

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, August 28, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/08/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, on this day I would ask that all Members of Alberta's Legislative Assembly, all others present here, and those observing these proceedings in their homes join together in a minute of silence and personal prayer as we reflect upon the lives of Canadian police officers and military personnel lost in service to their countrymen. May their souls rest in eternal peace, and may a nation be eternally grateful. God bless.

Hon. members, today we'll be led in the singing of our national anthem by Colleen Vogel. I would ask all to participate in the language of their choice.

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: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to be able to introduce a guest to you and through you to the Assembly. This gentleman is known to many of us for his years of dedicated volunteerism for many organizations. He has served as a board member and president of the Edmonton downtown Rotary Club, the Christmas Bureau of Edmonton, and ABC Head Start. He was a board member of the Edmonton Boy Scouts and the Grant MacEwan foundation. As well, he was a founder of the Trying for Kids triathlon event and is a supporter of Junior Achievement. On top of that, he has been an active fundraiser for numerous community organizations. We know him better as the former Member for Edmonton-McClung and the previous Minister of Economic Development. I've always enjoyed his great enthusiasm and passion for life and am delighted that he is pursuing an ongoing interest in our Conservative Party. He is seated in the Speaker's gallery. I am proud to introduce my good friend Mark Norris. I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Julius Yankowsky, the former MLA who served the Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview constituency for three terms, from 1993 through 2004. Julius is accompanied today by his wife, Katherine, and their grandson Brenden Steemson. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a very long list today, so a little patience, please. The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly staff from Children's Services governance services branch. Branch staff provide consultation, co-ordination, and facilitation services to assist child and family service authority boards, the Social Care Facilities Review Committee as well as the Children's Services appeal panel with their legislated responsibilities. They do a great job, and I'm extremely proud to be their minister. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome. They are Beverly Sawicki, Blair Addams, Laurie Anderson, Laurie Kehler, and Kris Loranger. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shad Valley is an organization that promotes interest in science, technology, and entrepreneurship to students in grades 11 and 12. Students who are accepted into this program attend a month-long program in July at one of the 12 universities across Canada. Many of the students then continue with a paid internship program. Two of these students are currently working with Alberta Innovation and Science. Jacinta Yeung and Brandon Evans are here today to be introduced to all of you. Jacinta has completed grade 12 and will be entering university this fall, while Brandon will be entering grade 12. They are accompanied by Lisa Bowes of the department. I'd ask them to rise and be greeted by all of you here today.

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, capital planning.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to introduce to you and through you a personal friend and young constituent, Mr. Adam Zaroni from Coaldale, Alberta. Adam is currently finishing his degree in accounting and financial management at the U of L. He has met today with our colleague the MLA for Battle River-Wainwright on some rural youth development issues. I think it's of some significance that Adam has recently been nominated for the CEO of the year award scholarship, a national award competition, by the University of Lethbridge. I'd ask him to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. I hope he is up in the members' gallery. I can't quite spot him.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I usually rise to introduce guests who have travelled a fair distance to visit us, but I'm surpassing all my records today because my guest has travelled from Canberra, Australia, to visit with me. He is a branch on the family tree, I'm proud to say. He worked for the Attorney General's office in the government of Australia, and he is now visiting Canada and getting a real view of Alberta. He worked for a week at the Calgary Stampede and a week at the Edmonton Fringe, so he is really getting an experience in Alberta. I would ask that Matthew Granlund stand and receive our welcome, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seated in your gallery are five bright and talented high school students who will be joining us here

in the Assembly in the upcoming year in their new capacity as pages in the Alberta Legislature. These individuals were hired over the summer after a successful application process and will be joining their fellow pages for training this fall. They're already here to observe the proceedings of the Assembly today. If the following pages could please stand up when I call their name: Nancy Easton, Victoria Micek, Nicholas Mickelsen, Kaley Pederson, and Helena Zakrzewski. I'd invite all members to join in extending a very warm and traditional welcome to these new pages.

1:40

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Duncan and Allie Wojtaszek, who are seated in the members' gallery. They're here to observe the discussion on Bill 208. Duncan, you may recall, has been introduced to this Assembly in the past as the executive director of CAUS, and I'm pleased to say that Allie is gainfully employed in important political work this summer and this fall. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this fine Assembly Mr. Michael Farris. Mr. Farris is the executive director of E4C, which is an Edmonton organization founded in the 1970s that runs 16 different programs for people of all ages who are in financial need. Among them are a couple that are well known to you: the Women's Emergency Accommodation Centre and the Kids in the Hall Bistro at Edmonton city hall. This organization and Mr. Farris have made a long-standing commitment to our city and our needy. I would like to ask Mr. Farris to rise and accept the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise and introduce to you a recent immigrant to Alberta, Canada, from Ukraine. He is a professor and a doctor in Ukraine who has established some roots here, and we welcome him sincerely. He is currently teaching part-time at the Minerva Senior Studies Institute, located at Grant MacEwan College. He has also taught for some time at NorQuest. He is a definite credit to our teaching profession. Accompanying him is well-known Edmonton lawyer Helen Tymoczko, who is no stranger to members of this Assembly. She is a good friend of the community, a good friend of mine, and she is also a very involved community activist and volunteer, particularly in the arts. I would ask Helen Tymoczko and Professor Walter Yahnishchak to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly an education advocate from Calgary who is sitting in the front row of the public gallery. Her name is Tianna Melnyk, and she has travelled up today to see how the Legislature works. She is a tireless worker for public education and an outstanding teacher. I'd ask Tianna to rise and

receive the warm welcome of all members.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. In the first I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Zyp family. This is a very active family. Some of you in Edmonton will be familiar with their letters to the editor, and they certainly keep me informed of their opinion. I would ask them to please rise as I call their names: John Zyp, Bettie Zyp, their daughters Danielle Zyp and Cynthia Prefontaine, and her 12-year-old son, Jonas Coyes, who wants to be the Premier of the province. I would ask you to please join me in welcoming them.

For my second set of introductions I would like to introduce several members of the activist GLBT community. Please rise as I call your names: Julie Lloyd, who is a lawyer that argued on the Vriend case and several precedent-setting legal judgments to her credit; Kris Wells, who is an educator; Ken MacDonald, the president of the Edmonton Pride Centre; Ron Rowswell, Rob Wells, and Elisha Andrews, who are all constituents of Edmonton-Centre.

I also have a number of artists in attendance in support of action against Bill 208. Please join me in welcoming Annie Dugan, with Firefly Theatre; John Ulyyat, who is a pre-eminent actor in Edmonton and throughout Alberta; Roger Schultz, a theatre designer; and Ryan Sigurdson, who is an emerging and very talented young musician and composer.

Please join me in welcoming these individuals to our Assembly.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of introductions today as well. The first of those is a special introduction for somebody who's been introduced in the Assembly before. Daniel Langdon has worked as a constituency manager in my office for the last year and a half. Unfortunately, we're losing him to McMaster University, and Friday was his last day in the employ of the Alberta government. He is also here to watch the proceedings today regarding Bill 208. I would ask Dan to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also, Mr. Speaker, several other constituents from Edmonton-Rutherford who are here today to watch the proceedings regarding Bill 208. I would ask them to please rise as their names are read into the record and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly as well. We have with us today Geraldine Young and a whole group from the Southminster-Steinhauer United Church: Patricia Seale, Dawn Waring, Sandra Lockhart, Thais McKee, and the Power family – Chris, Kathleen, and their children Aaron, Allandra, and Brayden.

Thank you.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the following guests who are here to show their objection to Bill 208: two from my constituency, Marc Trottier and Joseph Hachey, and also Jeffrey Coffman, Luc Drapeau, Jose Untalan, Jo Nicholas, Doug Dorward, Nick Green, and Barry Richardson. I invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House two people without whom I would not be

able to do my work as an MLA: Jan Millson, my constituency office manager, who's just done a tremendous job for me – and I'm proud to introduce her – and Peter Marriott, my summer STEP student. I would like them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two wonderful people from my constituency, Mick and Bernice Rempel. Mr. Rempel spent 26 years in the Canadian air force. Mrs. Rempel is very well known to many members of this House, being a former mayor of Leduc. She spent 13 years as senior co-ordinator for family aid services, four years as director of parks, planning, recreation, and culture. Both are now enjoying their retirement. They are seated in the public gallery. I request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Allison Mullen. Allison is a constituent of mine. As well as a student entering grade 12, Allison has honours and is very involved in the student council at her school. Allison was a new addition to my office as a summer STEP student, and it has been great having Allison in the office. I wish her well in her final year at Archbishop O'Leary high school. I'd ask Allison to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise here today and to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an outstanding young woman who is a credit to her family, her school, and her community. Desirée Ho is on student council at Archbishop O'Leary high school. This coming year she's going into her final year, and she's been a great help as a summer employee in the constituency of Edmonton-Manning. Desirée, please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this Assembly Sheryl Pearson. Sheryl Pearson is here with her husband, Vik Maraj. They live in the Kenilworth neighbourhood in the Edmonton-Mill Creek constituency. Sheryl and Vik recently had their first child, named Evan, in March of this past year, and they enjoy parenthood very much. Sheryl is a lawyer for the Alberta Law Reform Institute, although she is currently on maternity leave, and Vik is a human relations expert with his own consulting practice. This is their first visit to the Legislative Assembly as adults, although they both recall visiting during elementary school with their grade 5 class. They have just entered the Assembly, and I would now ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

1:50

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the following guests who are here today to show their objection to Bill 208. Please stand to receive the traditional greeting of the Legislature when I call your name: Tony Sware, Larry Jewell, Jeff Bovee, Jason Bodnariuk, John Grindrod, Helen Lees, Michael Schaffer.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My guest is not here.

The Speaker: Are there others? Did I miss anyone? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House today the following guests who are here to show their objection to Bill 208. If you would stand, please, as I call your name: Kayla Larson, Lana Phillips, Erika Lund, Cindy Walker-Watson, Craig Stumpf-Allen, Scott Graham, and Rheanna Sand. Please show them the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of introductions today, and I'll ask people to stand at the conclusion of all of them. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Mr. Neal Gray. Neal is here today to show his opposition to Bill 208. He was the federal candidate in Edmonton-Mill Woods-Beaumont for the NDP and is an active board member of the Woodvale Community League in Mill Woods.

My second introduction is Linda McLennan. Linda has been an Alberta resident for the past 30 years and has been a teacher since 1967, specializing in literacy and working with special-needs students. She is currently teaching at the Glenrose hospital school, and she is here to show her opposition to Bill 208.

My next introduction, Mr. Speaker, is Junaid Jahangir and Drury Straty, and I apologize for the pronunciations. Junaid and Drury are active members in the LGBT community and are here today to show their opposition to Bill 208.

My fourth introduction is Lois Evans. Lois was born and raised in Edmonton and has two wonderful children and six grandchildren. She is an active member in the Southminster-Steinhauer United Church and in many social justice groups as well here in Edmonton, and she is here to express her opposition to Bill 208.

I am delighted, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Robert Smith. Robert is a community development educator and a researcher with HIV Edmonton. Robert is here today to express his opposition to Bill 208.

It gives me great pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to introduce my next guest, Murray Billett. Murray is a well-known and prominent human rights advocate here in Alberta and is here today to express his concerns and opposition to Bill 208.

Christina Gray is a lead software development instructor at DevStudios. She also serves as chair of the Edmonton Transit system advisory board and volunteers with the Support Network's distress line. Christina was born and raised in Edmonton and currently resides in Mill Woods. She is here today, Mr. Speaker, to show her disagreement with the introduction of Bill 208.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to introduce my former colleague and good friend Michael Phair. Michael, as many of you

know, is a tireless advocate for the LGBT community and has been for many years. Michael was elected to city council in 1992 and is considered to be one of the most respected politicians in the province. He is here today to show his opposition to Bill 208.

I would ask that they all now 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. I, too, have a number of guests to be introduced. All of them are here because of their concern about Bill 208. First of all, I'm delighted to introduce to you and to others in the Assembly Arron Kardolus-Wilson. Arron is a transgender activist and same-sex married man. I'd ask him to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to introduce to you and the Assembly Debra Morris. Debra is the president of the United Church Women of Edmonton presbytery. Debra is an activist in the community, particularly on issues related to women and social justice. I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my third introduction today is Colin Simpson. Colin is a community activist and is here to express his opposition to Bill 208. He is currently compiling stories for a book on gay youth. I would ask him to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Glynis Thomas, Karen Smith, and Mike Haworth. Glynis is the executive director of the St. Albert Community Information and Volunteer Centre, Karen Smith is the executive director of the Sexual Assault Centre, and Mike Haworth is a student at Grant MacEwan College here in Edmonton. They are also here about Bill 208. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, my next guests are Scott Hlad, Maggie Lockwood, Jay Smith, and Gil Charest. Scott Hlad and Maggie Lockwood are the co-chairs of the NDP LGBT caucus while Jay Smith and Gil Charest have been ardent activists in the LGBT community for a number of years. They're also here, of course, about Bill 208. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask if they'd now rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a number of guests today to introduce. I believe all of them are seated in the public gallery. They are here to observe the proceedings of the Assembly this afternoon and also to express opposition to Bill 208. I'll start with my first guest, who is Kyle Toles. Kyle is entering his first year at Grant MacEwan College and is working towards his office administration degree. He is here, of course, to express, as I said, his opposition to Bill 208. I'll ask Kyle to please rise.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is Andrea Enes and Geneva Harwood. Andrea and Geneva are University of Alberta students, with Geneva working towards her bachelor's degree in human geography and Andrea working towards her BA in political science and economics.

My fourth guest, Mr. Speaker, is Jennifer Dailey-O'Cain. Jennifer is a professor in applied linguistics at the University of Alberta. She has recently received Canadian citizenship. She is originally from the U.S. She is also the president of the Edmonton-Strathcona federal NDP riding association.

Next, Mr. Speaker, is Erica Bullwinkle, Miriam Weinfeld, and Daniel Weinfeld. Erica, her daughter Miriam, and her son Daniel are here today to show their opposition to Bill 208. Erica is an education advocate and serves as a vice-president of the Alberta NDP. Miriam is entering her first year of university at the Faculté Saint-Jean here in Edmonton while Daniel is in grade 10 at Strathcona composite high school.

Next, Mr. Speaker, is Brendan Van Alstine. Brendan is an active community member and a registered social worker. He is here today to express his opposition to Bill 208.

I'm also pleased to introduce to you and to all of my colleagues in the Assembly Dr. Brian Staples. Dr. Staples is the chair of the Seniors' Action and Liaison Team, or SALT, and previously worked as a civil servant for the Alberta government in the department of learning.

2:00

My last introduction, Mr. Speaker, not the least but the last, is Reverend Charles Bidwell. Reverend Bidwell is an active member of Southminster-Steinhauer United Church in south Edmonton, which has been publicly declaring that it has welcomed gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people for the last seven years. Reverend Bidwell is licensed by the government of Alberta to conduct marriages, and he has performed several same-gender marriages. He received the Michael Phair man of the year award in 1994 for his ministry to AIDS victims in the 1980s and his ministry to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people during his 11 years as pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Edmonton.

I would ask all of my guests to please rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Managed Growth in the Oil Sands

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This summer from Athabasca to Lac La Biche to Fort MacKay and especially to Fort McMurray I have visited with public officials, service providers, small-business owners, and citizens of all kinds who increasingly feel overwhelmed by the challenges of growth. They can't find workers, housing costs are beyond reach, public services are overloaded, and infrastructure is inadequate. Studies such as the government's own 1997 growth summit and the 1999 housing symposium predicted these problems, yet this PC government, openly boasting about being on autopilot, failed to anticipate the obvious. My first question is to the Premier. Given that the Premier has said that this Conservative government does not want to intervene to manage oil sands development, is it the Conservative government's position that managing growth is not their responsibility?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I was also in places like Eaglesham and through Falher and Donnelly and Girouxville and Forestburg and Slave Lake, of course, Foremost, High Level, and I heard the same concerns expressed. I'm so happy that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has characterized these as challenges because that's what I see them as, not problems. Problems are what other jurisdictions are facing in terms of deficit and debt and how to deal with the rising costs of health care and just operating on a day-to-day basis. We're faced with challenges, the challenges of growth. The Leader of the Opposition is absolutely right. They are challenges. There are challenges related to labour, there are challenges related

to infrastructure, there are challenges related to the rising costs of construction, and so on, but it remains true that the market must prevail. If we tamper, as the Liberals and the NDs like to do, with the marketplace, it's so hard, so difficult, to undo what has been put in place through legislation or policy or government.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Overwhelming challenges become problems, as the Premier well knows. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Given that this government's failure to manage growth has contributed significantly to the huge cost increases of the oil sands, which are then directly deducted from royalty payments, can the minister tell us what is the current hit to the Alberta treasury in cost overruns at oil sands plants?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that it's my responsibility to talk about cost overruns in oil sands projects.

There is no question that the buoyant economy here, the vibrant and growing economy, that's probably the envy of Canada and much of North America, has caused a lot of pressure in a number of areas. There are shortages in some areas of concrete, steel, rubber. That's what a demand situation does. It does affect our capital buildings on the public side, but that's about 10 per cent of the capital that's occurring in this province.

Certainly, we will have an opportunity to address the issue of capital overruns on public buildings, that we fund through the estimates, because we have recognized it and, in fact, have funded it to ensure that our school projects, our health facilities, and all other public projects will not be in jeopardy.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Environment, Mr. Speaker. Is it this minister's position that the proposed rate of expansion of oil sands plants is in the interests of the residents and the environment of the Wood Buffalo municipality?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, allow me to reflect for a moment, having had the honour of sitting as a mayor and on city council. Did the opposition member, through the chair, know that the government of Alberta built a bridge to nowhere? Actually, we had streets paved, with fire hydrants and street lamps, where everyone used to teach their kids how to drive, but we didn't have any homes on them. We had a water treatment plant built for 75,000 people, but – you know what? – there were only 30,000 of us paying for it.

In actual fact, Mr. Speaker, the over \$750 million of infrastructure projects that are going on demonstrate clearly that we are listening to the people in Fort McMurray, Wood Buffalo, or in Cold Lake or in Peace River or in southern Alberta or central Alberta because we care, and we are dealing with issues that are important to a growing economy in a growing province.

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

Infrastructure Needs in Fort McMurray

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Large-scale oil sands development in Alberta has rapidly increased, as we all know, causing the population of Fort McMurray to double in the last decade. The provincial government has allowed this development to occur without any sense of a long-term plan, as the minister just illustrated.

The situation has become so dire that both the municipal council and the regional health authority have been forced to intervene at the EUB with major oil sands projects because hospitals, roads, schools, and all kinds of other programs can't keep up. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. I drove highway 63 just a few weeks ago and was surprised to see no sign of twinning. Why not?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what he was looking for because, in fact, I was up there just a short time ago, and driving south from Fort McMurray for many miles the right-of-way is all cleared. They will be constructing there immediately. If the member had gone north of Fort McMurray towards Fort MacKay, he once again would have seen activity. Last winter – and this is some of the forward planning that we're doing – we had a contractor come in and move a huge quantity of dirt in order that we didn't have to do it in the summertime. He moved it over frost. It was sitting there. They were spreading that out. That's just a bit of it.

Now, had he gone up 881, he would have seen that, in fact, this year we're completing the paving on 881. There's surveying going on as we speak on the La Loche road. Mr. Speaker, if he goes up there this winter, he will see that, in fact, we're starting on the hundred million dollar bridge across the river. We put in a bypass. We're improving the intersections within Fort McMurray.

So I don't know where he went, but certainly he must have had his eyes closed.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Given that an average of 30 people a night were turned away from a Salvation Army shelter in McMurray last winter, what steps is this minister taking to ensure that emergency housing will be adequate there this coming winter?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, as well, was in Fort McMurray. It's a high-growth, high-cost area, and if you'd met with the mayor of Fort McMurray, you'd know that we're working together. We're determining how we can assist even further than what we are now with the funding that we're providing for emergency and transitional housing. One of the areas in the spectrum of housing is this in Fort McMurray: the rental subsidy program that we have for residents in Fort McMurray. As I said, it's high growth, high cost. We take an average of the rents of apartments in Fort McMurray. We then subsidize people at 30 per cent of their rent. In Fort McMurray that's a subsidy for a cost of housing at \$70,000 per resident. So we are doing some good work in Fort McMurray.

Thank you for the question.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness. Has the minister been vocal in cautioning the Minister of Energy and others that hospitals and health care services in Fort McMurray cannot – cannot – keep up with the growth that's occurring there? Has she been speaking out?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, for the last several months I have been part of a special group that has been discussing the issues of the north. It was chaired by the Minister of Energy; it is now chaired by the Minister of Justice. I think any of my colleagues would be able to

identify that I've been speaking up. More than that, I have met not only with the people in the region but with the industrial representatives, the CEOs of the region, talking to them about what kinds of services they're providing on plant sites. I've talked with the local elected officials in Fort McMurray.

I think that while a lot of people look at the challenges, they fail to look at the fact that Alberta has attracted more physicians than anywhere else in Canada. We have attracted 800 more physicians in the last five years, and many of them are choosing to locate in the north.

One more thing. We have put in aboriginal scholarships, and last fall with Health and Wellness and Advanced Ed we added 10 other scholarships to make it available for rural people who wish to take up health as a profession.

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

Health Care Reform Public Consultation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over and over we've listened to this government claim that health care spending is out of control. This weekend we learned that this government wasted another 1 million taxpayer dollars on their third-way propaganda campaign to convince Albertans that they are not entitled to public health care. It is the government that is out of control, not health care spending. My questions are to the minister of health. Why did the minister begin designing glossy brochures promoting the third way to be sent to every household when promised consultations with Albertans had not even been completed?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of ways that I should approach this. First of all, a million dollars was not spent on glossy brochures. A full \$220,000 was spent on paper, and that paper is currently being used by Health and Wellness and other government departments. So that was not in any way, shape, or form a consumable that wasn't used. We spent another \$200,000 on ads to Albertans, letting them know how to get involved in discussing the third way. When we first went out with consultations, focus groups and other work done by the consultants advised us that at least half of Albertans had no familiarity with the third way. So we believed that it was important as a government to provide them information.

Now, this particular spring if we had only advertised and done nothing else, people over on the other side might have a legitimate concern that we weren't listening, but we took over 6,000 submissions from Albertans. I listened personally to over 400 Albertans who gave me their views directly on the third way. We did a number of things to make sure that we not only took into account their concerns, but we actually had a way of addressing those concerns had we moved forward with the legislative amendments that were implicit in our discussions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: as she has pointed out, given that the million dollars was strictly the cost of the prep work, what was the final budget once the cost of purchasing radio and television time and printing and mailing all of these brochures is factored in? What was the total budget if a million was just the prep work?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, a million dollars was the total. I believe it may have been \$1.12 million. The implicit and explicit detail I can

forward. It was a whole contract that dealt with production of television ads, and those two snapshots I gave on consultation focus groups and paper were a part of it. I mean, implicit in the criticisms of the opposition is that we just blew a million dollars on a campaign, and that is not correct. I have identified what we've done with the paper, and even with the adverts . . . [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, while we have done those advertisements, the mock-ups for the television advertisements – there were to have been five ads that dealt with the Alberta Hospitals Act, the Alberta health information and protection act, and the health insurance act. While we had those framed, it's obvious that they were not going to proceed because we chose not to table legislation. We believed it was prudent to be ready for legislation that could have been tabled this spring.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. My final question, again to the minister of health: given that the million dollars could have been used to pay the salary of 20 registered nurses for a year or up to 60 personal care attendants to help out in long-term care, does the minister still believe that Albertans got value for their money? All that help in long-term care.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, you'd be damned if you did, and you'd be damned if you didn't. If I had tabled on behalf of this government legislation with no explanation to Albertans, nothing to go into the householders' hands, no TV ad, which is almost all of the way that some people in remote areas believe they get information – they don't always see that householder that comes. If we had done that without advertising, we would have been criticized. Today we have in the archives of Health and Wellness some materials that would be available should we proceed with legislation. By the very fact that that legislation is outdated and needs refurbishment, I would suggest that we will.

And may I make one additional remark? The opposition compels me to do this. So much misinformation goes out on behalf of the opposition that it behooves us to tell the story.

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

Health Policy Framework

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Can you imagine what we'd do if we had a million dollars to get our message out?

My questions are also to the Minister of Health and Wellness. On April 20, the Minister of Health and Wellness committed to ongoing consultations with Albertans about their plans for health care in this province, yet just two weeks ago a new health framework quietly appeared on the department's website, and that proposal continues down the road of two-tier, private health care. Now, they've spent a million dollars on a propaganda campaign that never appeared, but they still can't consult with Albertans. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that Albertans vocally rejected this government's third-way proposals in the spring, why did the minister then quietly present a framework that represents government policy which includes expanded roles for private surgical facilities and future opportunities for delisting of services?

2:20

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I truly wish that the hon. member from the third party had listened to a local radio announcer in Calgary talk about the fact that there were a whole lot of allegations made by the third party about delisting, about government by sleuth,

about the fact that the sky was falling. They read that report, and they saw that it was exactly what we announced in April. The report, *Getting On with Better Health Care*, contained eight of the 10 original policies, all public information, all posted on the web, all things that were retrievable. The only addition, the only punchline in this that hadn't been emphasized in previous documentation, was the work that we would do on workforce. In the area of delisting services, page 23, he cited, and I quote: the health policy framework does not even include any mention of delisting services.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what they're talking about, but that's old news. It was already out there. It's repackaged so that Albertans have both the *Getting On with Better Health Care* and the health policy framework in one document.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I don't know why the government spends a million dollars on propaganda when they've got Dave Rutherford to get their message out.

My question then is why the government, in fact, did pay a million dollars on a propaganda campaign which never saw the light of day and then surreptitiously posted the government policy, which includes two-tier private health care, on a website that most Albertans will never see.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think all of us do our best to get the message out in government. We did our best to anticipate that there was a need for new legislation in health care. We put together a package of materials that would inform Albertans about that. All of the work that we had done reflected on a couple of things: number one, that Albertans were not sufficiently familiar with the third-way initiatives, and, number two, many people after consultation said that they needed more information. They needed more detailed information. They needed to understand, for example, if doctors were working in two systems, how that would work. What would it mean in their community? So we did our best to get that ready. We chose not to table that legislation and to give it further study. We listened to Albertans, and that's not a bad-news story. We pulled back on submitting anything to Albertans until such time as government in the future may choose to table legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the minister gave \$1.5 million to one of the largest private insurance companies in North America to consult for a pointless private insurance study and a million dollars to ad firms, Tory-friendly ad firms, for the campaign that never was, when will this government stop wasting Albertans' time and money on selling them on unwanted privatization and start investing in the public system?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, if you were anyplace in Canada outside of Alberta, looking in, you would say: we wish that our province could afford and could do what Alberta is and spend more per capita than anywhere else in the country. We are now spending \$10.5 billion. We are spending almost \$1,000 a year on capital projects alone for every man, woman, and child in this province. There's nowhere that they're investing as much in public health as we are in Alberta.

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

Agricultural Assistance

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The last few years have been extremely difficult for Alberta's grains and oilseeds

producers, who are facing increasing pressures on their livelihood. Producers taking off their crop this fall have to deal with lower than expected yields, depressed prices, and high input costs. This led the Alberta government to recently issue a disaster declaration in relation to this situation. My question is to the Deputy Premier. While this is a positive step towards supporting our producers, what constitutes a disaster declaration?

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, interpretation of statutes is not part of the purview of question period. There's a statute. We'll have a page provide the statute to the hon. member. He can study it.

Second question.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the same minister, and it has to do with the CAIS program, which is selected using the 2004 basis for compensating producers when, in fact, the input costs are soaring dramatically for the past two years.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there's no question about it. The agricultural producers in the grains and oilseeds sector are facing a very, very serious situation. In fact, Mr. Speaker, you would be looking at what could be called a perfect storm: you've had a very good beginning to the year, you've had extreme heat in July, you've had low precipitation in 70 per cent of the province, you've got input costs of fertilizer and fuel skyrocketing, and you've got a dollar that is appreciating in a significant way, which affects exports.

So how do you respond to producers in a timely fashion? The decision was made to use the CAIS program because it is the safety net program. It was decided some time ago that that would be the safety net program for the province. Producers knew that. Many of them are enrolled in it. The decision on using 2004, Mr. Speaker, was that the information is in and complete. If you used 2005, there are a number of producers who have not filed 2005, and you would be going into a long period of waiting. The problems that we have out there, as shown by declaring a disaster, are imminent. Producers need help now. They need to know what they can expect.

The CAIS program was used with two adjustments. Quickly, those adjustments are a 15 per cent adjustment in the reference margin – the reference margin has changed by 15 per cent – and a 25 per cent change in the margin used on fertilizer and fuel.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the same minister. My supplemental is: will all producers affected by this disaster receive support?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I should just add one thing on the first one. Maybe not everyone understands what the reference margin is. A reference margin is the producer's income minus his eligible expenses, just to put that into context.

All producers that are enrolled in CAIS in 2004 will either receive assistance or not depending on their CAIS situation. If they were not enrolled in 2004, they would not. There are about 60 per cent of some 20,000 producers that are CAIS participants. They will all have their support levels increased on that 2004. They do not have to apply. These calculations will be automatic. There will be no additional costs in accounting for these producers, and it is expected, anticipated, and the people at the CAIS program are working hard to ensure that those payments are out this fall, when they're needed.

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

Employment Strategies

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With high prices Alberta's oil industry is pulling workers from everywhere in Canada and from all occupations. The labour market is distorted and is hurting small business in particular. Some firms are delaying expansion, others may close, and some economic sectors look to shrink, and the boom will not last forever. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Will the minister ensure that the provincial nominee program, which fast-tracks new immigrant employees, be directed to small business, where this program is needed most urgently?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course we'll do everything we can as a government to meet those challenges head on and provide the employees that are drastically needed out there, but the particular program that the member is referring to is under another ministry.

Mr. Backs: The second question is to the Minister of Advanced Education, Mr. Speaker. With a small minority of employers training the vast majority of apprentices and less than 10 per cent graduating, will the minister ensure that more long-term apprenticeship spots are opened in the workplace so that young Albertans, women, aboriginals, and our shrinking farm population get a chance at the good jobs while they last?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. Quite frankly, we have created over 4,000 new spots with respect to apprenticeship. The member will know that our employers are really belying up to the table, if I can use that expression, to the rate of about a hundred a day. We are now registering over a hundred new apprentices every day. I have said many times that our aboriginal community is one area that I want to particularly work with because I think they're certainly one of our biggest opportunities.

2:30

Mr. Backs: To the minister of human resources again, Mr. Speaker: what contingency plans does this government have in place to deal with unemployed workers and professionals when this boom ends, as boom times always do?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, only the opposition Liberals would start thinking what may happen down the road which may never happen.

Managed Growth in the Oil Sands

(continued)

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, the pressures, challenges, and opportunities we face as a result of oil sands growth is one of the most important issues confronting this province not only in the future but right now. It is my understanding that the Minister of Justice will be chairing a committee that aims to look at addressing some of these short-term pressures; therefore, my first question is to the Minister of Justice. Could the minister please shed some more light on this new committee?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the premise behind the hon. member's question is quite correct, but I must say that this committee is not a new committee; it's simply a new chair of an old committee. It's the oil sands ministerial strategy

committee. The Premier had the wisdom and foresight some many months ago to establish this particular committee under the chair of the hon. Minister of Energy. I've been asked by the Premier to chair it to provide some neutral oversight and to continue the good work of the committee and the good work of the hon. Minister of Energy as chair.

Generally speaking, this particular committee has been identifying issues with respect to oil sands, and that particular general work will continue. But what we are doing is that we are adding additional resources to it in the form of a co-ordinator and additional resources for that co-ordinator. The co-ordinator has been hired. It's somebody familiar to government, somebody familiar to this particular Assembly, at least many of the people in this Assembly, someone who has 35 years of experience with this government, a former Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs, a former Deputy Minister of Agriculture, a former Deputy Minister of Environment, Mr. Doug Radke. He will be starting at the end of this week, and his full-time job will be to provide co-ordination with respect to matters associated with oil sands growth.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us how this committee will go about its work now?

Mr. Stevens: Well, the committee in large measure will continue to do what it has done, and that is that you look to the particular ministries to identify issues, and you look to the particular ministries who have the expertise to provide the potential solutions. So in that sense, matters will very much remain the same.

One of the issues, however, has always been to ensure that you get accurate information with respect to the growth associated with oil sands. We're talking about realistic, accurate information, and one of the things that our co-ordinator will be doing is developing a realistic growth forecast for the oil sands in the relatively short to intermediate term. Once that particular work has been done – and certainly that involves gathering all of the information and perhaps some additional information that's currently out there to develop that forecast – he will be working with the ministries to review the plan that we currently have in place, establish where there may be gaps, and provide some advice.

I can also tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it's our intention to continue what the committee has been doing, and that is taking a look at what I would call short-term wins. Those are issue and solution identification that can be done very, very quickly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. I realize that he has partially answered this question but just the same: how will this committee's work differ from the work of several other existing committees looking at the various challenges in northern development brought on by the oil sands growth?

Mr. Stevens: Well, that's an excellent question because there is a lot of good work that has been identified and will be ongoing by various committees. There's a land use committee under, I believe, the auspices of Sustainable Resource Development, there is an oil sands consultation committee under the auspices of Energy, Environment, and Sustainable Resource Development, I believe that there's an aboriginal consultation committee associated with much of this very issue, and so on. All of that work will continue to go on.

It is anticipated that Mr. Radke's involvement with this committee will be relatively short term, something in the order of five or six months. Much of the work that he is going to do will in fact be complete by year's end.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Softwood Lumber Trade Policy

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta lumber producers are under fire from the federal government to sign on to their softwood lumber deal. Many tell me that this deal is not in their company's interest, their workers' interests, or for the good people of Alberta. My questions are to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. If the majority of Alberta's lumber producers withhold their support for this deal, will the minister support Alberta's interest and stop going along with that of his federal cousins?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, the industry has already indicated what their position on this is. Minister Emerson indicated federally that they wanted the response by industry by the 21st of August. On that day individual companies within the softwood lumber industry in the province of Alberta and across Canada indicated their support for the deal. So we've worked hard in the negotiations, working with the federal negotiating committee, headed up by His Excellency Michael Wilson, the ambassador to the United States from Canada. Minister Emerson has worked very, very hard on this deal.

It is not an ideal circumstance, Mr. Speaker. This is not free trade. It is managed trade. But our focus from this point forward should be on how the industry should organize itself to take best advantage of the deal that will now go before the House of Parliament in Canada.

Mr. Bonko: To the same minister: if large amounts of lumber have to be cut because of the mountain pine beetle, will the minister bring in measures to ensure that producers are not penalized under the federal softwood lumber deal?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Coutts: We were thinking far ahead when we talked about mountain pine beetle well before they even knew that it was happening.

Mr. Speaker, this agreement has been a compromise solution that provides more predictable terms of access to the U.S. markets. You know, we continue to work with our industry within the confines of the agreements that are put forward and represent their interests both internationally and nationally. We have a very good relationship with our industry. They've talked to us about the impact of mountain pine beetle. They've also talked to us about the impact of what would happen in terms of the market price going down and how that would affect their industry. We talked to our industry at length about some of the competitiveness problems that they have. So I can tell you that the Alberta Forest Products Association and this government and particularly our ministry will continue to address those things in the future.

Mr. Bonko: To the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations: does the minister support the termination clause, where Canadian producers have to pay by giving up their lawsuits and the Americans can walk away after three years?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the agreement that's struck is much more complex than has been indicated by the hon. member. The purpose of the stand-still clause that he referred to is to say that when the agreement comes to an end, there's a 12-month period during which there cannot be any actions commenced by either side, by the United States or by Canada. The term of the deal is seven years. There is a renewal period that is permitted for an additional two years. The stand-still period will apply to the end of the agreement. So the seven-year agreement in pith and substance would become an eight-year deal, and if it's renewed, then the nine-year deal becomes a 10-year deal.

2:40

It is a very, very complex matter, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the overall package of commitments that were made by both sides, negotiated in a very, very difficult set of circumstances. I would only say this: if softwood lumber were an easy thing to have resolved, it would have been done 20 years ago, not today. But the deal is one that provides certainty. The side letter that has been provided by the United States trade representative should go a long way to demonstrating that the United States has real and demonstrable good faith in this and that they are not simply going to terminate the deal after a limited period of time.

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

Standards for Secondary Suites

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is thriving. With more than 90,000 people moving to this province every year, our municipalities are now facing enormous pressures in finding places for people to live. One option is to rent basement suites, but there are no standards for these types of suites. My questions are for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Could the minister please tell the House where his department is at in legalizing these basement suites?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely right that while all of us are familiar with basement suites in one form or another throughout, well, certainly my lifetime, the fact of the matter is that the building code under which we operate does not recognize something called a basement suite. We have single-family residential, and we have multiple family.

The building code itself requires significant standards if you have what's called a duplex. I think we're all familiar with a duplex. It requires separate furnace and ventilation systems. It requires the necessary windows that you would have in a building code in a home. It requires complete and total fire separation between each side of the duplex and, in fact, in many cases could be divided up and given title to each side.

So in recognition of this and in recognition of the need for accommodation like a basement suite, the government undertook a number of months ago to review the whole situation, consult with the public, consult with municipalities, with tenants and landlords, and come back with some recommendations on what we could do to develop a code specifically for secondary suites or basement suites.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Yes. Does the minister feel that these secondary suites will assist in alleviating the pressures on this affordable housing issue?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think that it will. The reason I say so is because in not requiring the standards that are there for a duplex and still maintaining safety as the primary overriding factor, there will be some opportunities for individuals who have perhaps in the past been hesitant to rent their basement, develop their basement as a basement suite, to do so. We also have the ability then for that to be a safe environment for the tenants when they move in.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. My final question is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us when we can finally expect to see these standards in place?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the report of that committee that I referred to earlier has been circulating throughout the province over the past couple months. Overall, the overwhelming feedback that we're getting is positive. It's my intention to move forward with the necessary amendments to the building code either later on this year or as early as possible in 2007.

I need to put one cautionary note in place, Mr. Speaker, and that's to note that at present while we don't have building code that refers to basement suites, neither do we have zoning regulations that deal with basement suites. We have R1 and R2, and everybody knows that R1 is single-family residential; R2 is multiple family. We really are going to need something like a one and a half to completely legalize basement suites. So once the province is in a position to set the standards – the building code standards, the safety standards for basement suites – municipalities are going to have to determine in which neighbourhoods they're going to allow them to develop.

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

Spray Lake Sawmills

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Water is the issue of the decade, particularly in southern Alberta, where, even this government has admitted, current water licences exceed the capacity of the Elbow, Bow, and Oldman systems. The Spray Lakes forest management plan, over 3,300 square kilometres of cherished public lands near West Bragg Creek, will adversely affect the drinking water of 400,000 Calgarians as well as disrupt animal habitat and a prime recreational area. To the Minister of Environment: will he be supporting Spray Lake Sawmills in clear-cutting or protect this critical watershed and water source for Calgarians?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, protecting the land, protecting the air, and protecting the water is my job. I am the Minister of Environment, and I will carry out that responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also say that very near to this area, in fact, the province of Alberta, the only province in Canada, will be hosting the first international water forum. Experts from 20 countries all over the world are coming to Banff. . . [interjections] Well, I'm glad to see that the members opposite are very impressed by the fact that Alberta took the initiative to host such an important Water for Life strategy, that we will excel at, be proactive on, something the opposite side really has no clue about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will the minister place water at the top of the priority list and press this government to buy back this critical watershed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. That's a very good question. Not only shall we say that we will put water at the top of the list of priorities; it is at the top of the priority list for this province and this ministry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: will this minister at least act to delay approval of this forest management plan until a land-use plan is available in this province?

Mr. Couffts: Mr. Speaker, Spray Lake Sawmills has been operating in Kananaskis Country in a multi-use area for the past 60 years. In order for them to get the forest management agreement on that particular multi-use area, they have to come up with a detailed forest management plan. It's a 20-year plan. It is not just a short-term plan.

The department is being responsible in asking the company to come forward and update their plan, which includes wildlife and water mitigation as well and the effects that resource extraction has on those two areas. It's part of the detailed forest management plan that we have asked Spray Lake Sawmills to come forward with. That detailed forest management plan will be reviewed by government and sometime within the next three months will be either accepted or rejected, depending on the regulations they have followed, which, by the way, are endorsed by Canadian regulations on forestry practices.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have a process to go through with Spray Lakes, and we will continue to do that in order to do as the Minister of Environment wants to make sure that watersheds are protected not only for the immediate people but for people downstream as well.

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

Energy Forecasting

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, since this remedial summer session is all about backpedaling to fix a myriad of budget problems, I think it's an opportune time to perhaps cast a critical eye on energy forecasting. Alberta's NDP opposition has determined that since 2002 this government has on average miscalculated crude oil revenues by 80 per cent and natural gas revenues by 65 per cent each year. Maybe the Minister of Finance could explain whether this state of affairs is a long-standing problem with her energy-forecasting department. Or is this government deliberately piling up unbudgeted surpluses year after year, keeping billions of dollars away from the democratic oversight of this Legislature?

2:50

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've explained through the budget process the process that's used for energy forecasts. The member opposite is suggesting that he has a better handle on this than eight private-sector energy consulting firms. I find that quite astounding, but then I have always found that people with hindsight have better insight when it comes down to the time.

Mr. Speaker, I do not apologize for having more money at the end of the year than less. That is considered prudent forecasting and budgeting. In fact, I referenced last week in a question Standard & Poor's. I'm sure that even the NDP opposition would recognize that Standard & Poor's is one of the top bond-rating agencies. Their comment, and I'm going to table it at the appropriate time today: "The provincial government's conservative and prudent budgetary

practices, which seek to protect Alberta's strong financial performance against potential volatility in resource revenues, through the use of its fiscal sustainability fund and the capital account," accounts for Alberta enjoying the highest rating in this country, the highest rating that we can achieve. No, I will not apologize.

The Speaker: And we will have the document tabled at the appropriate time.

Mr. Eggen: Those funds have nothing to do with forecasting. It's a question of budgeting.

Again to the Minister of Finance: given that in the 2002-2003 budget the government miscalculated crude oil revenue by 150 per cent, in 2004-2005 off by 127 per cent, how can Albertans trust a government that allows such wide miscalculations and misrepresentations of revenue?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, you know, we use a very wide variety of forecasts by people who spend all of their time determining this. I find it interesting that the hon. member is being very specific to oil. Very specific to oil. In fact, when I did my first-quarter forecast, one of the first things that was said by a reporter was: well, Minister, I don't think anybody's going to talk to you today about lowballing gas prices. Isn't that interesting, how gas prices are lower? We're not talking about that. Oil prices are slightly higher.

The other thing the hon. member should understand is that that is why we do a quarterly update. We adjust those numbers, and we share them publicly. They are so transparent on a quarterly basis. Again, prudent fiscal management works, and we are the envy of this country for having dollars at the end of the year.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that this minister since 2002 miscalculated the natural gas revenues to the tune of \$10.4 billion, how is it possible, then, for ministries to make meaningful budget decisions when the amount of money available to this government goes up and down like a roller coaster within each financial year?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, I think that maybe I misunderstood the hon. member or he misspoke because it wasn't this minister that made that forecast in 2002. That's first. I like the results of 2002, but I can't take the credit for that.

Again, I've had the same opportunity that all members of this House have had since we left the Assembly earlier and now return. I do not find criticism from the public on prudent financial management. In fact, the public supports having a surplus. You know, an unbudgeted surplus is saying that in excess of the needs of servicing your services, you put that money aside, which we do in a capital account and in a sustainability account. Mr. Speaker, that's what every person strives for in their household. That's what every business strives for, to have more money than they need to spend at the end of the day. I don't think that Albertans are going to swallow what they hear over there, which is spend, spend, spend at any cost.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'm going to call upon the first of six to deal with Members' Statements today, but first of all a historical vignette.

Today's subject is the Mace. The first Sergeants-at-Arms were the bodyguards of King Richard I, and these soldiers were each armed with a spiked club called a mace. Over time the mace was no longer used as a weapon but, rather, became a symbol of the

authoritative power of the Crown as exercised by Parliament. Over time and by tradition the Assembly cannot sit without its presence.

The formal procession to bring in the Mace and announce the entrance of the Speaker was introduced in the 1970s by Alberta's eighth Speaker, the hon. Gerard Amerongen. The Mace is placed on the Assembly table with the head toward the government side of the House by the Sergeant-at-Arms, who is the official custodian of the Alberta Mace.

Alberta's first Mace was constructed for the First Session in 1906 out of plumbing parts, old shaving mug handles, butts of an old bedstead, and scraps of wood and covered by a coat of gold paint. For today and today only, it is displayed on the Assembly table in the centre of this Chamber. Normally it rests in the display case on the third floor of the Legislature Building. This makeshift Mace was used for 50 years before being replaced on February 9, 1956, when the Civil Service Association of Alberta presented the Legislative Assembly of Alberta with the new Mace.

The design for the new Mace, our present Mace, was done by Lawrence Bonheur Blain, an Edmonton watchmaker, patternmaker, and employee of Irving Kline Limited. The final design was done by the firm of Joseph Fray of Birmingham, England, and is the Mace, again, that allows this Assembly to sit today.

On top of the Mace is the figure of a beaver mounted on the traditional crown, representing the connection to Canada and the Crown. Both the royal coat of arms and the Canadian coat of arms are displayed on the ball of the Mace. Sheaves of wheat, representing Alberta's prairies, and wild roses, the floral emblem of Alberta, are engraved alternately on the crown. The headband of the crown is adorned with a ring of seven gems and semiprecious stones. They have been chosen in part because their initial letters spell out Alberta – amethyst with the A, lazurite with the L, bloodstone with the B, emerald with the E, ruby with the R, topaz with the T, and agate with the A. Two bison heads are positioned just below the bowl. The shaft of the Mace is decorated with wild roses and is capped with a sheaf of grain. The current Mace is three feet long, contains 5,669 grams of silver, and is overlaid with gold to weigh a total of approximately 11 kilograms. The total cost of the Mace in 1956 was \$3,000.

As part of our 100 years of the Alberta Legislative Assembly commemorations we have designed a special 100 years Mace pin, the first of which was presented to the hon. the Premier on the last day of the spring sitting. Today I'm pleased to provide all members and table officers with a 100 year Mace pin. One will also be provided to all former members, the Sergeant-at-Arms, and members of the Alberta Legislature press gallery. I hope that all will wear the pin with pride.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Protection of Individual Rights

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Democracy has flourished in Canada for nearly 140 years and in Alberta for over a century. Our democratic system has ensured peace, prosperity, and progress. The Canadian democratic system is built on a foundation of rights, including freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and freedom of conscience. These rights, that are enshrined for every single Canadian regardless of their race, religion, colour, or sex, require constant vigilance and diligence on the part of all Canadians, particularly on the part of those who have the honour of serving as representatives in a Legislature body.

Specifically, I am talking about the issues that have arisen from the legalization of same-sex marriage. This is a practice that contradicts the faith beliefs of many, and while it is important to protect the rights and freedoms of same-sex couples, it is also important to protect the rights of others. It is a matter of balance. We must ensure that rights are protected for all Canadians and not simply those who are the most vocal or organized. By insisting that all Canadians are guaranteed the basic right to express themselves and act according to their own values, beliefs, and religion, we are sending a message to the world that Canada is serious about protecting human rights for everyone.

I wholeheartedly support the efforts of the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View to ensure that the basic rights of every Canadian that are enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms are protected. By ensuring the basic rights of all, we are ensuring the democratic freedoms of Canada for generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

3:00

CFB Suffield

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For more than 35 years British Armed Forces have been using Canadian Forces Base Suffield, located 50 kilometres northwest of Medicine Hat, as a military training ground. Two hundred and fifty thousand British soldiers have gained mechanized warfare training at the CFB Suffield site, and at 2,690 square kilometres the base is one of the largest military training grounds in the western world. CFB Suffield is larger than all five other British training grounds in the world put together.

This summer, on July 24, a signing ceremony between Great Britain and the Department of National Defence Canada was held to mark the British Armed Forces' training in Canada agreement. The signing recognizes the renewal of the exchange of notes allowing British Armed Forces' training to continue within Canada and, in particular, CFB Suffield. This agreement is unique in that it does not require periodic renewal and is therefore to remain in force indefinitely. The signing is beneficial not only in showing Canada's support for the NATO Alliance and its members but also in its economic applications.

The continuation of British training in Canada, including training done at CFB Suffield, ensures economic gain for the constituents of Cypress-Medicine Hat, Medicine Hat, Albertans, and all Canadians. Not only are jobs created within and around the Suffield base due to the military's use of these grounds, but infrastructure and general spending provide economic benefits both to Canada and Alberta generally. Approximately \$90 million is gained in economic benefits by Canada every year from allowing the British military to train their soldiers within this country.

Mr. Speaker, the continuation of British Armed Forces' training in Alberta has numerous economic benefits for the province and for the people of southeastern Alberta. The July 24 signing ceremony was a positive one for Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Canadian Derby

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Northlands for its successful hosting of the 77th Canadian Derby this past Saturday. I had the pleasure of attending the derby, which is one of the richest and most prestigious

thoroughbred races in all of Canada, attracting many of the best three-year-old runners in the country. At \$300,000 in purse money for the second year in a row the purse was the highest it has ever been.

This year's Canadian Derby offered one of the strongest fields of horses, featuring such notable favourites as Edenwold, the Queen's Plate champion from Ontario; Shillelagh Slew, the Prince of Wales champion from Ontario; Halo Steven from California, who entered the derby on a winning streak; and Bear Character, who was a contender for running in the 2006 Kentucky Derby. At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, it was Shillelagh Slew who took home the winner's share of the \$300,000 purse, nearly \$190,000.

But the Canadian Derby is more than just a horse race, Mr. Speaker. It is also about celebrating a deep-rooted tradition. With over 12,000 people in attendance this past Saturday the racetrack was reminiscent of the Royal Ascot in England or the Kentucky Derby in Louisville. Women sported their most elegant derby hats, and the event was as much a social event as a sporting one.

I would encourage all members to join me in saluting Northlands for hosting another great Canadian Derby.

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

Progressive Conservative Leadership Campaign

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A new vision for Alberta. In November 2004 over 200,000 Tory party faithful, disillusioned by this government's lack of vision and accountability, stayed home. While government MLAs were basically banished from Edmonton, four rookie Liberals running in constituencies with postsecondary connections were embraced in Calgary and Lethbridge. You'd think this wake-up call would have shaken this government out of autopilot, but this wholesale majority rejection of the status quo came close to repeating itself when Conservative insiders failed to wholeheartedly endorse their leader at this year's spring convention. As the Friends of Ralph Klein, the FORKs, and knives clashed, former and at that time current government ministers tripped over each others' ambitions in a race to distance themselves from their past policy failures and collective guilt by association.

In the most recent poll the front-runner in the Tories' desperate race to reinvent themselves was only three percentage points ahead of the second-place contender, who in turn was only eight percentage points ahead of the pack of other has-beens and wannabes who were tied with 5 per cent each.

The passage of years has not dulled the memories of Albertans who remember all too well how the race's current front-runner forced hospital and school closures or how this parade of wannabe Premiers helped create today's vast infrastructure deficits, falsely justified in the name of debt reduction. The so-called short-term pain has yet to materialize into the long-term gain the front-runner and other Tories promised. Devoid of policy visions themselves, Conservative contenders are attempting to co-opt long-standing provincial Liberal policies such as fixed elections, all-party policy committees, royalty and deregulation reviews, and land-use strategies.

Simply transplanting another old face onto a tired Tory body will not result in the substantive changes Albertans are demanding. Albertans want more than watered-down, warmed-up status quo leftovers. They are hungry for real change, ready to order from a full course, all-inclusive Alberta Liberal government menu.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: I hate to interrupt this interesting conversation here, but I believe there are some regulations relevant to members' attire in this Chamber, and my previous speaker seems to be missing several important components thereof.

The Speaker: So I take it you're raising a point of order.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Correct.

The Speaker: We'll deal with it at the conclusion. We'll also sanction the hon. member for using the name of an hon. member in the Assembly when he clearly knows that he's not supposed to do that. Right? He knows that? The member knows that he's not supposed to do that?

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you.

The Speaker: So you did it deliberately?

Mr. Chase: No. I referred to the Friends of Ralph Klein.

The Speaker: Okay.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Early Childhood Education

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is unfortunate that many people still see publicly funded child care and early education as unfriendly to families, the state meddling in the nurseries of the nation. The history of early childhood education shows us something quite different. Italian pediatrician Maria Montessori founded schools for children whose families were challenged in providing the basics, and Friedrich Froebel, the founder of kindergarten, recognized that poverty could be emotional. His mother died when he was an infant, and his father was unable to provide the nurture Friedrich needed. Froebel developed the children's garden where education, care, and a constructive approach to life went hand in hand.

The city centre education project is an initiative of this kind. Funds from Children's Services supplemented Alberta Education in a three-year pilot for inner-city schools. These unique efforts have been very successful by all accounts. The city centre education project has become a national model for the power of education to positively transform children, families, and communities. It won the Premier's award for excellence in 2004 and was recognized in the magazine *Today's Parent* for providing effective and creative solutions to the complicated problems of inner-city children.

I know a man who taught in one of these schools. He told me of children who arrived with hands chapped and bleeding without mittens in subzero weather. He talked of the importance of a breakfast program for children who had none. It is essential that we do not see children's needs in isolation. Care and education are part of an inseparable whole, and I commend the ministries for working together here.

Now the funding from Children's Services has run its term but the program and need have not. There is no funding in place for the prekindergarten programs at Delton, Spruce Avenue, and Norwood schools. Now is the time to think beyond targets, deadlines, and deliverables to something larger. It is 180 years since Friedrich Froebel said that early childhood should be a garden. It is time to allow those seeds that he planted to grow and blossom.

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

Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I was proud to join members of the Harvie family, my colleagues, and the Minister of Community Development to announce the preservation of a valuable part of Alberta's natural landscape. The new Glenbow Ranch provincial park west of Calgary will encompass over 3,200 acres and 14 kilometres of the beautiful Bow River shoreline. This area is a treasure of rolling grasslands which includes the Glenbow quarry, from which the sandstone for this very building was mined, as well as ranchlands that have been in use for over a century.

The park was made possible thanks to the Harvie family, who had the vision to conserve this property and who took the initiative to ensure that their father's dream became a reality. This incredible stretch of land is an important part of our natural and our cultural heritage, and the new park will ensure that future generations of Albertans will have the opportunity to experience and enjoy our history and our diverse landscape.

3:10

As Tim Harvie stated in his address, anyone who . . . ventured the length of the valley to witness the fragile biodiversity, the sharp coulees, the sandstone outcroppings, the fresh water springs, and the wildlife that inhabits this land, has seen the value in ensuring this natural beauty remains intact.

I am sure that all members of this House agree, and, Mr. Speaker, I ask that they now join me in thanking the Harvie family for sharing their dream and allowing the province to invest in a property that will well preserve and protect a part of our Alberta history.

Thank you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling 218 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.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to submit a petition signed by 196 concerned citizens from the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora, which reads, "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to take measures to control unacceptable increases in rent."

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a petition from a number of Albertans that reads, "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to consider increasing funding in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased."

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition on a proposed Standing Order 30.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 30 I wish to give notice that at an appropriate time I intend to move that the ordinary business of the Assembly be adjourned in order that we may hold an emergency debate on a matter of urgent public importance; namely,

the mounting risk to pending and future investments in Alberta oil sands, the potential loss of public royalty revenues, and the diminishing ability of local authorities to cope due to the failure of the government to plan and provide funding for the necessary public infrastructure and community services in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo.

The Speaker: Okay. We will deal with it at the conclusion of Routine.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 30 I want to bring in for this debate:

Be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely that the failure of the government to develop an affordable housing strategy has exacerbated housing shortages, causing rapidly increasing rental rates, homelessness, and unsafe tenancies across Alberta and that the Assembly should urge the government to immediately create a ministry of housing to address this crisis.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. It will be dealt with at the conclusion of Routine.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance I rise to table five copies of the Standard & Poor's document that she referenced during question period today while responding to questions from one or more hon. members opposite regarding budgetary practices.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first tabling today is a handwritten letter dated August 21, 2006, from Edmonton-McClung constituent Ms Sherry Eastwood, recounting her experience with Alberta Blue Cross in transporting her father to Norwood extended care, which is across the street from and linked with a tunnel to the Royal Alexandra hospital, and having to pay for the ambulance drive because Norwood is not considered an active treatment facility. She asks how those rules are arrived at and urges as much attention to seniors as is afforded other sectors, especially in these boom times.

My second tabling is an e-mail dated August 17, 2006, from Dr. Chris Evans, who is an emergency room physician and another Edmonton-McClung constituent, talking about some of the homeless patients he sees who can definitely work but feel that potential employers get turned off when they find out they have no place to live. He also talks about social services and that we should be looking at ways to help these guys get roofs over their heads so they can focus on going out and looking for work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I have on my list Lethbridge-East, Edmonton-Centre, Edmonton-Ellerslie. Are there more? Okay, we'll go up and down the line then.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre first.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. They are all in opposition to Bill 208. The first is from David Cournoyer, who voices his opposition and notes that nothing is acceptable to him in this bill.

The second is from Jason Rumer, a constituent deeply opposed to Bill 208, who would like to see the bill defeated.

Finally, from Gary Simpson, who is also very opposed to the bill and goes into some detail on the arguments against it.

Thank you very much.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a letter to myself from Kent Cameron expressing concerns about the funding of the city centre education program and explaining his views on the considerable value of early intervention programs like this. I have the five copies with it.

My other letter is from constituent Matthew Tang, asking that I table this letter, where he is expressing concerns about the possibility of Bill 208 passing. He is concerned that this bill does nothing more than protect discrimination.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the leader of the NDP I would like to table a document referred to in question period today. There's an article by Michelle Lang in which she writes, "The minister said the province would run the risk of criticism by introducing the complex act this late in the spring session of the legislature."

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling 18 letters in the required five copies. They are from Burke Babki, Wayne Dudley, Rodney Barrows, Kara Koop, Boyd Sorrel Horse, Kent Pedersen, Billy Wolf Child, Shannon Kehler, Daniel Wright, Melody Scout, Leah Williams, F. Torrento, Joe Groeneweg, Meghan Mulloy, Colin Gray, Donna Tarnava, Danielle Petersen, and Kelly Shaver. They are or work with persons with developmental disabilities. They are asking this government to please raise their wages because they are losing their staff to the local doughnut shop. Their question is: which is more important, doughnuts or vulnerable people?

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the residents of Alberta I would like to table a petition which has been disallowed by Parliamentary Counsel for some reason, urging the government of Alberta to "establish a system whereby the housing development in Edmonton includes one and two bedroom bungalows or apartment complexes with elevators so that seniors or war veterans can either buy or rent at affordable prices." Many low-income seniors and veterans "have some medical problems and want to maintain their independence."

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings today, and they're all in relation to the upcoming debate on

Bill 208. The first is from a constituent, Julie Chow, asking me to convey to this Assembly her support of Bill 208.

All of the others, Mr. Speaker, are asking that Bill 208 be defeated. They are from Nancy Steeves, Mrs. Mieke Wharton, Lesley Mitchell, Pat Seale, Thais McKee, Bob Hetherington, Chris and Kathy Power, Anne McCracken, Steve Cymbol, Dawn Waring, Gerri Young, Lois Evans, Daniel Langdon, Margaret Hetherington, and Claudette Esterine.

I'd just like to point out a couple of concerns from that last letter by Claudette Esterine. She indicates that she is also a person of colour and a person from an identifiable cultural group, where she has suffered discrimination for those two conditions, if I can call it that, and is concerned that if Bill 208 were to allow discrimination based on her sexual orientation, then where does it stop, and would it not also extend to those other conditions?

Thank you.

head: 3:20 **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, pursuant to the Agriculture Financial Services Act the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation annual report 2005-2006.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**
Committee of Supply Voting

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a point of order, we have two Standing Order 30s, and we have one procedural matter that I have to clarify with the House. On the assumption that, in fact, a Standing Order 30 might actually get approved today, that would negate, then, the opportunity to deal with the point of order or the little draft ruling. So I think we'll deal with the draft ruling, then we'll deal with the point of order, and then we'll go to the first Standing Order 30.

Government House leaders, in fact, I would specifically draw this matter to you. If you would take a look at Standing Orders 61(1) and 62(1) and (2), that would be helpful in terms of what I'm going to say because this is a situation that to our knowledge has never been the subject of a ruling by the chair before.

Under Standing Order 2 the Speaker is to decide upon the procedure in all unprovided for contingencies. The chair is making a statement at this time under this standing order so as to remove any uncertainty about the proceedings in committee this evening. Essentially, the chair must find a way so that there is not a conflict between two standing order provisions that come into play because we are considering estimates in Committee of Supply on a Monday night. Under Standing Order 61(1) for consideration of estimates to constitute a sitting day, the Committee of Supply must consider the estimates for a minimum of two hours any afternoon or any evening. Under Government Motion 25, that was approved by the Assembly last Thursday, the number of days that the Committee of Supply is being called to consider supplementary supply is two days.

Under Standing Order 62(2) the requirement is that on the last day of estimates consideration by the committee the chair is to interrupt 15 minutes before the normal adjournment hour and "put a single question proposing the approval of all matters not yet voted on." The normal adjournment hour tonight according to Standing Order 62(1) is 11 o'clock. So the chair should interrupt at 10:45. The problem is that this would mean there would not have been two hours spent on the estimates, so it wouldn't qualify as a sitting day.

This issue has never arisen before. In an attempt to interpret the

Standing Orders so that there is no contradiction, the chair has spent some considerable amount of time looking at this in the last several days and interprets them so that at the conclusion of two hours or if there is no member who wishes to speak before that time, the chair will put a single question on the supplementary supply estimates as required under Standing Order 62(2).

Now, all of this is premised on the fact that the Committee of Supply will start its consideration after 8:45 this evening. If Committee of Supply somehow were to start by 8:45, the two-hour thing that would come up by quarter to eleven would not be a consideration. But one is assuming that the full 60 minutes will be spent on the motion and that the Assembly in committee will not deal with this matter until at least 9 o'clock to 9:05 o'clock, which if you meant 120 minutes later, then in essence you have to deal with the vote between 11 and 11:05, and you could not apply Standing Order 62(2), which says it would come in by 10:45 to preclude the full two hours. Clear? Okay. Very good.

Point of Order
Dress Code in the Chamber

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. Point of order.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the drafters of *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* were kind to us and have provided for the situation where at times when we can't listen to each other, at least we can look at each other and have mandated all male members of this gallery to be wearing a jacket and a tie. I'm referencing section 330 of *Beauchesne's*. As I attempted to listen to the Member for Calgary-Varsity, I know that either his necktie appears to be absent or is covered by a shirt which may be wearing a slogan. I would like a speaker's ruling on it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. Point of order.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Yes, I would like to respond to the point of order that's been raised by the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. I note that section 329 of *Beauchesne* does set out what a member must wear, and that is a jacket, a tie, and a shirt.

That again is referred to in section 330. Now, it does specifically in section 330 indicate that a turtleneck is not an acceptable upper-body covering, that the shirt and tie are obviously required. But what *Beauchesne* does not lay out are additional garments that male members of this House may choose to wear. For example, it doesn't include a prohibition nor does it specifically ask that members be wearing a vest, which is quite a common garment that many gentlemen wear with a three-piece suit. It's also silent on, perhaps, a scarf. It gets a little chilly in here at nights, and I myself sometimes add a scarf or a shawl to what I'm wearing. So I don't believe this member has raised a valid point of order.

My hon. colleague for Calgary-Varsity has, in fact, a shirt, a tie, and a jacket on today. He has an additional piece of clothing on, but that is not prohibited by the Standing Orders and by the rules of *Beauchesne* under which we're operating. So I would argue that there is no point of order here.

Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, these are rather sexist Standing Orders and *Beauchesne* rulings that we operate under in that they are silent on the apparel of women. They are specific to the apparel of men. In this case we are talking about a man, and he has met the conditions that are set out.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Does anybody else want to participate on this point of order?

Hon. members, let me make this very, very clear. For 10 years now this is one subject that this Speaker has consistently avoided making any comment on, and there's a reason for that. If hon. members would look at the letter dated February 15, 2006, to all Members of the Legislative Assembly dealing with decorum in the House, there is one line that says, "suitable dress is always the order of the day and traditional practices will be continued." That pretty much clears the air on everything.

We may have *Beauchesne*, and we may have everything else in there, but traditional practice for gentlemen is generally a jacket and a tie. Listen, I've had notes from people telling me: you can't allow her – now, that's certainly sexist. "That skirt's way too short. She's not wearing a bra." I've had women send me notes saying: that member isn't wearing a bra.

Well, let me tell you that I'm not touching any of this stuff, okay? I refuse to touch any of this stuff. I'm not going to give a ruling on any of this stuff. I just want you to be neat, attentive, with proper decorum, that your mother would be proud if she saw you here and that she would expect. Talk to your mother about what you should wear, not to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

As far as I can see, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity does have a tie. It may only be an inch and a half. I have no idea what other insulation he has with respect to himself. If he finds it cool in the Assembly, so be it. Please, I'm not getting involved in this. If you want to have a committee of this Legislative Assembly to deal with the dress code, I'd be happy to secure names from all parties to deal with this.

You all look very, very nice. Thank you very much.

head: **Request for Emergency Debate**

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Infrastructure Needs in Wood Buffalo RM

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your wisdom and those comments. Nice move.

I'm rising today to propose the following motion under Standing Order 30.

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 mounting risk to pending and future investments in Alberta's oil sands, the potential loss of public royalty revenues, and the diminishing ability of local authorities to cope due to the failure of the government to plan and provide funding for the necessary public infrastructure and community services in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo.

3:30

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm well aware of how carefully you attend to these arguments, and you've pointed out many times that *Beauchesne* 387 and 389 indicate that the primary issue is the urgency of debate, specifically whether there is another opportunity for debate. But briefly establishing the importance of the underlying issue must certainly be part of the argument in favour of the request for leave as envisioned by Standing Order 30. So while the test for the motion is primarily procedural – namely, whether there are other reasonable opportunities for debate – the motion must also pass this basic test of importance, and I want to speak to that briefly. *Marleau and Montpetit* 584 also comment on this.

Basically, I want to demonstrate that this is a matter of urgent public importance. This is an emergency calling for immediate and urgent consideration. This is a specific issue within the administra-

tive competence of this government. This is not a chronic issue unless a failure of the government to address the issue is chronic. This is something specific, something that can be solved with an immediate commitment from this government.

I want to show that the public interest will suffer if it's not addressed. There is a risk to billions of dollars in investment and royalty revenues, and there is a risk to local authorities who are by their own admission in a crisis mode in relation to hospitals, mental health services, education services, water treatment, transportation, and infrastructure, and the list goes on, Mr. Speaker.

Finally, this issue is immediately relevant and of concern throughout Alberta and even beyond, throughout the nation. The recent EUB hearings and associated media coverage, which was very extensive, demonstrate this.

So, first, perhaps most importantly, let me say that this issue is critically important to the citizens of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. The actions and inactions of this government have produced a crisis situation for that community. The municipality's intervention, unprecedented I believe, at the EUB hearings in Fort McMurray indicates that very clearly.

The local authorities, the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, and the health authority, and the school boards simply cannot continue to provide the necessary public services, including health care, education, policing, and other human services as well as water, roads, housing, recreation, et cetera. They cannot support existing or new projects without immediate action by this government. Last-minute, politically driven rhetoric will simply not suffice. The municipality says that public facilities and infrastructure are under, and I quote, severe strain. There's a serious, profound infrastructure deficit, something that makes it impossible to support new expansions. Numerous new projects and expansions are planned over the next few years, possibly a hundred billion dollars or more over the next decade, and the strains as a result will only grow.

The rate of growth in Fort McMurray is so serious that, and I quote here, it puts the corporation at risk. Those are the words of the regional municipality. Now, the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo is already \$263 million in debt, I believe, per capita, the most deep debt of any municipality in Alberta and way beyond, and it needs at least \$2 billion to expand city services. The government's commitment to date is simply insufficient.

Mr. Speaker, the Municipal Government Act states:

- 3 The purposes of a municipality are
 - (a) to provide good government,
 - (b) to provide services, facilities or other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary or desirable for all or a part of the municipality, and
 - (c) to develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

Those are the purposes of a municipality in law. The municipality feels that it may not be able to continue those. This is not the fault of the regional municipality. They are struggling to fulfill their legislative responsibilities by insisting on adequate support.

The negative impact of growth is something that Suncor acknowledges, and it further acknowledges that these problems may worsen without immediate action by the parties with direct responsibility. The municipality there further claims that there are, quote, insufficient mechanisms available to provide for the municipality's needs in a timely fashion. End quote. In other words, we need to take extraordinary measures now to solve this problem.

The municipality also notes that prior approvals granted on the basis of promises to mitigate negative socioeconomic impacts have not been followed through by adequate action by government. They have not lived up to their promises. Current funding formulas are obviously and painfully inadequate. In short, there is currently no

regular process or mechanism to solve this situation. We need, in other words, emergency action. The fact that the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo has openly challenged the new proposal before the EUB indicates that the funding and infrastructure crisis has tipped the scale away from the public interest. Other communities, from Cold Lake to Grande Prairie, may well follow suit. The stakes are, Mr. Speaker, very high.

Another urgent reason is the threat to both the loss of investment and the threat to the provincial royalty revenue stream. This government has charted a budgetary course that has increased Alberta's direct dependence on nonrenewable resource revenues and the investments that drive them. Essential programs across this province depend on a stable investment environment, including the assurance that the host community can support these long-term projects.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, I've worked hard here to establish that essential services across this province are dependent, indeed disturbingly dependent, on these revenues from the oil sands. Secondly, we've established that the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo is in a crisis situation that requires immediate and urgent consideration if future oil sands developments are to go ahead. This government is pitting the health and well-being of the community members against the public interest to find more and more development and investment. The EUB hearings clearly show this conflict is unsustainable.

So, Mr. Speaker, we've established that this is a critical issue, an emergency requiring urgent consideration. It's a specific issue within the administrative competence of this government, and the public interest will suffer if the issue is not addressed. Finally, it's immediately relevant and of concern throughout the whole province. The Minister of Environment's unprecedented intervention at the hearings, though he apparently only appeared as a local MLA, is itself evidence of how crucial the issue is.

As *Beauchesne* 387 and 389 indicate, the most critical issue is whether we are to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly and debate this. The key tests are whether the rules of the House provide another opportunity. Well, Mr. Speaker, first, there are no government bills on the Order Paper that deal with energy issues. In fact, there are no government bills relevant to this at all. The only private members' bills do not address the issue. There are no private bills that touch on this, and the only motion being debated has nothing to do with energy or oil sands development. There are no written questions currently due for discussion that deal with this issue. There are no motions for returns requesting information that may help this issue move forward. We are receiving no committee or government reports that provide an opportunity to debate the issue, and any other tools, such as private members' statements or other debates, are not available.

As *Beauchesne* 387 says, the test is whether there is, quote, another opportunity for debate. End quote. Clearly, there isn't. *Beauchesne* 390 says that the test is not whether the issue can be raised but whether it can be discussed, and it clearly can't be unless we have an emergency debate, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period is also clearly not a proper forum for discussion. Finally and most critically, the supplementary estimates before this House do not specifically address the funding and infrastructure crisis facing Fort McMurray. Given the recent EUB hearings and the calls for action by local authorities, this is indeed troubling. Where is the government's action?

So, Mr. Speaker, I believe that this Assembly needs to send a clear signal to the citizens of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, to Albertans, and indeed to other Canadians and investors from around the world that the fears already being voiced by industry will

not necessarily be realized because this Assembly, this government is prepared to act. I would love to see this government act.

I've demonstrated, I believe, Mr. Speaker, both the significance of the issue itself and the urgency of debate. I would therefore ask you to find that a prima facie case for urgency has been made and that you put the question of whether to proceed with the debate to the Assembly as called for in Standing Order 30.

Thank you.

3:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 30 provisions allow for the chair to recognize participants, so could the chair get an idea – the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, and that's it then? [interjection] The hon. leader of the third party and the hon. Minister of Environment. Okay. Remember now that urgency is the only subject the chair is prepared to entertain. This is not a debate on the motion.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your words of wisdom with respect to the nature of the debate regarding the motion at this particular point. The hon. Leader of the Opposition did however spend some considerable time outlining his idea of the substance of the importance of the debate per se as opposed to the procedural situation. I would with your indulgence make a couple of comments with respect to that, but I would certainly agree that the fundamental issue with respect to this particular type of motion is whether or not there are other reasonable opportunities to address the debate. So what I will do is make a few comments on the former and then finish with the procedural side of the response.

First of all, I would agree, Mr. Speaker, that issues relative to oil sands, issues with respect to Fort McMurray and the growth associated with all of that are indeed very important. Indeed, they are a very large part of what Alberta is about today in terms of revenue, in terms of where dollars are expended, so there is no doubt about the importance of the matter. I would however disagree with respect to the critical and urgent need to have the matters set aside this afternoon for a discussion.

There is a great deal that is going on relative to this. There were questions today posed by the opposition which provided answers, to the extent there were questions, as to what is in fact being done by this government with respect to the points raised, but there's a great deal more than that. For example, in terms of infrastructure there is some \$680 million that has been budgeted for the work with respect to highway 63. There's an additional \$225 million, I believe, that has been budgeted with respect to highway construction in the Fort McMurray area other than highway 63 that is either being done or about to be done this year. So those are large sums of money, and I throw that forward as part of the matrix simply to indicate that here is a substantial amount of money in one particular ministry that is already committed from a budgeted perspective. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there is an additional \$260 million that is committed but not yet budgeted; in other words, to be done, say, next year in the next budget period.

We talked about the oil sands ministerial committee today in question period. We talked about the work that other committees are doing relative to consultation for land use, oil sands consultation, and so on and so forth. All of those things are being done, and they are going to be done in the fullness of time.

As it relates, however, to the procedural aspect, Mr. Speaker, this particular session is all about supplementary estimates. The debate on Thursday afternoon in large measure turned around that. Tonight

it will turn around that. Tomorrow afternoon, tomorrow evening, Wednesday afternoon, Wednesday evening, and Thursday afternoon we are going to be debating the supplementary estimates. There are 15 ministries that are associated with that, not all of them ministries, but the fact is that it embeds within that discussion the revenue assumptions of this government. It embeds where the money should be spent, where the money is not being spent. It embeds in that a certain portion of money that is being spent in Fort McMurray. Given the nature of relevancy in this Assembly – that is, that it is a flexible term, which the opposition fully understand and use at every opportunity – I would respectfully submit, Mr. Speaker, that the opposition have the opportunity and indeed will take the opportunity this evening, tomorrow afternoon, tomorrow evening, Wednesday afternoon, Wednesday evening, and Thursday afternoon to debate this issue should they wish.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party and the hon. Minister of Environment, briefly.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I note that an SO 30 application allows for a debate on a matter of urgent public importance, and the Speaker must rule that the debate is in order and put the question to the Assembly, so I ask that you do that.

The point, I think, that is made by this resolution is that the government does not have a strategy for the orderly growth of our province. It talks specifically about Fort McMurray, but in doing so, it talks about the orderly growth of the province as it relates to oil sands development. As a result, there are a number of interrelated crises which are emergent, which warrant urgent consideration by this Assembly and, in our view, are certainly a matter of urgent public importance.

The NDP opposition has called for a government commission to be established to look at all aspects of the tar sands. We've got no response from the government on that.

The MLA from Wood Buffalo himself appeared before the EUB in an unprecedented appearance to call for additional funding for infrastructure for his constituency, notwithstanding the fact that he'd been a part of this government for a number of years.

The procedure, Mr. Speaker, at *Beauchesne* 387 says that a debate under the standing order must deal with a specific question that requires urgent consideration. It must be "within the administrative competence of the Government and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate."

The Minister of Justice and House leader has argued that the supplementary estimates provide that opportunity. It's our submission, Mr. Speaker, that they do not. They are fragmented, piecemeal program funding that do not address the fundamental question of the government's support for the growth in the oil sands and specifically the question of oil sands development. This is within the competence of the Minister of Energy broadly, but it also has important considerations in Health and Wellness, Municipal Affairs, and Infrastructure and Transportation. Those supplementary estimates do not provide a reasonable opportunity to deal comprehensively with this issue and specifically on the focus of Fort McMurray.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to refer to *Beauchesne's* 391 and note that this question is not under adjudication in a court of law. *Marleau and Montpetit* on page 587 and *Beauchesne's* 391 tell us that the matter should not be elsewhere on the Order Paper. It is not. It is a recurrent theme that we are here to debate some very specific estimates, but there is very little time even to do that.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the mayor of Fort McMurray has been very clear in her position that the current pace of development in the oil sands is completely unsustainable. If there is no strategy put into place, Alberta's fastest growing city could crack under the strain.

Further, the economic distortions being caused by the government's cowboy economics are causing significant ripples throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that the New Democrat opposition is in support of the call for a debate on this issue. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the issue of urgency and also under *Beauchesne* 387 and 389, which has been referenced by the third party as well as the Leader of the Opposition, I came to Alberta almost 30 years ago, and under this urgency I came and made Fort McMurray my home. In fact, I have the honour and privilege of saying that I was the first mayor of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, with the support and the privilege that the people of Wood Buffalo offered me.

Mr. Speaker, on this issue of urgency I just remind the hon. members that close to a billion dollars, which is not in supplementary estimates tonight – in actual fact . . . [interjections] I'd ask the hon. members to please listen through the chair because I'm trying to make important points representing my citizens, no different than what you do representing yours.

But the relevance to this is simply the urgency in terms of what we are doing. Under urgency, a citizen said to me the other day: Guy, there is not one piece of road in Fort McMurray that isn't being ripped up by the province of Alberta in its money in terms of the billion dollars that's being spent there.

Is this an urgent issue? No, it is not, Mr. Speaker. Therefore, I do not support under urgency what is being suggested here this afternoon.

3:50

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, it's Monday afternoon, generally allocated for private members' day, so I appreciate very much receiving a copy of this notice of Standing Order 30 a number of days ago. It certainly allowed us an opportunity to review where we were. So I am prepared to rule on whether the request for leave for this motion of receipt is in order under Standing Order 30(2).

First of all, again to repeat that the Leader of the Official Opposition certainly gave proper notice of intention to bring a motion under Standing Order 30. Notice was received by my office last Friday at 10:24 a.m., so it gave us plenty of time, and that certainly met the requirement.

Secondly, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed can be put to the Assembly, the chair must determine whether the motion fulfills the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that the matter proposed for discussion relates to "a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." The member's proposed motion is to hold an emergency debate on the following:

The mounting risk to pending and future investments in Alberta's oil sands, the potential loss of public royalty revenues, and the diminishing ability of local authorities to cope due to the failure of the government to plan and provide funding for the necessary public infrastructure and community services in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo.

Again, very correctly the relevant parliamentary authorities on the topic of emergency debate are *Beauchesne's* paragraphs 387, 398 and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* pages 587 to 589. The key principles are that the matter must pertain to a genuine emergency and there must not be another opportunity for members to discuss the matter.

The chair also listened closely and attentively to the submissions made, and there's no doubt at all in the chair's view that this is

considered by some to be a very serious matter. It's also true, though, that we will have a bill during this session called the Appropriation Act, that is scheduled for consideration, scheduled for discussion, and there will be opportunity – whenever there's a bill before the House, the bill provides for the greatest latitude with respect to debate and discussion. It even affords for amendments. So there is that one issue.

The chair is also just a little concerned about a couple of other things. The hon. leader of the third party is quite prepared to waive his Standing Order 30 by making an argument that this Standing Order 30 is much more important. So we'll await with considerable interest to see what the hon. member will be saying with respect to the next urgent matter, which is housing, when the arguments were made very, very enthusiastically for this one to be of greater concern.

Secondly, virtually all members of the Official Opposition today – and today was an abnormal day in terms of introduction of guests and visitors – said that they were introducing visitors who were present to hear debate on Bill 208. Well, the chair is perhaps a little confused, because under *Beauchesne* 387 it says, "In making his ruling, the Speaker may, on occasion, take into account the general wish of the House to have a debate." Well, if so many members were here today to introduce guests who apparently were invited to see or hear a debate on Bill 208 and then members would come in with an emergency motion for debate, that would preclude an opportunity for this emergency debate. The chair is sometimes a little unsure of what he really hears.

So the ruling is very clear. The request for leave, despite the fact this is an interesting subject, is not in order, and the chair will not put the question.

The hon. Member for Edmonton Beverly-Clareview.

Affordable Housing Strategy

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the point is that Bill 208 is to be opposed no matter how.

I would like to move the following:

Be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely that the failure of the government to develop an affordable housing strategy has exacerbated housing shortages, causing rapidly increasing rental rates, homelessness, and unsafe tenancies across Alberta and that the Assembly should urge the government to immediately create a ministry of housing to address this crisis.

Mr. Speaker, you've already indicated that we distributed this order to your office about 10, well before the prescribed deadline of 11:30, as laid out in Standing Order 30(1).

Beauchesne 387 says that a debate under the Standing Order must deal with a specific question that requires urgent consideration. It must be "within the administrative competence of the Government and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate." Mr. Speaker, we're calling for a very specific action in this motion; namely, the creation of a ministry of housing. This is clearly within the administrative competence of the government. In fact, it's entirely under the prerogative of the Premier and Executive Council. Because creating ministries is undertaken by the government and not the Assembly, we have very little opportunity other than a debate such as this to discuss why such a ministry is so important.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to refer to *Beauchesne* 391 and note that housing crisis is not under adjudication by a court of law, and I would stress that there is no other opportunity to debate this matter. *Marleau and Montpetit* suggest the same criteria on page 587. In particular, although we are here to spend over \$1 billion in the next

few days, not one red cent has been allocated to the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports or to Government Services, the two ministries best positioned to address housing issues.

Marleau and Montpetit 588 also set the following criteria: the motion cannot "raise a question of privilege." Clearly this motion does not. The motion should not be of regional or local interest or related to only one specific group or industry. This crisis is affecting Albertans across the province, Mr. Speaker.

I think we've met the procedural requirements on this motion, so the question, then, is whether it is a matter of urgent public importance.

Mr. Speaker, over the summer we have heard of people living in tents in places such as Canmore and Fort McMurray because housing costs are grossly disproportionate to their wages. Earlier this week mayors from seven communities made a plea for housing support. They identified a need to deal with the homeless, for \$20 million to resolve this crisis. The 2006 count of homeless persons found 3,436 homeless people in Calgary. There have been media reports of rental increases in Calgary as high as \$1,000 per month. Average rent in Fort McMurray is \$1,500 per month for a two-bedroom apartment.

In the city of Edmonton the Boyle Street community services centre began a program to reach out to the estimated 200 to 600 people living in the river valley, many of whom are working but cannot afford housing. I have received heart-wrenching letters from constituents who are in very precarious housing situations. We mentioned that one Edmonton woman, a single parent, has been given rent increases of \$300 in just a few months.

Just today we heard from Reverend Keith Loewen, who works with CUPS Community Health Centre in Calgary. He is seeking help for a 63-year-old man who is disabled and living on a fixed federal pension and provincial social services. His rent is increasing almost a hundred dollars in one month. That means almost 90 per cent of his income must go to paying rent.

Mr. Speaker, we have a crisis in this province, and I can't think of anything more relevant than to debate the lack of a housing plan in this province. I would remind that after this session we probably will not be back here until February, and things are going to get worse before they get better. There's absolutely no doubt about that. So I would suggest to you that I think that this is a prima facie case of something that is urgent in all aspects, because we can't afford to go the way we're going. Thousands of people are suffering.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Is there a government spokesman on this particular thing? The hon. minister, the Official Opposition, and then shall we bring it to a head? Okay. The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports on the urgency.

4:00

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to respond to the motion pursuant to Standing Order 30 that has been raised by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. This is a very important issue, Mr. Speaker. As the minister responsible for housing programs for low-income Albertans – and that's this ministry; there is one: Seniors and Community Supports.

In responding to the issue of urgency, I know, as we said earlier, that there is unprecedented growth in Alberta. It's increased the demand for housing throughout the province. I'm hoping that you'll consider that the motion should have accurate information in it if it is going to be addressed on an urgent basis. I'd like to just let you know that it's inaccurate to suggest that the government is somehow

responsible for increasing rents and the demand for housing in Alberta, and it's also inaccurate to suggest that we do not have an affordable housing strategy. You're absolutely right, Mr. Speaker, from your previous ruling. The substance is inaccurate in this motion. I was a backbencher just recently, and I know how important private members' day is and how important it is that we're allowed as private members to put our information forward. This takes away from that for private members today, especially to base it on inaccuracy.

We do have a strategy in our business plan, Mr. Speaker. We have two goals, nine strategies, and five performance measures in our plan. It's available on the website. We continue to develop those strategies to meet housing. We have 113 staff members who work very hard, using their annual budget of \$171 million, to implement the strategies to address homelessness and affordable housing. Our efforts include what was mentioned as the whole continuum of housing, from homeless shelters to rent subsidies and affordable housing for low- to moderate-income people. We care deeply about looking after that area for Albertans.

So I'm going to submit that this debate, I think, should be dealt with, hopefully, in your ruling as was the previous motion 30 for the same reasons that you outlined in your ruling. I don't think that this motion really deserves to be holding up the time of the Assembly for what's been put forward today because it can be debated further this week as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on the point of urgency.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm speaking in support of the Standing Order 30 that has been brought forward on developing an affordable housing strategy, particularly around rental rates, homelessness, and unsafe tenancies. My hon. colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has gone through some of the arguments. I think we're always looking at two things in these arguments. One is the importance of the issue, and the second is the urgency of debating it now, today, as compared to some point in the future, what makes it an urgent debate now.

There is no question that the issue of housing and homelessness is rising up both on the actual thermometer of dire circumstances but also in the public's perception, who are becoming more concerned about this, and the increasing calls from the public to do something about this even if they are not personally involved, and that's reflected in increasing newspaper articles and letters to the editor. The point I'm trying to make here is that there is a progression of the issue.

Is the issue important? Yes, of course, especially when we look at some of the numbers that are coming forward to us. Fort McMurray: we've already mentioned that the Sally Ann shelter there was turning away around 30 people a night last year in the fall, and that's up considerably now. So how many people could they be turning away this October or November? That becomes a very important issue, both for the individuals who are facing that particular situation themselves but also as a larger issue for the municipality there and, I think, for the province overall.

In Edmonton our homeless count went up from the one that I did in 2000, which was around 1,100 people. The last time it was done, in 2004, it was over 2,000. So it pretty much doubled in four years. Again, we're seeing a progression there. Lethbridge: in their Women's Emergency Shelter they were turning away as many women and their children as they were able to offer shelter to. In Red Deer the People's Place shelter experienced an increase in both length of stay and number of guests and, again, turning away people

at an unprecedented number. My colleague has already talked about Calgary numbers. In Grande Prairie the street outreach and support van assisted 20 to 25 individuals per night last year, and 20 to 25 camps are assisted each night this year. So that's going from an individual to a collection of individuals already. So I argue that the tests for importance have been met.

Are there other opportunities for debate? The minister in charge has indicated that there are, but again, Mr. Speaker, we are charged in this particular sitting – the only business in front of us is that of Committee of Supply and then an appropriation bill in which we are debating some 15 different ministries, each requesting varying amounts of money to a total of \$1.4 billion. The concentration and the focus there is on the expenditure of money for specific requests. It's not an open debate on housing and homelessness in Alberta, and neither would the Speaker be very pleased with us if we turned that debate into such a thing. There is a time and a place for everything, and we are not being offered the opportunity to debate this issue during this sitting, which is why you have a request for an emergency debate in front of you.

Certainly, there's no throne speech that we could look upon, no government bill, no private member's bill, no private member's public bill or private bill, no government motions, no motions other than government motions. So our opportunities for debate are nonexistent on this issue. Oral Question Period, as the Speaker has often pointed out, is not an opportunity for debate. The written questions and motions for returns that we are looking forward to being able to put forward later this afternoon: none of them at this point are anticipating the issue of homelessness and housing and shelter because, of course, those written questions and motions for returns were submitted somewhere back in the spring. Any motion for a return or written question submitted today would not come up for three weeks if we continued to sit. So our opportunity to debate this issue as compared to actually just raising it is severely limited, and that's why I'm supporting the request to follow through.

Now, taking into consideration the Speaker's careful consideration of the previous request for an emergency debate and his reasoning against it, you know, I do defend my colleagues because I did listen carefully to the introductions of people that were with us in the gallery. In fact, a number of my colleagues said that people were here in opposition to a particular bill that was named but did not specifically state that people had come here to watch a debate. They said that they were opposed to it. They said . . . [interjection] Well, check the *Hansard*. Be specific about this. Check the *Hansard* and see what people actually said. Don't assume these things.

So I think that for clarification purposes I'll add that in as a defence of what we're trying to achieve with this Standing Order 30. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

The Speaker: The chair has already made comments earlier with respect to the previous Standing Order 30. One is the recognition of the hon. member for providing the standing order application within the time frame that was required. It was very much appreciated.

The chair recognizes that this is without any doubt a considerable matter. The chair is not sure that he can distinguish in his mind if it's more important than the situation last Thursday or three months ago. However, there's one thing in the motion that is rather interesting. It's the last number of lines in the motion: "to immediately create a ministry of housing to address this crisis." Yet Standing Order 30(6) indicates that "an emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly." There is a decision being requested. It's a serious matter. Standing Order 30 says a certain thing. The chair's conclusion, very briefly, is that the request for leave is not in order, and the chair will not put the question.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**
Private Members' Business

The Speaker: Now, hon. members, before I call Orders of the Day, I would like to make a couple of comments. I have observed with a great deal of interest what is happening on private members' day. The chair has indicated on numerous occasions in the last number of years that the chair would do everything possible to protect the integrity of private members and private members' day from a tyranny that might come from the government. Such has not been the case. It may be a tyranny of the Assembly against private members. There is a very limited amount of time in this schedule that we have in this Parliament in the province of Alberta that is allocated for private members' business. It has been relegated now to one day per week, and it's Monday.

4:10

To me one of the outstanding positives about this Legislative Assembly which makes it so different from every other Legislative Assembly in the British parliamentary mode – when members go and meet with other parliamentarians from other countries and other jurisdictions, even in Canada, they can't believe the opportunity for private members to actually stand up and advance something and do something. When the reforms were made in 1993, they were governed to providing this opportunity for private members to basically advocate for something. In fact, if you were to go and ask the citizens of Alberta, if they elected an MLA, most of them would say: we encourage you to go to Edmonton and introduce a bill and try and get it through.

Now, in that short time frame that we have, there's only so much time allocated. There's no hope in hell this afternoon that any private member's bill is coming up. Right after I call Orders of the Day, we have 16, 17 written questions or motions for returns, and even at five minutes for each one, it'll be after 5:30. I know what has transpired in the last Monday allocated for private members' day. I know what's transpired today. I applaud all the parliamentarians in the room for knowing the rules, applying the rules, and using the rules. I applaud you all for that. But just remember what the future will be for private members because I think that the new system now is that no private member's bill will ever be dealt with on any Monday in the future, period, and that to me is unfortunate. I couldn't care less what the subject is. That's totally immaterial to me. It's the principle of what Parliament is.

So I'm now going to call Orders of the Day, which means we can now have a cup of coffee, and we'll be here at 5:30 still dealing with motions for returns or written questions.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We would do well to heed your words.

Proper notice having been given on Thursday, August 24, it is my pleasure to move that written questions 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, and 35 be dealt with today. There being no additional written questions appearing on the Order Paper, there are none to stand and retain their places hereafter.

[Motion carried]

**Illegal Drugs, Alcoholism, and
Workplace Performance**

- Q28. Mr. R. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that the following question be accepted.
What consultations, studies, research, or other information-gathering exercises pertaining to the impact of illegal drugs and alcoholism on workplace performance, productivity, and absenteeism are currently planned or under way under the auspices of the Ministry of Economic Development?

[Debate adjourned May 15: Mr. Ducharme speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Community Development, do you wish to continue? You adjourned it last time.

Mr. Ducharme: I answered my questions.

The Speaker: Are there additional members? Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, you wanted to participate?

Mr. Chase: Yes, I did, sir.

The Speaker: Please.

Mr. Chase: On behalf of Mr. Bonko.

The Speaker: No. You can conclude on your behalf.

Mr. Chase: Oh, thank you very much. On behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Decore, who proposed this written question, and closing the debate, as a member of Public Accounts and having had an extraordinary session in the summer, out of the usual legislative session, his concern is that a tremendous amount of money is being spent on the tail end dealing with the effects of alcoholism and drugs. Instead of the 10 per cent that's being spent on dealing with drug addiction, we'd like to see that money turned around and the majority of the money spent, and that is why we've asked this question. If the minister is prepared to respond, we would be very appreciative of his answer. If he prefers to do that in a written format, that's great. We can save further discussion.

Thank you, and I close debate.

[Written Question 28 lost]

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

Divorce and Workplace Performance

- Q30. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that the following question be accepted.
What consultations, studies, research, or other information-gathering exercises pertaining to the impact of divorce on workplace performance, productivity, and absenteeism are currently planned or under way under the auspices of the Ministry of Economic Development?

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The reason for this question being asked has to do with our frequent trips up to Fort McMurray, where we learned that a variety of reasons – the isolation, the conditions of highway 63, the stress – has caused one particular trades group to have a divorce rate of over 82 per cent. The stress of life in Fort McMurray and in a number of distant regions is causing a great deal of upset and disunity in families, and that is the reason for our question. I would encourage the Minister of Economic Development

to either respond to the question orally or in writing. It's a major concern, especially in the boom town of Fort McMurray.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to indicate that we will be rejecting Written Question 30 on the basis that my department is not currently planning nor has under way any consultations, studies, research, or other information-gathering exercises pertaining to the impact of divorce on workplace performance, productivity, and absenteeism.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make some brief comments. Certainly, if the ministry is in fact not conducting these research consultations and other information-gathering exercises, they're not capable of providing that information, but perhaps this is a reasonable opportunity for us to look at this very issue in the future in regard to productivity and effectiveness and the overall human quality of life for workers in this province. We're creating a situation in this province where so many workers are compelled to be working far from where their place of residence is and where their family is as well. This creates an unstable environment for not only where usually the gentlemen are working, in camps, but also back in our cities where, mostly again, fathers and it's certainly not uncommon for mothers to be away as well for extended periods of time, causing undue stress. It would be useful, I think, for our provincial government to look at this as a study but certainly also to look for solutions for this problem.

Thank you.

4:20

The Speaker: Others?

I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close the debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Beyond a doubt our most important resource is our people. When parents are basically exchanging goodbyes and hellos and are so busy working trying to keep a roof over their children's heads, which is very much the case in Fort McMurray where two parents are employed there as well as those who by separation are trying to eke out an economic existence, the calling for a study is hardly an expensive or intrusive request. For the sake of the people in Alberta who are forced to take on numerous jobs at the expense of both their marriage and their family's quality of life, I would urge the Minister of Economic Development to undertake such a study. Thank you.

With that, I close debate.

[Written Question 30 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Education System Improvement and Reporting Branch

Q31. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Mr. Flaherty that the following question be accepted.
What measurable impacts do the activities of the system improvement and reporting branch of Alberta Education have on enhancing teaching and educational outcomes for students?

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The reason for this request is multifold. With education dollars coming at such difficulty, especially when it affects infrastructure and classroom reduction, it's extremely important that every dollar spent on education is accounted for. What this question is calling for is that kind of accountability. What exactly does the system improvement and reporting branch of Alberta Education do, and is there any evidence that it is actually directly related to either enhancing the teaching or educational outcomes for students? Education is a major draw on the province's revenue, as is health care, and it's absolutely essential that the money that's being expended be accounted for.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Written Question 31 I want to advise the Assembly that I'm prepared to accept this question on behalf of the government, but I want to just point out a couple of things very briefly. Number one, the system improvement and reporting branch should properly be noted as being a division because there are three other branches within that particular division: the learner assessment branch, the performance measurement and reporting branch, and the system improvement group, which is also a branch. It's just a small editorial thing but just for the members present to know that. It's being reorganized, actually, to become the accounting and reporting division.

However, with respect to this question in particular and understanding that what the member is really seeking is something to do with our outcomes or our performance measures, Mr. Speaker, the measurable impacts are actually provided in our business plans and elsewhere. Whatever we can find in that regard, I'll be happy to provide to the member.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Well, I appreciate the minister saying that this information is available elsewhere, but I would argue that it is not, in fact, completely available for us elsewhere. I appreciate that you're going to give us the information that you have.

The issue here is that we seem to have this section – now reorganized, you tell us, but nonetheless we've been operating under that system for some time – in which the system improvement and reporting branch seems to be there really to give information to the minister to make policy by or perhaps even budget decisions, but it really didn't enhance any kind of report back to either the parents or the staff in the school, which are the other two parties that need to have information about education and the impacts and the outcomes of how our system is working on students. It appeared to me that what was going on here was a bit of empire building because under the previous minister it did involve additional staff that were being assigned to the department, yet we weren't getting additional information that was coming out to the parents. This whole sort of accounting report-back system didn't really give the parents or, in fact, I would argue the schools information to make decisions on. It seemed to be information that was of most interest and usefulness to the minister.

I support my colleague from St. Albert on this motion, that was brought forward by my colleague from Calgary-Varsity, in attempting to dig out exactly what it was that the department thought this reporting branch was doing. We would argue that it's not giving information to the parents or the students. What was it doing in giving information to the minister, and would he like to expand on

that and give us some good reason why all that money was going in there? It wasn't going to any of the other groups that are of interest. I'm looking forward to the information that's forthcoming.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close the debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're looking for accountability. We're looking for value. It was in that direction that that question has been asked. I look forward to whatever direction the minister can provide us that will answer the questions we have with regard to the relevance of this particular department and how its relevance translates directly to outcomes either by enhancing teaching or improving the educational learning possibilities for students. I appreciate the minister's willingness, as indicated, to provide some of that information. It will be received with great appreciation.

Thank you.

[Written Question 31 carried]

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, you wanted to make a procedural proposal to the Assembly?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In deference to the issue of time and the possibility of division bells ringing today, I would ask under Standing Order 32(2) that when a division is called, the time interval between division bells be shortened from 10 minutes down to two minutes. The understanding typically is that the bells ring once for 30 seconds, then there's a two-minute interval, and then there's another full minute thereafter of the bells ringing.

Thank you.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Education System Improvement and Reporting Branch

Q32. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Mr. Flaherty that the following question be accepted.

For fiscal years 2000-2001 through 2004-2005 what are the total expenses broken down by project or function in the areas of system improvement and reporting within the system improvement and reporting branch of Alberta Education?

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, what we're seeking is basically the spreadsheet information, the amount of money that was spent in this particular branch of the Department of Education. We are asking for the figures so that we and the public have a sense of the organization's value, hence the request.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Written Question 32 I want to indicate to the hon. member, who I hope will indicate to the originator of the question, that I'm prepared to accept this question on behalf of the government. I just again will point out, as I said in the previous motion, that there are three branches

within the division of system improvement and reporting, and that should be noted.

However, with respect to the issue of the parents getting or not getting information, I think it should be noted, Mr. Speaker, that this information is publicly available, and I would have assumed that through the Alberta Home and School Councils' Association, AHSCA, the information requested in the previous motion and perhaps in this one as well would be provided through that mechanism. Alternatively, it should also be available on the website. We'll just check into that to make sure that it is, just to help this along. Nonetheless, I will provide the information to the best of my ability, as requested.

4:30

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I appreciate that the minister is going to give the information that the Member for Edmonton-Decore was asking for, but I think it misses the point, the point in the system improvement reporting branch. I think it's a broader problem we're facing here in terms of what we're testing. Clearly, there are many people that are expressing concerns – I know the minister is aware of it – on the preoccupation with standardized testing for the sake of ranking schools, for the sake of whatever. I think even in the Department of Education's curriculum they admit that standardized testing only measures a narrow six out of 20 broad outcomes that students are expected to learn.

I'm sure that the minister has heard this, but there's some worry that we've become preoccupied with standardized testing. Not to use in a diagnostic way to help kids; that's where standardized testing is obviously beneficial and desirable. But the fact is that it's being used now for reasons that have little to do with a good education. The fact is that perhaps the department should be looking at how to broaden the outcomes. If standardized testing only measures a narrow six out of 20 broad outcomes, then I think we have to look at this a little differently. How do we begin to measure those sorts of things? I'm wondering if the department is going to spend some time with that.

I think that we all know the problems with standardized testing when we are, you know, ranking schools for that reason because standardized testing, it's clear, Mr. Speaker, is not adequate. They're not good for immigrants who don't understand the language. They're certainly not good for aboriginal students. We believe that some of the standardized testing allows us to brag about how well we're doing on standardized tests as compared to other provinces and other countries, but that's actually irrelevant. The important point for standardized tests is simply that they should be used for diagnostic reasons to help kids learn, not to rank schools, not to rank provinces and all the other things that we're doing.

I believe that interschool comparison and ranking promotes shaming and blaming while masking important problem areas and important economic and social realities. People say on standardized tests – I know the minister's aware of this – that the biggest indicator of how well you do compared to other provinces is what your socioeconomic status is. That will determine how well you do in standardized tests. So we can't always take the credit. I'm sure that the minister should take a look at this if he's not aware of it. But that's the reality.

What are we going to do about the other broad outcomes that the department talks about, when only six of them are being measured, and we're taking that as the Holy Grail, Mr. Speaker? So I suggest that in this department we begin to look at standardized tests

differently, more diagnostic rather than for ranking, and begin to work on the 14 other broad outcomes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, and thank you very much for the words of the preceding speaker. He outlined things very nicely, and I don't have to go over the same ground. So thank you for that.

My concern, aside from that that's already been outlined by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, is that we're seeking to see how the dollars that are assigned into this area are actually enhancing learning for kids. That's not the information that we've been able to get from any other source. Indeed, as the previous member pointed out, what's being measured here is fairly narrow and, again, doesn't really give the information in a usable form. So the minister said: "Oh, all this information is available in other places. Parents should be able to have this through the home and school association." Well, it may be out there in statistics or in a very technical form, but it's not out there in a way that is usable information to parents and, I would also add in, the staff at the school. So I think it's important.

We know that there have been six staff added into this division that report directly to the minister. So I think I'm looking forward to seeing the enhanced information that we're able to get through the provision of information in response to this written question coming from the minister.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close the debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, I want to thank the minister for his willingness to at least provide the figures and his suggestion of putting it on the website, where it is available for all to see and to examine. As the Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, sort of beyond the raw data, explanations as to how that money translates directly to outcomes would be much appreciated.

As a teacher of 34 years and as a member of both school councils and as a council of schools representative this kind of information is extremely important because schools and parents are always penny-pinching, forced into fundraising, and they want to know that their government is putting the money where it's going to have the greatest impact at the classroom level.

Thank you.

[Written Question 32 carried]

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

Alberta Health Care Insurance Act

Q33. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that the following question be accepted.

For the fiscal years 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 what was the total cost of administering the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act broken down by costs associated with provision of customer services, registration, and benefit processing?

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The point about this is that we are one of the few provinces that charges premiums, and fairly significant premiums. In doing that, there is a cost. Of course, it's well documented that we believe this is an unfair, regressive tax and

shouldn't be there, but the government says that they need the income. I think there are other ways they could get the money. Even on this there are administrative costs, and we're trying to figure out how much it's costing us to administer this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is prepared to accept Written Question 33.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will look forward to this co-operation. Maybe we can have co-operation in the future when they get rid of medicare premiums. We can all sit there and bring this forward, and the minister will stand up and say that she supports it, and it will happen.

Thank you.

[Written Question 33 carried]

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

Health Insurance Premiums Act

Q34. Mr. Martin moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that the following question be accepted.

For the fiscal years 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 what was the total cost of administering the Health Insurance Premiums Act, and of that total what percentage was attributable to administering premium subsidies and what percentage to collecting overdue accounts, including payments to collection agencies?

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we are attempting to get more specific information about the cost that it takes to administer the premiums. It's not all profit, as we know. This government that calls itself conservative would surely want to cut down on these sorts of, you know, extra money that we don't have to spend.

Mr. Speaker, the minister was very co-operative in Written Question 33, so I'm looking for the same response to Written Question 34. Thank you.

4:40

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

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is prepared to accept Written Question 34.

Ms Blakeman: That's excellent news. Thank you, Madam Minister. I'm looking forward to that information because it's always struck me as a great irony that we do tax our people through this health care premium, and then we have to also figure into all of that a certain amount of money to chase down the people that don't pay that tax which is administered as a premium. Certainly, I think all of us who answer the phone in our constituency offices have had people phoning up, and they're baffled because they're now getting calls from a collection agency.

Part of what I'm looking to understand is: when a person falls into default with their Alberta health care premium bill, it does get sent to a collection agency. Usually when that happens, it's a matter of the originating group selling the debt for whatever: 10 cents on the

dollar, 20 cents on the dollar. So if the debt was \$800, they might sell to the collection agency, and the collection agency would pay them, whatever, a hundred dollars. Then the collection agency would attempt to collect the whole \$800, and whatever they can get out of that is how they make their money. I'm wondering if that's the process that's used by this government, that they in effect sell the debt to the collection agency, who then attempts to recoup more than what they paid for it.

I'm interested in the wording of this particular written question, which seems to indicate that somehow there's a percentage to collecting overdue accounts and that they're paying a collection agency to just chase down the money for them, which is a different scheme than the one that I believed was in play here. So I'm looking forward to how this is administered. I think that in the end we are supposed to be providing health care to people regardless of their ability to pay or their economic status, so the fact that we, in fact, have to get involved in all of this chasing people down to get this money owed is because this government refuses to give over this archaic and, I think, ideologically driven idea of a health care premium, which is a tax. It's not a premium. It's a tax.

An Hon. Member: A head tax.

Ms Blakeman: It's a head tax, yeah. Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the minister for accepting the question. The information that is being sought by way of this question that the minister has agreed to provide is, I think, of critical importance, this matter of health care premiums as a tax and not only a tax but a very regressive tax regardless of income levels. Some of those who pay this tax can afford it, others cannot.

Ultimately, I think once the minister provides this information – and I hope this is provided with some dispatch – it will first of all give the minister and her staff, I hope, good, compelling reasons to simply get rid of this unfair and regressive tax. It really does lead to great hardship for lots of Alberta families to find money to pay this regressive tax but also leads to considerable wastage in addition. In terms of the money that is spent on collecting the overdue premiums, I have received in my office information from some of my constituents, who have continued to receive letters for overdue payments and have come and asked us to plead on their behalf so that they can buy some more time to find a little bit of money to pay at least part of what's overdue. Looking at those letters that they receive, I wonder how much time is spent just on getting that correspondence out, how much time the staff spends on getting those letters ready, putting them in the mail and all of that stuff. So there's quite a bit of wastage right there.

Then the worst part, of course, of having this tax is the use of collecting agencies to collect the overdues that people are never able to pay in addition to harassment, intimidation that Albertans are subjected to as part of this process. Just the amount of public money that is lost in the process I think needs to be brought to the light of day so that we and the minister in a sober way can assess why it is really important. In addition to reasons of fairness toward all, there is no need for extra revenue for this government to generate through this unfair tax. It intimidates people, takes their dignity away when collection agencies are after them. All this information is available. I hope that the minister will come forward with a decision that leads very quickly to just getting rid of this unfair tax, which is also very, very wasteful.

I thank the minister for accepting this question, but I hope that she will take a close look at the information in addition to maybe providing it to us and come to the decision that some of us in this part of the House have been urging this government to do for at least as long as I've been in this Assembly, which is nearly 10 years now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. The irony of this particular tax is that it causes sickness instead of eliminating it. The people who are least capable of paying, who live from paycheque to paycheque, are stressed not only by the tax but then the follow-up collection agencies who come knocking on their door when they're unable to pay the tax.

I do credit the minister for having recognized the hardship of this nonprogressive, wealth-based tax on seniors. I'm very pleased that the minister saw fit to eliminate the tax for seniors, and I am aware that people at the lowest level of what this government determines poverty are also exempted. But the day-to-day pain that it causes people who are trying to get ahead is unjustifiable, and I look forward to the elimination of the tax.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm in almost total shock. That's two questions in a row that have been accepted. I'm almost tempted to write one out quickly and get rid of medicare premiums right here, but I thank the minister for agreeing to that question.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The vote hasn't come yet, hon. member.

[Written Question 34 carried]

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

Choice Matters Campaign

Q35. Mr. Martin moved that the following question be accepted. What is the total dollar amount spent by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development on the Choice Matters and related campaigns promoting marketing choice for each of the fiscal years 2001-02, 2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05, and 2005-06, what is the estimated amount to be spent in 2006-07, and for each of these years what portion was spent or will be spent on paid advertising?

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe now that it's in my name, it might have a little more trouble. I'm not sure.

Mr. Speaker, this goes back to the spring sitting of the Legislature. On April 12, 2006, the agriculture minister told the House that he would get the NDP opposition all the figures related to the Choice Matters campaign. He said: "Our Choice Matters campaign is in our business plan, and it is located in our budget estimates. I don't have the number right in front of me, but we'll get that for the hon. member."

4:50

Mr. Speaker, I'm afraid that the hon. minister was mistaken. The total dollar value of the Choice Matters campaign is not in the business plan or the budget estimates. We had the Legislature

Library look into the minister's statement, and they couldn't find the information in the business plan or budget estimates. The best the Legislature librarians could find was the purpose of the campaign as outlined in the first issue of the campaign's newsletter, issued in April 2004. In that newsletter the previous minister of agriculture stated:

The Alberta government sees the great potential of this industry, but we also see what stands in the way. For the agriculture industry to grow into the future, the Canadian Wheat Board should be one option for marketing wheat and barley – not the only option.

The first issue of Choice Matters is about the Alberta government's vision for the future of the grain industry, a vision shared by many Albertans. We see a marketing system where innovation, entrepreneurship, and risk [management] are rewarded . . . where individual producers decide what is best for their individual operations.

Mr. Speaker, when the NDP opposition staff members contacted the minister's office, his staff seemed unaware of the minister's pledge to get these numbers on the Choice Matters campaign. The NDP opposition is concerned that the Choice Matters campaign is a tax-funded – and I stress: Alberta taxpayer-funded – initiative to undermine and eventually destroy the Canadian Wheat Board.

It is well known that the single-desk marketing of grains results in higher prices for farmers. There are faults with the Wheat Board, and the board has shown some willingness to be flexible and to work with farmers to iron out the wrinkles and assist them. In fact, the Wheat Board has announced intent to seek some changes from the federal government recently, and they've sought new powers that would include the ability to invest in grain-handling facilities and other enterprises now forbidden under federal legislation. The board needs these powers to return more money to the farmers, who, as we all know, have been struggling to be profitable in the wake of skyrocketing costs and relatively low commodity prices.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board spans three western provinces and is within the federal jurisdiction. The province of Alberta should not be spending Alberta taxpayers' money in trying to undermine something that has generally been proven effective and, I stress, is not within the provincial government's jurisdiction. The minister of agriculture stated that the Alberta government did not want to abolish the Wheat Board, but the fact that they're spending this money and some of it in advertising in, clearly, a jurisdiction that they shouldn't be in indicates that they aren't serious about protecting the Wheat Board even if they make changes.

Mr. Speaker, I'd be very interested to find out where it now stands and whether we're going to get this information. Thank you.

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

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development we will respond and indicate that the government is prepared to accept Written Question 35.

The Speaker: Three for three, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm very much pleased that the minister has accepted providing the answer in terms of the amounts of money being spent on this particular program.

The federal government has also been making rumblings about the Canadian Wheat Board and, I'm sure, expending taxpayers' money in a similar fashion to undermine it or weaken it despite the service

it has provided for farmers and continues to provide for farmers throughout the prairie provinces.

I know that there have been various end runs made by this province in terms of trying to load trucks down and head across the border and sell it privately, and people have ended up in jail as a result of breaking the federal laws. My hope is that neither the federal laws nor the provincial laws will allow individuals to try and end run the value that the collective policies of the Wheat Board provide in terms of ensuring income to farmers through a large representative base.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Now you may have to carry me out, Mr. Speaker. I think that I'll quit while I'm ahead and thank the minister for agreeing to at least take a look at this.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I may have made a mistake here. Did the hon. Member for Highwood want to participate?

Mr. Groeneveld: You bet.

The Speaker: Well, okay. Please, go ahead. That was an error. My telephone here, which only rings once every 12 years, was just ringing at the same time, so I wanted to put it away. Okay. Proceed.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do realize that you were standing on your head on the throne there, so you couldn't see me.

I guess I would just like to take issue with some of the things that were said. Certainly, I don't want to get into a big debate here. [interjection] We might as well perhaps. I don't know.

The Canadian Wheat Board certainly is not serving all the farmers of Alberta, and I'm one of them. If you think that we're using taxpayers' money to knock down the Wheat Board, I don't think that's exactly the issue. I've discussed this with the minister, and we've heard it said before. It's not the Wheat Board that we object to; it's the monopoly and the single-desk selling. The last time that I checked, this was still a free country. Alberta maybe stands alone – I don't know – but perhaps we should look at this situation. I don't care whether it's a majority, a minority, or one person that doesn't want to deliver to the Wheat Board. That one person has his rights, and I don't think he should be forced into that situation. So perhaps with a little bit of luck we can maybe deal with this in the coming year.

I certainly am not in favour of this motion, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to now close the debate.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I like that argument that the member just said: if one farmer wants to do whatever he can, he doesn't have to go along with the board elected throughout the province, that they can decide to do whatever they want. That's interesting because less than half of the people voted for this government, but the people in the province still have to go along with what they decide. I wish they'd be a little more consistent in terms of what they see as democracy. A little more consistent.

Mr. Speaker, the point still remains that they do not have the jurisdiction over the Canadian Wheat Board. It's okay if the

Conservative Party wants to spend that money, but it should not be up to the taxpayers of Alberta to spend money organizing a propaganda campaign on something that's not in their jurisdiction. That's wrong, and it's wrong no matter how you cut it. For people that are supposed to be concerned about the taxpayers' money, I would think that the member would not be very happy about that. Would he be crying if the government was spending money on things that he didn't agree with? No, it's only when it works for him. So their idea of democracy is very interesting. Very interesting indeed.

Thank you.

[Written Question 35 carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, August 24, it's my pleasure to now move that motions for returns 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36 be dealt with today. There being no additional motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper, there are none to stand and retain their places.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of Edmonton-Decore.

General Revenue Fund Grant Details

M27. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents related to the \$150,800 grant provided to Maskalyk Miles as described in the 2004-2005 general revenue fund details of grants, supplies, services, tangible capital assets, and other payments.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To give the House somewhat of a break, I'm going to put forward the arguments, which I will not then repeat for 28 and 29. I'll give you the gist of the argument. It's an argument on accountability.

5:00

We're presented in this House with budgets that have very few lines. It's next to impossible for us as members representing our constituencies to try to get any idea where the majority of the money is spent. The government has indicated that any expenditure over \$100,000 must go through a bidding process, but the government can avoid this by simply cutting down the amounts and doing, basically, one for \$50,000, one for \$70,000 and another one for \$35,000 awarded to the same company in a piecemeal fashion, therefore avoiding the transparency of a bidding process.

Each of these motions for returns is for a large grant provided by the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development. All grants are listed in the general revenue fund details of grants, supplies, services, tangible assets, and other payments 2004-2005. This grant as indicated is for \$150,800, a sizable sum of money provided to a single contractor, Mr. Maskalyk. It's a large sum of public money with no supporting documentation. This is one of the largest grants paid to individuals in this ministry this year. In the name of transparency and accountability we're hoping that the answers and the fine print details will be provided.

The public does not know what services this individual provided. The public does not know what common good or what public value was obtained for this expense. What was the justification for providing grants to these people? The public has no idea why these individuals received public money. The public is unable to evaluate whether these individuals followed proper channels in applying for these grants. There could be perfectly good explanations. These people could be doing great work and helping many Albertans, helping the environment, protecting endangered species, helping with a solution for the mountain pine beetle problem, but we don't know. This government obviously has a justification for the hiring of these individuals. We would please ask them for an explanation so that we can see that this was money well spent and that outcomes were achieved.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are prepared to accept Motion for a Return 27.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank my colleagues for bringing forward the question and the minister for agreeing to supply the information because I think there's an underlying issue here around accountability and transparency of what the government does. It's extremely frustrating operating from the opposition side, trying to get information from the government. You know, there's often a reference: "Oh, it's in our business plans. It's in the budget documents." No, actually, it isn't. It's not broken down. We get a one-line rollup.

It's the same thing when we're looking at the end of the fiscal year. The annual reports from the various ministries contain a great deal more information about what they believe they achieved, but for breakdown of actual information of each program they had and how much money was spent and how many people were assigned to it, that's for the most part a mystery. That's when we have to start digging to tease apart what's actually going on in the government.

If you go back and look at what the budget document and the reporting documents looked like 15 years ago, you get a much more detailed picture of what the government was doing. Rather than becoming more open and accountable and transparent, this government has become less open and accountable and transparent. We've had to go through a number of layers to get to this point today where the minister has said: yes, I'll provide the information to you. That takes place over a very long period of time, while we try to dig out a very simple thing. This could be perfectly acceptable and done annually or whatever. There's probably a very good reason for this, but we have to go to extraordinary effort to try to get that information out, right down to being here on private members' day, using our private members' privilege to ask this question of the government.

The second part of this is that while we cherish the role of the Auditor General in this Assembly and the work that the Auditor General and his staff do, I think that sometimes we come to believe they are all powerful and that in fact they're auditing every single receipt of every business transaction that the government makes. That's not possible. We really would be giving the Auditor General and his staff superhuman powers if that were the case. They have a general look, and some departments they concentrate on in a given year, but in other departments they have a general look at what's

going on to see if the recommendations that have been made in previous years have been adhered to, check a couple of things by way of sample, and then they move on. In fact, it's quite easy to overlook something that may well have been improper. The idea that the Auditor General is out there checking every single thing is not true.

It's well within our duty as an opposition to be asking questions such as: what is this \$150,800 for? There is no supporting documentation to it. We've pulled this out of what's commonly called the blue book, which just lists the department, the individual, and the amount of money, but there's no supporting information. I'm very glad that we're going to see the information coming from the minister. I think we have a couple of other questions that are very similar, so in all likelihood I don't need to repeat my argument, but it's part of a context.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close the debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I just want to thank the minister for his openness and his willingness to provide details.

I want to extend another bouquet to the minister because I was extremely impressed having had my first opportunity to attend PNWER, the Pacific Northwest-Economic Region's conference. I was privileged, I would say, to be a part of a presentation that the minister provided on a variety of topics, including information that was provided, basically co-chaired with Dr. Brad Stelfox, at the University of Calgary. I also want to credit the minister for seeking information from a number of very informed individuals. The beauty of Dr. Brad Stelfox's presentation, as the minister recognized, is that he doesn't draw conclusions. He presents information. He presents projections, and with those projections we are able to form our own advice.

I also want to give the minister a bouquet for his explanation of how the province is undertaking the attack on pine beetles. What I'm very pleased about in this specific part of the attack is that at this point in the presentation the minister acknowledged with government biologists that the pine beetle is being attacked tree by tree. The minister pointed this out in question period last week, and the fact that clear-cutting is not the justifiable response for infestation gives me great hope. By singling out those trees, dealing with it tree by tree instead of clear-cutting massive areas of forest and threatening the watershed, I think the minister is dead-on in his one tree, one solution process.

Thank you very much. I close debate, and I appreciate the minister's actions and openness in providing answers to this request.

[Motion for a Return 27 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

5:10 General Revenue Fund Grant Details

M28. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents related to the \$188,000 grant provided to Jean Henry Paul as described in the 2004-2005 general revenue fund details of grants, supplies, services, tangible capital assets and other payments.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I promised that I wouldn't go into lengthy argument. What we're looking for is transparency and accountabil-

ity. Any information that any ministry can provide directly to this House or by posting it on a website saves a FOIP request. We all know how expensive and how frustrating those FOIP requests are. So if the minister and all ministers, following his example, would provide that information rather than forcing us to seek it through other methods, it would be a great change in transparency and accountability that all Albertans would appreciate.

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

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Member for Calgary-Varsity, I'd like to thank him for his comments about a very successful PNWER meeting. Certainly, the working group that he participated in produced some very good information, and that's what PNWER is all about. So thank you for those very nice comments.

With regard to MR 28 we are also prepared to accept this one on behalf of the government.

The Speaker: Shall I call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close the debate?

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate the clarity. I appreciate the transparency. I appreciate the collaborative work that this House is demonstrating this afternoon.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 28 carried]

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

General Revenue Fund Grant Details

M29. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Mr. Bonko that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents related to the \$103,000 grant provided to Lefebvre Edmond as described in the 2004-2005 general revenue fund details of grants, supplies, services, tangible capital assets, and other payments.

Mr. Chase: Thank you again. Without going into detail, the work of Public Accounts and the debate in the Assembly – so many of these other avenues for achieving accountability could be speeded up if the information was clearly expressed and pointed to. Again I would encourage ministries to post information and explanation rather than strictly dollar figures on their websites so that the public has the ability to judge the value for money that was received. I am hoping that we're in a 3 for 3 circumstance, and I look forward to the minister's reply.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion for a Return 29 will also be accepted as presented. We'll provide that information.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close the debate, or should I call the question?

Mr. Chase: I would like to call the vote, sir.

[Motion for a Return 29 carried]

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

Proposed Police and Peace Officer College

M30. Mr. Taylor moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents, including but not limited to studies, reports, submissions, and correspondence, regarding the design, cost, location competition, and curriculum for the proposed Alberta police and peace officer college.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This 3 for 3 act times two will be a tough act to follow no doubt.

Now, I recognize that this has been an issue largely under the purview of the Solicitor General as opposed to the Minister of Advanced Education, but it does involve, obviously, Advanced Education. Therefore, on behalf of my colleagues and on behalf of the people of Alberta I have an interest in this. So I move Motion for a Return 30.

One of the key things that we're looking for here, of course, is the location competition because we really are in a vacuum, as the opposition finds itself so frequently in with this government, in terms of understanding the nature of that competition. You know, I can't comment on whether decisions that were made were based on merit or not – I don't know – or whether it was all based on politics, but the competition seems to have pitted one small community against another against another against another against another.

What this motion for a return really does, among other things, is seek the reason why for that, the reason why that kind of a competition was necessary. We need to know whether the competition, the curriculum, the design, the cost of this proposed Alberta police and peace officer college is going to deliver what this province so obviously requires on a going forward basis, and that is the issue of consistent training for police and peace officers. I would look specifically at the increasing use of special constables, sheriffs with – what? – one month's training, I believe . . .

Ms Blakeman: Four weeks.

Mr. Taylor: Four weeks of training.

. . . going on duty here very shortly to enforce traffic regulations. While I suppose it doesn't take a degree in advanced mathematics to learn how to operate a radar gun and determine whether someone was in fact doing 120 in a 100 kilometre an hour zone or something like that, there's a need to know that the training has been consistent and will continue to be consistent.

So with that, I'll take my seat now and look for a response from the government benches, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We'll be rejecting Motion for a Return 30. This motion requests copies of documents relating to the proposed Alberta police and peace officer training centre. As the member opposite knows, we are currently in the process of a request for proposal for the training centre, and the rules governing RFPs prevent the public release of any information that would undermine the process. This includes not releasing any of the information requested in the motion, so therefore we must reject Motion for a Return 30.

Mr. Chase: I just have to rise to suggest that that's the weakest excuse I've heard in some time, and the reason I say that is that nowhere within Motion for a Return 30 is there a time or date; you know, Mr. Minister, we want it by 5:25 on the 28th or there'll be

trouble. There is no time requirement. What has happened is that this competition for the college has become almost like an international competition for the Olympics, where what has happened is that a number of communities who have restricted cash flows are hoping to make it big by having a college in their area.

I know that when I travelled last spring – that's the spring of 2005 – to Drayton Valley and I talked to the mayor and councillors there, they were looking for economic opportunities. They were thinking, possibly: "Could we have a satellite college like Athabasca University? Could we have aboriginal apprenticeship training offered in Drayton Valley?" I'm sure that Drayton Valley was probably one of the towns that was asking for this kind of a possibility because it would bring individuals into the community. They would be shopping at the local stores. It would add infrastructure, obviously, in the way of either dorms or off-campus housing. So it's a large concern and would be a large benefit to whichever lucky municipality received it.

However, what has happened is that trying to put forward the best bid possible involves money, and that's money that a number of these municipalities don't have. So they have to decide: "Do we go all out, and do we spend several thousand dollars? Do we create a PowerPoint program? Do we elicit support from MLAs in other jurisdictions? Would they give it up in order for us to have this jewel in our own location?"

5:20

If this process isn't an open and transparent circumstance, then a variety of municipalities have possibly been led down a very expensive government garden path in terms of trying to put forward a successful bid. Nowhere – and I repeat as I began – is there any call for a certain time period for this information. I would look forward to the minister saying: well, possibly I can't give you such and such a study or report submission at this particular time, but when the decision has been made to award the college to whatever municipality, I will be glad to provide you with the specific details that you've requested, realizing, of course, that because the competition is still on, I can't provide you this information at this particular time. We would understand that time limit. We would embrace it. But we're looking for transparency and accountability that previous ministries have demonstrated and we will hopefully find soon within this ministry.

Thank you.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have from the beginning, when this initial proposal for an Alberta police and peace officer college was presented, been supportive because I think there's a real need in Alberta to have the training for our police officers under one roof so that municipal police departments would not be all training their own recruits with standards different from other municipal police departments. So I think we've been supportive of the idea.

What this particular motion for a return asks for, simply, is more information about that. It's difficult even on this side to begin to provide our support if we don't know all of the studies, the studies that were engaged in to come to the conclusion that this was a good idea. So asking for such studies and reports and submissions seems to be just the sensible thing to do to have transparency, to have all the information necessary.

My hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity has raised the issue about the cost to municipalities. From the very beginning that has been a real concern. Having talked to people in different municipali

ties who submitted a proposal, I think that it's cost a lot of money for municipalities to put in their bid. I don't know to what extent municipalities have been helped in that process. I hope they have. But we don't have any information about that. We also don't have any information about the current process of determining the location. So it's all about transparency and getting the right kind of information so that we can even begin to support a government position that we might want to support.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to just make some observations on the minister's decision to reject MR 30 and the information requested therein. I find the minister's decision both disappointing and baffling. I know that he has spent his life in very important positions where he has learned to handle information in confidence, and perhaps the reasons for secrecy were obvious. He is now in a different arena. He's in a public arena, where he's expected to live by different norms, norms of openness, transparency, and providing the information to this House. It's very important for all of us to make judgments about whether or not decisions being made by the government and by ministers such as the Solicitor General here are worthy of our support.

For the minister to reject this request out of hand without saying: "Well, look, there's lots of information here. It seems to me as the minister that these pieces of information can be released now. There are others which are so sensitive, of a contractual nature, that I can't do that now, but once the time is right, I'll be very happy to share that information with this House" – that's why I use the words "disappointing" and "baffling." It's disappointing that the minister didn't find some obligation to share information asked in good faith with the House and baffling because I thought he was very much committed to principles of openness and transparency and accountability.

I still think that there's an opportunity for him to rise in the House and say that he does subscribe to these fundamental principles of openness, transparency, and accountability, that he has had time to have second thoughts about the decision, to perhaps change his mind and say: here are the following pieces of information that I willingly will share with you on such and such a date, and there are other issues on which the information will be made available once I've come to the conclusion that there's no longer a need to keep them secret and inaccessible to Albertans and this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, there is only one taxpayer, and numerous communities spent what we can only assume were considerable amounts of taxpayer dollars preparing their submissions. We can only assume it because the information won't be shared with us. Whether or not that involved expenditure

by this particular level of government or those particular levels of government – at the town level, at the municipal level – the taxpayer is still out of pocket for the money that was being spent, so the taxpayer has every right to ask for an accounting of the spending of that money. Since this was the level of government that required the competition, this is where the accountability should happen.

We need greater details as to why the government chose to put the location for a public institution out to a bidding war between communities. We need to know how much it was going to cost the communities. We need to know why the provincial government did it that way. We need to know whether there could have been a better way, whether there could have been a better process, or whether there was just kind of a desire on the part of government MLAs to use up some of their travel per diems and go on a government road show.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, no. Extra. This is above and beyond. This is more money.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. I suppose it is. You're right.

You know, it may also cause some problems. I don't know. It may not. But it may cause some problems for institutions and communities where colleges and institutions were already offering some version or portion of this curriculum. I'm thinking about, for instance, Lethbridge Community College. Does the weakening or the loss of this program from LCC have a significant impact on that institution? We need to know. Therefore, it's critical to know who the MLAs consulted with while they were on their road show, where they drew their ideas from.

It's critical to know whether high-ranking friends of the government, such as the Premier's former chief of staff, Rod Love, might have been acting as a paid lobbyist for any of these communities. I mean, we don't know. We know that he has acted as a paid lobbyist in the past. We don't know whether he was involved or not. We don't know whether there was any connection between who lobbied whom for which community and which community was or was not in the running for this police college.

We need to know, in short, Mr. Speaker, that this was a fair and open competition, that it was not about who you know, that it was not about who you could afford to hire, that it was about who was going to do the best job. Given that it was put out to competition, who was going to do the best job of educating the future police officers and peace officers of the province of Alberta?

The citizens of Alberta are entitled to nothing less. The citizens of Alberta are entitled to demand that. The citizens of Alberta are entitled to demand accountability from their police officers, from the government that sets in motion the process of training their police officers.

The Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. The House stands adjourned until 8 p.m.

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