

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, August 29, 2006**

**8:00 p.m.**

Date: 06/08/29

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Please be seated.

head: **Government Bills and Orders  
Second Reading**

**Bill 44  
Appropriation (Supplementary  
Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2)**

[Adjourned debate August 29: Mr. Stevens]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General still has 13 minutes if you wish.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. I look forward to this opportunity to discuss the supplementary estimates. The over a billion dollars that we're talking about is such a large sum that for some people it's hard to get a grasp on it, so what I'd like to do is kind of personalize it, put some faces behind it, and ask questions as to whether these faces and these situations that I bring up with regard to my constituency and contacts ring true with other constituency representatives, MLAs, throughout the province.

First off, a bouquet. As you're very well aware, I don't throw too many bouquets, but here's one for the health ministry. I am very pleased that the health ministry finally recognized the importance of funding Herceptin. This is something that other provinces have recognized for some time. The federal government has recognized the value. It's gone through all sorts of drug tests and series of approvals. Thank you, ministry of health, for finally helping people with that \$40,000 a year expense.

Another bouquet. This is a mixed floral bouquet that I would like to hand to the health department: the fact that lymphedema treatment will very soon be offered in Calgary. Prior to just basically last week's announcement women suffering from the after-effects, the swelling that occurs with chemotherapy, were forced to leave Calgary and basically anywhere else in the southern part of the province and come up to Edmonton to receive this treatment. Very shortly through the Calgary hospital connections it will be offered.

The reason I say a mixed bouquet is that the place where it will be offered is leasing space out of the Holy Cross hospital, and of course that is one of the hospitals that was unfortunately prematurely closed. The owners of that hospital are doing extremely well because, first off, as we're all aware, over \$32 million went into upgrading that facility, and then it was sold for under \$7 million. And over the years since that sale, I believe in 1996, we have been, through the Calgary health region, spending millions of dollars in leasing space that we once owned. So, as I say, a mixed bouquet.

As I continue with the cancer theme, I receive contact from constituents frequently who are suffering from various forms of cancer, and I want to relate the story of one constituent, whose name is Marlene. Marlene suffers from breast cancer, and adding to the suffering of the breast cancer is the fact that the chemo cocktail treatment that, again, has been approved in other provinces and is available in B.C. has not yet been approved for use in Calgary. The circumstance is that the exact combination of drugs that have been approved for the treatment of pancreatic cancer and are available at the Baker cancer clinic in Calgary are not available for breast cancer.

So Marlene has to make her way to B.C., leave behind her two children and her husband, who is a professor at the University of Calgary, and travel to B.C. to get this cocktail that's available in Calgary. But Alberta, again, won't recognize what other provinces and the federal government have recognized, that the combination of the two chemicals not only treats pancreatic cancer but has shown effective results on breast cancer as well.

Last year I talked extensively about the family of Jeanne Keith-Ferris. The two children, a teenage boy and girl, suffered the devastating effects of gastroparesis, which is a disease that causes a person to always feel on the edge of vomiting, if not actually vomiting. As I pointed out – and I will not go into great detail about last year – this family had to lay out \$60,000 to go down to receive treatment from a Dr. Abell, who actually performs this surgery in Mississippi three times a week.

The federal government has recognized that gastroparesis can be managed – not cured but managed – through the Enterra Therapy device implantation. The province of Quebec publicly funds the operation but does not have a whole lot of spaces in its delivery system, setting aside operating space specifically to deal with gastroparesis.

Since I recounted the story of Jeanne Keith-Ferris and her two children, an individual doctor from the University of Calgary has gone down to Mississippi. He has received training on monitoring the Enterra Therapy device. He's come back to Calgary, and basically he is, along with a number of individuals, appealing to the government to run a clinical trial. At this point the government has said that they recognize that Enterra Therapy works, but they have yet to figure out how it works. They're calling it experimental despite, as I've pointed out, a number of cases through Mississippi and through the States in general.

Tonight I want to introduce you to a young lady who sent out 83 letters to all our constituencies. I would like to thank the few individuals who responded to her. That is a young lady who is by training a nurse, a registered nurse. Her name is Krysta Livingstone. This is what I'm talking about by trying to put faces in front of the dollars. Krysta is in her early 20s. As I said, she's a nurse. Her gastroparesis circumstance is worsening on a daily basis. She doesn't want to end up like other individuals, in the Calgary Foothills hospital or in her Medicine Hat facility with a feeding tube. She would like to realize the quality of life.

She travelled this past spring down to Mississippi, where Dr. Abell installed a temporary device. She immediately received the benefits of that device, and it was like a change in her life. The problem is that it's a \$41,000 ticket to have the surgery done, the recovery, the cost of the device, and so on. But because the Alberta government at this point still refers to this treatment as experimental, this young lady and her parents are having to go through the hardship, as the Ferrises did, of putting a second mortgage on their house.

Now, Tenille Tellman, who is a reporter with the Medicine Hat *News*, has covered this young lady's story. I've been in contact with Tenille a number of times. Most recently I said that based on all the information I had received from the ministry of health, the best we can hope for in the near future is the clinical trial. There does not appear at this time to be any money, and we're talking, with these two individuals combined, approximately \$100,000, contrasted with the billions that are being discussed tonight.

**8:10**

What I'm getting at is that I wish we could deal with the major crises in people's lives and have some sort of funding, a compassionate fund, and a speedier process in bringing into Alberta what other

provinces and the federal government have taken into account. We have a committee that works with all of the other provinces in terms of drug approvals, we then have a secondary subcommittee here in the province of Alberta, and then we have a committee that reviews the findings of the subcommittee. What's happening is that people are getting lost in the bureaucracy.

Another individual who comes into my constituency, who I see fairly frequently because he shops at the Co-op and the Safeway just around from my house, is a senior. His name is Maurice. Maurice has to go to dialysis three times a week. He hasn't asked for much. All he's asked through Aids to Daily Living is for the government to cover the cost of under \$100 for a cushion that would give him a degree of comfort as he sits for hours in dialysis three times a week. Now, under our Aids to Daily Living a small expenditure like this would improve the quality of life of those people who have to go in for dialysis. These are not major expenditures. We should have funding for it. It should be approved. It shouldn't be a matter of great debate and discussion.

Another bouquet. It's nice to intersperse the concerns with the bouquets. I have an individual who comes into my constituency office approximately once a week. He's a firefighter who's suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder. It's been diagnosed and supported and finally accepted by Workers' Compensation. After years and years and years of getting very little recognition of his difficulties, he talked with the ministry of health. He pointed out that if you are a veteran suffering from posttraumatic stress or if you're an RCMP individual suffering from posttraumatic stress, there is a federally funded program that basically offers counselling, and it's based in Calgary. He had a great discussion; he got right through to the deputy minister, and for that, again, I give the government credit. The ministry is considering providing some provincial funding to support the already existing federal program. They've got the infrastructure. They've got the building. They've got the psychologists. It's just a matter of having some provincial money to support one more group.

As I say, I know that there are a number of firefighters who have been putting their lives on the line. My colleague from Calgary-North Hill has been a champion of firefighters' causes, cancer most recently. He talked about the heart coverage within 24 hours if a person goes down. He proposed legislation. So I'm hoping this is something that the government will embrace, the idea of dealing with people who have put their lives on the line for us yet somehow have gotten lost and shuffled in the system.

I'll change channels now and go to education. We're very aware that the problem is not just limited to Calgary, but the Calgary infrastructure problem, the bill between the Calgary public and Calgary separate school for delayed, defrayed infrastructure maintenance is now over a half a billion dollars. Unfortunately, in the latest supplementary estimates and in the Minister of Education's announcements we're still getting money that does partial repairs. While both the Catholic and the public schools in Calgary are grateful for whatever funding they receive, they don't know from year to year how much money they're going to get. It's very difficult for them to plan. They submit every year their three- to five- year plan to the government, and basically it's a wing and a prayer and a whim as to whether that money is going to come forward. What I've witnessed first-hand with my colleagues when we've toured various schools, for example Western Canada, is piecemeal patching, and I wouldn't want to say that nothing would be better than the something, but what happens is when you have a large roof . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

**Ms Blakeman:** I was interested in the topic that the member was talking on when his time ran out, and I'm wondering if he could just complete that section for me. Finish the statement, in other words. Statements are allowed under 29(2)(a).

**The Deputy Speaker:** If the hon. member would accommodate the request very briefly.

**Ms Blakeman:** The question is: what is it that he's particularly interested in around the educational deficiencies that he's noticed?

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to continue. When we went into Western Canada, we found that the roof had leaked in several places. Patch jobs had been done here, there, and in various places. It's almost like a mini-Katrina in the sense that the dike didn't break in just one spot; it broke in a series of spots. So what happened was that you if repair the spot in the northwest corner, there becomes a problem in the southeast corner. With every leak you end up redoing the work you've done. The gymnasium in Ernest Manning, a similar circumstance.

I went through Brentwood elementary school. The roof over the library leaked. They temporarily fixed it. In the next heavy rainstorm it was the whole west wing that went. What is happening is that every time it rains in Calgary, whether it's a devastating circumstance like the Marlborough elementary school, the partial fixes just become part of a more expensive repair. If you don't do it completely and right the first time, this happens. We know in terms of the infrastructure repairs that that's the half billion dollars. That doesn't even begin to address the \$3 billion that the public schools have put out for the construction of 19 schools. Calgary isn't alone. Edmonton has indicated their difficulties with maintenance, their need for building schools.

When we talk about other areas, roads and infrastructure, we all know, those of us who drive the province to come up to Edmonton for our various meetings, how much in need of repair the highways are. With highway 63, for example, just whacking down a few trees towards the end of Fort McMurray is barely scratching the tip of the iceberg. What needs to be done, at least on a temporary basis, is to have pull-offs. So instead of just concentrating at the Fort McMurray end, throughout that whole highway 63 at least take out some trees, at least put in some temporary compacted gravel pullouts so that people can get off that road.

Schools, infrastructure. The government can find \$11 million for new planes. They can find millions of dollars for waste treatments of a race track out in Balzac that neither the cities of Airdrie nor Calgary wants. There is money. It seems to be available for a whole wide variety of projects but not the ones that are the most necessary. I would suggest that the most necessary projects are the hospitals – the expansion, the staffed beds, the places in the university for the trained individuals to staff those beds – and education. After that, obviously, the third one is the infrastructure, the support the municipalities have been calling for.

I thank the Speaker and my colleague from Edmonton-Centre for allowing me the leeway of expressing my concerns. Thank you.

8:20

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there others on Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to speak on Bill 44, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2). We are debating, actually, more than \$1 billion, and this government has given \$6.6 million per minute for debate, which is not enough. Okay? This government has totally failed to manage the budget plan. They keep on repeating the same mistakes again and again. They should have done it during the budget time, but this time again they are asking an additional amount of more than a billion dollars. I think this is not a good thing. They don't want to learn something from the mistakes they have done in the past.

This government, Mr. Speaker, is really a big spender. I think they are number two in Canada. They used to blame the federal Liberals all the time. You know, the federal Liberals are big spenders. But this time this House, this particular additional amount of money, and the budget in the past clearly show that this PC government is a big spender. If we compare it to the other province which is number one, compare it to their total population, this government is the number one spender in the country. They don't spend money according to the plan. They don't spend money wisely. They throw money at the problems. They don't have any long-term sustainable policies, and they don't want to even think. If the opposition members give good ideas, they think the opposition is inflaming the situation. Everything is fine. If you talk about health care, well, we're number one or number two. If you talk about long-term care centres, we are number one. They find out when the Auditor General finds lots and lots of, you know, deficiencies in that department, and they are still not learning.

Let me start with the education side. This government is asking for an additional \$293 million. Any funding for education is welcome. But, still, it's a long way to go because by the time they locate some amount of money for education or health care, by the time the department receives the money, because of inflation and because of price increases, you know, by the time of completion, the prices go up.

I just want to ask the minister concerned to tell me if this additional amount of money is going towards new schools, playgrounds, recreational facilities, school libraries. The reason I'm asking is because my riding, Edmonton-Ellerslie, is growing very fast with lots of new development areas like Summerside and Ellerslie Crossing. There are thousands and thousands of new houses being built there. I mean, when you make a project, I think it is very important that they should have schools, playgrounds, libraries, everything planned before they submit the plan and show it to the public, but it's not happening.

Let me go through this list of my area alone. The funding pressure and priorities are eventually on the MLAs. I was door-knocking in the last, say, two, three weeks, and lots of people are asking me about the school and recreational facilities and libraries in that area, especially in the new development areas, but I don't have the answer.

I talked to the school board trustees, and they have an evaluation project for the year '99-2000. Catholic schools especially have higher maintenance needs. For example, Crawford Plains school is in my riding. The projection for '99-2000 is \$303,000; Daly Grove, \$115,000; Dan Knott, \$741,350; Ekota, \$766,000; Ellerslie school, \$602,000; J. Percy Page, \$285,000; Menisa elementary, \$488,000; Meyokumin elementary, \$354,500; Meyonohk elementary, \$656,000; Pollard Meadows elementary, \$610,000; Sakaw elementary, \$620,800; Satoo, \$381,850; T.D. Baker, \$406,000; Holy Family school, which is a Catholic school, \$818,950; Holy Trinity – that's a Catholic school as well, and they need \$1,096,800. That is the evaluation project for 1999-2000.

What will happen in 2005, 2007? Some projects are due in 2009. I think the price will be more than double. I won't be surprised if the price is three times higher than the projection. The maintenance has increased since 1999 to 2000. Schools in good condition will deteriorate. Those schools might need some money as well.

This is not a good plan. I think this government doesn't believe in plans, but without a plan, if they run this province, we will be back in a deficit one more time. We are lucky that the money is coming from the royalties, but these royalties are not forever.

My next area is Health and Wellness. The additional amount of money that this government is asking for is \$262 million. In this particular area the government didn't give us the breakdown once again. They give us only a few lines, no breakdown. They say: okay; we are going to buy medical equipment. Which medical equipment? Nobody knows, not in full details.

I just want to know because the Grey Nuns hospital is between the Edmonton-Mill Woods riding and the Edmonton-Ellerslie riding. We are the closest ridings in this area. The waiting time in that hospital is more than nine hours, especially on the weekends. When we had a protest in the 1990s, 50,000 people protested against the cuts, and even at that time the waiting time was four hours. Now it's nine hours. We had a complaint from a couple from Calgary. She had a miscarriage. I received a letter actually yesterday or the day before. I tabled that letter I think yesterday, and she had a very similar story. She was waiting in the Grey Nuns hospital for nine hours, and she had the same experience. I mean, if we don't look into these problems and we sit here and just keep on giving speeches and not taking any action, I think we are wasting our time. We should take it very seriously, especially health care and education. They are the top, major issues not only in my riding but all over Alberta.

**8:30**

Also, it's not clear in this \$262 million. I just want to know whether they are hiring new doctors, nurses, staff in the hospitals, new beds. Well, it's not clear enough. How are you going to distribute among different regions all that amount of \$262 million? It's not clear there which region will get how much, and nothing is mentioned in that report. This is all guess work. You know, guess work doesn't work, especially when we have an institute like this one. My suggestion is that money should go where the money is mostly needed. Okay?

Infrastructure-wise some hospitals need some money for the infrastructure, and it's not clear if the money is going for the infrastructure or not.

Human resources. With this money are they going to give some more wages to doctors, nurses, or any medical professionals? No. Nothing is clear.

Efforts to reduce visits to physicians is a good idea. I would suggest to them, I mean, that they should look at it.

Waiting time to visit the doctor. Some people are saying that there is abuse. I agree with that. If there is abuse, we should review the system very carefully and find out if some people are abusing. We should make sure. We should manage it properly and stop this mismanagement and stop this misuse of money. Especially, you know, we should make some efforts to reduce visits to physicians because when you go to the physician, there are long, long lines. You have to wait there sometimes two, three hours. This is very important.

I think that the main problem for waiting times in the surgeries in the hospital is three things: gambling, alcohol, drugs, tobacco, et cetera. We are making money out of these people. Nobody tries to stop this. Suppose I'm smoking. I have a bad lung. I have to go to

the hospital again and again. The same thing with the other bad habits. I think we should teach Albertans, you know, educate them not to use these things, and we can save lots of money. We can save lots of time as well. All these addictions are the main cause of rush in the hospital, as well as in the doctor's clinic. If some people believe that in the medical system there is fraud or abuse, it must be stopped.

My next issue is the Solicitor General and Public Security. This government is asking for \$4 million in addition to the budget. The budget was only three months ago, and now they want another \$4 million. First, I just want to know where this money is going and where it should go.

Alberta is supposed to be one of the best provinces in the best country. What we see in the newspaper, television, every time we see family violence. I recently heard that family violence is 14 per cent higher. And gang-related crimes, terrorism policy programs, aboriginal crime, organized crimes . . . [Mr. Agnihotri's speaking time expired] Could you give me a little bit more time, sir?

**The Deputy Speaker:** Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. I recognize her first.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much. I'm wondering if the member can expand on his concerns around what the budgeted amount for Solicitor General is being used for. He seemed to have a number of suggestions on where he could go with that money. If he could expand.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I saw one other member wishing to participate under Standing Order 29(2)(a), so if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie could briefly answer Edmonton-Centre's question, I'm sure other members would appreciate it.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back on the same – crime, aboriginal crime has also increased. Organized crimes used to be in Edmonton, then some people say they moved to Calgary. Now I heard the news just a couple of days ago, and it's extending to the rural areas. I mean, some people came to this country to enjoy their safety, their real democracy, and welfare of their family, but they don't see that anymore. Of course, we can do that if we are serious on this.

In my particular riding I have seen three or four dead bodies outside their houses. They were shot dead. When we talk to the police, they show us the numbers: "Oh, the graph is going down. Okay? The crime is going down." But if you ask the mothers who lost a son, the wearer knows where the shoe pinches. Still, the police couldn't find the person who shot the young 19-year-old, 20-year-old son. One young guy was shot down at the Mac's store. He was working there.

I want to know how long we will wait and what steps this government is going to take. How can we stop the crime in this province? If we don't stop this crime – I mean, all the members sitting here, they might say: it's not happening to me. Maybe it's not happening to you and me today, but who knows? I go outside and somebody shoots me or somebody shoots somebody else. Then we will realize how serious this problem is. So crime should be the top priority.

Also, when I was door-knocking, the people were complaining about, you know, lots of people stealing their cars, the gang violence, throwing petrol bombs on their houses, shootings taking place, break-ins, thefts. Just two months ago in my own riding one of the young ladies suddenly disappeared. She parked her car outside the bank, and we still can't her. The police say that it's a

homicide. There are many other people like this. So many other people like this. That's not the answer.

When we have a meeting in my riding, the people ask me these questions: "Can you answer this question? Why don't you guys do anything?" So I'm requesting everybody to take crime, this issue, very seriously, and do something about it.

Thank you very much. Thanks again.

8:40

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, on Standing Order 29(2)(a) you've got 13 seconds to make your point.

**Dr. Swann:** This is supplementary supply, so clearly the question is budgets. How does the hon. member feel this budget in Solicitor General should be spent?

**The Deputy Speaker:** The time period for Standing Order 29(2)(a) has elapsed. Back onto the debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm always pleased to get a little bit of time to talk about budgets. I had done the calculations that we were talking about, \$6.6 million a minute in Committee of Supply. I'm delighted that as we debate our way through Bill 44, the appropriation bill, and with some estimates of time, I'm hoping that we can bring that down to just debating \$2 million a minute. I've got 15 minutes, and that's going to get me through about \$30 million.

I'd like to focus on my own constituency first, and that's the constituency of Edmonton-Centre. I'd like to talk a little bit about the schools that are in my constituency and then maybe a little bit about some of the particular health issues of the capital. Then, if I get time, I'd like to talk about the situation in Grande Prairie.

When I look at the schools in my constituency, I've got a sort of interesting mix. Because I have what are considered inner city schools, we've already gone through a crisis, if I may call it that, in our infrastructure in the schools. This actually goes back to before I got elected. We were in pretty dire straights, and the community has worked very, very hard to rebuild itself and to develop structures to support a revitalization of the inner city. Coming along with that has been a revitalization of our schools.

We really value our schools as integral parts of our community. They are in many ways community schools. Even if they're not open extended hours, they do tend to be a focus for us. For example, St. Catherine, which is a very diverse elementary/junior high school in my riding, hosts several family fun days throughout the year in conjunction with the local community league and the community action coalition, which is a loose association of individuals and organizations working in the community. I note that along with the Boyle Street Co-op and the Edmonton Viets Association they also support a series of awards, and they co-sponsor the July 1 barbecue that happens, in fact, on the grounds of the school.

So our schools are really integrated, and therefore we need those buildings to keep standing. Now, what happened was that we went through a consolidation of schools and for much heartache – it was a real tragedy – one of our schools, Queen Mary Park, was in fact closed and the junior high school portion of John A. McDougall school was closed, so we lost those out of our community. The idea was that we were to sort of share resources more, and that's how the central inner-city schools were going to start to share things like art teachers and choral practice and bands and that kind of thing and actually move the kids around.

But on infrastructure we have Oliver elementary/junior high, and the junior high, of course, is the Nellie McClung program. That school has had an enormous investment in the building itself: new windows, better weatherproofing, some structural changes, a boiler and that kind of thing, so it's actually in pretty good shape. St. Catherine was also due for an upgrade, and of course once they started to get the walls open, they realized how much trouble they were in. I think what was supposed to be a six-month renovation program turned into almost a year and a half while they dealt with asbestos and a new boiler and then some problems with the flooring, and it just went on and on. That has now been totally revamped, and we're very grateful for it.

Of course, we had a major reno of St. Joseph's high school, which is one of the oldest high schools in the city and at one time was the major high school for Catholic boys in the city and has a very, very proud heritage. So those three schools have all had a fair amount of injection of funds, and as a result they can continue to serve the community very well.

What was supposed to be the showpiece and, in fact, was a major plank in the 2001 Conservative platform was the Victoria school for the performing arts, which continues to be more than a disappointment, Mr. Speaker. It is now becoming an eyesore. With a huge injection of I think it was \$64 million that was talked about at one point, this was going to be the Juilliard of the north, and a number of highfalutin promises got one of the Tory backbenchers elected and then defeated. That school continues to not have anything. It just sits there. I mean, I don't know what the government plans on doing with it now. You know, when I look at any indicator that is offered to us that we've been able to glean, if we look at the raw scores from the '99-2000 evaluation, it ranks as very poor, with a score of 1,240 points. Well, the "poor" index starts at 800 points, so you're well into this category with how bad the situation was with this school in '99-2000. We're now six years on from that one.

When we look at the maintenance reaudit that was done as an upgrade in 2000, we were looking at \$17,125,000 of necessary maintenance events that were required to happen in the next five years, so pretty expensive stuff. This school is in tough, tough shape. All they've managed to do is knock down one part of it now. That's the big improvement there: so much for the Juilliard of the north. This school is offering excellent programming and, frankly, unique programming. Some of the pre-eminent families in Edmonton have got their kids going to a school where you can't stand too close to the windows because they've been known to fall right out of the building and into the parking lot below, which is a pretty sad state for a school in our capital city in a province with as much money as we've got.

I don't know what the problem is over there or what happened to the great plans and all of the great promises. This is an absolute tragedy and a huge failure on the part of the government, and still we have no concrete plans and no real idea in the community of what is supposed to be forthcoming, when we will actually see improvements to the school or a new school entirely. I don't think there are enough words that we could come up with to describe what a complete miscalculation and boondoggle this has been for this government.

I note that one of my other schools, Grandin, is on a list to have some kind of improvements come up for it I think in '08-09 or '09-10. So it's coming, but again it's an old school. I mean, these are all these red brick schools with the lovely cornice pieces on them, but they're old. The boilers are old. The air exchange systems are old. The windows are old. They need major upgrades or they have to be redone, and at this point it's a better investment to upgrade them.

For Grandin, when I look at the difference between what was the estimated maintenance in '99-2000 and what was the new estimated maintenance in 2005, again for a five-year plan, it's almost doubled, more than doubled. It was \$353,123 in '99-2000. In the 2005 reaudit, if you want to call it that, we're up to \$736,695. It's ranking at 10.29 on the FCI scale, which is into the poor category. You've basically got under 5 per cent, 5 to 10 per cent, and over 10 per cent. This is in the very poor category. It's costing us more and more money to maintain it. It's considered in very poor condition. Something needs to happen there.

You know, these are very good schools. They've served us very well. They've certainly waited and bided their time on the list for a very long period of time. Some of them have been addressed, but there is one glaring, glaring problem and total lack of planning and follow-through from the government and another one that certainly needs to be on that list and get some attention to it quickly. I don't see any of that forthcoming in the budget that's been put forward to us although there's so little detail in the budget that perhaps I've missed something. I'd be happy to be corrected – and I'm sure that my schools would be delighted to hear me be corrected – that in fact there was actually going to be some action on either of those two schools in there.

8:50

I want to note that I have some schools that really don't have buildings that qualify on this Richter scale, and that is things like the Boyle Street charter school, which has been in the news recently for celebrating its 10th anniversary. That's a school that really came out of the community. It came out of a defined need. It's unique. It provides a really important service to the community that it is in. They have been wise enough to define success in a way that works for them, and more power to them. I'm very proud of the work they did, and my hat is off to Hope Hunter and her wisdom in launching this school out of the Boyle Street Co-op. It now operates in a different site entirely and I think is actually managed by a different board, so it's actually taken flight and is off on its own. That was a great community vision.

When I look at the health region needs for Capital health, there we're looking at a deficit of \$65 million, so that's certainly not going to be covered by the money that's been offered up in this budget. My question, as always, is: what is it that the government was expecting that Capital health would not do? You know, the government has devolved and created these delegated administrative organizations of the health regions, like the children's regions and God knows what other regions. It was meant to devolve responsibility for things, but ultimately they can't get it done if they don't have the funding to do it.

I'm always curious when, you know, they ask the regions to come up with a budget of how much money they need and why and defend all of this, and the regions do. The region asks for – I'm sorry; I can't remember off the top of my head what Capital asked for. Let's say 10 per cent, and the government says: "Hmm. No. Six." Well, what are they supposed to do with the 4 per cent that they didn't get? What is it that the government envisioned that they wouldn't offer or they would cut back, or how many beds or services were they not supposed to do and in what area? It's a very bizarre way of budgeting, with very little communication going back and forth. So we've got a \$65 million deficit with Capital, and obviously this budget is not going to cover anywhere near all of it. What does the government think the Capital region is supposed to do with the rest of that money or with the lack of the rest of that money?

We're certainly seeing pressure points. Edmonton is serving most of the north. We've already had some problems. I've asked

questions in the House about the number of code burgundies, which have increased, the issues around the ambulance authorities, about the wait times in the emergency rooms. The Sturgeon hospital in St. Albert had to close its surgical unit over one of the August long weekends. We've got a growing and an aging population here. We serve a very high aboriginal population in this city. We've got issues with emergency room wait times, bed shortages, health professional workforce planning. Our health professionals' vacancy rate is 4.5 per cent.

Alberta Health did allocate in October of last year, basically 11 months ago, an additional \$647 million. Now, that was out of last year's budget, and the goal was to add a number of new beds to help us reach a 1.9 per 1,000 acute-care bed ratio. I don't know how close we're going to get to that. There are a number of construction projects, but the earliest they'll be available – the earliest they'll be available, and this isn't all of them – is 2007, including an elective surgical centre at the Royal Alex, more beds and increased ICU at the Royal Alexandra, the Misericordia, the Grey Nuns, and the U of A hospitals. That's all of them. We need some work at the Eastwood primary care centre. We need the 38-bed replacement hospital still working its way through the system in Fort Saskatchewan and the one in Sherwood Park. All of this just from Capital, and I'm not even talking about the other health regions in the province.

Everybody flaps their hands and says, "Well, we're working on it" and "Give us some time" and "Gee, only the Liberals plan; we'll have to scramble to catch up." Well, get on it. This is not acceptable for a government that's been in power for as long as this government has to be this far behind the eight ball in planning and implementation.

What I would like to do is actually just go back and talk about my schools again and some of the unique strengths and programs. I started to talk about Boyle Street. One of the things that we found – and it's a small funding thing, but it matters when you don't have any money and you can't do it – with a number of the kids that we serve, for example, that a lot of them come with very high needs. We have . . . [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on 29(2)(a).

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. I'd be interested in knowing if Edmonton is experiencing a similar problem to Calgary. For example, our Tom Baker cancer centre at the Calgary Foothills hospital can no longer cope either with infrastructure or with individuals working within the centre. Is there any equivalent shortage for cancer treatment? Also, does the member know of any place in this budget or any other place where the Premier's promise to invest a half a billion dollars in cancer treatment has shown up? I haven't seen it show up in Calgary. I'm wondering if you've seen any evidence of that money or cancer program extensions in Edmonton?

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, thanks for the questions. I'll try and answer them. In Edmonton the Cancer Board is ahead of Calgary in its implementation of a new centre. We know where it's going to be located. The land is secured; the drawings have been done; the plans have been done. For that kind of a facility it's a long planning horizon because those are complex structures to build, and the idea was that there would be research space incorporated into that. So that work is well on its way. They've now got the sign up, actually, that's sort of announcing what's going to go in the space. So we are progressing on that, and I have to say that I think that the Cancer Board is actually managing to look after itself better than some of

the health regions have been able to. Their support is a bit more secured. The capital infrastructure money for the Cross was secured sometime back, and I know that it's a little less secure and that they're in a different part of the planning process for Tom Baker. So for those of you in Calgary it's harder to see because it's not as much in front of you.

The second part of the question was: where is the money? Yeah. Again, I think that we're early enough in the implementation of the various plans that the Cancer Board has for that endowment that you can't really see any of it now, but we do know that the two facilities are progressing. Edmonton is ahead of Calgary on that one.

So I hope that's actually answered your questions.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on Standing Order 29(2)(a).

**Dr. Swann:** A quick question. I know that the hon. member is from the arts community. I'm wondering what her sense of investments in the arts is in relation to this budget.

**Ms Blakeman:** I can't possibly answer that question in the few seconds we have left. This government has consistently failed to invest in the arts considering the enormous return that's been proven in so many other locations across the world that you get for an investment in the arts. The arts funding has essentially been stagnant in this province. There was a \$3 million increase in the budget that we saw in the spring onto a budget that had essentially been stagnant since the late '80s. I mean, there hasn't even been inflation-proofing in that money. It's really a shell game following that because there have been things added into that budget, different sections or branches added into it and then taken out like the film division, for example. So money appears to be added into it, but then it disappears when the program is taken out and moved somewhere else.

9:00

We must at least double the funding to the arts without fail. I would at this point argue that the funding to the arts should be tripled considering what kind of a payback we can get from that investment. It's definitely worth it. If we're really proud of our heritage in Alberta, we should be investing in our artists to tell our stories to ourselves, to create those stories and to tell them to us. So that's the creation of it and the development of it, the touring inside of the province but also the touring outside of the province.

If we really want to see our cultural industries flourish, we need to be supporting the conduits that get that out as well, and I'm talking about the publishing industry, the recording industry, the film industry, and fine crafts. Those are our cultural industries, and we've absolutely failed them.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the debate.

**Ms Pastoor:** Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm going to talk about the debt that remains after the attempt to eliminate this provincial government's debt. There remains a large infrastructure debt, school buildings being only one of many neglected areas.

When I was on the Lethbridge city council, the operations staff created and used a sort of template for the ongoing monitoring of every public building, a 25-year window based on the known data of how buildings and materials will deteriorate. There was proper planning and management. The most important component was that the money was budgeted forward, and there were no surprises, like a roof caving in on kids trying to learn.

In Lethbridge school boards 51 and Holy Spirit have made some progress in relation to this issue, but maintenance planning and managing remains unresolved because it is impossible without the proper funding. Dollars are needed to catch up, and a stable budgeting process for sustainable dollars to take Lethbridge schools into the future is imperative.

My riding is home to 18 schools. A reaudit from the year 2000 used the facility condition index, which is a tool that determines exactly how much maintenance is needed. It's calculated by dividing the dollar amount of total required maintenance by the replacement value of the building, and there is a sort of an evaluation based on: under 5 per cent is good, over 5 per cent is fair, and 10 per cent is poor. So with that information, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to discuss some of the schools in my riding of Lethbridge-East.

The Ecole Agnes Davidson school has an FCI of 11.14 per cent. Fleetwood Bawden is good; it's only 0.38 per cent. Galbraith elementary is 5.27. Lakeview elementary is 10.38. Some of these schools have not had their reaudits. Lethbridge Christian school has not had that reaudit. Senator Buchanan elementary is at 8.8.

Westminster elementary is at 10.31. Westminster elementary is an amazing small school. When you go into assembly – they are so fortunate there – it almost looks like the United Nations. It is a very multi-ethnic school, and they have some wonderful things going on there. So the fact that they need maintenance at 10.31, which is very, very poor, is sad when you realize how much they're giving the children that come from the lower socioeconomic area of our city.

Park Meadows elementary has not been reaudited. Gilbert Paterson middle school, 6.59; Wilson middle school, 6.71; Allan Watson, 5.97; Lethbridge Collegiate Institute, 1.80.

Winston Churchill and Catholic Central high schools have not been reaudited, and I would suspect the reason is that, yes, we are fortunate in Lethbridge, and we are getting two new high schools on the west side, a Catholic high school and a public high school which will be joined in the middle by a library. However, the school isn't built yet. It will be another two or three years. Already it's probably full to the rafters, and we haven't even got the ground turned over yet.

Ecole St. Mary school is at 10.63, very, very poor. Our Lady of Assumption, 16.8. St. Francis junior high and St. Paul schools were not done.

So out of a number of 12 we've got five at poor, five at fair, and only two at good, and then of course the other ones haven't been done. I don't think that's a very good record to be proud of when we've got kids trying to learn. They are our future.

In Medicine Hat is a different story for some reason. Out of 12 schools they have three poor, three fair, and six good. Interesting. I don't know the ages of these schools, so I hope that they are much older than the ones that I have in Lethbridge-East.

The McCoy high school is 2.9 per cent. That's good. Mother Teresa and St. Francis Xavier have not been done. St. Louis school is .03 per cent; to me it sort of sounds like it's brand new. St. Mary's junior high school, 3.61; St. Michael's, 7.76. St. Patrick's school is .60 per cent. St. Thomas Aquinas has not been done.

In the public schools the Alexandra junior high school is at 8.2 per cent. Central Park school was not done. Connaught school is 19.38 per cent; that is even higher than poor. Crestwood school is 14.42 per cent. Again, that is exceedingly high. Earl Kitchener school has not been done. Elm Street school is 0.93 per cent. Again, I'm just guessing, because it needs so little maintenance, that it's a brand new school. George Davison elementary has not been done. Georges Vanier has not been done. Herald school, 15.16 per cent. Medicine Hat high school, 7.9 per cent. River Heights elementary has not been done. Riverside school, 4.13 per cent. The ones that have not

been reaudited are Ross Glen school, Southview community school, Vincent Massey school, and Webster Niblock school.

Now, these reaudits have been performed since 2001. I would suspect that that's not a very good record to have them all done when they've had over five years to get them done.

There is \$232 million in this supplemental funding for school upgrades and renovations, and \$232 million is something I can't even comprehend. It is so huge. However, I think that putting those dollar figures out is only a distraction. What I want to know is: for that \$232 million what were the outcomes? I don't want to just know the amounts because you can throw out huge amounts of dollars and huge percentages. What did those dollars really deliver? Obviously, not fixing up many of the schools that I've just referred to. Who got the dollars, and which school was considered of the highest need in this province, and if it was evaluated throughout the province and not within regions, did it really get the dollars that it needed?

What are these dollars for? At this point it would appear that they're only for catch-up maintenance. But what's required? How many dollars are required to go forward in some sort of a planned fashion? When is this work going to be done? Is there any time frame that this work could be done in? Is there any time frame that would include the dollars that they need to actually have it done? Of course, in this labour market I understand, as everyone else does, that there are huge costs to try to actually get these jobs done, and the longer you let it go, the more expensive it will be because labour is diminishing, and obviously salaries are rising.

Where is the plan? Why do we really need these plans? I think it's because we need the information to be able to budget forward. It has to be in a sustainable fashion. It cannot just be for maintenance. There has to be dollars that will recognize that there is growth in these schools. I don't think there's a school in this province that isn't growing, and the fact that we close small community schools and make young children bus is a disgrace, a total disgrace.

9:10

Another thing that I believe is that our kids deserve much, much better than portables. Please. Portables. These are windowless ATCO trailers, so let's call them what they really are. Trailers are expensive to heat, and the air exchange at any time is certainly questionable at best. It's very hard to learn when you're sleepy because the air is not fresh.

The point is that there is no long-term plan. In fact, there isn't even a short-term plan, and I'm not even sure that there is any plan at all. So far the dollars are only for catch-up, and that is not good enough. So don't quote me dollars.

Tell me what your outcomes are. Are our schools really good enough for our students to learn in? Are our schools good enough, and are they really safe for all of our students that are going to be our future? After all, we need the labour force. We need these kids to be graduating. We need them to accept apprenticeships. We need these kids well educated. They have to be educated in an atmosphere that is conducive to learning.

Mr. Speaker, I'll leave these questions out there. Maybe this government will consider these as crucial issues and actually come up with a plan that includes outcomes, which would reflect that all the maintenance is finally caught up and that there actually is forward thinking.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Standing Order 29.

**Mr. Chase:** If I could under Standing Order 29 ask the hon. Member

for Lethbridge-East if she has a sense from her constituents of being left out of the boom? When I was speaking to residents of Crownsnest Pass, they expressed great concerns about the lack of twinning of highway 3. There was a definite envy of the power corridor between Calgary and Edmonton. I'm just wondering, in talking with your constituents and talking in your outreach with people from Medicine Hat, if they're feeling that the southern part of the province is left out when it comes to highway infrastructure.

**Ms Pastoor:** When I was on city council, I sat on the twinning committee for that highway 3. I'm trying to think. It was probably eight, nine years ago when we first sat on that. Then it was a huge issue. Now it is a huge issue, and they're still sitting at the table talking about highway 3 being twinned. It isn't just a question of: gosh, it would be nice to get through. It's a question that it isn't safe anymore, but then highway 2 is not safe either. I have to drive here every now and again, and the last time I came up on a Sunday, I clocked in at 140, and I was with the traffic. I was not leading it; I was in the pack. I was bumper to bumper, and I had guys beside me. I could barely move in and out, and I was clocked at 140. [interjections] That's not the point. The point is that that highway has to be enlarged the same as highway 3. I'm following trailers with three pups, and I'm telling you that they're going 140. It's not safe. It's the same as highway 3. The highway is obsolete. There's too much traffic on it to accommodate the traffic. It's obsolete.

However, highway 3 has exactly the same problems. The trucks that are coming through from B.C. will obviously increase if and when we ever get the Canamex up and the highway running, which of course is another whole issue that I'd love to discuss at some point. I want everybody in this House to go to Germany and go on the autobahn. That's what a highway looks like. Highway 3 must be twinned. They're still talking about it. Where's the money? Show me the money for highway 3, and I'll be happy, and so will everybody else along that corridor. We'll feel, finally, that southern Alberta is a part of this province because we're outside of the magic corridor.

**The Deputy Speaker:** On 29(2)(a).

**Dr. Swann:** To the hon. member. Water is a key issue in southern Alberta. What would you like to have seen in the supplementary budgets in relation to water and water protection?

**Ms Pastoor:** Where do you go with water in southern Alberta? We hope that we can go to our reservoirs. We hope that these dams that we've put up are going to be enough. It isn't. It's oversubscribed. The water is oversubscribed.

One of the things that I found interesting with the international committee was that the Americans actually came to us and asked us if we would help them with their water storage because they are wasting it. They know that we are lucky – and I give credit fully to the government for this. Actually, I think it was under the Lougheed government. Anyway, we are lucky that we have had enough dollars to put in to create storage and pipes that will save our water. The Americans are still using wooden storage if, in fact, it's not out in the open. Some of our irrigation ditches and all of those are now enclosed. So we are very fortunate. But the fact that the Americans realize that they're wasting the water which is part of our water basin I think is a very, very serious issue.

Water, as we all know, is the oil of tomorrow, and if we're not smart now, we are going to be in deep, deep trouble. The majority of people are not going to be able to buy bottled water, so what are they going to do? It's a huge, huge issue.

I'm proud to say that at the Lethbridge water treatment plant as

much water as we take out of the river we can put back in, and it has been treated. However, all along that river we have many, many feedlots that are not contributing to clean water.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Member for Lethbridge-East, I'm not sure if *Hansard* is a document that the local RCMP regularly review for confessions, but perhaps you can take that up with the Solicitor General.

**Ms Pastoor:** I'm not afraid of the RCMP. It's those new sheriffs that scare the hell out of me.

**The Deputy Speaker:** On the debate, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to speak to Bill 44, supplementary supply. It's about sharing the Alberta advantage, and I guess that the questions we have to address today have to do with the role of government in ensuring that we all share in a well-planned, well-invested future. I want to talk about several areas. One is my constituents. The second has to do with their social concerns, some aspects of the schools, how this supplementary budget fails to deal with some of those issues, and finally some closing comments on the environment, which is also very close to the hearts of many of my constituents.

How are we managing? How are we managing our capital, our financial, human, and natural capital? If we're not balancing those three – financial, human, and natural capital – we are not really managing for the future. How are we sustaining in our planning these vital resources for the future, and why are we continuing to focus on gross domestic product as the measure of our success? When a forest fire increases our gross domestic product and more ambulance services and more casualties increase our gross domestic product, this is a very false measure of how we're doing. If we're planning and spending on the basis of gross domestic product, we are planning to fail. In fact, as we've said repeatedly in the House, what we're doing here in supplementary supply is recognizing the failure of planning and continuing to overspend based on nonrenewable resources. This is a serious issue for all of us in Alberta, and more and more people are asking for leadership in this province on planned, sustained funding.

We need to look at a future without oil. Clearly, that's coming within the next few decades. More and more people are saying that we need to see people and the environment and the educational processes as investments, not as expenses in this province. In that context, then, we need to look at policies and investments that reduce demand, increase efficiency, and increase investment in renewables. So it's in that context that I want to raise questions from people in my constituency in relation to their school systems and the health care system and the environment.

9:20

In the context, then, of our ideological commitment in this province to business over public interest, what has resulted is a counterproductive cycle in which there is increased competition and focus on money. There's a lack of trust now and an erosion of community. There is uncontrolled growth as a result of what we've seen in the oil sands primarily, but it's a reflection of the overall philosophy of this government to grow at all costs. Well, in medicine growth at all costs is called cancer, and as I've mentioned, it causes an erosion of community, a decrease in the health status of people, and an increase in health care demands, which is exactly what we're seeing. This needs to be cut off through a serious commitment to larger thinking about what our future holds and what



our budgeting has to do with where we invest our dollars and how we increase the capacity of communities to care for themselves and care for the future. Compounding these factors is the struggle of our disadvantaged in this province: growing frustration and despair in those who cannot cope with the existing status quo; persons with developmental disability and their caregivers, abominably paid in this province; AISH recipients stuck at a thousand dollars a month, half of the poverty line. How are they expected to live in quality and health? Those on social assistance and unemployable and homeless youth are increasing. How is this reflective of our commitment to Albertans and to the future? This is a social deficit that we have to begin to address. We have paid off some of our financial debt. We have only begun to address social and infrastructure and health deficits as well as environmental deficits in this province.

The national report on welfare was a scandalous, scathing indictment of the way we are managing our most disadvantaged in this society. Where is the supplemental supply for the most critical and disadvantaged in our society? We have essentially decided that they're only worth 50 per cent of the support we gave them in 1986. Well, we gave ourselves 5.5 per cent this year. What does this say about a government and their morality?

Students are also coming increasingly to say that the stresses they're under have to be alleviated in some way. We have to minimize and assist them in getting through to be more productive citizens without an obsession with money after they graduate, which is what we're creating with high debt loads. Medical students and residents have indicated this week that they graduate with over \$100,000 debt in most cases. Like other postgraduate students they are not given the opportunity of waiting till after they graduate to start paying down their debt. This is adding a tremendous toll in terms of their mental stress, and it has to be addressed as well.

Infrastructure clearly has been an important part of what has to be addressed in the supplemental supply, and we have to acknowledge that many good investments have been made to patch up the neglected infrastructure over the past decade. Schools, for example, have identified some of the key challenges. Most dominant in my mind in my constituency is the Marlborough school, which had to be closed down because of significant risks from the roof. It was leaking and potentially going to fall in.

The Calgary board of education released statistics on many others in my area. Nine were generally fixed this past year, and I commend the government for making the appropriate investments there. However, six are still in serious disrepair.

**Ms Blakeman:** Which six?

**Dr. Swann:** The Chris Akkerman elementary school, a raw score of 470, with \$700 million needed to be fixed; Albert Park elementary, at a score of 830, with over a million dollars in needed repairs; David Oughton elementary, also in Calgary-East, 570 the score, with over one and a half million dollars needed in repairs; Belfast elementary, Calgary-East, 560 the raw score, with \$1.1 million in repairs needed; Sir John Franklin in Calgary-East, 440 score, with \$1.2 million deficit spending; and Holy Redeemer in Calgary-East, at 740 raw score, with \$1.4 million deficit.

In my own region of Calgary-Mountain View are another seven schools that clearly have been neglected: the Briar Hill elementary, with a raw score of 490, nearly a million dollars deficit maintenance budget; Queen Elizabeth elementary and Queen Elizabeth high, both in the 700s as a raw score with, respectively, \$1.3 million and \$3.2 million in maintenance deficits; the Hillhurst community school, a raw score of 480, with \$900,000 in deficit maintenance; Rosedale school, one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods in the city, with

serious neglect in their school at over \$677,000 in deficit; Crescent Heights high school, a very well-recognized school in Calgary, significant underspending with a \$3.08 million deficit; finally, the most needy school, Christine Meikle for the handicapped, in my constituency, with a raw score of 920, amounting to a \$1.29 million deficit in spending. This reflects some of what still needs to be caught up in both my constituency of Calgary-Mountain View and Calgary-East.

In relation, then, to Environment, which is, I think, woefully underfunded and on which our very future depends, I'm very disappointed to see the minimal supplementary investments. This whole ministry needs to be reviewed and a significant expansion of their scope in monitoring, in inspection strategies, and enforcement of our environmental legislation.

Most critically, our water inventory, is still very much behind. We still have no idea what's going on in our groundwater around this province. We continue to make allocations and give out licences. We continue to fail to measure how much water is being used in our province in spite of knowing that with climate change and predictions both in terms of glacial loss and changes in precipitation we're going to be facing a serious water crisis in the next couple of decades. We need to get a serious handle on water, both surface and groundwater, in order to manage it in a sustainable way.

Watersheds need to be critically examined for their protection and for sustainable practices that will ensure that our major communities continue to get water into the future. A recent foothills study that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity and I attended in Chain Lakes raised very stark predictions about continued development in the southern foothills of Alberta and the need to seriously look at legislation that protects these from both foresting and other resource activity if we're going to have water quality and water quantity in the future.

The Rosebud community continues to be troubled by ongoing gaseous and deficient water in spite of the reassurance of the Department of Environment. They have not been able to do the adequate testing. They have still not been able to conclusively say whether or not the water has been damaged by resource activity. This is unacceptable. The people in Rosebud continue to wonder about their water, and there's increasing evidence that government is not being up front about what they're finding in people's water.

I was today meeting with scientists at the University of Alberta who see significant evidence that gas migration continues to occur in our groundwater. There is a resistance to talking about this in the public. The government is continuing to be challenged on the basis that it is siding with industry in silence and not recognizing that this represents a serious threat to long-term water independence in this province.

We again need an independent committee to look at this. The level of trust, especially in the rural areas among landowners, is at its all-time low in terms of the investigation of these water bodies that appear to have been damaged, some by resource activity, some by age and decline in well quality, but these need to be sorted out by all means and quickly if we're going to get restored confidence in rural areas and get back in a constructive way to look at a balanced development in rural areas. So I would again acknowledge that the Environment department is working hard, but it is failing because it lacks the resources and the political will, I would argue, to actually call it what it is. We've had some resource damage to water in our province, and there's an unwillingness to identify and state that and move towards constructive solutions.

A number of rural communities around Calgary have raised concerns about water and other developments in the area. When it's acknowledged by the government that we have overallocated the South Saskatchewan River, there is obvious concern about how we

are going to manage continued demands for business and development, confined feeding operations. Any industry is going to need is going to need some water, and we have no idea at this time how we are going to make these difficult decisions about who gets to develop a business and who doesn't.

So those represent my significant comments on supplemental supply, and I thank you for the opportunity to raise this.

9:30

**Ms Blakeman:** Interbasin water transfers.

**Dr. Swann:** Interbasin transfers of water have been raised as I've just been reminded. Obviously, taking water to people is not a long-term sustainable solution. It is never going to be supported on this side of the House. We must begin to live within the means that we've been given. We cannot at a huge expense transfer water and disrupt ecosystems and create the conditions that are not sustainable, where people continue to grow and develop businesses because new water has come and then the endless cycle of expecting water to come to people instead of asking people and their businesses to move to where the water is.

So that is not a solution. It's obviously being discussed because we are increasingly stretched in southern Alberta even as it is, not even considering the considerable losses we've had over the century and will continue to experience with climate change in this next 10 to 20 years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** On Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View mentioned landowners' concerns in Calgary. My constituency has a big issue of low-income homes and affordable houses especially, and I would really appreciate it if he could draw some attention in this House, please.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. Very much a concern in Calgary, obviously. I have many people who are living in handicapped conditions in my constituency, many who are being squeezed out of their accommodation as a result of the massive increases in rent. It's a very serious issue for the municipal, provincial, and federal governments to get a handle on as quickly as possible. People are suffering. People are living with extreme anxiety. One family, a young couple, both working and three children, is going to be forced to be out on the street if they cannot – even though they have jobs, they are low-paying jobs. They simply can't afford \$1,850 a month, which now the rental accommodations in central Calgary are demanding.

So we need to find creative solutions. We need to assist some of the granny flats to get established. I know that the government has been making some strides in that. I think that's important. I guess I would argue that we need to collaborate as much as possible with all three levels of government to try and get our own investments as governments and ensure that the development community steps up and makes their contribution of 5 to 10 per cent affordable housing in any new housing developments.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. My colleague from Calgary-Mountain View commented on our trip last Friday to Chain Lakes, where we talked to environmentalists, local ranchers about their concerns with regard to water and also maintenance of the natural

grassland. My question to the hon. member is: when we travel together to places like Ponoka and Turner Valley, Nanton, Trochu, Drayton Valley, can you comment on the unanimous concern of the extent and the potential for pollution of underground aquifers that we are hearing at those meetings attended by hundreds of individuals?

**Dr. Swann:** Well, thank you for the question. I guess the overriding concern that we experienced in the rural areas is a lack of confidence that what they're hearing from government is the truth, a sense of being reassured, that we know what we're doing, that groundwater is understood, that casing of wells is going along properly, that there's not been any identified well contamination from resource activity. So the overriding concern is a real cynicism.

Again, that comes down to addressing it head-on instead of pretending it doesn't exist and that these farmers are really imagining things and setting up an independent committee to look at these issues, some independent science, and reporting back in a timely way to actually, explicitly say: "These wells have been damaged by resource activity. These have not. Back off. These are the lessons we've learned from those wells that have been damaged, and this is the way that we're going to legislate protection and monitoring and enforcement in the future." Learn from what we've done, and move ahead.

I think that everyone believes that our resources are wonderful and that they should be developed. The question is: at what rate and under what supervision, under what standards and conditions to minimize threats to our lifeblood? These rural people know where their lifeblood is, and it's not in oil and gas. They feel violated in many respects by this unwillingness to accept genuine concerns and in fact genuine science that's saying: "We have some damage done. What are we going to do about it?" When are we going to face up to it and address the oil and gas industry and the public in an honest way and say: "This is what we're doing about it. We're going to confront it. We're going to deal with it, and we're going to solve it"? It's going to be a win-win for industry, for the public, and for the government.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much. I hope I've still got enough time. I notice that there is an additional subsidy of the horse-racing industry contemplated in this budget, with \$4.8 million for infrastructure assistance for municipal waste water to support a project in the MD of Rocky View that includes a horse-racing track and equine centre. Could I get our water guy to comment on the anticipated effect of this?

**The Deputy Speaker:** Sorry. The time for Standing Order 29(2)(a) has elapsed.

Are there others who wish to participate in the debate?

Are you ready for the question?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a second time]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Stevens:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 9:39 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]