

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, August 24, 2006** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 06/08/24
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome back. I would ask all hon. members to remain standing after prayers so that we may pay tribute to our former colleagues who have passed away since we were last in this Assembly.

As we commence proceedings today in this Assembly, we ask for divine guidance so that our words and deeds may bring to all people of this great province hope, prosperity, and a vision for the future. Amen.

Mr. Roy Alexander Farran
January 2, 1921, to June 2, 2006

The Speaker: On Friday, June 2, 2006, Roy Alexander Farran passed away. Mr. Farran was first elected on August 30, 1971, and served until March 22, 1979. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Calgary North Hill for the Progressive Conservative Party. During his term of office Mr. Farran served in cabinet as minister of telephones and utilities and Solicitor General. Mr. Farran served on the standing committees on Public Accounts; Private Bills; Standing Orders and Printing; Law, Law Amendments and Regulations; Public Affairs, Agriculture and Education.

Mr. Randolph Hugh McKinnon
July 22, 1917, to June 10, 2006

The Speaker: On Saturday, June 10, 2006, Randolph Hugh McKinnon passed away. Mr. McKinnon was first elected on June 18, 1959, and served until May 23, 1967. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Strathcona West for the Social Credit Party. During his term of office Mr. McKinnon served in cabinet as the Minister of Education. Mr. McKinnon also served on the select standing committees on Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; Private Bills; Standing Orders and Printing; Public Accounts; Public Affairs, Agriculture and Education; and Railways, Telephones and Irrigation.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of their families who shared the burdens of public office. Family members of Mr. Farran and Mr. McKinnon are with us today in the Speaker's gallery. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask all members to remember hon. members Roy Farran and Randy McKinnon as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

Hon. members, I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Mr. Lorieau, of course, comes off a very, very successful spring nine weeks, and I would ask all to participate today so that in the event that Mr. Lorieau does what he did this spring the place will not become stone deaf.

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: Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's an honour for me today to rise to introduce to you guests who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. These guests are family members of our former colleagues, and I would ask them to rise as I introduce them. The family of Mr. Randolph McKinnon, former MLA for the constituency of Strathcona West, represented by Randolph's brothers Bert McKinnon and his spouse, Janice, and Dick McKinnon and his spouse, Lorraine McKinnon. The family of Mr. Roy Farran, former MLA for the constituency of Calgary North Hill, is represented by his daughter Sally Gregg and son-in-law Tim Gregg. If they would rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two distinguished members of Alberta's postsecondary education community who are seated in your gallery. Dr. Ron Bond is the new chair of the Campus Alberta Quality Council, appointed in July. During his 33-year career at the University of Calgary Ron was a professor of English, head of the department of English, dean of the Faculty of Humanities, and most recently provost and vice-president academic.

In addition to his work at the University of Calgary Ron has a long track record of serving the national postsecondary community. His positions include terms as vice-president of the Social Sciences and Humanities Federation of Canada, president of the Canadian Association of Chairs of English, and president of the Canadian Conference of Deans of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. He is a strong advocate for quality education programs, making him an ideal choice to lead Alberta's agency for the quality assurance of degrees. His impeccable academic credentials and reputation precede him in this very important work, which bodes well for the quality of postsecondary programs in this province.

Ron is joined today by Marilyn Patton. Marilyn is the director of the secretariat for the Campus Alberta Quality Council. She is a respected member of the advanced education team and I'm told does a terrific job.

I'd ask Ron and Marilyn to please stand now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Evans: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What an honour today to introduce two groups, one group from Strathcona county and their proud partners in an FCM and CIDA program from Vung Tau City, Vietnam. They are linked in a municipal partnership program. They hope to work in co-operation. This delegation here will stay for at least two weeks. They will be with the Strathcona officials and focus on areas of co-operation and look at new steps that they can take to advance that co-operation. The officials from Vung Tau are Mr. Long, who is vice-chairman of the People's Committee of Vung Tau City; Mr. Soan, vice-chief, administrative office of the People's Committee of Vung Tau City; Mr. Dieu, head of population,

Families and Children's Department of Vung Tau City; and Mr. Cong, deputy principal, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, who accompanies the delegation as an interpreter. The Strathcona county officials with us today: Kevin Glebe, who is the manager of corporate planning and intergovernmental affairs; Russ Pawlyk, manager of recreation, parks, and culture; Kristen Schindel, the strategic initiative assistant; and Alf Cunningham, the community liaison officer. I would ask them now to please rise and for the Assembly to give this special group a warm welcome.

1:40

My second group, Mr. Speaker, are representatives of a company that many of the hon. members of the Assembly are familiar with, Janssen-Ortho Inc. We are privileged today to receive Mark Fleming, who is the national director of government and community relations for Janssen-Ortho. He is based in Toronto. He has held a number of senior leadership positions in sales, marketing, and health economics. He is accompanied by a person who is very familiar to this Assembly, Mr. Michael Lohner, who is the regional director for western Canada – we congratulate him on his position – and a well-known favourite Brent Korte, who is the regional manager for Alberta. I'd ask those guests to please stand and for us to honour their presence here with a round of applause.

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two of my dear friends who are here in the House today, Rick and Rose Lundy. Rick and Rose live in Calgary and have recently joined a patient experience committee to help improve patient care in the Calgary health region because of a recent personal tragedy that took place at the Peter Lougheed hospital in Calgary. Rick and Rose are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the St. Albert Lilydale White Sox slo-pitch ball team, who are joining us here today along with representatives from Lilydale. The White Sox competed in the over-60 age division of the 2006 national slo-pitch championship which was held August 3 to 7 in Moncton, New Brunswick. In a thrilling final the White Sox captured the championship by defeating a team from Brantford, Ontario, by a score of 4 to 3. In total the White Sox have now won six national championships and are on their way to the Worlds next year. The members of this team are truly positive role models for the community and have demonstrated what can be accomplished with a positive attitude, determination, and teamwork. The White Sox success would not have been possible without the generous support of Lilydale. I would like to thank this company for its strong community spirit and many contributions to worthwhile causes. They are seated in the public gallery. Once again, congratulations. I would ask that they 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 you to members of this Assembly the Mandrusiak family, who are celebrating the 100th

anniversary of the arrival of their ancestors Ivan and Wasylyna Mandrusiak and their two sons, Dmytro and Mike. Ivan and Wasylyna emigrated from Galicia in 1906. They settled on a homestead near Musidora, where they raised 10 children: Dmytro, Mike, Bill, Annie, Nick, Pearl, Alex, Steven, Helen, and Walter. Bill and Pearl are in attendance today. I'd also like to introduce Rose Herard, the spouse of the hon. Minister of Advanced Education, who is also a descendant of the Mandrusiak family. The members have travelled here from various locations in Alberta to be with us in the Legislature today. They celebrated their 100th anniversary on Saturday with 180 descendants, and it was reportedly a fantastic event. Located in the members' gallery and the public gallery, if I could ask the Mandrusiak family to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Dunford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a couple of representatives of the Williams corporation out of Tulsa, Oklahoma. The Williams corporation is currently here, like many businesses throughout the world, continuing to look at Alberta for further expansion. With us today we have Lina Taylor, who is the manager of government affairs for Williams and is from Tulsa, Oklahoma. With her is Ken Faulkner, who will be known to Members of this Legislative Assembly and who is with Global Public Affairs in Calgary. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the members of the Legislature.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Jonathan Sharek. Jonathan is a musician, he's a music educator, he's a teacher, he's active with the ATA advocacy, and most importantly to me, he is a constituent. I would ask Jonathan to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Joe Fallwell and Tim Martin. Joe is 13 years old and is entering grade 8 at Wilma Hansen junior high in Calgary, and Tim is 15 years old, entering grade 10 at Father Lacombe high school also in Calgary. These two bright and intelligent individuals, surprisingly, are the grandchildren of the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and are seated in the public gallery. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It indeed gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Maureen Hindman and Susan Evans. Maureen and Susan are constituents of mine and are here to watch the proceedings of the Legislature. Maureen has been an active volunteer with the Highlands United Church and is presently active with the Stollery children's hospital. Susan Evans has been working with ATCO Gas for the past 26 years and has two children and two grandchildren, with another grandchild on its way. They are seated in the public

gallery. I would ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Today I have the honour of introducing to you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to members of this Assembly two very special and important people who have been an inspiration to me throughout my life. Both are registered nurses, and both are from St. Catharines, Ontario.

First, I would like to introduce my sister, Nicola Kalagian-Sider, who has been a very active community volunteer, a Sunday school teacher, a major fundraiser for her church, the United Way, the March of Dimes, and the Kidney Foundation. Nicki has also been a board member for Canadian Mental Health for eight years. Nicki suffered a stroke in the year 2000 and is now a motivational speaker for stroke survivor groups.

Donna Mallette has also been a very active volunteer in her community as a Sunday school teacher and fundraiser for the March of Dimes, the Kidney Foundation, and the Kinsmen fundraiser for the Special Olympics. Donna is a degree RN in Ontario, working for the past six years as a clinical research co-ordinator, specializing in cardiology, diabetes, and stroke prevention and studies. She was also my campaign manager for the nomination.

They are both seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that Nicki give us a wave and Donna stand to receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Brian Rozmahel and Len Legault. Brian is an active member in his community of Viking and helped to found a student organization called Augustana Against AIDS. Brian also organized a charity hockey game in Viking to raise funds for the Stephen Lewis Foundation. Len Legault is a community activist in Chauvin and has run for the New Democrats in Battle River-Wainwright. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they now rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure whether my guests have arrived yet, but with your permission I would like to proceed with the introduction. Today I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my son Chris Miller, who, along with a number of his friends, is celebrating his 19th birthday today. If they're here, I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

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

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to have with us today my son Taylor Abbott visiting from Drayton Valley. He's in the public gallery. He's here this week playing with the NAIT Oaks conditioning camp for hockey, hoping to make a triple-A team this year. I'll ask Taylor to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House. Also, sitting with him is my Leg. assistant, Theresa Lightfoot, and I'd ask her to stand as well. If you could all welcome them, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a second honour today and the pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly employees from Advanced Education, strategic corporate services division, human resources. They're doing their public service orientation here today, and they are Lisa Urwin, Maegen Beattie, Salha Moloo, Kate Annis, and Connie Scott. Please join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the Leader of the Official Opposition, just let me note again that I sent a note to all hon. members a couple of days ago that basically indicated that as a result of changes in one caucus membership, the rotation of the question period now will revert to where we were when the spring session began.

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

Health Care Services

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. An unexpected pleasure to be back for all of us, I'm sure.

While this government preoccupies itself with its own leadership issues, Alberta's health regions are facing a crisis. This summer the hospital in Grande Prairie, for example, was forced to repeatedly fly patients to Edmonton for emergency surgery, while intensive care beds, operating rooms, and emergency rooms in at least five health regions had to shut down due to acute staff shortages. The people of this province are being seriously and sometimes catastrophically affected. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that the crisis at the Grande Prairie hospital has been boiling for years, why has this government completely failed to sort it out?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there have been many things done throughout Alberta to address the needs of the health regions. Earlier this summer I visited with the doctors in the health region and had an extensive period to meet with the board. I think it boils down to a couple of things. In North America there is a phenomenon of a lack of a qualified workforce to address the needs of a population that is booming, particularly in Alberta, with some 92,000 people here over and above what we had previously. The other thing, Mr. Speaker: we have had such an influx of people who, as our Premier often references, come without their schools, their hospitals, their families to support them. It adds an extra burden and strain to the region.

So I would contend that, for the most part, there have been excessively effective measures in managing the health of Albertans. In some cases, yes, we've had some strains.

Dr. Taft: Pure excuses, Mr. Speaker. Pure excuses.

Again to the same minister: given that the Grande Prairie region is now without a fully functioning hospital so often, including most of this month, what contingency plans are in place for something like a major bus crash or a major industrial accident?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member in the preamble for his first question noted, the Capital region predominantly has taken off some of the burden by airlifting patients here. Other contingency and disaster plans exist in every region for that hoped never-to-occur

tragedy. Disaster planning is part of what every hospital region does in order to get its circumstances in order, and I can confirm that that's happening because every single region is prepared with its own particular plan for the pandemic. It would not be unlike a plan for any disaster such as the bus accident or something that would be catastrophic that has been cited by the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Advanced Education: given that Alberta needs more doctors, more nurses, more physios, OTs, lab techs, more health professionals of every kind so desperately, why are institutions under this minister's jurisdiction turning away fully qualified applicants?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's very interesting to look at the numbers that have been published recently with respect to the turnaways in postsecondary. As I recall reading, 13,000 qualified entrants into postsecondary have been turned away, but when you really look at the numbers, you find out that one-third of those were not in fact qualified and therefore were rejected because of their lack of credentials and marks and so on. One-third of those were from outside of Alberta, and another third had applied to a number of different postsecondary institutions and were accepted by some and rejected by others. So it's impossible to tell. You're just a bit early to cry wolf with respect to this. It's too early to tell exactly how many students have actually been rejected.

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

Low-income Albertans

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the National Council of Welfare released a provincial comparison of welfare incomes, and the results were absolutely scathing for this government. The report ranks Alberta as the worst province in Canada for the level of support provided to low-income residents, particularly single parents with little kids. This is a dismal portrait of how this Tory government treats low-income people, particularly little children. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: given that Alberta ranks last in the entire country in welfare income for single parents with children, can the minister tell us how these people are supposed to enjoy the Alberta advantage receiving only \$12,000 a year? I'd like to see the minister survive on that.

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, I just received the report, actually, about an hour ago, and basically from what I understand, the report mainly concentrates on the income support rates rather than results. Here in Alberta we try to do the results because – and this is very, very important for everyone here – when you go back to '92-93, the welfare caseload was 97,000 cases, with 180,000 individuals on welfare, with 5,400 social workers working out there, and 80 per cent of the people on welfare were single people or couples without children that had no business being on welfare. When we changed the system, that 80 per cent has gone now into the workforce. Today's welfare caseload is down to 25,000, and only 13,000 of those are going through some challenge. The other 12,000 are people that are able to work and will get back into the workforce because there are a lot of jobs out there.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister can't explain away the treatment of little children here.

Again to the same minister: will the minister admit, given the clear evidence in this report, that the Alberta Works program doesn't work?

Mr. Cardinal: Of course, according to the Liberals, Mr. Speaker, a welfare caseload over 200,000 is probably the thing they'd want to do. On this side of the House, we provide top-notch services. In fact, going back to the day of the welfare reforms – this is so important to the public out there and to the opposition – when I was minister of family and social services back in '92-93, the four departments that are here today were under one ministry: children's services, persons with developmental disabilities, aboriginal affairs, and of course family and social services. Part of the reforms were to have better services for those people in need. Today there are four ministries with big budgets that look after all those high-needs areas. Those are results that Albertans want.

2:00

Dr. Taft: It's disgraceful, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Premier. What explanation can the Premier give to the thousands of parents and especially to their children, Mr. Speaker, struggling to survive in the richest province in Canada for the treatment this government provides to them, forcing them into the lowest income levels of any welfare program in Canada? This happened on his watch. How does he explain it?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, unlike the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition I wasn't looking forward to being back here, and I'm even looking forward less after that question, but I will attempt to answer it.

The hon. minister pointed out – and you have to understand historically what happened. Every week the minister of social services was coming in with requests for special warrants to accommodate welfare recipients. We changed the tone, and we said to the minister, who was the same minister that we have right now, that the emphasis should be on finding work for the employable to instill within those people a sense of dignity and a sense of hope, and he did that. But he also said: for those who are employable and don't want to work, here's a bus ticket, and, you know, you can find welfare someplace else, but for those who really want to work and are employable, we will assist you in every way, shape, or form. In other words, rather than a handout, we gave a hand up, and that is the philosophy of this government.

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

Health Care Services (continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government's inability to plan for the future, manage our resources, and govern the health system has resulted in what physicians throughout the province consider a crisis. Five health regions experienced unexpected closures this summer, impacting patient safety and quality of care, including Rose and Rick Lundy's tragic experience in a Calgary emergency room. My questions today are to the minister of health. Given that physicians have always taken holidays during the summer and we haven't had the same problems with closures in the past, why has this government failed to anticipate and cope this year?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would contend that this government has coped very well with the emergencies and other things throughout Alberta this year. We have had a very solid track record throughout the province. To generalize based on a few particular circumstances would be an error.

Now, I must say that I felt it was tragic and very regrettable that the Lundys experienced what they did, and I mention that because the hon. member has referenced them. Let's just talk about what happens when something goes wrong in an emergency situation or in any other situation. The Calgary health region has undertaken not only to review that but to meet with the Lundys and discuss the issue and look at the issues that surrounded triage and all the other kinds of circumstances. They have finally this week announced the opportunity not only for Mr. Lundy to serve on the patient experience committee but for the Health Quality Council of Alberta to do a thorough assessment as an independent body of the emergencies and to see whether or not there is a crisis.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would contend that everything that we've done, including absorbing 1,200 more patients in the emergency departments in Calgary, has been on the track of supporting patient health and patient safety.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that physicians from throughout Alberta but particularly Grande Prairie and Capital have lobbied the minister specifically with their arguments that the system is on the verge of collapse, why has the minister failed to take action? [interjections]

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the echo and din of all that let me just say that we have taken action, and we are working with the staff in those areas. We are working not only on the plans that they have provided us but looking at complementary services in other regions to provide assistance. In the north the Capital region has involved particular staff members not only to liaise with Northern Lights but with the Peace Country. We have provided locum programs. We have increased the dollars, doubled in this year's budget, for primary care. We have increased the dollars for the ARPs to support the physicians. I should highlight that if you look at the number of doctors and nurses and other health care professionals that we have added this year, it's considerably more than many of the other jurisdictions. We're funding at the highest rate per capita in Canada, and I contend, despite the cries of anguish on the other side, that we have the best health care system in Canada.

Ms Blakeman: Don't diminish Albertans' experience.

Back to the same minister: why would the minister spend time visiting other countries to learn more about their private health systems when Albertans were experiencing closures in surgical, ICU, renal, and mental health units here in Alberta?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's not one shred of evidence that I went exploring private care systems. Prove it, and then we'll talk about it.

But let's talk about what we've been doing here. We have been taking every effort with our health business plan, with our policy framework, with Getting on with Better Health Care, to look at practical ways to improve the system. To the largest extent we have been successful.

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

Education Funding

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government's long history of guesstimate budgeting has finally come back to bite them, forcing them out of their country clubs and fishing lodges. At the end of the spring sitting the members across were watching the clock like grade schoolers before summer vacation, completely neglecting to adequately budget for things like education, health care, and infrastructure. So here we are in summer session, doing remedial lessons on budgeting. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. To the hon. minister: despite the fact that parents, school boards, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and the Alberta NDP repeatedly raised the alarm about crumbling schools, school board deficits, and growing class sizes during the spring budget debate when the Education estimates were being discussed, how is it that the government still failed to remember to adequately budget for Alberta's 600,000 grade school students?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, first, the hon. member might be interested to know that there was a hailstorm at my country club last night, and that's where I've been enjoying the country clubs.

There is going to be an opportunity over the next several days to debate the merits of all of the expenditures that have been brought forward before this House. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think that Albertans appreciate the fact that when there is necessary spending coming forward, we attend to it in a timely fashion. We are able to do that thanks to the prudent and conservative budgeting process that we use. Most governments in Canada would really appreciate being able to deal with some of those issues.

On the particular issue of the timeliness on the education funding, I think it would be appropriate to have the Minister of Education, who has been dealing with this issue, as he explained over and over again in the House, with all of the school boards that came up with this plan.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the Minister of Finance: did the minister know that school board budgets were inadequate when she brought forward her spring budget, and if she didn't know, why wasn't she listening to us? Because we told her exactly that.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. leader of the third party researched a little bit, he would know that we don't even get that information from the school boards before the end of June. So, obviously, had I known, more importantly had the minister known, it would have been attended to in the budget that was presented in this House much earlier in the year.

Mr. Speaker, again I would like the Minister of Education just to very quickly explain to the hon. member how it works.

2:10

The Speaker: Sorry. The hon. leader, please.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister must have a hearing problem because we all heard the school boards.

Why didn't the minister acknowledge that there was a severe shortage in the Education budget at the time, and will she table all of the correspondence she received from school boards, teachers, and parents before the development of her budget to show that she didn't know about it?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I wish to undertake that question on behalf of the Minister of Finance because I think what has to be clarified here is exactly how much money is already going into this system, the best education system in Canada. That's undisputed. We also have the highest funded education system, the highest paid teachers.

Now, we want to even go further and make it the best education system in the world, and that's what we're planning to do. In order to help get that done, we're going to be spending close to \$5.6 billion this year, which comes out to about \$27.9 million each and every school day. Twenty-seven point nine million dollars each and every school day is what we're spending on the education system. We're working with the school boards, we're working with the superintendents, we're working with parent home and school councils, and we're working as hard as we can on behalf of the future of this province, our students, and we are getting the results we seek.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recent reports indicated that the mountain pine beetle has spread as far north as Fairview and as far east as Fox Creek. Over the past few years we've seen the mountain pine beetle spread across British Columbia and devastate their forests. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is your department doing to address the spread of this destructive pest, and especially what are they doing to help our forest industry withstand the impact of this rapidly developing situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. We do have 6 and a half million hectares of mature pine forest that are at risk because of the mountain pine beetle. We have been extremely proactive in our efforts to get rid of the mountain pine beetle since it was first detected in 2002. We survey our forests, and we will continue to survey our forests and absolutely burn each and every single solitary tree that we know the mountain pine beetle has infested.

A couple of weeks ago, it is sad to say, with strong prevailing westerly winds the mountain pine beetle came over into the Peace Country. No one could have predicted that, Mr. Speaker. However, we are being very proactive in dealing with that as well. Our strategy has not changed. We will continue to survey, cut, and burn. We will make sure that our forest industry is engaged in that as well because what we're doing is looking at resequencing harvest plans so that we can harvest the most vulnerable trees possible. We're receiving plans as we speak to make sure that we deal with them promptly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. What is being done to determine the extent of these new infestations?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, it's going to require all Albertans to help us with this. Our forest health officers will conduct examinations based on reports that we receive from staff in the field as well as industry players and the public at large to spot infestations of trees.

We're looking to make sure that we plan to retain and train our seasonal firefighters so that they can help us with these surveys and do the cutting and burning that is required.

We're also asking all users of the forest, Mr. Speaker, and particularly our oil and gas industry, recreationalists, and survey companies to make sure that if they find trees, they will identify them for us. All Albertans need to take part in identifying these trees, particularly where they show signs of sawdust around the base or if we have a crystallized honey that is on the surface. Anyone who spots trees with those signs is asked to mark that location and call us at 1-877-927-BUGS.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. Will the government's comprehensive strategy put an end to the mountain pine beetle in Alberta?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, scientists have told us that we're doing absolutely the right thing. As well, British Columbia, from their experience, has told us to be very proactive, and that's what this government is doing. By hitting the beetles hard, we think that we can try to prevent them from spreading any further. But the pine beetle is a natural phenomenon, and basically the best thing to get rid of them is about minus 40 degree weather. Nature is a formidable force, and under the right conditions the pine beetle infestation could travel across Canada into the boreal forest if we don't get that cold weather. There are 6 million hectares of pine forests in Alberta. Those 6 million hectares are roughly the size of New Brunswick, and to put it in perspective, the tremendous social and environmental and economic loss that would happen to this province is one reason why we cannot give up the fight.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Education Funding (continued)

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the year 2001 only 11 per cent of the school boards posted a deficit. In the year 2004-05 this figure skyrocketed to 43.5 per cent. This is an increase of 300 per cent – 300 per cent – and clearly indicates the failure of this government to adequately fund the education system at a time of great prosperity. Even with the announced increase in spending it's a drop in the bucket. To the Minister of Education: given the fact that Alberta's school boards requested over \$2.5 billion of capital funding in 2005, how many school boards will still be shortchanged despite this increase in funding that he proposes?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I don't think any school boards are going to be shortchanged, and I don't think that the member has properly concluded his question in the way he might have wanted with that word. Let me just say with respect to the overall capital plan that we do have a significant injection of money being added to the K to 12 system, and since having inherited that particular budget from the infrastructure ministry, I should tell the House that we have increases of about \$177 million this year coming for the school capital funding initiatives. That will take funding from \$195 million previously up to \$372 million this year. That will, for example, this year see the completion and the opening of about 13 brand new schools right now and the commencement or continuation of another 51 over and above that, and that's even before we bring forward the plan for the next five years in the next few months.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will this minister finally stop blaming school boards for the government's failures and take responsibility today for the lack of schools in places across the province, particularly in Calgary and Edmonton, and do something about it?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, no one on this side is blaming anyone. I don't know where the member is getting that from, and if he wishes to blame the school boards, then he can do that because it seems like he's accusing them of a lot of wrongful things. We're not blaming or accusing anyone. I'm giving you some straightforward facts.

What I would encourage the member to do, which clearly he hasn't been able to do over the summer, is to take a look at school capital plans such as the ones put out here by the school boards just a few months ago, last spring, and he will learn in there exactly which schools are already being funded, which ones are opening, when they are opening, and where some of their additional needs are because of dramatically shifting and dramatically changing population numbers and school enrolment numbers. It's pretty flat province-wide, Mr. Speaker, but in certain spots they are experiencing enrolment increases. I should point out that Alberta is only one of two provinces in Canada that is experiencing that sort of sharp incline, an increase in student populations, and we're dealing with it.

Mr. Flaherty: Talking to school boards, they're not saying that.

Does the minister intend to provide ongoing funding for school maintenance, or is he content to just throw money at the problem each time a crisis like that in Calgary develops in some of the schools across the province? What's he going to do about it?

2:20

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure why the hon. member is trying to be so inflammatory in his comments. He knows full well that we've increased operations and maintenance support to school boards by about \$28 million. That's about a 7.5 per cent increase. That's just in these last few months. It's going up to \$404 million. That's the largest amount they've ever had for operations and maintenance.

With respect to infrastructure and maintenance renewal programs, which maybe he's mixed up between the two, that is going up from \$48 million to \$200 million this year. From \$48 million up to \$200 million. The hon. member should have done some homework over the summer to know that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Royalty Programs

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday the Minister of Energy announced amendments to a number of royalty regulations in Alberta. As we know, the energy industry is Alberta's main economic engine, and Albertans want to be assured that when changes are made that affect the industry, they are not mere tinkering. My question to the Minister of Energy: is this a conclusion to the royalty review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said on numerous occasions, this is part of the ongoing review that the Department of

Energy does with respect to royalty programs. This isn't just an event. We're constantly monitoring changing circumstances, be it here or throughout the world, to make sure that we have the best structures to ensure that Albertans get their fair share of the ownership of that resource to which they are entitled.

I'd like to mention that even the tinkering kinds of questions – the royalty programs are going to bring back an additional \$186 million to Albertans. I don't know about in your books, but that's still a fairly substantial amount of dollars that come back into this province that will be there for the future. Those are made in adjustment to changing circumstances.

I'd also like to make one comment about a fair share question. It's true that the industry is making substantially greater profits today. In the past we made \$3 billion to \$4 billion off royalties from the province, this past year just under \$15 billion, well surpassing anything that we've ever had in that range. As Albertans we, too, are benefiting substantially from the increased profits.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many producers, large and small, would be affected by these changes. My question to the same minister: can he provide the rationale for his decisions?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we will be bringing forward additional information to the public with regard to these programs and the royalty review in due course. But with respect to the four programs in particular the highlight of some of those is the fact that the price has been part of the question, the horizontal re-entry program. For example, technologies have vastly improved on horizontal well drilling versus the past. It used to be a very new, innovative technology. Now it's very commonplace. That was reflected in the change.

The deep gas royalty program. That's to reflect that today where it's in Alberta's interest is to help explore the vast resource, and it is a vast resource in the tight sands and shales, substantially or potentially more resource in gas in that than all of the other gas that we have, including the coal-bed methane. So it's in that respect that we continue to focus our efforts in getting the best value and the most recovery of that resource for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. He has suggested that the Alberta royalty tax credit might be terminated. Why has he not done so?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we have also mentioned that it has been the intent in our review to eliminate the Alberta royalty tax credit effective January of this coming year. We have undertaken with industry to give them through the end of this month to provide us with any solid economic reasons or business reasons for the people of Alberta why we should continue that. We are just waiting for the last of the process, which we continue through the end of this month, just another weekend. It still is our objective once we get that information, unless there's something substantively new, that we will work towards elimination of that program.

Electricity Generation

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, the failures of electricity deregulation along with the total incompetence of this Progressive Conservative government were exposed a month ago today when the Alberta

electricity grid was in complete chaos and crisis. Electricity was in very short supply and prices were very high, and Albertans were forced by this government's flawed policy to endure an electricity blackout. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Where was all the extra electricity generation capacity this government continually brags about when during afternoon rush hour on July 24 we were at least 250 megawatts short in our electricity supply?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I am thrilled that he chose to bring up this instance as how they continually mischaracterize and misrepresent and actually I would say falsely portray to the public that this was a result of market design, i.e. deregulation. This had nothing to do with generation. It had nothing to do with market design under any model. If this was under the old regulated model . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor. Carry on.

Mr. Melchin: If we went back to what they would propose, if we had a fully regulated model, I would be interested how it is that they think they could control three different strikes by lightning, different times, different places, that destroyed the network of transmission, and get the generation available for supply to the consumers. I'd be interested in how they're going to regulate lightning.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Under the regulated system whenever an operator pushed the button, a generating station would start, but it doesn't anymore. Given that the market surveillance administrator's report lists 265 megawatts as being unavailable on that afternoon for the following reasons – "unit failed to start," "unit is inoperable," and unit "not generally available to the system" – can the minister tell us this afternoon if this is the extra electricity capacity generation that the Premier and this Progressive Conservative government continues to brag about? If you push the button, it won't work?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, first off, I'm glad that he highlights that we do have excess capacity of generation. It's been a complete success of the market design that we have. A complete success. You know, sometimes equipment needs to be brought down for maintenance. Surprisingly, that happened with the old model too. Sometimes, as in this instance too, there's a mechanical failure. I'd be delighted to see how they'll regulate that in the future there'll never be a mechanical failure. Sometimes the wires, which are still regulated today, which are the highways to get that electricity from that plant to you and I as users, break down. In this case they did. So it doesn't matter how much electricity generation you have if it can't get there through the highways, which are regulated today and under the old model. It won't make any difference.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why are these generation stations counted in our overall Power Pool capacity if they will not start when they're needed to provide electricity during an emergency?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, there was plenty of generation available to get to the market. The reason was that the tie-line between Alberta and B.C. was out because of a lightning strike. Sheerness 1 and 2 were off because of transmission wire facilities that were not

available to give that generation. They put off the generation. It takes time to bring those coal-fired plants back on to stream.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Labour Supply

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Alberta's hot economy has created a number of challenges, and when I travel around my constituency, the most proliferating sign is Help Wanted. The Alberta government has recently released its long-term labour force strategy. Mr. Minister, isn't this plan just a little late for the challenges that are already being faced by Alberta's businesses?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we have a booming economy in Alberta thanks to this good government. Our diversification plan is working. In fact, within the next 10 years we are going to create over 400,000 new jobs, and with all the training programs in place and other programs we will only be able to supply 86,000 workers. So it's a challenge. It's a problem, but many jurisdictions in North America would love to have the problem we have. We are doing many things. In our recent release of our 10-year strategy our first priority, again, is to train and hire local people, Albertans, and then the ability of other Canadians to be able to move to Alberta and work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the hon. minister. It's been reported that the Alberta Federation of Labour was not consulted on this strategy. If this is true, can you explain why?

Mr. Cardinal: Well, Mr. Speaker, in addressing the labour force challenges and opportunities we have in Alberta, the provincial government alone cannot resolve the challenges and the problems in that area. This is why, in fact, in order to develop the plan, we consulted with industry, education representatives, aboriginal groups, to get their input in this process. In fact, we met with the Alberta Federation of Labour on February 17 to address and get their input on the strategy that we developed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is for the Minister of Advanced Education. The report sets targets for meeting the number of apprentices. Mr. Minister, can you ensure that your department will see to it that the postsecondary sector can meet this need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The good news is that we currently have over 53,000 apprentices in this province, and I'm very pleased to say that we have more than 1,400 aboriginal apprentices, which is a growth of about 200 just in the last couple of months. I want to commend employers for really stepping up to the plate because in the last number of months we've been registering over a hundred new apprentices per day. That's because the

employers in this province recognize that they need to step up to the plate, and they need to be commended.

We're doing a number of other things also, Mr. Speaker. We continue to offer technical training through distance delivery, mobile delivery, SuperNet delivery, and other methods. We recognize apprentices from other parts of Canada at the same level that they are in their own territory. We promote the registered apprenticeship program, RAP. We recognize tradespeople from other jurisdictions through the red seal program. We're working very closely with our aboriginal community, because I think that's our biggest opportunity in the future.

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

Budgetary Practices

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to failing, this government deserves an A. This government has failed to plan affordable housing in Edmonton. They failed to plan hospital sizes in Calgary. They failed to plan infrastructure in Fort McMurray. But worst of all, yesterday the Finance minister admitted that this government doesn't even have a plan to manage Alberta's massive surpluses, billions of dollars of surpluses. To the Minister of Finance: given that Albertans across this province are asking for a surplus plan, where the heck is it?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I guess the only person who has kind of missed this is maybe the hon. member and maybe some other members of his caucus. We've repeatedly discussed what the surplus plan would be and said very clearly that we had to change our plan for unbudgeted surplus because there was a very important event that occurred in this province that changed that. Previously, unbudgeted surpluses could be used for putting money into the sustainability fund, for debt repayment, and for capital. Well, of course, Alberta being the only jurisdiction in Canada and probably North America that is debt free, we no longer have to do that. So there is an adjustment to the plan that has been in place. The real people that fail in this room are those people over there that fail to listen.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister admitted that she has no plan for the budgeted surplus, and she admitted that there's a \$6 billion deficit, or debt, to the teachers' pension fund. Will the minister please tell us how much more of the surplus this government plans to blow before the year is out?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, again a failure, and it has to be a hearing failure or else the member failed to be in the same scrum I was because, frankly, the only question on pension that came up at all was in reference to a document from Standard & Poor's, who happens to be one of our rating agencies, who I met with in Toronto in June. On August 22 Standard & Poor's – it's very timely – released their rating of the province of Alberta, where they said: triple-A ratings affirmed on extremely low debt. The question came in the scrum: "Well, then, do they consider pension debt in that?" which is off line for us in our budget because there's a long-term plan to address it. I should say, though, that the tax-supported debt as a share of GDP is 1.6 per cent, which is very low, which is expected to go to 1.3.

Mr. Speaker, I will table this document because I should table it. But there's one line, if I could have your permission to quote it:

The provincial government's conservative and prudent budgetary practices, which seek to protect Alberta's strong financial perfor-

mance against potential volatility in resource revenues, through the use of its fiscal sustainability fund and the capital account, which is where we deal with surplus dollars.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Finance again: given this government's complete inability to manage the province's surpluses, why doesn't the department do the responsible thing and adopt the Alberta Liberal surplus plan? We have one. We've done the work for you. Why don't you adopt it?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, a very good question. [interjections]

The Speaker: Question period is about government policy. It's turning into a bit of a debate here in the last question and answer. If the minister wants to proceed.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, a very good question. Frankly, if we had adopted that plan from the opposition, we would not have put \$1.3 billion into health facilities last year. We would not be building the number of schools that we are. Their plan limited the amount of capital expenditure that you could have in one year. We did not do that because we recognized that there was a requirement for more capital, and while our savings are very close to what their plan wanted, our spending on schools, hospitals, and other government infrastructure is higher. I rest my case.

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

2:40

Rental Increases

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a severe housing crisis in the province of Alberta. Working families and students find themselves in increasingly precarious housing situations, and the number of homeless people in the province has doubled. It doesn't matter whether we hear from Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, or other centres. This crisis, frankly, is a predictable result of this government's own reckless, growth at all costs, short-term thinking and lack of planning. As an example, I received an e-mail last week from a single mother living in Edmonton whose rent has increased 33 per cent, \$300 per month, in just the last few months. My question is to the Minister of Government Services, who's supposed to be looking after the renters. To the minister: what do we say to this woman and other hard-working Albertans who are spending over half their income on housing in this overheated economy and cannot even afford the basics?

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, you know, the member opposite is absolutely right. We are facing unprecedented growth in this province. In areas like Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, and Fort McMurray we hear from people that are faced with rental issues. I'd ask this member to provide me with the name and the circumstance. We have landlord/tenant protection in this province. Give me the circumstance, and I'll take care of it directly. We'll do it tomorrow. We'll do it today for you.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's one person. I'd be glad to send it over to the minister, but the reality is that there are thousands of Albertans facing this situation. What's he going to do: look after all of them? I want to be specific to the minister. What is he prepared to do with these exorbitant rental increases that are occurring over the province, that are coming about not just for one person but for thousands?

Mr. VanderBurg: Again, Mr. Speaker, we do have legislation in place to protect renters, but if this member is asking if I am going to introduce rent controls, the answer is no.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that all the renters in the province will be glad to hear about that. I would ask the minister: why is he not prepared to look at caps, as is done in British Columbia, as is done in Ontario, where it's basically to the cost of living? Why is he not prepared to look at that? There are thousands of people being impacted in this province.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, we've been through this in this province before. You know, there were rent controls at one time throughout this country. It proved not to work. There were people who wanted to invest, and they said that they're pulling back that investment money and they're not building those rental accommodations. I don't want to go back to a situation where we prove that it did not work. We have to look at other options. I will assure this member and all Albertans that I will talk with my colleagues in cabinet. I'll talk with them seriously to find a way that we can find more housing, more land to develop. We'll do that quickly.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the first of six, a little historical vignette for the day.

A number of Alberta MLAs have had a town, village, or post office named after them.

Boyle is named after John Robert Boyle, a Liberal, who served in the Alberta Legislature from 1905 to 1924 representing the constituency of Sturgeon. Mr. Boyle was a leader in the revolt which ended Alexander Rutherford's service as Premier.

Holden became a village in 1905 and is named after James Bismark Holden, a Liberal, who represented Vermilion in Alberta's first two Legislatures, from 1905 to 1913. Mr. Holden also served as the mayor of Vegreville for various terms between 1914 and 1945.

Jean Côté was named after Jean Leon Côté, a Liberal, who represented the constituencies of Athabasca then Grouard between 1909 and 1921. He was appointed to the Senate in 1923 and died in 1924.

Douglas Corney Breton served in Alberta's sixth Legislature, from 1926 to 1930, as the United Farmers of Alberta MLA for Leduc and saw Breton named in his honour in 1927. He served in India and Afghanistan during World War I.

George Hoadley served as a Conservative MLA from 1909 to 1921 representing Okotoks, from 1921 to 1930 as the UFA MLA for Okotoks, and from 1930 to 1935 as the UFA MLA for Okotoks-High River. The post office in Haverigg was renamed Hoadley in 1924.

Vernor Winfield Smith served as a UFA MLA from 1921 to 1935, representing the constituency of Camrose. Smith was Alberta's Minister of Railways and Telephones when the Lacombe and Northwestern Railway named the siding of Winfield after him.

Henry Elbert DeBolt represented the constituency of Spirit River as a Social Credit MLA from 1940 to 1952. He had become the first postmaster in an area known as American Creek in 1923, and in that year the post office became known as DeBolt.

The first member of Ukrainian heritage elected to this Assembly was Andrew Shandro, who represented the constituency of Whitford from 1913 to 1926 as a Liberal. The locality of Shandro is named after him.

Some members might remember Henry Mancini's music about Peter Gunn. The hamlet of Gunn bears the name of Peter Gunn, the

Liberal MLA for Lac St. Anne from 1909 to 1917. Gunn was the sheriff for Athabasca and Peace River districts.

In the fall of 1947 residents gathered in the Notikewan River Valley to discuss a new name for their area. They endorsed the name of Manning for their post office after Ernest Charles Manning, Alberta's Premier. In 1951 Manning became a village, and in 1957 it became a town.

A number of Alberta recreation areas, streets, and roads also bear the names of former and current MLAs, as do a number of Alberta constituencies.

In 30 seconds I'll call upon the first of six members.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Rick and Rose Lundy

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in the members' gallery we have two people whom I introduced earlier today. Like all people they have experienced many difficult challenges throughout their lives. Recently they have been caught in a media spotlight surrounding a deeply personal tragedy at the Peter Lougheed hospital in Calgary. Few of us here today can imagine the challenge faced when one faces a miscarriage. I know that the deepest sympathy of all hon. members goes out to Mr. and Mrs. Lundy on their loss and the difficulties surrounding that night at the hospital.

Today, Mr. Speaker, the Lundys face new challenges and old ones, the questions of why and how and what types of services and steps could have been taken to alleviate their discomfort and what were the appropriate procedures that could have been in place to assist them, the questions of a process-oriented nature. No process, no review, and certainly no remedial action by anyone will ever truly make up for the situation that they confronted that night. For the Lundys it cannot be a matter of simply the process and procedures of our health care system. It is to be, however, about a system that must become more responsive to the needs of individual Albertans in crisis.

We as Albertans expect things of our health care system, expectations that are not always easily met, and when they are not, we need to ask the question, "Why not?" not just with the interest to define right and wrong but to define the appropriate course of action in the future.

Mr. Speaker, during this terrible ordeal the Lundys have shown a lot of courage, and their strong character has been prevalent throughout this situation. I'm glad that they have accepted the appointment to the patient experience committee. I know that they will do their best in making an ongoing contribution to produce better patient care for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Alberta Summer Games

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many people said that they were the best Alberta Summer Games ever. From July 27 to the 30th 3,100 coaches, athletes, and officials gathered in Red Deer for the largest ever Alberta Summer Games.

At the games Alberta's youth were given the opportunity to compete in 17 different sporting events as well as cultural events, including a legacy sculpture and a downtown street gala. Congratulations to the city of Red Deer, the Red Deer county, and the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation for hosting the 2006 Alberta Summer Games.

The Summer Games were made possible by the hard work and dedication of 2,600 volunteers. These volunteers worked tirelessly to prepare meals, provide transportation, and deal with a massive array of logistics related to hosting an event of this magnitude. This hard-working group of volunteers was led by the tireless effort of the chair, Lauralyn Radford, and the board of directors: Cheryl Adams, Patti Anderson, Greg Atkinson, Debbie Bonnett, Darin Doel, Carol Dyck, Carrie Farnell, Bob Grainer, Hugh McPherson, Marg Phelan, Rinn Purnell, Jared Sayers, Ron Schuster, Greg Scott, Rick Tofani, Rob Willms, and Fred Zucker. The board also had a great supporting team and wished to express their huge thanks to games manager Barb McKee and her staff members.

2:50

The Summer Games allow the youth of Alberta to showcase their various talents, to form friendships that will last a lifetime, and to learn the value of sportsmanship, teamwork, and fair play. Those who exemplify these values are recognized with the spirit of sport award that was won by zone 4, Parkland. Congratulations to zone 6, Edmonton, on winning the minister's cup for the most points overall, and zone 4, Parkland, for winning the Alberta cup for most improved zone. Congratulations to all those who participated in Alberta Summer Games. Win or lose, everyone who participated should take pride in their accomplishments and cherish the many memories that they'll take home with them.

Alberta wishes Medicine Hat all the best in hosting the 2008 Summer Games.

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

Westbourne Place

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize a unique senior citizens' institution in my constituency of Calgary-Nose Hill. Westbourne Place is a senior citizens' apartment complex with a warm Christian atmosphere situated on the hill above 64 Avenue N.W. It's adjacent to the Westbourne Baptist church, with which it is connected by a walkway and a multipurpose room. The residents also enjoy amenities including a social room, a pool room, a gift store, a garden, and an outdoor barbecue. The residents receive home care and daily health care services.

I can truly say that Westbourne Place is a friendly and welcoming community. It's much enjoyed by the residents who live there and by those who come to visit. A unique feature of Westbourne Place is the individual style and artwork that many of the residents bring to their own apartments and their doorways, which adds to the cheery and homelike atmosphere.

Reverend David Ferguson is the administrator of Westbourne Place, and I want to take this opportunity to salute him and all of his staff as well as all of the residents of Westbourne Place for making this complex in my constituency of Calgary-Nose Hill a great place to live and a great asset to our community.

Canadian Forces Mission in Afghanistan

Mr. Bonko: Mr. Speaker, today I address this House in order to recognize and celebrate the loyalty, the dedication, and the heroism of our men and women in uniform. To date over two dozen Canadians have lost their lives while serving in Afghanistan. These heroes died to protect Canadian freedoms; they died to extend those freedoms to the people of Afghanistan. They gave their lives as ambassadors of goodwill and Canadian values. Thousands of other Canadians continue to put themselves at risk on a daily basis to ensure that our mission in Afghanistan succeeds. Their loyalty and

their commitment to the ideals that made our nation great are cause for celebration.

We must continue to give all of the support that we can to our men and women in uniform. The yellow ribbon that many Canadians wear to show their support to our troops is a powerful symbol of our respect and gratitude to these exemplary human beings. With courage, compassion, determination, and hope they have ventured into the world's most dangerous places at great personal risk. They do so because they are willing to put their lives on the line for the highest ideals of humanity: peace, freedom, and our ultimate goal, universal understanding and brotherhood.

The families and friends of these brave and loyal soldiers are dealing with great loss and sorrow, and while no words of mine could possibly ease their suffering, I hope that this acknowledgement of the heroism of their loved ones will at least serve to let them know that the people of Alberta and Canada are profoundly grateful to the lost ones.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, I was advised by way of request from the hon. member's office several days ago that the hon. member was going to be making a member's statement today. He sought permission to provide all members of the Assembly with two cobs of corn from his area, which I presume is what the subject matter of his statement is, and I gave such permission. However, I did not give permission for him to circulate to all hon. members vanity fridge magnets with his name on them. So if you want to send these back to me, I will have them recycled with my name on them.

Taber Cornfest

Mr. Hinman: It was there for a good idea, so I hope you all do that.

Mr. Speaker, today is a special day as it marks the beginning of the annual Taber Cornfest. Cornfest is a celebration of more than just the corn harvest. It is a celebration of the hard work, dedication, and vision – which, by the way, is the variety of corn which you received today – of countless Alberta families.

Today's bounty would not be possible if not for the innovation of irrigation, transportation, and processing. In 1915 the area landowners voted to establish the Taber irrigation district. Soon after constructed dams, canals, and reservoirs became the backbone of the needed infrastructure. This is an example of how wise use of our resources is paramount to our present and future economy.

The railways were used to bring machinery and equipment into the area to attach southern Alberta to world markets for their harvest. It is a shame today to see these great assets of railway lines being demolished rather than remaining a vital link for our rural economy.

Current crop and forage production in the area consists of sugar beets, corn, potatoes, beans, wheat, canola, alfalfa, and timothy, just to list a few. Before oil and gas this province's economy was based on forestry and agriculture. Even today agriculture continues to contribute greatly to our economy. Many of the oil and gas workers are farm grown. It will be detrimental to the future of Alberta to have our economy based and focused only on one sector. Ours is the responsibility to ensure that our economy continues to be diversified.

Mr. Speaker, for the members of this House who have not had the opportunity to sample fresh Taber corn, I feel privileged to provide samples for all the members. It was picked fresh this morning at 4. I request that all members of the House eat their fresh Taber corn. It will add sweetness to their soul, and they'll have a tender heart for at least 10 minutes.

As the harvest continues throughout the province, I pray that we

can all remember to thank our farmers and ranchers. Corn does not grow in a can, a carton does not produce milk, and beef is not produced behind the beef cooler.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I don't know; I've got eight magnets now. If anybody has some corn they don't want to use, I'm going home later this afternoon, so send it up as well.

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Montana First Nation Satellite RCMP Station

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently attended the opening of the Montana First Nation satellite RCMP station on the Hobbema First Nations reserve. Led by Chief Carl Rabbit, this event was met with much support from the community, as was demonstrated by both good attendance and celebration throughout the day.

By introducing an additional satellite RCMP station, the community will benefit from crime prevention associated with an additional nine RCMP officers in the community. This presence within the community will help ease the community's law enforcement challenges. The new satellite station marks the fulfillment of the signing of the community tripartite agreement this past March between the federal and provincial governments and the local reserve.

During the opening ceremonies of this event, I was impressed with the prominent and conspicuous role the Hobbema cadets played. One year ago the RCMP began a comprehensive crime prevention initiative aimed at disrupting gang activity. Following this, the RCMP formed a partnership with the Hobbema community to implement the First Nations Community Cadet Corps program. Today the cadet corps has more than 650 members from Hobbema's four bands. These cadets, aged eight to 18, have decided to proactively shape their community's future. Not only is this movement giving these young people a sense of strength and solidarity; it is engaging the community against crime. The Hobbema cadets reflect the inspirational direction of the community.

I am pleased to see Hobbema's youth actively seeking to secure both their future and the future of the following generations. I commend Hobbema First Nations reserve for their initiative in crime prevention through the new satellite police station and the cadet corps movement, which will enhance the quality of life and safety of this community.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling 271 petitions today urging the government "to move the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive ring road south of the current proposal" to reduce noise, increase safety measures, as well as "minimize the environmental impact of the road."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 30 I'd like to give notice that I will be rising at the appropriate time to move that ordinary business of the Assembly be

adjourned to discuss an urgent matter; namely, the imminent risk to the health and safety of Albertans due to the failure of the government to provide the resources required for Alberta's health regions to operate essential health services.

Thank you.

3:00

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time I will be rising to move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity under Standing Order 42.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly [of Alberta] does not have confidence in the government because it has failed to adequately plan for the infrastructure, housing, education, health, and environmental needs of the province in a period of rapid growth.

The Speaker: A notice of motion, hon. Government House Leader?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Yes. One notice of motion. I just want to give oral notice regarding the following motion.

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the summer sitting of the Second Session of the 26th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Government in Council.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table five copies of the Campus Alberta Quality Council's second annual report.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of a letter from Arlene Stephen. Ms Stephen is a single mother whose rent has recently increased by \$300 per month. She's asking for a limit on how quickly rent can be increased and other strategies for affordable housing.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling this afternoon, and it's in regard to the questions I asked earlier in question period today. This is the Market Surveillance Administrator's report on the events of July 24, 2006. Further to my questioning, it certainly indicates here that a unit owned by ATCO in Rainbow Lake failed to start. It's an old unit. Another ATCO unit was unavailable as the unit is inoperable, and the Rosedale generation stations 8, 9, and 10, owned by EPCOR, were not generally available to the system slow-start units. Then there's another unit here that also failed to start as it is an old unit. I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to have a look at this document.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table an e-mail from my constituent Bev Burgess, whose daughter was bleeding for nine hours while she miscarried at the Grey Nuns hospital. It's a very similar story to Calgary.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table a copy of a letter from a constituent, Daniel Langdon, to the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Mr. Langdon was employed over the past year by a PDD-funded organization and is expressing his concern that the government hasn't recognized the severity of the situation faced by such organizations. He's urging the government to increase funding and conduct a full review of PDD funding.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to section 4(2) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act I'm tabling with the Assembly the annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer for the calendar year 2004. The report includes this office's financial statements for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2004.

Before we move on to the next segment, might we revert to Notices of Motions?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Notices of Motions**
head: (reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, and my apologies. I'll be brief, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3) to give notice that on Monday, August 28, I will move that written questions 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, and 35 be dealt with that day.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday, August 28, I will move that motions for returns 27 through 36 be dealt with on that day.

There being no additional written questions or motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper, there are none to stand and retain their places.

Thank you.

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. Mrs. McClellan, Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Government Accountability Act the government of Alberta 2005-06 annual report; pursuant to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act the Members of the Legislative Assembly pension plan annual report for the year ended March 31, 2006; pursuant to the Securities Act the Alberta Securities Commission 2006 annual report, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research endowment fund financial statements dated March 31, 2006, the Alberta heritage science and engineering research endowment fund financial statements dated March 31, 2006, the Alberta heritage scholarship fund financial statements dated March 31, 2006, the ATB Financial annual report 2006, the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation 2005 annual report.

On behalf of Mr. Liepert, chair, Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee, the Alberta heritage savings trust fund 2006 annual report for the year ended March 31, 2006.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I would ask the Government House Leader if he could rise and share with us the projected government business for the week beginning the 28th of August through the 31st of August.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday afternoon we'll deal with private members' business. On Monday evening from 8 to 9 we'll deal with Motions Other than Government Motions. There is one, Motion 512, scheduled. At 9 p.m. we will proceed to Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply, in anticipation of that being day 2 of 2, and we will seek to revert to Introduction of Bills, assuming that everything goes okay, and hopefully ask for first reading of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2).

On Tuesday afternoon we will proceed, we hope, with second reading of that particular supplementary supply act. On Tuesday evening second reading again. Should it be necessary, we'll continue on the supplementary supply act and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday afternoon Committee of the Whole is anticipated on the supplementary supply act, and, if necessary, Wednesday evening we'll continue with Committee of the Whole on the supplementary supply act.

On Thursday, August 31, we should have third reading of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2).

head: **Request for Emergency Debate**

The Speaker: Hon. members, before proceeding, we have to deal with the application re Standing Order 30.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health Care Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move:

Pursuant to Standing Order 30 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the imminent risk to the health and safety of Albertans due to the failure of the government to provide the resources required for Alberta's health regions to operate essential health services.

That motion has been distributed, I believe.

In my arguments on the urgency of this issue, Mr. Speaker, I reference *Marleau and Montpetit* 584, which is requesting that the issue be specific, that it be urgent and important, and that it be a "matter requiring urgent consideration." I would argue that when a citizen's access to health care is imperilled, it is urgent, and it requires the immediate attention of this House.

Since April the health system in Alberta has experienced a progression of crises with closures of beds, both in-patient and in surgical, renal, and mental health, plus a reduction in diagnostic services and in beds in one particular ICU. This has affected five health regions, Mr. Speaker: Capital health, Calgary region, Aspen, Peace Country, and Palliser.

I note that *Marleau and Montpetit* 585 also supports an urgency argument and asks that issues be "immediately relevant and of attention and concern throughout the nation." We know that the issues around access to health and wait-lists and provision of resources, planning, and policy is a matter of discussion that is arising in a number of places.

To the argument on urgency I refer to the parameters set out in

Beauchesne 387 to 398 on emergency debates. I note that this issue is not currently before the courts. If I look at a number of the other tests that have been either noted in those sections in *Beauchesne* or in precedents in this House, that would include the throne speech as an opportunity to explore a subject. Well, the throne speech was some time ago, and the timing of the next one is unknown but would not likely be before another six months have passed.

3:10

I have examined the Order Paper, and there is no bill that would address this issue on the Order Paper or, indeed, outlined in any press release or media release from the government regarding this fall session or generally. We are scheduled for a supplementary supply budget, but I note, Mr. Speaker, that we have a total of 210 minutes in which to debate some 15 ministries and almost \$1.4 billion. That's 14 minutes tops if we divide every ministry into equal time, and I would argue that at a rate of \$6.6 million a minute and 14 minutes a ministry, that is not a sufficient amount of time to debate a complex issue like this. Fourteen minutes is not conducive to a thoughtful debate on access and waiting lists and the closure of a number of different units in health regions across the province.

There is no other reasonable opportunity for debate, Mr. Speaker. Oral Question Period is not enough time to debate a complex issue, and the Speaker is often admonishing us not to create debate during question period. We did indeed ask our primary and our third-position questions today on exactly this issue but were not able to get satisfactory answers from the minister.

I've looked at the written questions and motions for returns that are on the Order Paper and were just noted by the Government House Leader, and these do not cover the subject that I am seeking debate on. There are no private members' bills on the Order Paper on this issue, and there are no motions available on this issue, either a government or a private member's motion. The Premier blew off this opposition's request for an independent inquiry, and we note that Calgary health has teamed with the Quality Health Council for a report which would possibly be released sometime after May next year, which is not immediate enough given the issues that have arisen in the last five months.

I would argue, using the arguments in *Beauchesne* 389, that this issue is "so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention." Indeed, we have people that have been brave enough to join us in the gallery and to travel some distance to bring their story to light and to try and work beyond that to improve the situation so that others do not have this same experience.

Under *Beauchesne* 390 "the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately," and I think a number of us or all of us can attest to a demand from our constituents that this issue be addressed. I argue that the government's failure to provide planning, policy, and resources required to operate Alberta's health regions is posing an imminent risk to the health and safety of Albertans. I argue that our Standing Order 30 request meets the tests that are set out, and I urge the Speaker to rule in favour of our request.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the argument.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 30(1) and (2) the chair will allow for brief arguments from additional members. The chair will recognize the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness on this procedural point.

Anybody else? The hon. House leader for the third party, and then we'll just proceed.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would appreciate the opportunity to respond to the motion that has been raised, and while

it would be tempting to cite the number of accomplishments that would in fact show that we have been improving the system for the future, I will just focus on the need for the emergency debate.

Mr. Speaker, I would entreat you that while this is an important issue, an emergency debate would just serve to lengthen the time before we could table our supplementary estimates and get on with the debate relative to the funding and the important work that would be done in providing additional funding for the health system. I think this debate in the Committee of Supply will be an appropriate time for us to discuss the issues, and I would hope that the hon. member opposite would be patient with us and find the patience to help us go through the tabling of the supplementary estimates, indicating what sorts of plans we have in place to accommodate funding issues, workforce shortages, and the other kinds of things that have been identified in previous questions today.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I think this debate would only delay a session in which we could more expediently move forward with the supplementary funding that is needed by the regions and will enable them to get on with their job.

For all these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I strongly contend that this matter, while important, does not constitute an emergency debate today.

The Speaker: Just for clarification and the elucidation of the chair, is the hon. minister saying that when an estimate is submitted to this House, there are dollars for health in it?

Ms Evans: Yes.

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

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief, but it seems to me that there's a lot of crisis developing in this province right now. Certainly, health care is a serious matter, and I'll speak to the urgency.

I mean, the reality is that we've seen the Sturgeon hospital in St. Albert close its surgery room August 5 to 6. That could be very serious. As already mentioned, this month the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Grande Prairie closed its intensive care unit for a week. The Foothills hospital has closed beds due to nursing shortages, and of course we're familiar with the sad experience of Rose Lundy, who miscarried while waiting for a bed in the Peter Lougheed hospital in Calgary. So this is very serious, and I would argue that we really don't have a good opportunity to debate this issue. The minister says: well, we can talk about it during supplementary estimates. Well, we have 15 departments to go through – 15 departments – and only two days to debate them. It seems to me hardly reasonable to grapple with an issue as complex as health care reform in such a short period of time.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that if nothing is done, these shortages in these hospitals are not going to get better; they're going to get worse. We've already seen some serious problems develop, and I would say that supplementary estimates in two days – I would argue that probably not even if we were doing it on the regular basis, but with 15 departments in two days it really does not give us the opportunity to fully debate these very serious matters.

So, in conclusion, I would urge you to rule the motion to be in order and hope that we can have an opportunity to thoroughly debate this health care crisis. Nothing bad could come from debating this, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the representation came from three different sections. I presume that that is what it is then.

The chair is prepared to rule on the request for leave for this motion to proceed as in order under Standing Order 30(2). First of all, I would like to confirm that the Member for Edmonton-Centre has given proper notice of her intention to bring a motion under Standing Order 30. Notice was received by the Speaker's office on Tuesday, August 22, at 1:43 p.m. The subject matter was provided at that time. Therefore, the requirements under Standing Order 30(1) have been met.

Secondly, before the question as to whether the motion should proceed can be put to the Assembly, the chair must determine whether the motion meets the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that "the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." The member's proposed motion is to hold an emergency debate on "the imminent risk to the health and safety of Albertans due to the failure of the government to provide the resources required for Alberta's health regions to operate essential health services." The relevant parliamentary authorities on the topic of emergency debate are *Beauchesne*, paragraphs 387 to 398, and *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 587 to 589.

Albeit that the debate with respect to this particular motion was rather short, the chair has listened attentively to the submissions from all of the members participating in the debate, and after hearing the arguments before it, the chair does not believe that this request meets the requirements under the standing order for emergency debate to proceed. One reason, the principal reason, is that the urgency stressed in the standing order is "urgency of debate." As pointed out and indicated by the Minister of Health and Wellness and in the question period today as well by the Minister of Finance, the main reason that the Assembly has been reconvened is to debate supplementary supply, which, according to the Minister of Health and Wellness, will contain a request for additional funds for the Department of Health and Wellness. These would be the additional resources that, presumably, the Opposition House Leader refers to in her request for leave. Furthermore, while the chair is aware of the importance of this issue, it is difficult to conclude that there is something so extraordinary as to constitute a genuine emergency as required under Standing Order 30(7).

To reiterate, while the member raises a serious matter – this is a serious matter – the chair does not consider it to be of such urgency to warrant postponing the business of the Assembly this afternoon as it appears that the business of the Assembly this afternoon will be exactly what the motion is all about.

So the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on a Standing Order 42 application.

head: 3:20 Motions under Standing Order 42

Motion of Nonconfidence

Mr. Mason:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta does not have confidence in the government because it has failed to adequately plan for the infrastructure, housing, education, health, and environmental needs of the province in a period of rapid growth.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An SO 42 application allows a motion in case of urgent and pressing necessity to be made without notice under Standing Order 39. To proceed, the motion must receive unanimous consent of the House.

I believe that this is an urgent and pressing necessity. The government has failed to provide even a minimum level of governance to this province. Its competence is also extremely minimal.

The government seems genuinely surprised that there are pressures created by economic growth in this province and has not taken adequate steps to prepare the province and protect the people of this province from those pressures.

Many Albertans have been put into an extremely precarious position because on this government's watch Alberta has been burdened by a growing infrastructure deficit, economic distortions which threaten housing supports, and the government has played politics with our health care and our schools. From Fort McMurray to Medicine Hat working families and municipal leaders have been warning of impending crises in our environment, our school boards, and our hospitals.

In the area of infrastructure the lack of adequate planning is evident, particularly highway 63 and highway 19.

Earlier this week in the area of housing, mayors from seven communities made a plea for housing support. They identified a need for \$20 million to resolve the crisis. Mr. Speaker, just last year the count of homeless persons found 3,436 homeless people in Calgary. There have been rental increases as high as \$1,000 per month in Calgary, and the average rent in Fort McMurray is \$1,500 per month for a two-bedroom apartment.

The Alberta School Boards Association in the area of education estimates that base funding to accommodate salary increases for teachers has fallen short by \$48 million over the last three years and \$13 million in the last year. The ASBA estimates that \$1.2 billion...

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. With respect, the purpose now is to seek the approval of the members, not to give the debate. Once you get the approval of the members, then we'll recognize the hon. member to really give it the shot. So brevity right now is kind of important.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, in the area of health, wellness, and environment I would argue that the situation that has developed in our province requires a debate on this issue. We need to see whether or not the people of Alberta support this government or whether this House supports this government. In my view we ought to have the debate.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the house to agree to debate this motion because in this very short session there will be no opportunity to thoroughly consider the major public policy issues facing this province. Indeed, with the exception of some private members' business on Monday, the only matter the government is bringing forward to debate is a patchwork budget designed to cover over the lack of its vision. There is no real opportunity for debate on a wide range of issues facing the people of this province. The shortcomings of this government are increasingly evident to all people.

To conclude, I would argue on behalf of working people and their families that there is a very urgent need to find out what, if any, plans this government has to ensure orderly and reasonably paced long-term growth and that this remedial sitting of the Assembly will not permit any other opportunity to have such a debate. Mr. Speaker, it's my submission that we need to debate this motion. This government has lost the moral authority to govern. It has abjectly failed to provide for the needs of this province, and it ought to have done so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The chair would like to acknowledge to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood that he provided adequate notice, which was very important. It's a courtesy and appreciated.

Hon. members, under Standing Order 42(1), unanimous consent of the Assembly is required in order for us to proceed.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I have received a certain message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving a number of motions relevant to the supplementary supply estimates, I wish to remind the House that I provided the government's 2006-07 quarterly budget report for the first quarter to all MLAs yesterday morning. I also made this report public as required by section 9 of the Government Accountability Act.

I now wish to table the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates. These will provide additional spending authority to 15 departments of the government. When passed, the estimates will authorize approximate increases of \$1.37 billion in voted expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$149 million in voted capital investment, and \$16 million in voted nonbudgetary disbursements.

Mr. Speaker, when a second or subsequent set of estimates is tabled, section 8 of the Government Accountability Act requires an amended fiscal plan. The quarterly budget report serves as the amended fiscal plan.

I'm also tabling the first-quarter activity report describing the major achievements of our government during that period. Also being tabled is the first-quarter update for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

head: **Government Motions**

24. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 24 carried]

25. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(9) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund shall be two days.

The Speaker: This motion is a nondebatable motion.

[Government Motion 25 carried]

head: 3:30 **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

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

head: **Supplementary Supply Estimates 2006-07
General Revenue Fund**

Health and Wellness

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

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Today I'm here to request additional support for our health regions in providing essential services to Albertans. While we've made great improvements in providing a quality and effective health care system, there are many pressure points facing us, some that have been mentioned today.

Before I discuss the specifics of supplementary estimates, I would like to provide an overview of the state of our health system, including some of our challenges and innovations that we're employing to be proactive and forward thinking as we address them not only for today but for the future.

For the first time ever this past spring the Alberta Health and Wellness budget surpassed the \$10 billion mark. The approved health budget as it exists for 2006-07 is \$10.3 billion, an increase of \$735 million, or 7.7 per cent, over last year. Today's supplementary estimate will put us over the \$10.5 billion mark. We've the highest per capita spending of all the provinces. Today Health and Wellness spending accounts for 36 per cent of the government's total expense in 2006 and '07.

Nearly two-thirds of the Health and Wellness budget is being provided in operating grants to health authorities, and that is a good thing, Mr. Speaker, because it means that Albertans are benefiting directly from health service providers, technology, and treatments. Every hour we spend more than \$1.2 million to operate Alberta's health care system.

In our budget this year health authority funding was allocated to address population growth and annual inflation costs ranging from 4.9 per cent for Chinook regional health authority to 8.3 per cent for Northern Lights health region.

We're investing in the right places to meet our growing and changing population, and we're excited in the province about Calgary's new Children's hospital, which is the first built in Canada in over 20 years. We're proud of the Mazankowski Heart Institute, which holds great promise for improving health outcomes and is attracting interest from top health professionals.

Infrastructure is important to building a strong public health system. Seven hundred and forty-eight million will be spent on health capital this year, including \$672 million in capital grants to health authorities.

Spending on the 2006-2009 capital plan will increase by 74 per cent over the previous three-year plan, to \$2.9 billion. This includes \$2.5 billion for health facility projects, including the Alberta bone and joint institute in Calgary, the Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute in Edmonton as well as health facilities in a number of communities. These projects will add an estimated 2,000 new beds, which by increasing capacity increases access. We recognize that the additional beds will mean additional operating costs. For 2006-07 the additional cost is over \$14 million, and this additional funding will help address that.

We have allocated \$1.88 billion to physician services. This allocation includes \$75 million for alternate payment plans to allow academic physicians to focus more time on research, education, and delivering speciality care to Albertans and \$70 million for primary care initiatives. Now, Mr. Speaker, the primary care initiatives as they grow are a very strong example of how we're stretching resources, improving scope of practice and the quality of care Albertans receive.

If you've read our recently updated health policy framework, you'll be surprised to see that there are now 26 primary care networks operating in Alberta communities, involving 550 physicians and providing services to more than 700,000 patients, over a quarter of Alberta's population. The primary care initiative has led to 24/7 access to primary health care services and will be a new model to lead the future of primary care in Alberta.

That health policy document also identifies that 800 physicians practise under the ARP agreement, allowing for flexibility and improved service. We're being innovative in this province to attract and retain health care professionals and are reaping the benefits. Over the past five years we've had the highest net increase in physicians, 800 in all, more than any province in Canada.

Of course, I must also mention the hip and knee replacement project, which decreased wait times for orthopedic surgery from 47 weeks to five weeks and will be a model to reduce wait times for other surgeries and procedures. We're doing a lot of things right.

However, we must continue to invest in other improvements. We've approved regulations to allow pharmacists to prescribe some drug treatments. Mr. Speaker, something they will be looking at modifying and accommodating as much as possible are the regulation requests, as they table those later this fall, by the addition of other health professionals to assist in the definition of the final standards. These regulations fall under the Health Professions Act, and overall it's a strategy to make the best use of health professionals.

We'll continue expanding our electronic health record so that patient information will be available to health professions by 2008 from all health authority regions. Regional health authorities will also be required to report how their mental health plans are addressing mental health services.

We've set priorities to address other demands. Managing growing costs in emerging technologies and pharmaceuticals, we're working with our partners to ensure that we have the right mix of providers to meet our system needs.

What are our system pressures? Well, we're blessed with a healthy economy, and that's attracting people from all over the world. Recent numbers suggest that 90,000 people have moved to our province in the past year, a huge increase from the mid-90s. Our prosperity, though, remains a challenge to the quality of our health system. With changing demographics, people bringing their aging population with them to accommodate the needs of grandparents and great-grandparents, currently 10 per cent of Alberta's population is 65 years of age and over, and this percentage is expected to increase to 13 per cent by 2016 and to 20 per cent by 2030. The province's population continues to shift from rural to urban centres, with one of the highest population growth rates in Canada at approximately 1.5 per cent per year.

Other challenges include the cost of emerging technologies and pharmaceuticals, workforce shortage expectations, increased health spending, broad public health risks, mental health issues and challenges, and addiction issues. I can't stress too much the fact that Albertans expect a high quality of health, and it is one of the reasons why, Mr. Speaker, we spend more on health than any other province in the country.

Over the next 10 years regional health authorities will be required to recruit 54,000 new workers. The Alberta Medical Association recently reported that the health system needs 1,100 more physicians right now, and this summer we've seen health regions struggling to maintain service in the face of staff shortage and increasing demands. The Northern Lights health region continues to cope with more than 150 staff vacancies caused by a highly competitive job market in the Fort McMurray area. Some regions have temporarily

closed emergency rooms, ICUs, and surgical units to deal with staff shortages. This week the Calgary health region announced that it'll be conducting an external review of its emergency care services, which are seeing huge volume increases year over year. We are concerned, and we need to take even more action.

There is no question that we face enormous challenges. We are fortunate here in Alberta to be in a position to address these challenges. Health and Wellness is requesting \$262 million in supplementary estimates for 2006-07. Additional operating funding totalling \$112 million will go to the nine regional health authorities and the Cancer Board to address cost pressures and the impact of the licensed practical nurses' mediated settlement. In addition, funds totalling \$150 million will be used by the RHAs and Alberta Cancer Board for diagnostic and medical equipment. The operating funding represents an additional 2 per cent budget increase, bringing the overall operating increase that the health authorities will receive from an average of over 6 per cent a year to just over 8 per cent, for a total of \$6 billion to the health authorities.

Approving this supplementary funding will help ensure that Albertans continue enjoying the best health system in the country and give confidence to health providers that we are indeed not in crisis.

The RHA deficits that have been projected. Well, Mr. Speaker, business plans for 2006-07 revealed that a \$210 million deficit was projected for 10 health authorities, the exception being the Cancer Board, which projected a balanced operating budget. Even with the additional funding of \$112 million, only Chinook, Aspen, and the Cancer Board are projected to be in a surplus position at the end of the year. I should point out, however, that even if the health authorities' operating budgets are increased to an average of 8 per cent, the allocation is still below what the health regions have requested for this year. The overall average increase requested by the health regions was 16.5 per cent.

Operational funds will be used for such things as recruitment and retention, utility expenditures, and other general operating expenses. Funds have been assigned to the regions on a population-based formula, so you'll note that the Northern Lights health region, which includes Fort McMurray, will receive the largest percentage, 10.5 per cent in 2006-07, with the rest receiving between 7.4 per cent and 8.8 per cent in total operating funds for 2006-07.

3:40

Questions about the shadow population in Fort McMurray are not relevant when we're talking operational dollars because as people receive health care services, whether they are in Fort McMurray or in Calgary or if they live in Red Deer, the money follows them. There are transfers between regions and indeed between jurisdictions beyond our provincial borders.

The additional operating funding will mean that the nine health regions receive an average increase of 8.1 per cent, which will go a considerable distance in helping them address their financial challenges.

Thirty-one million will be provided to RHAs and the Alberta Cancer Board to address the impact of the LPN mediated settlement. The new collective agreement is retroactive to April 1, 2004, and extends to March 31, 2008. The allocation is based on the number of LPN FTEs reported in each health authority for 2004-05. There are 2,900 LPNs registered in Alberta, and this is an important part of our health professional delivery system as the LPNs are recognized for their ability to make a valuable contribution to the changing needs of Albertans, particularly in long-term care.

The capital funding of \$150 million will be distributed to the nine health authorities for medical equipment. The health authorities will

use the money for the capital priorities. This money is earmarked to purchase a range of diagnostic and medical equipment which will include MRIs, CT scanners, nuclear medicine equipment as well as surgical, patient, and safety equipment. Each RHA prioritizes their region's equipment purchases. The funding will then help overall access to new or replacement state-of-the-art diagnostic imaging, laboratory, medical, and surgical equipment that can result in reduced wait times, earlier detection, and more effective treatment outcomes. The capital funding will ensure that health authorities continue replacing medical equipment that has reached the end of its useful life.

When we visited the Children's hospital, we noted how much efficiency can be gained by diagnostics that reach all parts of the hospital through new and updated medical technology. This will save time. This will save money. This will save patients. This will save emergency capacity. This equipment can also be purchased any time with this money in the fiscal year. Accounting for the funds that will be spent under the grant is part of the quarterly financial reporting.

Eligible equipment is in four categories: diagnostic imaging, diagnostic and therapeutic, medical/surgical, patient safety. Not only is equipment important in improving access and outcomes; it's a very visible outward sign of how we put patients' needs at the centre of our health system. This capital funding is also important because new technologies can enhance efficiencies in the health system. The regions will be able to use this money to both replace existing and purchase new technologies they don't previously have.

Mr. Chair, this government wants to strengthen our public health care system, and that takes investment. While we face many challenges and cost pressures, we are in a position, a delightful opportunity here, to fund solutions and to find solutions. The supplementary funding for the health authorities will help fulfill this goal and will help Albertans to be assured that they have the strongest health system possible.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity, the very brief opportunity, I'm going to get to speak to the issue of the supplementary supply health funding in the province of Alberta.

Let me start by saying that I appreciate what the minister is saying, that the government intends to do well and that they are looking at investment, but from where I'm sitting, that's not good enough. This is the same government that ramped up the economy, that fired everybody on go, that whipped everyone into a frenzy, that doesn't seem to be able to cope with any kind of a planning process on any level. As a result of that, we now have an overheated economy, that the government now admits is overheated, and I maintain that there is a mismanagement of the growth in this province. Yes, we've had an enormous number of people move into the province, and some of them have been health professionals. But let's remember where we started from. This is the very same government who spent most of the '90s cut, cut, cutting in health care, blowing up hospitals, selling hospitals, particularly in Calgary. Now what do we have in Calgary? A capacity problem. Now we're trying to build new beds and get new spaces in there.

I look at this and say: where's the planning? Where's the forethought? Where's the foresight in this? If the government, with all of the resources at their disposal, cannot figure out how to plan in advance on this, we are truly sunk, and that does seem to be exactly what the situation is. They lay off all the nurses. They tell

them rudely to leave and to go to the States and to get out, and then we're paying signing bonuses to get them all back because we can't get enough health professionals back into our system right now. So it's a situation of money, but more than that, it's a situation of planning. It's possible that in this resource-rich province we could get enough money back into the system. It's still not going to solve our problem because we haven't done the appropriate planning that goes with it. You need to plan for growth as well as planning for a reduction. I don't see that kind of consciousness coming from this government.

There are a number of issues that come up continually here, and I'm still not seeing them addressed by way of planning and policy from what the minister has just said. I took notes on a number of things, and I'll refer as I go along.

We have a huge problem with health workforce, and I remind everyone that that is not just about doctors and nurses. It's also about technicians. It's about physiotherapists. It's about speech therapists. It's about counsellors. It's all of our health professionals that make our system work. We particularly have enormous pressures in Medicine Hat, in Grande Prairie, in Peace River, in Westlock. All of those have cited very specifically health workforce problems, and that has led to closures of various units and various beds in the locations that I just mentioned.

I've talked about the huge infrastructure capacity problem in Calgary but also a workforce capacity problem. Over the summer what we had happening in Calgary was operating rooms were left vacant. There was no business going on there because of staff nursing shortages. Fifteen beds were closed at the Foothills hospital renal unit from June until mid-September, the entire summer. Also, we were cut back by diagnostic procedures. About a thousand exams were not proceeded with because of a reduction in hours due once again to staff. We had mental health beds that were closed for a month over the summer: all of this in the Calgary region. It's not just about pouring more money in there because, frankly, there aren't the health professionals to hire if we had all the money in the world right now.

Again we look to the government and say: where's your planning on this? How many spaces are you going to open up? Questions today for the Minister of Advanced Education saying: where is this plan of how we're going to get these people on stream? I want to also look beyond that and go: okay, if we get enough health professionals in here within, let's say, five or six years, which is what it's going to take, what is your planning for year 10, for four or five years beyond that? Do we need to keep increasing at that same rate, or should we be starting to draw back? Government is the only one that can do this kind of planning. Private health delivery services are not going to do this kind of planning and thinking. That's not their job. They're there to make money. It's for the government to do, and frankly the government hasn't done it.

The other big issue we hear is wait-lists, wait-lists in ERs, which I still refer to as the canary in the mine shafts. If we've got trouble in our ERs, we've got serious trouble because that for a lot of people is the entry point into the system.

We've got some advocates that are here with us today that have been generous enough to bring their own stories forward. I'm referring to the Lundys, who stayed with us through question period. They're still here in debate. That's darn hard to do, to put your personal life on display to make a point. And this is far beyond their personal situation. They're trying hard to make sure that this is going to improve the system and move beyond them, and my thanks to them for that work.

We've got wait-lists in the ERs. We've got wait-lists in things like surgery. I mean, when we're closing surgery units because we

don't have enough staff or enough beds to do it, that's going to back up everything else that's happening. That's why we end up with people in the hallways in ER. We can't actually get them into a surgery ward and fix whatever their problem is if we take them through ER.

3:50

Lastly, I want to talk about primary care and family doctors, which is still a huge area of concern. All these new people that are coming can't get primary care doctors, family physicians. That does put them into the ERs, and we've already discussed the problem of there not being enough capacity in our ERs to handle that.

You know, I've been health critic now for just about two years, and I'm still hearing the same problems today that I did almost 24 months ago, and I don't see great solutions in place. I'm hearing the same problems. I'm hearing that there's a crisis. I'm hearing that there's not enough health workforce people. Twenty-four months later I'm hearing exactly the same things. I'm not seeing solutions to the problems. I'm not seeing the action that's going to move us past that.

The minister mentioned electronic health records. I'm concerned that we're falling behind on that. I know that the Premier attempted to sort of artificially jump-start that and put a new deadline in mind, but I'm really wondering whether we're going to be able to achieve it.

I would ask the minister to please not blame the seniors anymore. I'm really tired of hearing about how our health care system is going to be brought crashing down by the fact that we've got a bunch of people turning 65. That's a really cheap way out. It's blaming the victim, and it's simply not true. As a matter of fact, if you look around this room, I would bet you money that there's a number of people approaching 65 or, in fact, over 65 who would argue very strongly that they're not going to cost the health care system any money at all. They try hard to look after themselves, to be fit. We should be in better shape: we've had the advantage of nutrition, we've had the advantage of housing and heat in our houses, and we've had the advantage of medications and medical treatment to get us past things that would have killed our parents' or our grandparents' generation. Please quit blaming the seniors for this.

I find that it's the choices of this government that have created and caused the shortages and the pressures, and I don't find it acceptable that the delegated administrative organizations that are in place here, which is the health regions, are supposed to shoulder the burden for this. You have a health region like Calgary that says: "This is what we need. It's a very good argument. We're dealing with all of the back-capacity that was taken away from us plus the influx of new people. We need an 11.2 per cent increase." I would like an explanation from the minister why the government gives them 6 per cent and something. Why? There was no explanation from the government as to what the missing money was supposed to do. I say to the government: tell me why. What are they supposed to do with that difference? You just say no, but you give them no explanation for that. At least it's not a public explanation, and I think it should be. I want to know why that's happening.

Specifically, I'd like a breakdown from the minister on how the money for medical equipment will be spent, and she of course can provide that in writing. I'm wondering what equipment is required and, specifically, if she can give me that breakdown by region. Also, an idea of when this new equipment would be in operation. If we're buying it now, will we see it in place within three months, or are we on some kind of a waiting list and it's two years from now? With that, of course, do we have the professionals that are required to run \$150 million worth of new equipment, or do we get that

equipment in place, and once again, like the unused operating rooms, there's nobody to run the equipment and it just sits there? What's the plan? Let me see how that's going to work hand in hand.

I'm also wondering why this money wasn't included in the spring 2006 budget. This can't be new news, and if it is, I've got to question where the government is getting their information. What were they hoping for, this kind of windfall money that they were then going to use to fund the system? It's that kind of stop and start that's creating the inconsistency in planning that we have here.

I would really like to see a very detailed plan about how the health workforce training is going to work out. I'd like to see how many new spaces are going to be created in dentistry and pharmacy and in training LPNs, PCAs. I want to see all of this laid out and exactly where those spaces are going to be created and when, at what facilities, and how they're going to be funded by the government. We just get this vague stuff but nothing specific. We must know how many people are needed. Health sciences can tell you. AMA can tell you how many docs. They want 1,100 docs. You know, those numbers are out there. How is the government going to meet that, and how long is it going to take to meet it? What are we looking at in terms of scope of practice? The Liberal opposition has been suggesting that you look at things like nurse anaesthetists to help out in the operating rooms to be able to move some of that surgery. What kind of training programs are available there? How fast could we move people through? Can we fast-track that?

I mean, this is what Albertans cannot understand. How can we be so wealthy – the money is just spurting out of the ground, you know, and the government is hiding it all over the place in all kinds of special funds, and they've still got a four point something billion dollar planned surplus that's coming – and Albertans can't get in to see a doctor in the ER for 10 hours? That simply does not make sense to them. What is it that we want for our people in Alberta? If we want that kind of excellent system, then let's do it. A big part of that is the training. It's possible to fast-track training. Why aren't we doing it? Why aren't we attracting people from across the country to come here and do a fast-track training program? I can't get numbers out of people. I can't get an indication of institutions. Why? If you're really thinking about it, you should have that stuff.

I would like to know how the \$31 million for auxiliary nursing salary adjustments is being allocated.

The minister talked a little bit about LPNs. I'm wondering if this could have been planned for earlier, or was it in the pipeline already, and now that you've got the money, you can do it? What if you didn't get the money? What was going to happen then?

I'm very much aware of the very short amount of time that's available. We basically have two hours today to debate, and there are some five or six ministries up. In consideration of my colleagues I will take my seat, most reluctantly as I would have liked to go through in detail a number of the health regions that are experiencing severe pressures. They've been in touch with me. They'd like questions asked. I'm going to have to look for another opportunity in order to give my ND colleague and, indeed, my Liberal colleagues an opportunity to debate other issues. I'm most angry about that, actually, because I don't think it's serving Albertans well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Ms Evans: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Just on one point. It's my understanding that the debate on Health is not just simply for this two hours. It will go on at the pleasure of this Assembly over this next week. I just want to make that observation and say that, in deference to the hon. member, many of the points that the hon. member has

raised will be things that we will provide commentary in writing as she has requested and in order to make sure that we properly follow through.

I'd just like to make one observation. When we account for changing demographics and note the increase in the band of population that is over 65, we do so prudently because we want to acknowledge that on an annualized spending, they spend more. We spend more as we get older. It's a simple fact of life. So acknowledging that is not blaming those individuals. It's celebrating the fact that we have them here but also recognizing the need to fund that. The Aon report in its content identified quite clearly that that is prudent to do because the aging population will begin to catch us as early as 2015. We have to be planned and prepared for that, and I know the hon. member would want us to do that.

In deference to the members opposite and others in the Assembly who may wish to raise questions or ask for clarification, I will sit down and allow them to come forward with their points of view.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's interesting that we're here in this session, and again I would like to talk about what I call bad budgeting. Think about it, to this minister and to others. We bring forward a budget in March. We pass it in June. Here we are in August, you know, passing another budget, a funding increase of \$262 million. Now, I'm not suggesting that the money isn't needed. It is needed. But for the life of me I cannot understand why we couldn't be doing these things when we brought our budgets in in March. Our budgets that we bring in the spring now, Mr. Chairman, basically mean nothing. It means nothing. You know, when we bring in – what? – \$1.3 billion in capital funds, this is more than some provinces' budgets, and here we are dealing with this in two days.

4:00

I would just say to this government and to this minister specifically about this \$262 million, putting \$150 million to medical equipment: couldn't we possibly have foreseen that back when we were passing the budget? Eighty-one million for health authority operations. It's like the schools. They were saying: we've got a problem. Why couldn't we have seen it back then? And \$31 million for auxiliary nursing salary adjustments. Why could we not have foreseen that these things were occurring, Mr. Chairman?

You know, the reality is and the government's excuse is that the economy is booming and all the rest of it. Well, that's true, but it's this government's economic strategies that are pushing that. They want to get in the tar sands as fast as they can, rip it out as fast as they can, and get into the American market. Well, it shouldn't surprise us under those circumstances that we have people moving here. They talk about 90,000, but surely that should have been part of the planning in health care – I'll talk about health care specifically – when you bring in an economic strategy. That's what you plan. You plan for the infrastructure: the social infrastructure, the health infrastructure. All these things should have been part of it, but this government seems to just sort of move ahead and say: "Well, good. We're planning. Go in and do what you can in the tar sands, and we'll see what happens after that."

We're starting to see what's happening in health care. We mentioned in the emergency debate that we've got serious problems. They're not going to get that much better, even with this money, unless we change some things around. That planning should have been done before, and I think the minister knows this. Now we're playing catch-up, and it's more expensive, and we're trying to play

catch-up in our capital costs. With an overheated economy we're paying a lot more. So when we're going to have an economic strategy, the economic strategy should include the social infrastructure and the physical infrastructure. It hasn't been done, and now we've got serious problems.

Frankly, to the minister: all the rose-coloured glasses in the world can't take away this particular problem. Yes, we're spending more money. Yes, we are, but the reality is that the province is growing that much faster. It's like we've talked about in housing or education, the rest of it. So it doesn't matter what numbers you give us and say that we spend the most in Canada. That's irrelevant. It's how we begin to adapt and whether we need more money or not and how we adjust it. I think the minister knows this.

As I say, Mr. Chairman, we have some very serious problems in health care. I noticed that the minister in her remarks alluded to all the doctors and how things were coming along and that we're getting more doctors moving into the province. Well, I just noticed the president's letter from the Alberta Medical Association – I'm sure the minister has looked at this – that just came out on August 16 from the president, Dr. Lee, and what he is saying is very scary in this particular documentation. They're saying that in the first report in 2000 they predicted "an immediate shortage of 333 physicians and predicted a shortage of 1,329 physicians by 2005." Now they're saying that "the current estimated shortage is 1,088 physicians with a predicted shortage of 1,541 by 2010."

The minister says that there are more doctors moving here. That's true, but we're falling behind, and more of these doctors are retiring. So we have serious problems here, and the president's letter has indicated that. They go on:

Alberta has an average net increase of just over 200 doctors annually for the past five years. Even with this level of growth continuing, and all other factors remaining the same, Alberta will still be 1,500 physicians short by 2010. If we hope to address the predicted shortages, Alberta will [have] to add 500 new physicians per year for the next five years.

That's the result of a boom economy, and that's why we had to plan this to go along with it. That's the AMA saying that; it's not me. So that's the reality of what we're facing.

I would just like to say very quickly, Mr. Chair – and I won't go on long – about the framework that was announced on the website. Now, most of it, good. Primary care, fine. We've talked about this before. But you can understand our skepticism when we see on page 21 an expanded role for privatized surgical facilities. How will that make the system cheaper, when we put the profit motive in, rather than the alternate?

The other things you talk about, great. Communities and different delivery systems, great. But we always worry, because we know where it's coming from, that this is another move in a stealth sort of way to move into private health care. Why would we even mention that? Get on without doing it. The public told us very clearly: "I'm glad that we backed off on the dual systems. I'm glad we backed off on the so-called private insurance." But I also notice that on page 23 that could include the delisting of future medical services that may be medically necessary. I know it's going through a process, but excuse me if we're skeptical because we know where this government has been coming from, that that could lead, again, to more private insurance.

I recollect the minister saying that she would bring this new framework to the Legislature in the spring and that there would be full public consultation. There wasn't even a press release. We happened to catch it because of somebody from the nurses' union telling us that we should be concerned about this. All of a sudden it was on the website. I think that we deserve better than that in terms of bringing this forward.

As I said, Mr. Chairman, there are a lot of good things in that framework. The minister talked about primary care. Excellent. I think we have to go further in primary care to more of the community clinics, health professionals working much closer together. There are all sorts of things we have to look at there.

Mr. Chair, there are some other things – I'll be very quick about this – that we have to do to bring more physicians on. We could eliminate differential fees at medical schools. Certainly, we need more educational institutions. Alberta lags behind the national average in postsecondary spaces. We have to target rural shortages by creating a provincial work experience and internship program in rural areas. We can encourage recent graduates to practise in rural Alberta with expanded student loan forgiveness. We have to do something about more foreign doctors, especially in rural areas. There are all sorts of things that we can do, but it has to be done within the public system.

The things that the minister brags about are correct. She's right to brag about the changes to knee/hip, but that was done through the public system, as the minister is well aware. We should be concentrating on doing some of the things that are being done, but concentrate on those and not get carried away again in this whole privatization. It doesn't work, it's more expensive, and the minister knows that.

I'll tell you, Mr. Chairman, just in conclusion, that we are going to be playing catch-up, like we are in so many areas, because of the economic strategy, the way it is right now. These problems that we've talked about, the hospital closures and the serious things that are occurring in the hospitals, are going to continue even with this amount of money going in because, as predicted in the thing, we have 90,000 more people. We'd better do some things fast. It may require more money, but it's not just money. I think that rather than worrying about privatization, getting into that whole debate, we should start to fix the problems in the public system and look at some innovative ways that are occurring in other parts of the world. I don't know where the bulk buying of prescription drugs is that we've talked about compared to New Zealand. I know that the minister said in the past that they were looking at that. Where is that and a number of things that we have to do?

Rose-coloured glasses aren't going to solve this problem, and talking about how much is being spent is not going to solve the problem. It may be that we need more. When you've got 90,000, as in I think the Minister of Finance's press release, when you've got the size of Red Deer moving into Alberta all the time, then it's not relevant to compare what's happening in Saskatchewan or Manitoba and the rest of it in terms of numbers.

I would just conclude, Mr. Chairman, by saying that I believe that there is a crisis not only in health care but in other areas, and this government is playing catch-up. The fact that we're having this session shows it. You know, as I said, bring in a budget in March, pass it in May, and here we are back asking for \$1.3 billion in August. That's some way to manage the farm.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4:10

Ms Evans: Mr. Chairman, I am tempted to reference a very old movie where the hon. member opposite and myself were part of the same organization, and I remember the school board one day examined a budget. I was part of the board at the time, and they looked at an allocation that was provided by the superintendent of schools that everybody questioned. They said: what is this amount of money? He referenced a conversation I've never forgotten. He said: "Well, you know, it's like if you have a tractor that you hope will get you through the season, but it might not get you through the

season, so you put a little money away in case that tractor breaks down sometime during the year and you have to spend the money. So it's just there as a safeguard, so that if you need it, you can spend it."

What he was really referencing was an allocation that was provided for collective bargaining increases but wasn't necessarily identified for collective bargaining increases. It was some type of contingency. I have long rued the day that I moved away from places that had the capacity to put contingencies in. Health ministers across this country will tell you that the blood, sweat, and tears that go into getting a health budget allocation which they truly believe will fit that cloth that they have to provide for their constituents and their constituencies is just a battle. I look at the percentage increases all across this country. They range from 3.5 per cent, 5 per cent, 7 per cent. Somebody got 12 per cent, but the way they calculate their budgets is different than the way that we do, and you have to take a look at what base it's building on. I can assure the hon. member opposite that if we were able as health ministers to budget what we define as our list of wants, we may still not accommodate what we've had this year in the growing population and some of the particular challenges in some of the regions.

I also reference from my own constituency the boom/bust that happens in an economy, where all of a sudden when it's boiling, you need things now, and you may not have had the capacity to provide them in time to get those services there for when you see the whites of the eyes of the people. That is a very big difficulty that I think we have to wrestle with and hopefully overcome in the best way possible.

But your remarks on those points are both understood and empathized with, and as a health minister, if I was any other health minister in the country talking to you, I would probably say the same things. I would only rue the day, if I was in another jurisdiction, that I didn't have the ability to pump up the economy, if you will, for health care services like we are in Alberta. So we're truly advantaged.

I do want to make a couple of observations about the health policy framework, which has been referenced. Now, in April, when we made the announcement that we were not going to proceed with private health insurance, that we were not going to allow doctors to work in both systems, we emphasized that the workforce was one of the issues we wanted to both attract and retain. We took Getting on with Better Health Care, the existing health policy framework, and put it in one document, and we made this as an editorial release of something we had announced back in April. We announced this, Mr. Chairman, because we knew that Albertans wanted to find out what we were going to do. So this framework document is not a drastic departure from anything we've said. In fact, we listened to Albertans, explained our ideas, and released a document that was the response to theirs.

On delisting services, as mentioned by the hon. member opposite, there's not one mention of delisting services. What it does describe to Albertans is the decision-making process that's been in place for over a year and helps ensure responsible spending, particularly because of the use of the Alberta health technology decision process. That decision process is important to do the clinical and scientific review we need.

One of the hon. members opposite in the spring raised Enterra Therapy, for example, as one of the things to deal with gastroparesis, and I was overwhelmed by the petitions that I received and the letters: oh, please, relieve us with this electrical stimulator to look after persistent nausea and vomiting. In actual fact the health technology group with a group of experts was not able to validate that the scientific evidence was there to prove that this would be a

valid type of technology to deploy. In fact, nowhere else in Canada do they fund this particular device.

So I'm saying that this identification of a process for a proper review of drug evaluation and therapeutics was inserted into the health policy framework to give Albertans an assurance of how the process would work when they ask for new drugs, new technologies. There has to be a process so that it can't be something that could be whimsical or political in evaluation.

The second point on the use of private surgical facilities. Well, it's common knowledge that HRC has been providing services to Calgary for hip and knee procedures, and a number of procedures are performed in a private facility but publicly funded. Once again, on page 21, for the use of those facilities we wanted to make sure that we identified precisely that they must be accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, must have ministerial approval, and have a contract with a regional authority to be valid. We spent a lot of time working on that and felt that the insert of this was important because on an almost weekly basis people discuss this kind of procedure.

Now we'll be able to reference a document that points out what the lay of the land is. Hopefully it won't change that much, at least in my tenure, but I note that the new president of the CMA has already raised the spectre that there may be changes that will be contemplated by doctors across the country, so we'll see what debate follows through. But I intend to do nothing of the sort with the mandate we have in this government, and we certainly don't intend, as the member hinted at, that we might govern by stealth. I'm much preferring us to be open and declare our intentions, and hopefully we are doing that this afternoon.

The Chair: Does anyone else wish to participate in the discussion? The next issue for consideration is the Department of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Chairman, I think we would proceed with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development instead at this time.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

The Chair: I recognize the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development I will just indicate the following. There is a need for an additional \$715,000 to defend Alberta in aboriginal litigation matters. Alberta has been named a defendant in aboriginal lawsuits containing claims of more than \$125 billion in damages. I'm not sure if that reads billion or million; I can't quite tell from the note here, but we'll clarify that quickly. It does say billion, quite clearly, from one standpoint.

In any event, this litigation is not reflective of the relationship between Alberta and First Nations, which is both positive and very much strengthening. However, three actions are being pursued actively by lawyers for the plaintiffs, and in these claims two attempts are there to set aside treaty land entitlement settlements and to challenge the validity of Treaty 8. Also, there's one attempt to challenge the validity of both Treaty 7 and the natural resources transfer agreement. Now, in addition to claims for monetary damages from Alberta of approximately \$35 billion, which, I guess, jibes with the \$125 billion I referenced earlier, these active cases claim aboriginal title to the entire province and challenge the validity of every resource disposition issued in Alberta's history.

Over the past seven years expenditures in defending litigation have been contained within the ministry's budget. The combined

cost of fees and disbursements for outside counsel and the cost of research, document collection and management have averaged about \$500,000 per year, but the increased pace of the three active cases has increased expenditures for 2006-07 quite substantially. These developments are either mandated by the courts or they are in response to initiatives by the plaintiffs, and the result is an increase in litigation costs from \$500,000 to more than \$1.2 million.

Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development as well as Finance, Energy, Sustainable Resource Development, and Justice are co-operating in the preparation of a longer range plan to resource aboriginal litigation issues. This proposal will be presented as part of our 2007-2008 business planning process, and accordingly the request is for one-time funding of \$715,000, which I would on behalf of the minister request favourable consideration thereto.

Thank you.

4:20

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In light of the fact that I have a number of questions which, it's unlikely, would get answered in this situation right now, I would like to submit some questions to the minister in writing at a later date and hope I will get a response to them. In light of the fact that we have many, many more millions of dollars to debate before 5:30, I will just submit my questions in writing later on.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am just again going to be somewhat brief as my colleagues have suggested that we have lots of things to do and a very short period of time in which to do them. However, I don't want to pass up the opportunity to just make some brief comments on this situation.

It's unfortunate that the scope of these lawsuits has embraced basically almost all of the land area and resource base of the province, but then I believe and I think that it's increasingly obvious that due to improper planning by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development over a long period of time, things have come to this crisis situation where people are seeking recourse in the courts to provide for basic services for aboriginal people across this province.

I've expressed the same sentiments in the past, and I will again, that we only have to look as far as the terrible overrepresentation of aboriginal people in our prisons in this province, look at the overrepresentation of aboriginal people on the rolls of our social service programs and health care, low success rates in education, and so on and so forth, to see that we are living still in the direct shadow of the mishandling and mismanagement of aboriginal affairs in this province and across western Canada for these past hundred years.

So living within that larger shadow of history, I think that it's appropriate that this ministry might use this opportunity in the supplementary estimates to in fact try to address more directly these glaring and embarrassing and tragic problems that we see in our aboriginal community in regard to overrepresentation in the prison population, the health issues, high unemployment, et cetera.

I just wanted to be on the public record, and I will have questions specifically for the minister, when she is available, in regard to this court case, but I do want to be on the record and say that, you know, this unfortunate court case is a direct result of mismanagement of aboriginal affairs in this province. Until we address these injustices in a comprehensive and honest and thorough way, then we can only see the problems getting worse and the solutions becoming more complex.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the hon. minister of aboriginal affairs.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would just say on behalf of the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development that answers will be provided either in writing or later during the debate during Committee of Supply or perhaps during the anticipated second reading, committee stage, and so on of the actual Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act once it is tabled.

Community Development

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe we do have one of our ministerial colleagues who will address the issue of supplementary estimates on behalf of the Minister of Community Development. I see that he is prepared to do that, so I would cede the floor to him for that purpose.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy on behalf of the hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the Minister of Community Development I just thought I would comment a little bit on the supplementary estimates of his department, just a few comments. They're receiving 15 and a half million dollars "to fund site reclamation at various historic sites and provincial parks related to environmental liabilities and expense."

Some of this funding will be directed to historical sites. For example, it will help construct a new site protection and containment system at the Turner Valley gas plant. The health and safety of the people of Turner Valley continues to be a priority for the department. They are committed to funding this new system to prevent hydrocarbons and other contaminants from moving off site to allow for their removal. They received construction tender bids on August 11 and are currently evaluating them, and they'll have a better idea of the cost once they have finished reviewing the tender submissions. They continue to monitor and work with Health and Environment and other experts to make the site safe.

With regard to provincial parks I'd just add one comment. The additional funding for parks is required for reclamation of some abandoned wells, old sewer systems, abandoned mine shafts, and old garbage sites.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on the supplementary supply estimates for 2006-07. On page 24 I can see that the government is asking for an additional amount of 15-plus million dollars. Some of the money is – there's a breakdown, but it's not all of it. I can't see a clear statement here of where they are spending this money, but I have a few questions about these supplementary supply estimates.

First of all, we don't know where this money is going exactly because we don't have anything in writing, a breakdown of which department this money is going to, and why this department has failed in finding out the cost for different departments. The Community Development department this time again has failed to give us proper plans. I want to know why this department has failed in finding out, you know, any specific amount of money at budget

time. No formal confirmation of purpose of monies. The first-quarter document suggests that some of the money is for acquisition of aboriginal artifacts.

This money, \$15,537,000, is a huge amount of money, and this is nonbudgetary disbursements. Will any of this money go towards better supporting the Alberta Foundation for the Arts? Book publishers in the province are being driven out of business due to this government's lack of support, so it would be nice to hear that some of this money is going to support the arts and cultural community in Alberta. It's missing again. I know that the previous ministers keep on promising that they will give us a proper policy on support of cultural facilities. I haven't seen that so far in any of this money.

4:30

I want to know if any of this money is going towards the recently announced Glenbow ranch provincial park. I don't have the breakdown. I know the money is going towards provincial parks, but which provincial park the money is going to I don't know. I want to know if the minister can give me the breakdown on this.

Will any of this money go towards sports and recreation?

I can see on page 23 that close to \$14 million is going to cultural facilities and historical resources but not in detail which cultural facilities, which town, whereabouts. It's not clear. I would like to know where the government is spending this huge amount of money. Also, I'm interested to know because last time we saw the Alberta sports plan was in 2003, and every year the minister keeps on changing. They keep on promising that we will give to the Alberta sports plan, and so far we haven't seen any.

Once again I request the government, through Mr. Chairman, that in the future if the government is spending a huge amount of money, the priority should be sports because sports in Alberta are very much concerned with the health department. If Albertans are healthy, we will spend less money in the hospitals, so it's very important. I'm sure the government will consider this very seriously.

This year the budget has zero dollars allotted for cultural facilities and the historical resources grants. I'm really glad to see that the intention of the government in this supplementary is really good, but how do they spend money? If they just throw the money at the problems, like they did in the past in a different department, that's not acceptable to me, and it's not acceptable to my constituents. I hope this government listens and that they do the needful and give this department of cultural facilities and historical resources, you know, the money they need so that they can help Albertans to get proper attention on this matter.

I hope they are not spending money on horse racing. Last time they spent quite a huge amount of money on horse racing. I'm glad this time the government's attention is cultural facilities, parks, and protected areas as well as various historical sites and provincial parks related to the environmental liabilities. This is a good thing.

I hope the priorities of this government are more funding for the arts and humanities, the Human Rights Commission. They should promote and support Alberta sports, Olympic athletes for the year 2010 for the winter games, the Alberta comprehensive sports plan, which is due for a long, long time.

Some of the members sitting here have been Minister of Community Development some time ago, and they should make a note and suggest that the present minister initiate this matter as soon as possible and make Alberta active and healthy. As I said before, if the money is going to recreational facilities, that will help to make Albertans active and healthy and reduce the load in the hospitals and save some dollars from Alberta health care. I hope the priorities of this government are also an Alberta sports plan in the coming year.

I want the government to begin to develop a strategy that will promote and support Alberta sports as well.

I just want to know why they can't have long-term economic priorities like long-term, sustainable funding, to spend money wisely. When they make a budget, they don't show us where the money is after the budget is done, and then they always ask for an additional amount of money. This is surprising to me. I don't know how the other members feel, but this is mismanagement, I would say, and it should not be happening.

Every time the members remind them that they should mention during the budget time. We discussed the budget three months ago, and now again we are discussing here additional billions of dollars. Okay, \$1.2 billion or whatever. This is a huge amount of taxpayers' money. We should at least listen to the people who elected us. This is mismanagement.

We should improve every year, but since I was elected, I see the same routine keep coming, the same thing this government is repeating again and again, and nobody listens. I hope that if I say something, somebody listens, and they act on this and make this money useful for Albertans. [interjection] I don't know. I am just requesting everybody to listen and act accordingly because it's a huge amount of money. You're not buying a suit or socks for yourself. You're talking about billions of dollars, and, no, I don't think a majority of the members sitting here take it seriously, and they should. I read one big booklet for the last, say, 20 years, the same routine budget after budget. They keep on asking for an additional amount of money.

Mr. R. Miller: What happens if you go over budget in your constituency office?

Mr. Agnihotri: The constituency budget. Yeah, the same thing.

My question is: when will that time come when the elected officials start listening to their constituents and act accordingly? At least save some dollars for the people who elected them, who put faith in them. It's not happening.

Another of my questions is the social priorities. All socio-economic groups get benefits from Community Development, and I hope nobody is left behind. If we have an Alberta advantage and Community Development is giving grants to different communities, it's a very good idea, but I want to make sure that that advantage is for everybody. Everybody. Not a few people. It should be for everybody. I want to see the balance, which has not happened in the past. All Albertans worked hard in the past, and they deserve to be treated as anybody else. So I request once again that there should be a balance. All communities should be served properly and . . .

Mr. Bonko: Fairly.

4:40

Mr. Agnihotri: Yes, fairly because the gap between rich and poor is increasing in Alberta. I was door-knocking last month, and the majority of people are asking – some people are not fortunate enough, and they are asking me: “Where is the money for this purpose? Where is the money for this purpose?” Some people are getting the major share, and some people are unfortunate and are not receiving enough funds. How this system works I don't know. I request the members sitting here that they should take it very seriously.

We have no problem. I mean, we will sanction this additional amount of money once again. But I warn and request the Assembly to please consider that if this is happening, say, in the last 20 years, let's pledge that it should not happen next year.

Thank you very much. God bless you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just very briefly want to augment the comments that have been made by my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie. Thank you to him for being an excellent advocate for the quality-of-life areas that we find under the Department of Community Development.

No surprise to you, Mr. Chair, my advocacy and strong ties to the arts and cultural sector. When I look around at some of the other ways that this government is choosing to spend money in this province, I continue to argue for an investment in the arts for job creation but also for job retention. We have a lot of people moving to this province. We want them to stay here and become part of a stable community, to put down roots, buy houses, participate in their communities. An integral part of that is the arts and cultural sector.

We, as you have heard me say many, many times over the last 10 years, are appallingly bad at supporting our arts and culture sector in this province. I mean, essentially we're giving it the same amount of money today that we did in 1988. It hasn't been adjusted for inflation. There's a little, tiny increase that happened in the budget this year of \$3 million, but, you know, we need to go big on this one, not to double the budget to the arts but triple the budget to the arts or maybe quadruple the budget to the arts, which still isn't going to bring it over \$100 million.

When I look at how much we're subsidizing the horse-racing industry, which is a for-profit industry – yes, it employs some people – and when I look at the cultural sector and the approximately \$20 million that it's getting right now, if we turned that into \$60 million or \$80 million, the number of people that would benefit, I would argue, would far exceed that that benefits from the subsidy of the horse-racing industry, which in an annual budget from this government is now running at about \$66 million a year. I notice as part of this supplementary budget that we're talking about an additional amount not to exceed \$8.3 million. So at \$66 million plus the \$8.3 million we're well over \$70 million a year this year for the horse-racing industry, which is a private-sector industry. It's a private corporation. This government is not out of the business of being in business at all.

In comparison to that, we've got a not-for-profit sector that actually retains people and particularly those people the government professes that it's interested in retaining with education and ties to the business community, et cetera, et cetera. A couple of the things that we're really starting to hurt from in this province because of the underfunding of the arts are things like our publishing industry, our recording industry, our film industry, and our fine crafts. All of those help us to get our artwork out to others. We also need to look at touring dollars if we're trying to get our stories out and bring other people's stories back to us. We need to invest in the touring of our arts and culture sector around, both in the province and outside of the province.

So, you know, I continue to hear mouthings from the other side about how important the arts and culture sector is with absolutely no real support for it. How about the report that was done by the HRE a couple of years ago on cultural industry workers? It went nowhere. A very strong report that had all kinds of great things to say, got no support, and it just died.

There's a lot this government could be doing. I appreciate my colleague's efforts in trying to encourage the government to do that, and I will answer that as well. This is our future. This is a knowledge sector. We want to invest in arts and culture. This is going to continue to pay back for us. It's renewable, it's people centred, and it makes Alberta a much better place to be. So not just \$20 million a year, but let's take that horse-racing money and put it in there. We

could have 90 million bucks a year into the arts and cultural sector. Now you'll see something very cool happen.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make some brief comments on the supplementary estimates for Community Development. This is one of the ministries where the original budget was I think grossly undervaluing this particular ministry at least by half. I know for a fact that the minister responsible for it at the time was very, very disappointed to see this important cultural ministry undervalued, essentially, in the spring estimates.

So when I saw that we were going back to Community Development, I did flip with some anticipation to see if our arts and culture and parks sector wasn't going to be finally belatedly rewarded. But I see that, in fact, where this money is being spent is in sort of peculiar areas: where the Community Development ministry has inherited some structural problems on sites they have rather than actually on investing in human cultural development in regard to the arts and provincial parks. So I confess that I was a bit disappointed to see where the money actually went.

Also, I just wanted to make a comment briefly. Specifically, having to spend millions of dollars on the Turner Valley site I think is part of a long legacy of how we ended up picking a real lemon here with this site. The owners of the site knew that the Turner Valley historical site was in fact terribly contaminated from long use as an energy plant, so I believe that when we picked this up for a dollar or whatever the deal was, the people were happy to unload it. Now with the contamination of the Sheep River from this area we're obliged to clean up probably a very long and complicated mess that someone else made. I mean, it seems, of course, as though we are left holding the bag with this. What a shame that Community Development is having to spend such significant funds on something that otherwise could be money put to better use.

Also, when I heard that provincial parks were part of this budget change, again I was anticipating with some hope that there would be some investment in the infrastructure in regard to actual campgrounds and redeeming some recreational areas that have been left in quite significant neglect over the last 10 or 15 years. I received a number of complaints in regard to people finding campgrounds that are in obvious states of disrepair and neglect. Again, we're not seeing that money going directly to those places that need that assistance. Some areas are being fixed up, but others are being left to go to seed.

At this juncture of rapid economic development, Mr. Chairman, I would suggest that this is the chance we have to increase the amount of park space that we have in the province. I believe that, you know, at least 10 per cent of the province should be with some degree of protection for recreational and wilderness areas. Otherwise, we just can't do it. The time will pass very quickly, and with each month and year millions of acres of land are being redeveloped for industrial and mixed use. Now is the time for us to invest in our provincial parks system so that we have a legacy of wilderness and recreational areas that we can be proud of for the future. We need to put the money into this department, so here's the chance with our surprise summer session.

We're not meeting the needs of this ministry at all, I would say. This budget is grossly underfunded in regard to arts and culture, and considering the rapid urbanization and immigration to this province, I think it's a crying shame.

Thank you.

4:50

The Chair: Anyone else wishing to participate in this discussion? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I apologize. I've got too many things going on. We have such a short session that it's hard to keep up, but I have a couple of questions. It says here that it's requested for site reclamation and related to environmental liabilities. I wasn't sure: are these overruns, or have we found more things that we need to update? Are these reclamations? Have we been aware of them? I don't understand why they weren't in the budget at the start of the year. All of a sudden we have \$15 million worth of expenses that have been added on. So I'm somewhat surprised at that amount.

As some of the other members have said, though, that the parks are very much enjoyed by Albertans and Canadians and visitors from around the world, that they are getting to the point where they're very costly. I just had two people comment to me in my own riding about Waterton national park and the cost of \$80 to get in now even for seniors for a year's pass. The prices are going up and up, and it just seems like we're passing on the bucks to the few users that get in there, and we're discouraging more people from going into our parks and recreation areas.

I hope that this money is well allocated and that it's not because of the rush to try and get the job done in one year that the expense has gone up so much because we're paying a premium in order to get the work done. I would appreciate seeing a more even-handed budget, where this would occur over four or five years rather than just one year, if that in fact is happening. But I'll wait to hear and find out more later.

Thank you.

Economic Development

The Chair: The Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to bring to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that we're asking for some additional funding, and this basically and primarily is to assist us in our provincial nominee program, to help us seek out and find and recruit immigrants to Alberta that will help us with the labour shortages we have, and that would be in the skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled categories.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First, I'd like to say welcome back to the hon. member. It's a pleasure to see you here. I will continue on with some of my other comments then. First of all, I think we realize that there has been a labour force shortage for some time, not just six months. It has been coming for about a year. I mean, we can see the times, and we can recognize some of the obvious signs out there. This government is one that's pro importation of temporary foreign workers, so to request the monies that are being sought here, the \$2,235,000, is perhaps a little bit premature because the request for this could have been and should have been handled in the spring budget. I know that it's not a lot of money, but in the big picture it's a lot of money. It could fund schools or hot lunch programs or hospital beds. Instead, we're dealing with labour shortages that we knew about as well as the importation of foreign workers.

Some of the specifics. Given that the additional money requested is for funding, is this a policy change from the business plans that

were given in the springtime? That would be one of them. I also thought that immigration was a federal issue, unless we're trying to have the same sort of deal that Quebec has, which is to be able to directly manage and determine the amount of immigration into our province. I don't know if that's the case that we have here before us today.

Is any of that money being used for hosting in the future to try and attract solid business venture or skilled workers or immigrants? How much money is going to be required for travel to fill this request as well? Like I said, we have a labour shortage here, and we're going to go throughout other provinces in Canada trying to take their labour shortage woes and compound them just to fill our need. I'm not sure.

Is any of this money being used to cover any of the costs of the Smithsonian festival down there in Washington? I know that we had a number of people from Alberta to host and highlight some of the activities and the experiences that we in Alberta sometimes take for granted. We're trying to bring that much more travel there. Is any of this to cover the hosting expenses of the individuals as well as the MLAs that were down there taking in some of the activities? As well, has the department done any cost-benefit analysis in relation to the money that was spent down at the Smithsonian? I'd look forward to seeing a breakdown of that.

How can Albertans be confident that the money is going to be used wisely? Like I said, with a \$33 billion plus budget that we have, how can \$2 million adequately address the labour shortage? I'm not sure. Are we just putting up bigger billboards? I don't know. The big one is: how will the money address the labour shortage?

Those are just some of the specifics with regard to this particular request. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Dunford: Just a couple of things to make sure that we're on the record. This is not a Quebec-style type of immigration policy. The member needs to be aware that in agreements with the federal government each province was able to have a provincial nominee program, and certain parameters were set upon the particular agreement as it was developed and signed. We are planning to expand the provincial nominee agreement in two ways: one is to increase the numbers, and the second is to shift the focus from solely on skilled labour to, as mentioned, categories of labour that could also include semi-skilled and unskilled.

Also, this money will be used in the future rather than the past. So it will not be used in any way, shape, or form for any outstanding obligations that there might be from the Smithsonian.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. I'd like to thank the minister for clarifying that a little bit. I guess my question, to go a step further, is that the federal immigration program isn't working as well in Alberta as we would like. So I would encourage the minister to continue looking at perhaps having our own plan that works for Alberta, as Quebec has for their interests.

I appreciate that we're going to unskilled labour because the small businesses are the ones that, as I'm sure everyone in this House is aware, are going around looking for workers. Last year we were debating about having to raise the minimum wage. Well, it's standard now. You go around, and they're advertising \$9, \$10, \$11, \$12, up to \$15 for unskilled work. So it's great to see the minimum wage issue being eliminated. But it's very frustrating for the small business owners that I've gone and talked with in that they struggle a great deal with trying to bring over people that want to come and

that they know from the countries they've immigrated from, yet they can't get them here.

So I would encourage the minister to look at making a made-in-Alberta policy and perhaps taking immigration into our jurisdiction, which we have the jurisdictional right to do, to benefit the workforce and the businesses here in the province. Like I say, I'd encourage him to continue to aid businesses in being able to get foreign workers into the province and not just as temporary but as full-time.

Thank you.

Human Resources and Employment

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment I would ask for favourable consideration of the supplementary estimates as indicated in the supplementary estimates table earlier and also undertake on his behalf that questions asked, should there be any at this time, will be answered in writing by the minister, or they will be answered verbally in debate later on during this discussion or once the actual estimates culminate in the presentation of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, which is anticipated next week.

Thank you.

5:00

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know that these amounts in the whole scheme of things are not a great deal, but I look at the whole scheme of things too, and I see, you know, a billion and a half dollars being spent in hardly any time. We're all kind of rushing through it in order to give everybody a bit of time to address these estimates. It's bizarre that we keep on doing this time and time again, that we can't have a budgetary process that will fully plan for many of these types of items.

I look at this item and I see that it's something that should have been, I think, in the budget in the spring, and I wonder why it's missed. We see this billion and a half, and it sort of reminds me of, say, looking at somebody playing the VLTs in our province, and they're running out of money and then running to the cash machine. You know, we've got a few hours to debate a billion and a half dollars. It's like myriad and many millions a minute. That's not democratic accountability, and that's not really responsible government.

A few questions just to be brief. Why was this amount not foreseen in our original budget? The second question is: why is this being funded from general revenues, and why is this particular disability income continuance plan for that bargaining unit not fully funded? A third question is: what is the estimated long-term liability for long-term disability in this unit, and is there a plan to pay down and fully fund this liability? A fourth question is: are there any other unfunded liabilities of this nature in the public service administered by the public administration office? Those are the four questions directed at this particular supplementary supply estimate, and I would appreciate those replies in writing when they do come.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and again I'll be brief. I have certain questions that I guess we'd at least throw out. We've been told that there is an ongoing – it seems to be ongoing – labour standards review, and we're never sure where that's at. It was

supposed to be last spring, and now it got into the whole debate about child labour and the rest of it. I guess that with the minister not here the question I would ask is: where does that stand? Is the actual review coming, and when is it going to be made public so that we can take a look at it?

The other discussion I've had with the minister – and I won't go into the broad aspect of labour laws, but certainly the one that created the problem in the Brooks area with the Tyson strike was the idea of first contract bargaining. That was something the minister has said in the past in this Assembly that they were still looking at whether they were going to do it. There are only a couple of provinces that don't. We think it's self-evident that they should be doing that. Again, I'd like to know where the government stands with this very important issue.

Mr. Chairman, the other area that I've raised in the past has to do with the Appeals Commission with the WCB. We're talking about increasing persistent delays. We go back to the report, the earlier recommendations from when the government looked at this. They made it clear that appeals should take no more than 90 days, and this should be in regulation. Well, their own report that just came out shows that the wait time for WCB appeals now is at least 218 days and up to 280 days. Something has to be done. Now, maybe this is part of the same old problem with the booming economy: we're having more people getting injured or whatever the cause is. But we're not even close to what the government laid out back in the reports five years ago. As I said, justice delayed is justice denied. I'm sure all hon. members would say that in their constituency offices problems with the WCB and specifically the Appeals Commission take a great deal of our time. So I'd like to know what we're going to do about this delay. It's been raised before, and I'd like to raise it again.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the other part was brought up today by the Leader of the Opposition, and it has to do with Alberta Works. When we think about being a disadvantaged person in this society, we're talking about the housing crisis, we're talking about all the other things that are occurring. We talk about Alberta always being the greatest. We sort of laugh about it: it's the greatest in Canada, the greatest in the world, the greatest in the universe. The National Council of Welfare says that Alberta has the second-lowest for single employables, and there are a lot of people coming into this province thinking they're going to find jobs that they aren't. That's not something to be proud of. We have the lowest for persons with disabilities, and that's the lowest in the country in a very rich province, the lowest for single-parent households with one child, mid-range for a couple with two children. Now, this is in an overheated economy in the richest province. With the amount of money rolling in here, we're probably the richest place in North America.

There was a small increase, I think, back on May 1 but not nearly enough. Really, it should become clear to this government, and I guess this is the question that I would ask: why are we not moving towards a market-basket measure for social supports? This is particularly important in municipalities like Calgary, Fort McMurray, and Edmonton now, which are seeing increased housing costs and overall inflation.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I would take the hon. House leader at his word, and we would expect a reply to these important questions in this department. Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you again, Mr. Chair. You know, I was very interested a little earlier in the estimates that were brought forward

by the Minister of Economic Development. He mentioned some of the monies that are being spent by his department for the provincial nominee program and seeking out skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled individuals in other areas. It's an area that I think is of particular concern to many Albertans, especially those who run small businesses because those are the people that have been stressed the most in this labour market.

The labour market, of course – everybody can see it – is being incredibly affected by the conventional oil and gas industry and will be increasingly affected by the oil sands industry. The oil sands industry, of course, has been moderately booming for about seven or eight or nine years, and we'll see a huge increase in the number of employees that are required there. But the real increase has been spurred on by \$75 a barrel or more oil and the conventional oil and gas industry that is punching holes everywhere it can and trying to take advantage of a commodity price that is at its zenith.

How long will this last? How long will we see the American economy continue? Many people are forecasting that it will begin to see some serious downturn in the new year. We're into the 58th month of a commodity boom right now. The last longest commodity boom in many generations, to be truthful, was 28 months. This is fuelled, of course, by some of the foreign policy of the Bush administration in the United States and the transfer of the manufacturing capabilities, quite a bit of them, largely from North America to China and the needs of growth there.

A lot of the things that we see are not just shortages in labour. There are shortages in various things like concrete, cement, gravel, steel, and many, many other things that are components of construction.

5:10

Another question that would be going to the minister of human resources, and I would like a reply in writing: what are the projected increases that the provincial government and his department will be seeking in terms of numbers for the provincial nominee program, and can those numbers be directed to help small businesses with the great problems that they're having right now in maintaining their businesses? We may be seeing constriction. We may be seeing businesses closing. I've got a restaurant in my area that's not doing its lunch trade, for an example on a small basis. There are many restaurants having that problem. I had a bank manager just a couple of blocks from my constituency office quit his job here a couple of weeks ago to go work the rigs. You know, we're seeing odd things happening, and how long this boom will last, how long we'll see this keep going like this is a real question, but how it is affecting those small businesses is real. We sure would like to see them maintain themselves here in Alberta and maintain employment from people who could come under that provincial nominee program.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The next item we will go back to is Health and recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health and Wellness (continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I'm really glad that we've been able to get a bit more time on Health. I appreciate my colleagues' co-operation in that, at the same time recognizing that likely we did not discuss everything that had been brought to our attention as we tried to truncate everything and get it in.

I'd just like to go a bit more in depth in the notes that I have accumulated since the break and particularly talk about the health region deficits. I went back through the notes I took while the minister was speaking, and I apologize: I heard her say something

and I didn't write it down, so I will repeat a question. On the \$81 million that is set aside for the health region deficits, the way it's written up on page 38 of the supplementary supply estimates book is that there is "\$112,000,000 for additional operating funding to health authorities, including \$31,000,000 for the anticipated cost of auxiliary nursing salary adjustments," which in my calculations is leaving us about \$81 million beyond that. Will that be covering all of the deficits from all of the health authorities? I know the minister said something about that, and I'm sorry that I missed it, so I'm just asking about that again.

I've done some research about what's out there, and I know that with the Chinook health region, for example, they have a current-year operating deficit of \$2.4 million, but they have a \$9.6 million total deficit accumulated from the previous year. I don't know how much of that might be taken care of or, indeed, any of it. Certainly, the top three issues that they're concerned about are, number one, human resources and recruitment of health professionals, a huge issue for them, and with that comes providing access to all of the health services. They have an extra concern there that the funding formula is based on population with adjustments taking into consideration both age and gender. It's no secret to any of us in this House that pockets of southern Alberta have a higher percentage of seniors than other parts of Alberta. Although I have argued before that I don't feel that seniors are necessarily going to cost the health care system more, there can be a diversity of services that's required. Certainly, that's the feedback I'm getting from people in that health region. If we included long-term care costs in there, that may well be the case.

As a part of this supplementary supply and my continuing questioning of the government around their planning and policy development process, we have to bring up once again: where are we with long-term care? We had the first anniversary last May of the Auditor General's special report on long-term care, which certified what residents and their families and their friends and advocacy groups in the community and, indeed, the Official Opposition and this member had been saying for many years: that long term care was beyond in a crisis, that in some cases it was downright dangerous, and it was being appallingly managed.

So we've had the anniversary of that report. We've had the minister or ministry officials agree that it would be a certain amount of money to sort of come up to speed. I think the amount that was said at the time was \$250 million, and we've had a fraction of that that's actually been brought forward. So is any of this money that's being pledged here today to address specific concerns in long-term care, which I think is behind what's being brought forward by the Chinook health region?

There also seems to be a desire to move to expansion of the Lethbridge regional hospital, especially to include more space for outpatient programming, and I think that's including radiation therapy. That area also has some special considerations for First Nation and aboriginal peoples. With that is a focus on preventing and managing diabetes in particular but also obesity and the complications that that brings with it. So that's around a focus on education on the risk factors for diabetes and early testing and diagnosis but also, as we know, really good chronic management of diabetes. If you can manage those chronic diseases well, then they don't escalate into a need for the more intensive and therefore more expensive health services that become required in others ways, like use of an ICU, for example, if they end up with real foot problems or eye problems, kidneys, et cetera.

There is an identified need in Chinook region for new technology and operating room design and equipment. They believe that this would shorten the lengths of stays and increase the surgical capacity

and would also likely help them recruit and retrain specialists, obviously. They're looking for \$1.5 million there for two operating theatres, so I'm wondering what's going to happen with that request. Is any of that money going to be included in the \$112 million? Perhaps it's part of the \$150 million that's additional capital grants for the medical equipment that's being offered.

You know, I find this government that talks about accountability and transparency very frustrating when you're talking about \$262 million and there are basically two sentences that describe everything. We're constantly having to go through and say: "Well is it going to cover this? Is it going to cover that? What about this? What about that?" I don't understand why we can't just get a listing of what the money is supposed to cover. You know, if they know that they need \$150 million for additional capital grants to support medical equipment, what's the medical equipment? For whom? For what? Why can't it just be printed out instead of this constant sort of teasing out of information? The minister tries very hard to answer the questions on the spot, but again we're time limited. Then some months down the road there's something that comes in writing which doesn't completely answer the question. So it's a very frustrating process.

The other place where we're seeing pressure around long-term care and home care specifically is the David Thompson health region. I haven't been able to find out what the deficit is in that region, so I don't know how much money would be going there to deal with that, but our research has shown that they seem to feel that there's quite a bit of pressure on home care.

5:20

We do end up with a patchwork of services across the province with the health region structure. That's one of my concerns about having it all divvied up like that. Each health region is supposed to try and deliver services to their people. You do end up with checkerboarding. You don't get the same kind of health care resources, you know, in Edson as you do in Edmonton. You just don't. Are Albertans willing to accept that? I don't know. I would say that they would argue not, that they should be able to get the same thing that you can get in the city. But here we have home care. There are also increasing wait times for long-term care beds in the David Thompson region. So is any of that going to be addressed with the money that's coming here?

Now, we've had admissions to one of the continuing care centres, called CollegeSide, curtailed back in the spring because they didn't have enough staff. Has that situation been alleviated? Are they able to move on from that? Is there enough staff there now? Is this money going to help with that? Same issues around the shortage of physicians: both recruiting and retention, problems with people having to work through their holidays, not being able to get enough locums, all of those. We've heard all this before.

The other area that has specifically come before me was Peace Country health region. The staffing shortages there are really critical. This is one of the areas that had to close off access to some of the emergency departments in that area. They seem to be looking for a lot of money for capital upgrades as well, but on the closures, the Leader of the Official Opposition spoke in question period today about the number of people that had to be flown from that area into Edmonton to be looked after. I'm looking also at 10 psychiatric beds that were closed and some problems with surgery and ER and that they had a critical shortage of physicians so that patients had to be sent to Edmonton. So, you know, how are they finding some relief there?

There was a request to the infrastructure minister back in April that they needed new acute care facilities in High Prairie and Grande

Prairie. Has that been addressed by any of this money? There is a deficit there, and the argument is that the deficit would be even larger if they actually had the staff to be able to fully deliver all of the services. If they were able to deliver all of the service that they normally do, the deficit would be even larger: that is the argument that we've got coming from them. This is the location where the ICU was closed during the first week in August.

I've spoken to some of the doctors up there, and they are beyond frustration. You know, if they could have, they would have sent some people here during this short sitting to try and underline their concerns with what's happening there. Of course, they can't even take their holidays, never mind come here to lobby. You could just hear the stress in their voices. It's really critical.

One of the other areas that I've been watching really closely and that I've spoken a bit about is the Aspen health region as well. That's where we had the in-patient beds closed. All the other ones that I've talked about have been surgical beds, ICU for example, some renal-care beds, but this is in-patient beds for the whole month of August. This isn't just a week because you're trying to cover, you know, somebody that's out on holiday and there's nobody else to cover for them. This is a whole month. That's a fairly central region, so I suppose the idea is that they can just come in to Capital. But we had closures in the Sturgeon hospital, which is part of Capital region, so in putting all of the load on Edmonton – yes, they're able to carry it right now, but how long are they expected to carry all of that? Sure, they're paid for people that come from other health regions – they get reimbursed for that – but they still have to have all the doctors and nurses and bedsheets and gowns and all of that here to be able to accommodate those people. So this is no small thing.

I've talked about David Thompson. I've talked about the Peace Country. I've talked about Aspen and Palliser and Chinook. I mean, these are issues in almost every single health region in the province. This isn't small stuff that can be dealt with easily and will go away. You know, people are feeling that it's critical, and they can't seem to get the attention of the government long enough to get any sort of relief from them that there's going to be an end to it all, and I think that's what is causing a big part of why we're having such a hard time with physician retention in the rural areas. They just don't see where it's going to end. Why would you bother trying to tough it out another week, another month when, in fact, you could be toughing it out another two, three, four, five years?

An awful lot of this goes back to: where are we going to get the health professionals from? Where are the real concrete steps that are being taken to fast-track, to open those new spaces? You know, I'm now hearing in Calgary, just as we're about to try and get new spaces for health professionals, that people are being told to hold off because it's too expensive to build the new facilities that would create the new spaces, which would house the new students I guess is a better way to put it, because the inflationary costs are just too high. So there's a lack of overall planning and forethought from the government, and I don't see any improvement.

You know, I talked earlier about being 24 months, and I'm hearing the same things, only worse. I don't see the big steps that are being taken to solve this except keep going back to: well, we'll get the private sector to look after this. But the private sector really does not help us, especially around workforce problems, and it really doesn't help us around training because they in the past have been very reluctant to take residents into their operating rooms and let them do that period of their required training. Certainly, we saw that around the ophthalmology clinics and surgeries that were so much in the limelight back in the late '90s. You know, there was the comparison that the Consumers' Association did between the private, the contracted, and the completely public, and the best deal was in the public, and that was the shortest waiting list as well. My neighbour at the time was studying to specialize in that field, and he was immensely frustrated because there were only so many residency spots, and with all of these surgeries at that time going to a private provider, he couldn't get into the residency program.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, but pursuant to Standing Order 61(1), which provides for not less than two hours of consideration of estimates, I would now invite the Government House Leader to move that the committee do now rise and report.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would at this time move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2006-07 supplementary estimates for the general revenue fund, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

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

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That being the case, I would move that we now call it 5:30 – I see we're almost a minute away from that anyway – and stand adjourned until Monday at 1:30.

[Motion carried; at 5:29 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

