have some concerns. Is it information like that that would be used to reject the drilling of a natural gas well?

I think this information would be very useful for any number of reasons, but I would remind the minister that it would go a long way to restoring public confidence in the regulatory process, and it would give landowners both on the edge of the city and in rural areas more confidence that this regulatory process is a balanced and fair way of dealing with applications.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Written Question 19. Certainly, with some degree of concern about what opposition members expressed about wording – wording is important. It's a good thing that in language we're better able to communicate so that we understand that which we're asked. In this case, I'm going to ask

for an amendment, actually quite willing and wanting to provide the information, though I'm going to ask for some co-operation from the members opposite on this one in the co-operative spirit to try and engage in providing information on a useful, timely basis, but here's the challenge. I don't know if the amendment has been passed out.

4:10

With respect to the amendment I'd like to move that Written Question 19 be amended as follows: by striking out "2001-2002, 2002-2003" and by striking out "2004-2005" and substituting "2004-2005, and 2005-2006." So the amended written question will read as follows: "For each of the fiscal years 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 how many applications received by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to drill natural gas wells in Alberta were rejected?"

Now, the reason for that is that I'm told that the records for the information requested for the earlier years, 2001-2002 and 2002-2003, would need to be manually accessed and collated due to a change in the computer system that they've had put in place. It would take some considerable time for them to compile the information, just getting the numbers, giving the quantity of wells and applications they have, which they would not necessarily have available for the past years.

That said, we wanted to say, "Okay. Well, let's provide them with the more up-to-date figures and add another year on to the end of it," so that we still give you as much of the information that's available that could be reasonably and easily compiled. All that is asked for, though, even in this one, is how many applications. In the hon. member's comments, before he started getting into reasons why, that's not even in the written question, but we certainly can comply with that, and I think that's the reason we'd like to provide as stated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: On the amendment the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again the reasons for this amendment surprise and startle me. If the department is not as the minister indicated last week in *Hansard* – "There isn't a 'latest royalty review'" – I think there would be lots of staff in there that could dig up that information for those years, 2001-2002 and 2002-2003. We're going to get two years' worth of information here. Perhaps my suspicions in regard to these electronic records were more accurate than I thought, whenever we're talking about this issue here in the last 15 minutes. Perhaps that electronic system over there is not working as well as had been anticipated. But, you know, as the Rolling Stones say, you can't always get what you want. In this case, I will certainly look at two years' worth of information.

Mr. Melchin: Three.

Mr. MacDonald: Three? Oh, yes. Pardon me. Three. Absolutely. The amended written question will read for 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006. You bet that's three years. We will look forward to receiving this information. I would have to on behalf of the citizens at this time thank the hon. minister for at least providing part of the information that we requested.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Again on this one I will be very brief. On behalf of the public, the diligent Alberta Liberal research staff, and myself I would express my gratitude to the minister. I am disappointed, however, that he could not provide information even in amended form in written questions 17 and 18, but we will look forward to having a look at this information throughout the summer.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 19 as amended carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:15 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Lukaszuk	Pastoor
Amery	Lund	Prins
Blakeman	MacDonald	Rodney
Brown	Magnus	Rogers
Calahasen	Martin	Stelmach
Cenaiko	Marz	Stevens
Chase	Melchin	Strang
Doerksen	Miller, B.	Swann
Ducharme	Miller, R.	Tarchuk
Fritz	Mitzel	VanderBurg
Hancock	Oberle	Webber
Johnston	Ouellette	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Abbott	Goudreau	Haley
Cao	Griffiths	

Totals	For – 36	Against – 5
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[Written Question 19 as amended carried]

Community Initiatives Program

Q20. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Tougas that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 1998-99 through 2004-05 what is the total number of community initiatives program grants awarded without matching funds being provided by the grant recipient broken down by recipient and amount of unmatched grant?

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The reason for requesting this information is that the CIP is set up so that below a certain amount groups can apply without providing matching grants. Above \$10,000 it's required that you provide matching grants. We're wondering how many have taken advantage of the threshold and applied for the grant that doesn't require the matching amount.

The second part of this is that in our experience in questioning the government on this particular issue, we've now been told that they can make exceptions. So we're wondering if perhaps there are additional people that we're not aware of that had their requirement for matching grants waived that would also be included in this amount. So that's why we're looking for the breakdown of recipient

and the amount of the unmatched grant to see which of those, in fact, were over \$10,000 that were granted by the exception that has been brought up.

I'm hoping that this will meet with approval, and I will give way to the government member to see whether we're going to get this accepted or not.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. With respect to Written Question 20 I'm pleased to comment on behalf of the hon. Minister of Gaming that we will accept this question.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close.

Ms Blakeman: Excellent. Great. I am looking forward to this information coming forward. We wish to probe this particular incident around the sorority house and the answers coming from the government, which we feel were somewhat incomplete. So we feel that the reasonable explanation has not been thoroughly evaluated.

In addition, in this particular instance the application that we FOIPed showed that the reasons used for justifying the nonmatching funds were that they weren't being provided because the fundraising the group was doing for the year had already been decided and they weren't going to do additional fundraising.

Ms Calahasen: It was accepted.

Ms Blakeman: Relax. This is the only chance. You tell us that we're supposed to be asking the questions here, so I'm asking the questions here, minister of aboriginal affairs. This is our opportunity to talk about it and ask the questions. You want me to spend more time justifying it to you? I'm happy to, but I'd really rather just get on with it.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, through the chair, please. Are you finished?

Ms Blakeman: No, I'm not finished.

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead, but through the chair, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, and of course through the chairperson at all times.

The issue here is that there were a number of the provisions that are set out as criteria in this particular grant that appear to have been waived or not met; in particular, the reasonable explanation for why they weren't providing the matching grants, the fact that it was waived above the threshold level of \$10,000, and the particular justification of public good that was involved in this particular grant application. I think that a number of people are finding leather-covered bar stools and all a bit tough to justify somehow as works for the public good seeing as this is furniture that was inside of, basically, a private group that you couldn't... [interjection] Well, that's true. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is drawing a similarity to the leather-covered chairs we have in the House. But the public is invited in to watch what we're doing, and that is not necessarily true in the group that we were examining.

So I'm delighted to hear that we are going to be getting the information that I requested, and at this point I'd like to call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 20 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:34 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Hancock	Oberle
Blakeman	Jablonski	Ouellette
Brown	Lukaszuk	Pastoor
Calahasen	Lund	Rodney
Cao	MacDonald	Rogers
Cenaiko	Magnus	Stevens
Doerksen	Martin	Strang
Ducharme	Melchin	VanderBurg
Eggen	Miller, B.	Webber
Fritz	Miller, R.	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Abbott	Griffiths	Johnston
Amery	Haley	Snelgrove
Goudreau		

Totals: For – 30 Against – 7

[Written Question 20 carried]

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

Community Initiatives Program

Q21. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Tougas that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 1998-99 through 2004-05 what is the total number of community initiatives program grant applications that were rejected?

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Part of our reasoning for this is trying to figure out the total number of applications that were received. We know how many actually received money. If we know how many were rejected, that tells us in the end how many applications were received. So we're just looking for some baseline information as we try and weed through how these two lottery programs administered by the Minister of Gaming are in fact administered and the choices that are made with that. It's pretty straightforward information. Just how many of the grant applications that they received were rejected?

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Gaming I'm pleased to indicate that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 21.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 21 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:50 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Fritz	Ouellette
Blakeman	Hancock	Pastoor
Brown	Lukaszuk	Rodney
Calahasen	MacDonald	Stevens
Cenaiko	Martin	Strang
Doerksen	Melchin	VanderBurg
Ducharme	Miller, B.	Webber
Engen	Miller, R.	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Abbott	Haley	Magnus
Amery	Jablonski	Oberle
Cao	Johnston	Rogers
Goudreau	Lund	Snelgrove
Griffiths		

Totals: For – 24 Against – 13

[Written Question 21 carried]

Community Facility Enhancement Program

Q22. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Tougas that the following question be accepted.
For each of the fiscal years 1998-99 through 2004-05 what is the total number of community facility enhancement program grant applications that were rejected?

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I hope the government will co-operate and provide the information.
Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Alberta Gaming I will respond that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 22.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate.

Ms Blakeman: The question, please.

[The voice vote indicated that Written Question 22 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:03 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Hancock	Pastoor
Blakeman	MacDonald	Rodney
Brown	Martin	Rogers
Calahasen	Melchin	Stevens
Cao	Miller, B.	Strang
Cenaiko	Miller, R.	Tarchuk
Doerksen	Oberle	VanderBurg
Ducharme	Ouellette	Zwozdesky
Fritz		

Against the motion:

Abbott	Haley	Lund
Amery	Jablonski	Magnus
Goudreau	Johnston	Prins
Griffiths	Lukaszuk	Webber

Totals: For – 25 Against – 12

[Written Question 22 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf.

Community Facility Enhancement Program

Q23. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. Tougas that the following question be accepted.
For each of the fiscal years 1998-99 through 2004-05 what is the total number of community facility enhancement program grants awarded without matching funds being provided by the grant recipient broken down by recipient and amount of unmatched grant?

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is following up on some earlier things where the minister made it clear that he has the discretion, if he wishes, to make different decisions on the CIP grant, which is the other grant administered by the same department. We note that the CFEP grants quite clearly state that you are to match those funds, but we wondered if, in fact, there was the same sort of discretion available to the minister with this grant, so we're asking to see which grants were provided without the matching funds and who were the recipients and what were the amounts of the unmatched granting amounts.

I hope that the government is able to provide this information, and my thanks for the opportunity to request it.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Written Question 23, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Alberta Gaming I'm pleased to indicate that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 23.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate.

Ms Blakeman: Call the question.

[Written Question 23 carried]

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

A Learning Alberta Advanced Education Review

Q24. Dr. B. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Taylor that the following question be accepted.

What is the total cost broken down by function – projected staff costs, consultant and legal fees, facility and hosting expenses, travel costs, et cetera – of the review of Alberta's advanced education system known as A Learning Alberta?

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that this review is coming to an end. There have been lots of other reviews of advanced education over the years and not much has come out of those reviews, so it's really important that we get this kind of background information about what kind of costs are involved in this particular kind of review.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

5:20

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Advanced Education it's my pleasure to indicate that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 24.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to hear that, and I'm wondering at this time if the hon. member could confirm to this House that when we're talking about the total cost breakdown for consultants in particular, it will be advice that has been received verbally as well as all written contracts.

Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is precisely the type of question that calls into question the purposes and motives of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, so I can't let that one go by. The hon. member knows or ought to know that there was a process engaged in last year called A Learning Alberta, and there was huge participation from Albertans, giving lots of verbal advice. To make what I assume was a quip intended to be humour just draws to the attention of the House, though, exactly the problem with the way some of the questions are phrased.

Now, this particular question isn't a problem. This question asks for certain cost information which the House would be entitled to have and the public would be entitled to have and would clearly point out not just the cost but, perhaps more importantly, the value of the process of A Learning Alberta and the number of people that engaged in it. For the hon. member to get up and say, "Would this include verbal advice?" shows his ignorance of the process that went on, which involved in excess of 350 Albertans participating in round-tables around the province and giving verbal advice, all of them consultants, all of them active participants in the process, all of them stakeholders, and all of them interested in Alberta being a learning society and in Albertans having the opportunity to advance their level of knowledge, skills, and ability so that they can fully participate in the Alberta economy and fully contribute back to building a stronger Alberta and stronger communities.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close debate.

Dr. B. Miller: I'd like to call the question.

[Written Question 24 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on behalf.

Student Loan Program

Q25. Dr. B. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Taylor that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 2000-2001 through 2004-2005 inclusive what was the total dollar value of all Alberta student loan program disbursements, all Alberta student loan relief benefit payments, and all Alberta student loan relief completion payments?

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important question, considering the fact that tuition has gone up so much, especially for the professions of medicine, law, dentistry. It's very important for us to know what kind of loan programs have been in place and what kind of benefits have been disbursed so that we can get an idea of what the burden is on students in Alberta. I'm looking forward to this kind of response to this kind of question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Alberta Advanced Education it is my pleasure to indicate that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 25.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close debate.

Dr. B. Miller: Yes. I'd like to put the question.

[Written Question 25 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on behalf.

Problem Gambling and Workplace Performance

Q26. Mr. R. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that the following question be accepted.

What consultations, studies, research, or other information gathering exercises pertaining to the impact of problem gambling on workplace performance, productivity, and absenteeism are currently planned or under way under the auspices of the Ministry of Economic Development?

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This as well is a very important question given that we all I think recognize that problem gambling is becoming a greater issue in this province. Alberta Gaming is taking steps, thankfully, to address this problem, and I think it's a relevant question to ask whether or not the Department of Economic Development is also doing studies to see what the impact of this growing problem is on business in Alberta.

I look forward to the government response. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Economic Development I wish to respond to Written Question 26. The Ministry of Economic Development will be rejecting this request as the department is not currently planning nor has under way any consultations, studies, research, or other information

gathering exercises pertaining to problem gambling on workplace performance, productivity, and absenteeism.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to close debate.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand the reasons for rejecting the question. If, in fact, there are no studies under way, then it wouldn't make sense to accept the question. I guess the only thing I would say is that perhaps Economic Development should be considering whether or not, in fact, they might wish to undertake such consultations and studies given the seriousness of the problem and the impact that it may well be having on business in Alberta.

Thank you.

[Written Question 26 lost]

Access to Prince Rupert Port

Q27. Mr. R. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that the following question be accepted.

What steps is the Ministry of Economic Development taking to work with the government of British Columbia and the federal government to allow all Alberta exports safer and faster access to Prince Rupert port in British Columbia?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Economic Development I wish to inform the hon. members that Written Question 27 will be accepted by the Department of Economic Development as they are presently working on an ongoing basis with the governments of B.C. and Canada.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to close debate.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to see that the government has accepted Written Question 27, and I would call the question.

[Written Question 27 carried]

Illegal Drugs, Alcoholism, and Workplace Performance

Q28. Mr. R. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that the following question be accepted.

What consultations, studies, research, or other information gathering exercises pertaining to the impact of illegal drugs and alcoholism on workplace performance, productivity, and absenteeism are currently planned or under way under the auspices of the Ministry of Economic Development?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Economic Development I wish to inform the Assembly that the Department of Economic Development will be rejecting this written question. Economic Development is not currently planning nor has under way any consultations, studies, research.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, it's 5:30. The House stands adjourned until 8 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]