

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title: Wednesday, August 30, 2006**

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 06/08/30

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special family that's visiting from Calgary today. It's my absolute pleasure to introduce my friends Al, Noelle, Kathleen, and Nicholas Mah. They've made a special trip to our Legislature so that they can tour the Legislature. I think we'll even be going to your office this afternoon, seeing where you are as well. The children are very interested in that. I'm very glad that you're all here today, and I ask that you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Cardinal:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two aboriginal leaders who have been involved in aboriginal issues, working for the government. Tom Ghostkeeper and Clifford Supernault are both working towards retirement and will be leaving the government. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In response to the Turner Valley Gas Plant's environmental contamination of the Sheep River and its surrounding area a group of residents from Black Diamond and Turner Valley have come together to address their concerns over site cleanup, drinking water supply, and environmental integrity. Two of them are joining us today, and I would ask them to please rise as I call their names. Linda Abrams is the leader of the Sheep River foundation, which is a group of area residents that formed specifically to address the contamination of the Sheep River and the surrounding area by the gas plant, and Roxanne Walsh is a member of the Turner Valley Gas Plant Committee for a Safe Historic Site. This committee is attempting to get stakeholders and community members together to come up with a solution that not only contains the problems but reclaims the Turner Valley Gas Plant as a historic site that is safe for visitors and also for those who swim or recreate in the Sheep River. I am pleased to introduce them to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, and I ask that you join in welcoming them to this House.

Thank you.

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly today guests from the Good Samaritan care centre in Mill Woods. The guests today are Dwayne Danforth, Rowena Emmons, Harold Ferguson, Earline Kwasnycia, and Linda McClinton. I'd ask these guests to stand or wave as they receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Dr. Gene Kalita, a well-known psychologist in the Edmonton region. Would you please rise, doctor, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, over the past few months I've been meeting with a number of municipal leaders who comprise the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability. Again this afternoon, immediately following question period, that minister's council will be getting together to deal with important issues related to municipalities. It's my pleasure to introduce one of the members who has joined us today, who I will ask to rise very shortly. I would like to point out that the president of AUMA, Mr. Bob Hawkesworth, was planning to be with us and will be participating in the meeting, but I understand that he has the pleasure of changing a tire on QE II at the present time, so he'll be a little bit late. We do have Mr. Don Johnson, who is the president of the AAMDC, with us in the gallery.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's interesting to note that in preparation for this afternoon's meeting this morning I read a speech that was given by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in 1962, reporting on the work of his advisory council, that was structured very similarly to the one that we have ongoing now, so history does have a sense of repeating itself from time to time.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Diane Martin. Diane is the current president of the Alberta Lymphedema Association. The Alberta Lymphedema Association is a not-for-profit charitable organization founded in 2003 by a team of people who recognized the need to help people living with or at risk of lymphedema. The ALA works to make a difference and to empower affected individuals and their families to help manage this condition and is committed to ongoing education of its stakeholders. Diane has been affected by lymphedema for the past four years and has worked tirelessly since her diagnosis to effect change in the community. She's also the co-founder, along with Kirsten Hausmann, of the lymphedema therapists association. She's in the public gallery. I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

### Oral Question Period

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

### Health Services in Grande Prairie

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The conditions in Alberta's health regions due to acute staffing shortages continue to deteriorate. Physicians in Grande Prairie feel that they have no support from

local MLAs, no input into medical affairs, and they fear someone will die before the provincial government addresses the crisis. In a letter from the president of the Peace Country region medical organization, which I will table, the president states that “the growing deficit of family physicians has reached a crisis where whole communities may soon be without any physician.” My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that these physicians express concern that “many existing services are only one physician or one nurse short of complete collapse,” will the minister finally admit that this government has failed the people of the Grande Prairie region?

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

**Ms Evans:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the contrary. I would acknowledge that there are pressures in Grande Prairie. There are pressures in Fort McMurray. There are pressures in Calgary, quite frankly. You don't add 92,000 people to a province within one year and not have pressures on workforce. We are not unique. We are part of a North American phenomenon where workforce issues are a problem. We are taking action.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that Peace Country health was unable to retain its only child psychiatrist for the entire region, will the minister admit that this government has failed children needing mental health services in the Grande Prairie region?

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, on the contrary. A very interesting comment from Senator Kirby in the time that he worked on the mental health commission was that in fact Alberta is doing more for mental health services than anywhere else in the country. Clearly, there have been issues in Grande Prairie retaining a child psychiatrist. I spoke to the psychiatrist that remains there. We have been networking with Capital health region to put a bridge over troubled waters, if you will, for the kinds of needs that are either for the acute system or the mental health care system, and we have been working as best we can to provide that support measure when urgent cases come to the attention.

1:40

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the intensive care unit and the surgical departments in Grande Prairie were both forced to close for a week earlier this month and face the same situation again, will the minister admit that this government has failed the Grande Prairie region's most critically ill residents?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Ms Evans:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Over the last several weeks we have done a considerable amount of work with the Grande Prairie region. My deputy was there yesterday listening to the doctors, getting some of their ideas about attracting more physicians. It's not unusual in the summertime to find that the pressures in health regions are increasing because of absenteeism of some of the physicians and nurses and other health care professionals who choose to take holidays. But I'd have to acknowledge that the most important thing we . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, thank you so much.

The thing that I find most impressive is that the Capital health region has been assisting that region where needs can be met, providing locum support, and our rural physician action plan continues to build on the amount of dollars and amount of resources that we're providing.

Mr. Speaker, the last point: we doubled the amount of money this year in the academic relationship plan for physicians, putting more physicians in place, and I would remind the Assembly that we had a greater per capita increase in physicians, with 800 physicians more over the last few years, than any other part of Canada.

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

### Calgary Health Region CEO

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The crisis in Grande Prairie, which has been building for years, is just one example from across Alberta of how this government has failed to deliver the health care services Albertans deserve and need. Yet documents just released show that CEOs of regional health authorities are paid top dollars, especially if they're connected to top Tories. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given the serious and chronic problems of the Calgary health region, how does the minister justify the head of the region, Jack Davis, getting a \$57,000 raise this year alone for a grand total salary of \$593,000 plus a car allowance? Justify that.

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously the hon. member opposite has not looked closely at the delegation of authority from the province to the regional health authorities to manage their affairs, their staffing, their management issues as they see fit. That management authority looked at the marketplace, looked at what was happening in Canada for payments to people that provide CEO services, looked at the risk and liability of the position. I can share with you that in one of the larger Toronto hospitals they recently advertised and got a CEO for the cool price of \$1 million plus benefits. The reality is that top health officials to run a top system are paid at a market price higher than what many other professionals are paid.

Mr. Speaker, they are addressing the questions to the wrong person. They should address those questions to the chair of that board. I can assure you that the chair of that board, speaking to me, is well satisfied that they are receiving value for money with the challenges and the planning that goes in place to run and operate a situation like Calgary's health region.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that Mr. Davis is widely known to be a good Tory with close connections to the Premier and to the former Provincial Treasurer and only one year of experience in health care management when he was hired, is this minister actually confident that there is no one else in Canada who could do the job better for less?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite misses the point. First of all, this minister does not appoint that individual. That individual is accountable to the board. It is not up to this Legislative Assembly to get involved in the health care recruitment for CEOs and evaluate whether they're doing a good job. But may I say this: I am very confident that not only in the Calgary health region but throughout the health regions of Alberta we are getting yeoman

service from excellent professionals that don't deserve the strikes and accusations and malignment that they are getting from the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. She speaks of accountability. What action has the minister taken to hold Jack Davis accountable for the outrageous contracts that he had the Calgary health region channel to his friends Rod Love and Kelley Charlebois?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Point of order to come.

The hon. minister. [interjections] The hon. minister has the floor.

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, I think it's regrettable that in this House we are maligning people and making references to contracts without giving quite specific examples about what is outrageous, what is unwarranted, and the references to this party, to this government are totally without call.

Mr. Speaker, on my way into the Assembly today it was referenced to me that an hon. member of the third party called us monkeys. Quite frankly, I don't think the reference points and this kind of name-calling are necessarily appropriate either in this Assembly or out, and words like "outrageous" and the kinds of deleterious comments are not fitting to respond to.

**The Speaker:** Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. Martin:** Mr. Speaker, point of order.

**The Speaker:** Another point of order. Okay. [interjections] The hon. member has the floor.

#### Electricity Generation from Gas over Bitumen

**Mr. MacDonald:** Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Yesterday in this House the Premier said that the millions of dollars' worth of gas that was used to subsidize electricity production in the oil sands belongs to the generators, not Albertans. My first question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain, please, why this government believes that the gas used to subsidize electricity generation in the oil sands belongs to the generators and not the fine citizens of this province, who own the natural resources?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. Minister of Energy supplement, but the hon. member is alluding to gas over bitumen – gas over bitumen – and whether they use that gas to generate electricity or sell it on the open market is entirely up to them. They lose money one way or another. First of all, gas on the open market is very expensive, and gas to burn to generate electricity is very expensive. Either way, it's six of one and half a dozen of the other, and I would hope that the hon. member will understand that.

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister briefly.

**Mr. Melchin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, once again, there's a response to the hon. member across the side to a letter back in July, which I understand he tabled also, about this question in particular and fails to recall that I also mentioned in the same letter

that gas that's used to help produce an additional product out of the oil sands, be it in their processes to get bitumen to a product that can be sold on the market, much of which is upgraded and refined, has actually created \$75 million more than anything else that he would have called a waiver or otherwise. He doesn't talk about that, that we do charge a royalty on a final product produced and sold. It's in that sense that we've created the extra value, the tremendous value that Albertans are receiving in this case in specific.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: how long will this government continue to subsidize generators of electricity at the oil sands while forcing Alberta consumers to pay record prices for the electricity?

1:50

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, Albertans are not paying record prices for electricity. Secondly, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

**Mr. Melchin:** Mr. Speaker, these are not subsidies. These are products in the oil sands. It's a net profit. It's a net profit regime, 25 per cent of net profits. Their costs are deducted from them to sell a product, which is either bitumen or synthetic crude, that's upgraded from oil sands. From that we charge a royalty on the final products that are sold. There is no subsidy in this kind of a question that he asserts or otherwise.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that the Minister of Energy admitted in a letter dated August 2, 2006, that \$162 million worth of gas for electricity generation was exempted from royalties in 2005 alone, will the Premier now admit that he was wrong yesterday and apologize to the true owners of the resource, Albertans?

**Mr. Klein:** No, I'm not going to apologize for anything, and I wasn't privy to the letter.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

**Mr. Melchin:** Mr. Speaker, once again, in processes that the oil sands go through, in bitumen, in their upgrading to get it to synthetic crude, they create off-gases, a product that is then used for them to help create this bitumen and synthetic crude to be sold. It's in that that all the costs are deducted. There's no forgoing. If we had charged a royalty on that one, then they would have deducted it as a cost wherein in the end all we're trying to do is a simple system so that they would charge the royalty on the final product that's sold to the market, of which we receive substantially more in royalties than if we were focused specifically on that question.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

#### Hospital Bed Capacity

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This morning the NDP opposition released figures from Alberta Health and Wellness which showed that Edmonton and Calgary each have fewer acute-care beds than they did in 1992. In fact, despite Edmonton's population growth of nearly 100,000 people, we have 15 per cent fewer beds than just over a decade ago. The region has clearly not

recovered from the reckless cuts of the 1990s, and we are facing longer waiting times in our hospitals as a result. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the minister admit that the government has created a bed shortage crisis by allowing a persistent gap between population growth and investment in new acute-care beds?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, no, I will not admit that. I am disappointed, to say the least, that the NDP opposition release that I have in my hands quotes these figures, that we lost beds from 1992 to 2004, and fails to account for the beds that have been added up to March 2006. In that period we added 470 acute beds in the Capital region and we added 165 acute beds in the Calgary region, and many other health care providers, both for continuing care, assisted living, and other forms of care beds, provide additional support to the health system.

Mr. Speaker, one final point. Many years ago when I was a nurse, gall bladder surgery might take two weeks in the hospital. Today it may take two or three days. Many outpatient services that are provided in day surgery and by new technology have changed the complexion of health care. The delivery through primary care and community health centres, in fact, very much supports a health care model where recovery is best facilitated in the home. So to look at the beds as an indicator that Albertans maybe are being failed in their health care system is not only erroneous, but it is misleading.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister just told the House that new beds have been added since the period covered by this document and given that I have a release from her department, October 14, 2005, announcing those beds – and clearly those beds have not been built – will she stand up and apologize for misleading the House? Those beds do not yet exist.

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the release from October 2005 is for yet more beds that will be built, \$1.4 billion worth that will be added still. The statistics that were quoted in their release were up to the end of 2004. Since that period the figures that I've just quoted to the House are the beds that were added and were opened from 2004 to March 31, 2006. Calgary, by the opening of the new southeast hospital in 2011, will have at least 700 more beds. There are many more beds that are scheduled for opening in the Capital region.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's unfortunate that the acknowledgement is not current, is not up to date, and I have just sharpened that point by pointing out in the last two years the additions that have been made.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, given that Calgary has grown by nearly 240,000 people and given that the minister's document does not include bed cuts as a result of the blowing up of the Calgary General hospital and the privatization of other hospitals, how can the minister justify the fact that Calgary has fewer beds now than it had in 1992 even though it's grown by 240,000 people in the meantime?

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, let me use the simple example and the recent example of the children's beds and the opening that I spoke about yesterday. We had 80 beds in the Children's hospital, but they weren't all effective. Sometimes the rooms accommodated three children. When a child came in with a communicable disease, two beds were sterilized because one child was being looked after in the third bed, so nobody else could go into that bed. We're looking at effective beds now, and effective being a term which says that we can use all of these beds, that we are not ever without a bed that can

be used. So in the Children's hospital, for example, we expanded to 135 beds. Once again, we have made several changes in Alberta to improve the health care of Albertans.

I would point out that over 85 per cent satisfaction in the delivery of health care service is exactly where we were sitting at the time that the last report was released, with the acknowledgement that in some areas services could be improved, but to the largest extent Albertans are satisfied with the health care they're receiving. As I've said, beds are but one indicator, and we have been doing our best to rebuild and add beds. Going back to the '90s and trying to prove that those were poor decisions to remove beds is a total fallacy. The removal of those particular hospitals was done to protect the people from being exposed to asbestos, and other construction was necessary and has taken place.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

### Energy Innovation Fund

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Energy unveiled the government's integrated energy vision, and earlier today he announced the program details for the \$200 million energy innovation fund. As my constituents in West Yellowhead have a vested interest in the future of our province's energy industry, especially as it relates to coal development and conventional oil and gas, my first question today is to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister explain how the energy innovation fund will help the coal and conventional oil and gas industries that are so important to the citizens of West Yellowhead as well as Alberta?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Melchin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I will table a document called Integrated Energy Vision, one part of the rollout of the things which we can do to help accomplish the tremendous opportunity that's before Alberta. We leave about 73 per cent of the oil in the ground. We leave half of the natural gas in the ground. Only 10 per cent of our oil sands are in a proven category. You add to that the huge and enormous potential of renewables, the coexistence of energy development and environmental practices: all of those things to which we can apply the science and innovation that ought to be at the forefront. That's what this energy innovation fund is to help do, so that when we think about coal and clean coal environment, there are tremendous potentials given. There's more resource and energy in coal than all the oil and gas combined.

It's in that thrust that we've put together a \$200 million energy innovation fund, announced in the first-quarter budget and more detail announced today. There are five sponsoring ministries: Department of Energy; Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; Environment; Innovation and Science; and Sustainable Resource Development. Through those development priorities we have enormous opportunity to create this value, an opportunity for all Albertans for centuries to come.

2:00

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

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the Minister of Environment. How will this new fund assure my constituents, who rely on water and aquifer water for drinking, washing, growing crops, and feeding livestock, that their groundwater will be protected, especially during coal-bed methane development?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that this will create a permanent monitoring network in the Athabasca oil sands. What it will be able to do is keep a constant eye on ground-water quality and quantity. Even more importantly, what it's going to be able to do, the money in the West Yellowhead area, is safeguard, of course, the important groundwater supplies, that we have recognized as blue gold. Everyone in this Legislature, all parties, do agree that it's such an important resource. But criticism has come in the fact that there hasn't been money. This is living proof of that money and another example of the long-term vision of our Premier and this government, of our work and the money that's going towards this important work.

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

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the Acting Minister of Innovation and Science. What research is being done to develop the province's vast reserve of coal?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Energy Research Institute, otherwise known as AERI, co-chaired by the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky – and I thank him for the hard work that he and his crew do with AERI – is working with the departments of Energy and Environment, as we earlier heard, as well as industry and the research institutions in Alberta and all across Canada to advance cleaner coal production. You know, in the next few weeks we will be announcing specific projects that will result in more innovation and power generation with fewer emissions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

### Continuing Care Costs

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People in my constituency are becoming vocal about the lack of support and commitment from this government to continuing care facilities. We owe our seniors a friendly environment where care is based on their needs, comfort, and independence and provides security, but residents are expressing anxiety and fear with the pressure to take on increasing costs. My first question to the minister of health: given that quality of life can be significantly improved when residents of continuing care facilities have an opportunity to participate in activities and have access to recreational therapy, what is the minister doing to ensure that these services are readily available?

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, may I convey a compliment to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who has done yeoman's service in working with her residents in a particular facility, the Good Samaritan Society, and worked on the conversion from assisted living to long-term care. She deserves to be applauded.

It's a delight to see residents from that particular care centre today and acknowledge that there has been a lot of work that has to be done and is being done. I believe it was on August 18 when the last meeting took place between Capital Care, the Good Samaritan Society, and I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods was in that company. Residents were concerned about the recre-

ational therapy services, the response time for call bells, and were concerned about the change from assisted living to long-term care because they believed that not sufficient kinds of opportunities were being made available to them. So we have undertaken to work with Capital Health to ensure and monitor that the continuing care standards that this government released will be, in fact, fully in place by early next year. We will work quite specifically in support of this facility to make sure that these kinds of opportunities exist.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the hon. member has other questions, so I'll sit down and let her go forth.

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you. My next question: given that retaining staff is a critical factor in enhancing quality, when will the minister implement competitive wages, permanent positions, and increase staffing levels?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, we hope to have all of our standards in place which address staffing needs as well as wages by early next year. There have been a number of strides made in that direction. Obviously, we have to work with the regional health authorities to make sure that this is accommodated. In some of the regions it has been more quickly accommodated than others, but we are working with a target of full implementation of the standards by early next year. At that time we'll be able to more fully respond to each of the issues surrounding each particular facility.

I should note that some of the facilities, because of their staffing mix, are up to the standards, are being paid wages at the standard that would be appropriate, but there's still more work to do on others, and we acknowledge that.

**Mrs. Mather:** To the same minister: how is the minister prepared to address the issue of the increasing cost burden on residents?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports to respond on accommodation challenges. We have a recognition that in some of our facilities and in this particular facility converting from assisted to long-term care has created a hardship, and work is being done with individual patients. But if I could ask the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports to respond on accommodation challenges.

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. The accommodation fees for both facilities, whether it's a designated assisted-living facility or a long-term care facility, are for room and board services. They are regulated in long-term care. Those rates have not increased in long-term care for three years. The rate for private accommodation, for a private room, is \$48.30 per day, and the rate for a semiprivate room is \$42 a day. As you know, when the budget came in in February, we did place further funding into the budget, as I indicated to you, to ensure that as the increases for fees take place, which will be coming soon because they haven't increased for three years, we assist our low-income and our moderate-income seniors with that. Having said that, we also like to ensure that our seniors still have \$265 at the end of the month, and that is taken into context when they pay their fee. I'd be willing to look into that further with you, hon. member, as well.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

### Water Supply in Southern Alberta

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans, particularly in southern Alberta, are becoming increasingly alarmed about the shortage of water available to sustain their quality of life. To the Minister of Environment. I know that you call water Alberta's blue gold and that everyone places a high value on this resource. My question is: what action is being undertaken to assure the people of southern Alberta that they'll have a reliable water supply for the future?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I said in this Legislature to all members a while back that if you were in a desert and had a choice between a barrel of oil and a barrel of water, what would one choose? I think it's obvious to us all. That's why our government in cabinet just approved a comprehensive water management plan for the South Saskatchewan River basin, referred to as the SSRB, which includes residents from Red Deer all the way to the member's constituency down in Cypress-Medicine Hat. This is a monumental and significant decision that clearly demonstrates this government's commitment to protecting our watersheds.

The SSRB water management plan provides a long-term vision for water management in southern Alberta. We have wonderful examples during drought where Albertans help their neighbours side by side, on how we work together as neighbours, helping each other with this valuable resource.

This is really the first plan of its kind in North America under Alberta's Water Act, and it's a key deliverable under our Water for Life strategy. I thank the members from all parties who are joining us at this international forum where 20 countries are coming to this province because of our government's forward thinking in terms of the actions we're taking, such as this monumental announcement we made today relative to the South Saskatchewan River basin.

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

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Given that a key action of this plan is to stop accepting applications for new allocations on the Bow, Old Man, and South Saskatchewan River subbasins, how will municipalities, industries, and other water users in these subbasins be assured that they'll be able to continue to get the water that they need?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

2:10

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to first of all thank all Albertans and the multitude of stakeholders who have sat on the watershed councils that we have met with because this is a very important and valid point. In fact, at the appropriate time I will provide highlights. In fact, in this document, to summarize, this plan reflects a balance between protecting the aquatic environment and the amount of river water required for economic development in the SSRB.

I want to assure my colleagues in this House today, Mr. Speaker, that the plan for managing this basin ensures a sufficient and sustained water supply for southern Alberta's economic growth and, at the same time, protects the basin's aquatic environment. Ultimately, this is a goal of our Water for Life plan.

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

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that this plan will have serious implications for the people of southern Alberta, can the minister tell this House what role Albertans have played in the process to develop this plan?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Well, Mr. Speaker, again I want to thank the multitude of Albertans, the watershed council members, the consultations that took place in the early part of January. We are currently also in discussion with the First Nations residing in the river basin. Input from Albertans on this critical issue will continue because it is ultimately so important to us all and, I know, to the members across the way.

So Albertans have made their voices very clear and loud, and the government has taken action based on the input, the very good input, that they have given to us. We're acting on it because we have a vision.

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

### Water Quality in Turner Valley

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The chief medical officer of health for the Calgary health region and the Turner Valley gas plant committee are concerned about contamination from the site that is entering the Sheep River, a source of drinking water for nearby communities. The health impacts of this contamination have not been explored, and concerns from citizens are bounced between Community Development, Environment, and Health and Wellness. No ministry is taking responsibility for co-ordination and leadership of testing and measures to protect the health and safety of area residents. My first question is to the minister of health. Why hasn't the minister advised either Alberta Environment or the Calgary health region to sample the water wells that are across and downstream from the Turner Valley gas plant historic site?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, I'm very confident that the Calgary health region has undertaken the necessary tests and has undertaken the necessary due diligence for the health of the region. In fact, earlier in the spring I had an extensive conversation with the chairman of the Calgary health region. They were not only pleased to undertake that; they were very forceful in their acknowledgement that there were issues that they wanted to explore.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, for more information on either environmental testing or on sustainable resource development that may go on in the area, one of my colleagues would like to add to the response about testing.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. The chief medical officer disagrees.

My second question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the minister commit to conducting a comprehensive health assessment of residents in the area? Comprehensive. Of everybody.

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Environment is continuing to monitor the Sheep River and looking after the local residents, and I'm going to ask the Minister of Environment to respond so that we don't get any incomplete or misinformation about what is going on based on the questions.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, quite contrary to the preamble, this government and this ministry are working closely with its residents.

We want to do the right thing. We are doing the right thing. We are doing the appropriate testing and will continue to do so.

I also want to say that I thank the hon. member from the Bragg Creek area and also the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, who have been working really closely with us and working on solutions. That's what we're harnessing our energy to do rather than what we are not doing or accused of not doing. Quite the contrary could be true in terms of what you are suggesting.

**Ms Blakeman:** That's why there's a problem. Health assessments get referred to Environment.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Let's get on with the question.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister explain why, when Alberta Environment was digging at the site 10 days ago, the site was not secured, nor were there any signs posted to warn parents with children playing at the campsite downstream about the contaminants leaching into that very same water. Why?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, what the preamble of this question was is simply not accurate. Number one, why are we testing? We are testing because residents want us to test, and we are doing what citizens in the area have asked us to do. What the hon. member is really saying is, "Don't listen to the citizens of Alberta," which could be so far from what we do. So it is clear to us that our testing and our proper order of what we do is getting to the right decisions so that we can protect Albertans, contrary to what the hon. member is suggesting.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Community Development to supplement.

**Mr. Ducharme:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to advise the House that the House is very much aware that earlier this year there was an advisory committee that was formed specifically to deal with the issues of the Turner Valley gas plant, where there has been \$5 million spent to date as far as containment. I'd like to advise that we're presently debating in this House, what we have been doing over the past number of days, supplementary estimates. In terms of being able to set up a containment and diversion system for that plant, I can advise the House that tenders have been received, and hopefully a contract will be awarded very shortly in terms of being able to address the issues.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

### Skilled Worker Immigration Program

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the Minister of Economic Development. In August the Canadian Federation of Independent Business reported that the biggest concern facing Alberta business owners is employee shortages. I understand that your department runs the provincial nominee program. What is your department doing to bring more workers into Alberta today?

**Mr. Dunford:** Mr. Speaker, the provincial nominee program is a response from the province of Alberta and, as a matter of fact, other provinces to work with the federal government in terms of bringing foreign workers into the province. Normally, the involvement with

an employer that has a shortage of workers and wants to use immigration as the response to that deals with the federal government, but under this particular program we are able to respond, then, to those particular needs.

Members of the House will know from their review of the estimates that we have currently in front of the House a request for additional funding for the provincial nominee program. Under that particular program we bring about 400 to 600 people into the province depending on the year, but clearly, Mr. Speaker, we're finding that that's not enough. So we hope that the members will respond in supporting our ask. Under the estimates we want to increase the resources to this program and perhaps move those numbers up to something like 1,200 per year.

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

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: would the minister consider changing Alberta's PNP program to be more like Manitoba's or Quebec's? They nominate hundreds more employees every year.

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Dunford:** Yes. That actually is one of the reasons for the estimate request. We have heretofore been focused almost entirely on the professional and higher skilled ranks, but clearly there's more of a demand, there's more of a need in Alberta than what this program has been able to respond to to this point. As I mentioned in the estimates when it was my turn to speak, we are looking at this program, going to open up the categories now into not only the skilled areas but into semiskilled and unskilled and, hopefully, then be in a better position to respond to what is clearly seen as an urgency amongst employers in Alberta.

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

**Ms DeLong:** No further questions.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

2:20

### Affordable Housing

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Human Resources and Employment has so clearly pointed out, the Alberta Liberals are well known for their ability to think and plan for the future. To ensure sustainable growth and build a prosperous, compassionate society, this government must take action because homelessness is skyrocketing and affordable housing is so difficult to find. My first question would be to the minister of seniors. What steps has the minister taken to secure the \$20 million that was requested by the seven-city delegation for the national housing initiative to provide prevention and support services for the homeless and towards the affordable housing crisis in Alberta?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. I can tell you that I'm fully supportive of the request that was put forward just recently to our standing policy committee by seven municipalities as well as community agencies that serve the homeless, and I want to tell you why. It's because it's innovative. It's unique. The initiatives that they've brought forward are different solutions than have been brought forward in the past. It's not for building more shelter spaces as much as it is for three pilot projects that they know

have worked, the outcomes which were that they have outreach teams that assist our homeless as they move through the transition of housing, from emergency shelter to transitional housing to rent supplement. These outreach teams will assist people staying in that shelter by accessing the services that are available. So I'm fully supportive. I am moving that forward through the proper process, which, of course, is including my colleagues that will be very much a part of the decision-making.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you. Thank you to the minister for that answer. That's certainly what I was looking for.

But I'm still looking for \$20 million, so I'd like to address my next question to the Finance minister. Is the minister aware that funding for prevention and support programs require fewer resources than dealing with at-risk citizens in the justice or health system? When do you think you could make that funding available?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a very competent minister who brings these programs forward as they're ready to be developed. I will totally agree with the member opposite that prevention should be our first priority in all cases. In all cases. More emphasis on prevention in health, on early childhood problems, on drugs, any of those areas, alternatives for children: this government believes in that firmly. But, again, I'll repeat that we have a most competent minister who has been a stalwart minister in bringing forward those issues and having action taken on them.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you. My next question would be to the Minister of RAGE. Can the minister attempt . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, please. I have no idea who the member is talking about. If the member would enlighten the House, that would really be helpful.

**Ms Pastoor:** Restructuring and Government Efficiency. I'm sorry. I do apologize.

Can the minister attempt to identify any inefficiencies or areas that could be restructured to find the \$20 million requested for the long-term and affordable housing plan?

**Mr. Ouellette:** You know, Mr. Speaker, I do have to agree with the hon. Treasurer that this government has its priorities set on prevention, early prevention, of all the different categories that the Treasurer said. Actually, we're always looking for efficiencies. We're always looking for different cases where we can save some money, but when we save that money, it still goes through Treasury and the business planning to come up with money for the different necessities that this government needs.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor.

#### Early Education for At-risk Children

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's absolutely shameful that this government has failed to implement an important Learning Commission recommendation to provide funding for full-day and junior kindergarten for high-needs children. The Edmonton city centre project's junior kindergarten program is an award-winning success story of inner-city Edmonton schools helping vulnerable children and families overcome challenges of poverty and lack of

opportunity. To add insult to injury, it is now clear that this important program will no longer be funded by this government. My question is to the Minister of Education. Why has the minister forgotten to budget for at-risk inner-city children when this program is such a success?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, the Education ministry has not forgotten its obligations. In fact this particular program that the hon. member is referring to, I think he knows full well was a program funded by Children's Services. It was funded I believe for a period of three consecutive years or thereabouts, and it was in fact in a couple of cases extended for yet another year because it was a Children's Services program. The program being offered was not one of the recognized ECS programs, which would have enabled Education to fund it.

The member should know that if that particular batch of schools – I think there are three there – want some of these students funded, they have to come under the qualifications and criteria of an ECS-recognized program, and those options have been outlined to those schools. All they would need to do is identify the students who come into the particular criteria, and then they would be considered for funding by the local school board, which in this case I think is the Edmonton public school board, where the hon. member sat and would know that, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, Mr. Speaker, frankly, it's gobbledygook. Yes, it was provided by Children's Services, but the reality is that this program is no longer going to be there as of the 15th of September. I remember that the minister told me in a letter dated June 14 that he would work with the inner-city school project co-ordinator and, I quote, maximize available educational funding for the program. That was the promise. Why is this program not going to be funded?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, that particular statement and that particular promise remain in place. We have worked with them, and the co-ordinators have indicated to us, the best I can recall anyway, that they do not wish to approach the school board to whom they would otherwise report for possible qualification under a recognized ECS program.

Now, if they were to do that, they would simply have to turn to the renewed funding framework manual, and they would see where additional funding is available. In fact, it's been increased significantly this year, and we do fund ECS children who, for example, are under mild, moderate, or special needs or gifted or talented to the tune of about \$2,241 through the locally elected school board. So there are remedies in place to see programs like that continued.

But in this particular case, Mr. Speaker, that project was told in a letter written in September of '05 that funding would be curtailed – although it had been extended, it would be curtailed – in June of '06. So there was ample time for that case to have been brought forward.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this is not anything to do with special needs. The reality is that this program is done and out.

How can the minister justify saying that he cares about these sorts of programs that work and then not fund them?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, we do not have a mandatory junior K program in this province, and that is an entirely separate issue. Here if you have children who you know need help, be they mild or moderately delayed or perhaps they might need other assistance such as is provided through our parent link centres, there are remedies available. I'm sure the hon. Minister of Children's Services would augment if time were to allow on what the benefits are of some of



these – is it 30 or 40? – parent link centres that have been established. Some of them are not too far from that area.

**The Speaker:** Hon. minister, would you like to supplement?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister of Education has indicated that his department has been working with the Edmonton city centre education program and the Edmonton public school board. We have established over the time of the ministry 45 parent link centres. Parent link centres look at early intervention and try and deal with these particular individuals. So they can utilize the parent link centres. There are four in the city of Edmonton.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, 37 years ago, in 1969, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity took a bride. Thirty-seven years later we congratulate him.

## 2:30 Vignettes from the Assembly's History

**The Speaker:** Now let me take you all back, let us all go back 35 years ago, to August 30, 1971, and let me quote exclusively the words of Calgary writer George Koch as found in the book *The Sixties Revolution and the Fall of Social Credit*, pages 298-299. My sole change to the text is the inclusion of the full names of the individuals mentioned.

Yet even on August 30, election day, most Socreds remained hopeful. The Calgary *Albertan* had endorsed the incumbents, calling their overall record “the convincing argument for their party’s re-election on Monday.” Even the blatantly pro-Lougheed *Edmonton Journal* still thought the Socreds would win. [Peter] Lougheed himself compared the election to a Grey Cup kickoff; once the ball was in play, anything could happen – but had booked a vacation to start immediately after the election. For most of the day, Lougheed and his top aides were convinced they had lost. “I don’t think we made it,” he said glumly around 4 p.m. But as final returns trickled in, they began showing the PCs picking off even strong Socred candidates like [Don] Hamilton, who was running in a very conservative Edmonton riding. [David] Wood had keyed on Stettler as a bellwether, a constituency with a mix of ranching, farming and petroleum, where the population lived on farms or in small towns and were reasonably prosperous but not rich. It too went Conservative.

One after another the Social Credit bastions fell and at 9:13 p.m. CBC television predicted a Tory majority. The party was elected or leading in 49 ridings, to the Socreds’ 25. It was a vastly better result than any PC had dared hope for; the boldest prediction by the wildest optimists had been for a bare majority of 39 seats. By now, Lougheed’s spirits had revived, and he changed into a clean shirt and tie. A “nearly hysterical” crowd began to gather outside PC campaign headquarters at Calgary’s Westgate Hotel, wrote [Alan] Hustak, and a carnival atmosphere prevailed as Lougheed arrived to deliver an acceptance speech. Thanking both his supporters, and Social Credit for its “remarkable contribution,” he ended up with “This is the best darn province in the world.”

The Socred gathering at the Jubilee Auditorium in Edmonton was a funeral scene, as first Edmonton fell to the PCs, then much of Calgary. The party was shut out of the North. Central Alberta split. Only the rural south held, and not overwhelmingly. Eight cabinet members were defeated, and only eight of the 38 newcomers elected. “White-faced men bravely tried to look optimistic and women sat crying as they surveyed the wreckage on a large chalkboard,” noted [John] Barr.

[Harry] Strom, who stayed in his Cypress riding long enough to be sure he had won his own seat, arrived at the Jubilee about 10 p.m. He mounted the stage, conceded defeat, congratulated Lougheed on his victory, thanked his party for their work, accepted responsibility for the outcome, and hinted he would soon resign. President Orvis Kennedy presented Strom with a statue of a horse. A planned victory party in Edmonton’s west end turned into a brief, sparsely attended wake which

soon ended with the host roaming his house putting away unopened bottles.

There are two footnotes. Footnote 1, the results showed Conservatives with 49 seats and 46.4 per cent of the vote, Social Credit with 25 seats and 41.1 per cent of the vote, the NDP with 1 seat and 11.42 per cent of the vote, and the Liberals with zero seats and 1.01 per cent of the vote.

Footnote 2, Alberta nearly lost Peter Lougheed the night he became Premier. After celebrating his stunning upset in Calgary, Lougheed boarded a corporate jet and flew with his wife Jeanne and a few aides to Edmonton to greet supporters there. The plane was met on the tarmac by a boisterous crowd of 300 that had to be parted by a flying wedge of Lougheed aides. On the return flight the weather turned foul. The pilot had to try twice to land, the second time successfully, then noticed he had passed the control tower on the wrong side and nearly plowed into the ground.

## Members' Statements

### Beddington Heights Community Association

**Dr. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a fine community located in my constituency of Calgary-Nose Hill. Beddington Heights is one of Calgary’s largest communities, with a population of over 12 and a half thousand people.

Beddington Heights has a large and active community centre, which contains a large preschool, a banquet hall, a gym, and an after school centre. Outdoors the centre is adjacent to a large field and contains an ice rink which becomes a skateboard park in the summer.

The community centre offers a large number of courses and programs, including soccer, volleyball, martial arts, dance, darts, yoga, fencing programs, and the community Block Watch Association. To help finance these programs, the community centre hosts over 40 bingos a year.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to salute Danielle Leger, the president of the Beddington Heights Community Association, and all of the other members of the executive and board of directors, who give freely of their time to make the community centre run and to make Beddington Heights such a great part of Calgary.

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

### Wetaskiwin Centennial

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Have you ever wondered what’s in a name? A name can reveal history, meaning, and direction. Never has this been more evident than in the recent Wetaskiwin centennial celebrations under the chairmanship of Alderman Bill Elliott.

The festivities commenced with the rededication of the city’s peace cairn. This monument marks a significant facet of Wetaskiwin’s extensive heritage. The history of the cairn goes back to a legend that tells of an 1867 battle between the Blackfoot and the Cree. As legend has it, the Blackfoot tribes sent Buffalo Child to scout out the enemy’s position as did the Cree tribe when they sent Little Bear.

When the two men ended up on opposite sides of a hill, each man maneuvered his way through a bush to a crest of a hill, where they came face to face. They fought without weapons. Because they were so evenly matched, neither could gain the advantage, and finally, exhausted, they rested. Buffalo Child pulled out his pipe and tobacco. Little Bear did likewise but found that his pipe had been broken in several places. The two men shared one pipe, and from

that act of amity, peace was made. Since that day the hills have been known as Weteskewin Spatinow, meaning the place where peace was made.

We see this legacy continue today. Since the honorary chair of the celebrations committee, Dr. Leavert Johnson, was present at the first dedication of the peace cairn in 1927, he can tell us that the cairn was erected at that time to commemorate 60 years of peace between Blackfoot and Cree.

Lieutenant Governor Norman Kwong was a special guest at the rededication of the peace cairn along with many young Hobbema cadets. He and Chief Gerry Ermineskin of Hobbema had the honour of unveiling the plaque for the cairn signifying peace. Representing harmony and growth, the peace cairn is both physically and metaphorically the focal point in the heart of the city.

I would like to thank the 250 volunteers and Mayor Don Montgomery of Wetaskiwin for continuing Wetaskiwin's tradition of peace and friendship into the 21st century in the hills where the peace was made and where peace is embedded in the name Wetaskiwin.

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

### Disadvantaged Albertans

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want today to talk about the Alberta disadvantage. The Bible quotes Jesus as saying: inasmuch as you have failed to do this to the least of my brothers, you have failed to do it to me. All religions, in fact, call on their members for genuine support of the poor.

The recent Welfare Incomes 2005 report in Canada singled out Alberta not for its pre-eminent economic status but for its profound failure to meet the basic needs of its most vulnerable citizens: the unemployed, persons with developmental disabilities, the impoverished, including single parents and homeless youth, a burgeoning part of our urban populations in Alberta.

In Alberta today a lone parent with one child receives \$12,300 a year. In real dollars this is roughly 50 per cent of what they received in 1986. This is unconscionable and hypocrisy at its height given this government's decision this year to increase MLA salaries by 5.5 per cent. Is it, therefore, any wonder that politicians have the lowest level of trust in this society?

2:40

The blind adherence of this government to an ideology of competition and markets is a profound insult to our humanity as it deprives people of their basic human rights. Far from enabling dignity and opportunity, this punishes people, including children, undermining their humanity and ability to contribute meaningfully.

This government has created a class of worthy and unworthy citizens, shaming all Albertans. Having eliminated the unworthy over the last decade, the Tories extended their same blame and rigid thinking to those that cannot work. Growing food banks attest to the failure of planning and commitment to our most vulnerable by this government. The irony of this blaming of our victims in Alberta is that from an early age Albertans feel that life is about winners and losers and increasingly focus on their own success at the expense of others, weakening the sense of community. The health of people, both mental and physical, declines. The health system is witness to growing numbers of people who are unable to cope with this unhealthy climate: higher depression, anxiety, domestic violence, and suicide.

Most Albertans do not support abandoning our poor. They share a sense of shame at how this government treats our most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you.

### Special Olympics Softball Tournament

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Speaker, last weekend I had the privilege of attending the 20th annual Special Olympics Softball Tournament in St. Paul. The goal of this year's tournament was to have 20 teams for the 20th year of the tournament, the largest such event in the province. I am pleased to say that the organizers reached this goal and were even able to host a team from as far away as Parsons, Kansas.

Thus the tournament was an opportunity for participants from all over North America to play the game of softball, and what was truly a great event was that while the winning teams in each skill division won a trophy, winning was not the focus of the tournament. Camaraderie and sportsmanship were the real highlights of the weekend.

Mr. Speaker, this event would not have been possible without the support from the St. Paul community and the many, many volunteers who helped to address the challenge of hosting and co-ordinating such a large group.

At this year's tournament a very special individual was honoured for his continuing support and extensive work in organizing the Special Olympics Softball Tournament. For 25 years this individual has been part of the Abilities Network. Over the years he has enhanced the lives of many players, helped to ensure that all participants had an enjoyable time, and worked hard to make sure that this year's tournament went off without a hitch. Because of his dedication to this tournament, spanning a great many years, in his honour this year's tournament was renamed the Conrad Jean Softball Tournament. There is no other individual who deserves such recognition more than Mr. Jean. His support for the tournament and the players is truly inspirational.

I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the players and coaches on a successful and fun weekend and thank all the volunteers who helped make certain that the tournament went forward. Without them this wonderful event would not be possible.

Finally, I'd like to give a special thanks to Conrad Jean for his continued good work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

### GlobalFest 2006

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. GlobalFest burst onto the scene in 2003 with 10 cultural pavilions and three countries competing in Alberta's very own international fireworks competition. The festival had attendance of close to a hundred thousand in the first year, making GlobalFest one of Calgary's top draws for local citizens and tourists alike.

GlobalFest's mandate as a not-for-profit society is to produce an inclusive, world-class multicultural festival and international fireworks competition that will offer the viewing public an affordable and accessible, multifaceted cultural experience. This year South Africa, Germany, Canada, and Hong Kong vied for the trophy from August 18 to the 26th.

Although some of the fireworks launched from Elliston park can be seen from other parts of the city, there is no experience like that from within the park. The reflection of the fireworks off the water and aquatic fireworks that bounce off the water are components that cannot be experienced unless you actually come to the park. But most of all it's the synchronization with the music that makes this such an exquisite experience. The fireworks are not just timed to the music, but they actually become an expression of the music itself, an exciting and unique new art form. The audiences were awed. Hong Kong won the GlobalFest 2006 trophy.

Thank you to the many volunteers that made GlobalFest such a success. I along with hundreds of thousands of others look forward with anticipation to next year.

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

### Royalty Revenues

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are confused over the resource royalty system used in this province. Yesterday the Premier added to this confusion by stating that gas used in electricity production in the oil sands belongs to the generator, not the citizens of this province. That is wrong. No wonder we are collecting less in royalties than we should be.

Albertans are demanding a full public review of our royalty structure, not a secret, internal review conducted by the minister with industry insiders. The owners of the resource, the citizens, demand a say. Progressive Conservative leadership hopefuls also question the process and rightly so. Albertans have witnessed their fair share of the royalty pie decrease over the last three years from 24 per cent in 2002 all the way down to 19 per cent in 2004. This decline in resource royalties has cost Albertans potentially billions of dollars in lost revenue.

The government only needs to look at a report published recently by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to realize that the royalty structure may need to be adjusted to reflect the new realities in the energy market. This report shows that marketable natural gas and natural gas liquids produced from Alberta in 2005 had a market value of \$50 billion. Why is it that we are only getting 13 per cent on the take of the natural gas and its byproducts produced in our province when the government's own performance measure sets a target of 20 to 25 per cent?

The government must be up front with Albertans as to what their fair share of the resource revenues is. These resources belong to Albertans, who overwhelmingly support the Official Opposition's call for a full public review of the royalty structure in this province at this time.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, 26 years ago on this day I had the distinct pleasure of attending the wedding of the very beautiful Rose and the then handsome Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Development. So congratulations to both of you.

head:

### Presenting Petitions

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition with 335 signatures calling on the government to include coverage for complex decongestive therapy. This therapy is absolutely essential for people with lymphedema, an incurable condition which many women develop when receiving radiation therapy for breast cancer.

Thank you.

head:

### Introduction of Bills

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

#### Bill 214

#### Public Service Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act

**Mr. Shariff:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 214, the Public Service Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act.

This bill would offer whistle-blower protection to public service employees to enable them to bring matters that they consider to be instances of serious government wrongdoing to the direct attention of the provincial Ombudsman.

[Motion carried; Bill 214 read a first time]

head:

### Tabling Returns and Reports

**The Speaker:** The Acting Minister of Innovation and Science.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, the first dealing with the Vital Statistics annual review. This review summarizes all births, marriages, deaths, and stillborns that occurred in Alberta during 2005. Any member wishing to receive a copy of this can obtain one from my office.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table in the Assembly today five copies of the '05-06 annual report of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research, otherwise known as the Alberta ingenuity fund. A copy of this report has been forwarded to all MLAs directly from Alberta Ingenuity.

Thank you.

2:50

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Melchin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today the government's copies of Alberta's Integrated Energy Vision, that we released last week. This is a look towards where we could potentially go not just with hydrocarbon integration but the value-added opportunities, the renewable platforms, the perpetual energy opportunity, and furthermore an approach to integration of planning for those opportunities among various government departments.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter to table that I sent to the hon. Minister of Energy on July 12, 2006, and this letter is asking questions regarding the natural gas royalty regulation, 2002, specifically section 12 and section 15.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Miloslav Bozdech, who is the president of the Peace Country health regional medical organization, directed to the hon. Minister of Gaming, the minister of aboriginal affairs, the MLA for Dunvegan-Central Peace, the MLA for Grande Prairie-Smoky, and the MLA for Peace River. I believe it's also CCed to a number of other individuals, including the minister of health.

Thank you very much.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table today. The first is a chart produced by the Canadian Institute for Health Information. It shows that between 1994-95 and 2004-05 there has been a 19 per cent increase in the length of in-patient hospital stays in this province.

The second is an open letter sent from the Alberta Association for Community Living to all MLAs. The AACL would like to remind us that funding for persons with developmental disabilities has not

been sufficient to sustain existing supports and services and that support is needed to ensure that all Albertans are able to participate in community life.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon, both copies of e-mails from constituents. The first is from constituent Maureen Slater, who is writing expressing her concern about out-of-control rent increases in Edmonton and, indeed, across Alberta, and particularly that landlords can increase those rents by whatever amount they choose once every six months, and obviously that is creating an awful lot of hardship for many residents in this province.

The second correspondence, Mr. Speaker, is from a constituent, Stephanie Ibach, who is writing requesting that the province change the provincial and federal tax laws – well, clearly, the provincial tax laws – “to allow a university student to transfer ALL of his [or her] tuition credit to [their] parents or other eligible persons.” Currently, legislation allows only a \$5,000 transfer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Melchin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m tabling on behalf of my colleague the Minister of Environment copies of the approved water management plan for the South Saskatchewan River basin. This plan itself provides long-term vision for the water management in southern Alberta, and it’s another tangible success under Alberta’s Water for Life strategy.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

#### Point of Order Referring to Nonmembers

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with respect to *Beauchesne* 493(4), essentially, which reads on page 150-51 as follows under Protected Persons: “The Speaker has cautioned Members to exercise great care in making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply.” I have other citations I will refer to momentarily.

I think it was pretty clear this afternoon as the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition started his second round of questions – I believe it was his second round of questions – that he did make some imputations that I felt were improper and violated this particular tradition of the House, where we do not cite names of individuals who are not here and able to speak for themselves and defend themselves. I don’t have the benefit of the Blues yet, Mr. Speaker, because they’re not available to me to quote you chapter and verse of what was said, but I’m hoping that members who were present did understand that that was what the hon. opposition leader was in fact doing.

In fact, he began this approach yesterday. Or maybe it wasn’t him; maybe it was another one of the members in the opposition. They were maligning another private individual. Today they tried to malign two additional private members during question period, and I find that that violates the traditions of the House.

In *Erskine May* on page 348 it clearly states the following: “Questions to Ministers must relate to matters for which those Ministers are officially responsible.” It goes on under sub (3) to say:

It is not in order in a question to ask for action to deal with matters under the control of local or other statutory authorities, or of bodies or persons not responsible to the government . . .

And it gives examples.

. . . (except where there is a government shareholding in such companies).

Clearly, the issue that was asked about today by the hon. Opposition House Leader dealt with a health authority, and questions about health authorities would likely be acceptable. At least, they have been in the past. But to name individuals who are employees of that health authority and not directly employees of the government, which the minister, therefore, is not responsible for, is clearly in violation there.

I would also mention that the tone and nature of the hon. opposition leader’s questions seemed to be of almost a threatening nature, and we would note under *Beauchesne* 487(1) and (2), where threatening language is referred to, it says the following:

- (1) Threatening language is unparliamentary.
- (2) Words may not be used hypothetically or conditionally, if they are plainly intended to convey a direct imputation.

I think that did happen, unfortunately.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would look at the citation under *Beauchesne* 409(1) and (7), wherein we again have the tradition of question period explained in part under (1). It says, with reference to question period: “It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate.” Clearly, the hon. opposition leader was expressing an opinion, which went far beyond normal opinions that are allowed in this House, perhaps.

Under (7) it says: “A question must adhere to the proprieties of the House, in terms of inferences, imputing motives or casting aspersions upon persons within the House or out of it.” In this case we have a person who is referred to that is not able to be in the House and is not an elected member.

So I would find it appropriate to bring this matter to the attention of the House, particularly with respect to the first citation I mentioned, *Beauchesne* 493(4), about the Speaker cautioning the members, and I look forward to your ruling in that regard.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to answer the points that have been brought forward by the Government House Leader and, in fact, to rebut them all, for they’re well intentioned, I’m sure, but inaccurate.

Now, there seem to be two or three matters that the Government House Leader was most concerned about, and the first was naming the individuals. Well, what the Leader of the Official Opposition was doing was actually naming the contracts, and since the contracts were actually held by the individuals, the only way to refer to the contracts was by naming the individuals that had them. That’s the only way to make clear what the topic is that we’re talking about. Otherwise, it is so vague as to be meaningless and not very helpful to the minister. Had the contracts been held with Alberta numbered company 123456, I’m sure we would have been happy to refer to the contract so. But that is not the case. They were with two individuals, who were in fact named.

3:00

That is public knowledge. It has been discussed in the media a number of times. As a matter of fact, the two individuals that have been named were named repeatedly in an exchange on April 11, 2005, in *Alberta Hansard*, appearing on page 643. Certainly, there was no point of order called at that time and no caution coming from the Speaker about that, again around the same actions or contracts. So the naming of the individuals is connected to the contracts, and that’s how they’re identified.

There was also a reference to I think it was 493(4), in which the Government House Leader has acknowledged that referring by name

to Mr. Davis, who holds a position that is directly accountable to the health region and to the Minister of Health and Wellness and, further, to this Assembly, is in order. So that was not the problem. There was no maligning of the individuals. It is definitely connected. The sentence is, “for the outrageous contracts he had with the Calgary health region channel to his friends Rod Love and Kelley Charlebois.” So it’s definitely referring to the contracts there. There was no maligning. “Outrageous” refers to the contracts, and I think that \$8,000 for one speech is pretty outrageous. Certainly, I have media reports which comment on that as well as the contract that Mr. Love had for verbal advice at \$42,000.

Finally, the Government House Leader seemed to be saying that the Leader of the Official Opposition was voicing an opinion. In rereading the question that I have in front of me – and I was sitting here and listening carefully, and I do not believe that the Leader of the Official Opposition extemporized at all, but we can certainly check *Hansard* – there is no opinion that is ventured here. It is factual on comments with the connections between the Premier and the former Treasurer and the CEO of the health region. That’s all well documented. His resumé is documented. None of that is an opinion or an invention. It all exists in fact. The Government House Leader did not give any detail on what opinion he thought was being voiced here, but what I’m looking at is all connected to fact, which I’ve been able to assemble.

Finally, the “threatening language” is a really interesting one because, again, as I look at this, I mean, nowhere in here did the Leader of the Official Opposition say, “Do this or else” or “I’m going to get you” or “Step outside” or any of those other sort of phrases that we traditionally associate with some sort of a threat of either physical harm or harm to a career choice or losing your vocation or something like that. There just is no threat here. The language is strong, but there’s a lot of strong language in this House. There’s absolutely no threat in here. There’s a question. There are some facts that are stated, and it’s directed specifically to: what action has the minister taken to hold this person accountable? I don’t see how that’s threatening, certainly not either to the individual or to the minister. So without the Government House Leader giving some indication or a quote of what he felt was the threatening language, I don’t see it in here, and I would maintain that there was no threatening language.

Again, no imputation against a member. Any actions that were quoted in here are verifiable actions. It was accepted that the given name of the CEO of the health region is appropriate to be used. The other two individuals named have been named in this House on a number of occasions, and I gave you an example of one time. Their names were used in direct connection with the contracts that were the focus of the question. There is no threatening language that has been used, and neither was there an opinion voiced on anything, unless it’s about being a friend, and I know that there’s a Speaker’s ruling in 1997 in which he admitted that it’s okay for Tories, even top Tories, to have friends. So that would be the only thing I could see being an opinion there.

So thank you very much for the opportunity to refute and to rebut what the Government House Leader has brought forward as a point of order. I maintain that there is no point of order available under any of the citations that he listed.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** Would any other hon. member like to participate?

That having been the case, then we will now deal with this matter. All of the citations quoted today, by the way, were the appropriate citations, and hon. members can review those citations again at their own opportunity.

Just for a quick referral here *Beauchesne* 493 in particular says: (3) The Speaker has traditionally protected from attack a group of individuals commonly referred to as “those of high official station”. The extent of this group has never been defined. Over the years it has covered senior public servants, ranking officers of the armed services, diplomatic representatives in Canada, a Minister who was not a Member of either House, and the Prime Minister before he won a seat . . .

(4) The Speaker has cautioned Members to exercise great care in making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply.

There are other citations as well.

The chair listened very attentively to the text of the question and really has great difficulty finding this an appropriate point of order, and let me explain why. Number one, the name of the key individual cited in the particular question, who is a member from outside of the House, is public information as a result of legislation passed by this Assembly. It was this Assembly that passed legislation which caused full disclosure of the CEOs of all health regions and other senior officials to have their name, their benefit package, their salary, and everything else listed in an annual report. This annual report then is not made public by the health authority. It is tabled in the House by a minister of Executive Council. It is this House which approves the full 100 per cent expenditure of health budgets in the province of Alberta. There is a direct flow and a direct connection with respect to that. So we’re not seeing inappropriate-ness at all with respect to the naming of such individuals.

In terms of opinions all members have opinions on everything. If they want to say that somebody making \$599,000 a year with a bonus of whatever it was – \$54,000 a year – is outrageous, that is their right to make that statement. There’s nothing that prevents a member from saying that, the same way that for every one of us, when we go home on the weekend, our constituents look at us and ask us, “Well, how much money do you make as an MLA?” We tell them, “Sixty-seven thousand dollars a year.” They say, “That’s outrageous.” So opinions vary. We’ve heard already today in the Assembly another hon. member saying that the salary of an MLA was outrageous.

In terms of temperament, yes, there’s absolutely no doubt that when we get towards the dying days of a session, the temperature always seems to go up a bit, and people tend to be a little more aggressive in the questions. But that’s the give and take of a parliamentary democracy.

The chair would just like once again to ask for temperance with respect to everything, temperance in the question and temperance in response, but we’re going to move on from this particular matter.

Now, hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you have a point of order?

#### **Point of Order Clarification**

**Mr. Martin:** I’ll be very brief, Mr. Speaker. It’s more a point of clarification. The Minister of Health and Wellness said that I called the government monkeys or something like that. I want to clarify what I said so that the Assembly is well aware. I did not call government members monkeys or even compare them to monkeys. What I did say is that 82 monkeys could run this province better than this government. That’s my point of clarification.

3:10

**Ms Evans:** So, Mr. Speaker, if I can understand that clarification – and the comments were made by the media gallery to me outside about that reference, and I declined to get into the cesspool of name-

calling – what I understand that the hon. member has just said is that our planning, our capacity as MLAs is less than that of monkeys.

**The Speaker:** Well, I think we should bring this whole matter to an end. First of all, this purported reflection was not made in the Assembly. The hon. minister said that she got it second-hand, if I recall it correctly. So we're dealing with a matter that wasn't made in this Assembly; it was made third-hand. Then we had a confession from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, who was not named by the Minister of Health and Wellness. So I think transparency has come about in a way that this is totally clear for everybody now. We're all honourable members with a great deal of love and synergy.

head: **Orders of the Day**  
head: **Government Bills and Orders**  
**Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

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

**The Deputy Chair:** Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** I think we'll just proceed with the discussion of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2) during this time in committee.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to lead off debate in the Committee of the Whole on Bill 44, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2). I think it's important to recognize the "No. 2" that's printed on the front page of this bill because what it tells Albertans is that this is the second time this year that the government has come back to this Assembly, asking for more money than they had budgeted. I think that's an important distinction.

Before I get into my comments, Mr. Chairman, I would like to acknowledge once again the Minister of Finance and the respect I have for her and the respect I have for the assistance that her staff provides myself and my researcher. As I've pointed out before, I actually have one-fifth of a researcher because the Official Opposition does not actually receive a whole lot in the way of financial support, so we don't have the same benefits that members on the other side have in terms of support. So myself and my 20 per cent of a researcher certainly do appreciate the help that we get from the minister. We do get a lot, and they're always very respectful of the job that we have to do. As I've pointed out before, I do believe that this results in better debate and, ultimately, better legislation.

I'd also just like to acknowledge that the Finance minister and myself, I think it would be fair to say, probably think more alike when it comes to matters of finance for this province than either one of us would ever admit publicly. Having said that, I have some serious problems with this bill and particularly with the process that leads us to debating this bill today.

I said before that I'm not going to necessarily complain about a lot of the money that's being asked for by the government in this bill, although there are some instances where I do question the money, but for the most part this is money that I think it would be fair to say could have been recognized three or four months ago that would have to be spent.

The real question is the validity of the budgeting process that the government undertakes, how much worth there is in it when we come here every spring to debate the budget, whether or not there is adequate planning and adequate recognition on the part of various departments as to how much money they will be needing for the coming year, and quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, whether or not there is adequate discipline on the part of the government in terms of sticking to a budget that this Assembly passes. I would certainly argue that, in fact, there is not adequate discipline, that there doesn't seem to be much willingness, if any at all, on the part of the government to pass a meaningful budget and then show the discipline to stay within the bounds of that budget.

It may have been mentioned previously but I think it's worth noting what happens to other entities if they, in fact, exceed their budget. A graphic example, for sure, is individual MLAs. When their constituencies go over budget, they're actually required to deduct the amount of overrun from their next year's budget. Now, I'm not suggesting that we would want to see that happen in the case of the Alberta government because the people of the province would then suffer for the mismanagement of the government, which it could probably be successfully argued they do anyhow.

You can look at school boards, for example. When they go over budget, they're subject to audit by this government. When health authorities go over budget, they have to come begging cap in hand to the government for more money. Sometimes they get it; sometimes they don't. In the case of the Calgary health region, which has been discussed a number of times in the Assembly today, they're getting a little more money but not enough to cover their budget overruns. So whether it be MLAs or party caucuses or school boards or health authorities, there are some relatively tight reins on their budgeting and, certainly, not just a matter of giving themselves more money if, in fact, they do go over budget.

This government, however, not only makes it a practice but, in fact, it's almost without saying, it's just an automatic, a given that we will find ourselves debating in this House at least once a year and quite often twice a year supplementary spending. They just come back and get more money. It's that simple. It really, as I said, leads to a lack of discipline in terms of sticking within a budget.

One of the biggest concerns that I have, Mr. Chairman – I mentioned this in the press conference last week when the minister gave her first-quarter update – is that this document, this Bill 44 that we're debating this afternoon, is asking for about \$1.5 billion in extra spending, which not coincidentally, I would argue, is almost identical to the amount of extra money that the government took in in the first quarter of this year. At that press conference the minister announced an unbudgeted surplus, an even bigger surplus than what had been forecast in the budget and what we had approved in this Assembly, of \$1.5 billion, and here we are today debating the expenditure of \$1.5 billion. So quite clearly we are, as I've argued before, spending the money as fast as it comes in. We're spending the money as quickly as it can come out of the ground. There is no real effort whatsoever to save this legacy for our children or their children; rather, we just spend it as quickly as we make it.

Mr. Chairman, I've argued in the past that we should perhaps be looking at an idea where we would save up front some of that natural, nonrenewable revenue so that there would be something left over when this is all over. I've referenced the bumper sticker in the

past, and I won't read it verbatim because I got into trouble with this House the last time I used the exact language. Certainly, the bumper sticker – and many of us had them on our bumpers in the mid-80s – talked about making sure that there was something left over the next time, and here we are spending the money as fast as it comes in.

3:20

I have a real problem with the fact that we continue to have on the books in this province legislation that demands that every single penny of net income from the heritage savings trust fund go into general revenue. I can't imagine that we have that legislation on the books at a time of unprecedented wealth and unprecedented revenue from nonrenewable resources, that we're still making ourselves, mandating ourselves, legislating ourselves to put every single penny of income from that fund into general revenue and thereby raping that fund. I've talked before about how that fund is worth only approximately half of what it would be worth had we at least inflation-proofed it since 1987, which we failed to do until only a year and a half ago. So the very minimum that I would ask of this government is a commitment to at least save the revenue that that fund generates. And it's not just me saying that. Everywhere across this province when people learn of the fact that that money gets dumped into general revenue and isn't saved in the fund, they can't believe it either.

Now, we talked about unbudgeted surpluses, and I mentioned that in the first quarter alone this year the unbudgeted surplus is \$1.5 billion. In fact, Mr. Chairman, over the last 12 years the total amount of unbudgeted surpluses – now, this is money that is over and above what we said we would make extra. What we said we would earn beyond what we spent, over and above that. We're now in – I can't remember the exact number – something in the order of \$35 billion in the last 12 years. The Finance minister said many times – and I agree with her – that it's better to have more money at the end of the year than you thought you were going to have. I don't disagree with that, and I don't think anybody does. Clearly, this happens year after year, 12 years in a row.

Last year it was \$10 billion more than we had budgeted that we would have left over at the end of the year, and there's every indication that it could very well be that much again this year. We passed a budget only three months ago that showed a surplus of \$4.3 billion. Already that number is up to \$5.9 billion, nearly \$6 billion, and that's after only the first quarter. So there is a very realistic expectation that if oil prices continue to hover around \$70 and \$6.50 or \$7 for gas, we could once again be looking at a \$10 billion surplus.

The Finance minister at that press conference last week stood and answered a question about unbudgeted surpluses and admitted to the people of this province that the government does not have a plan for how to use those unbudgeted surpluses. She said: we're sitting on it; we're watching it collect interest. That's the only plan, to sit on it and watch it collect interest.

We as the Official Opposition have been arguing since early 2004 that at the very least we should have a plan for unbudgeted surpluses, and we've outlined it: 35 per cent for the heritage savings trust fund, 35 per cent for a postsecondary endowment fund, 25 per cent to address the critical infrastructure debt, and 5 per cent to go to an endowment fund for arts and humanities. I've said before, Mr. Chairman, that you can argue the percentages, you can argue the allocations, you can argue the uses of those funds, but you can't argue that it is a plan that would deal with surplus dollars, which this government and the minister the other day flat out acknowledged that they don't have a plan for. It's just a terrible disservice to the people of this province and to future generations that will follow us to admit that.

Mr. Chairman, we were called back into this Assembly for this very rare, very short summer sitting ostensibly to approve added dollars for education. It's been argued by speakers before me both in second reading and during Committee of Supply that this was entirely predictable, and I'm certainly not going to stand here and suggest that we shouldn't approve extra money for education. In fact, I support it wholly. The truth is that there's probably not enough money here for education. In fact, I think the minister has acknowledged that there will be more money coming, that there's a need for more money.

The question is: why couldn't they have seen this coming? The Minister of Education has trotted out excuses like, "Well, you know, they don't do their budgeting until late in the year, and it doesn't mesh with our budgeting" and so forth. The reality is that there were indications from school boards long before the budget was ever introduced in this Assembly back in March that there would be needs above and beyond what the government was willing to give. I've got letters in my office from teachers, I've got letters in my office from various members of school boards indicating that they had asked the government for more money. The capital plans of these various boards across the province show that they need more money. So for the minister to suggest that they weren't aware of the need or that the exact dollars weren't there in advance I have trouble accepting because, clearly, it had been communicated time and again to the government, to the Finance minister, and to the Education minister that these needs were going to be there.

To come back now, quite frankly, at the end of August and finally approve that money almost does a disservice to the various boards because now they're left scrambling, trying to do what they should have been able to do back in May and June. It's questionable whether or not they're going to be able to get things in place in time for the start of the school year. In fact, Mr. Chairman, you're probably aware that some of the schools are already back in, so we've got kids in schools, and we don't have teachers. They might be there next month if we can find them. If those teachers that we laid off back in June haven't found other employment, if they're still available by some chance, perhaps we might get them back. We may be able to move towards reaching the goals of the Learning Commission in terms of class size, but there's absolutely no guarantee whatsoever that that's going to happen.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about school fees. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-McClung has talked an awful lot about school fees in this House. He's presented petitions in this House from constituents of Edmonton-McClung regarding school fees. I just want to outline some of what's going on out there. I'm not going to name the high school. I don't necessarily think it would be fair to point them out in particular because, quite frankly, I don't think that they're all that different from anybody else. If I were to suggest that this one school is doing this in terms of fees and somehow leave the impression that they're different from others or that others aren't doing this, I think that would be unfair.

Here's an example from a registration handbook, some of the fees that this particular high school is charging this year's registrants. I think you'll agree with me that some of them are unusual, and many of them I'm sure that most people would have thought would be covered and certainly should be covered by the Education budget and wouldn't necessarily be expected from parents.

The first one that caught my eye, Mr. Chairman, is parking. This particular high school in Edmonton is charging students to park. Now, there aren't very many students that actually have the opportunity to drive to school. Most, I'm sure, take transit. But can you imagine? There's a \$44 per year parking charge if a student is fortunate enough to have a vehicle to drive to school. I've never

heard of that before. It took me by complete surprise. I don't know if they charge the teachers for parking as well or not. I'd be curious to know that.

Optional fees: bus passes. Thirty-eight dollars now for a bus pass for a student to attend school. We've talked about this before. We know that the minister has actually given a little more money to the schools for transportation, yet this same school charged \$30 last year, and it's \$38 this year. Now, we talked a little bit earlier today about MLA compensation. I don't think there's an MLA that can't afford to pay \$38 for their child to buy a bus pass, but I can guarantee you, Mr. Chairman, that there are a lot of parents in this city who will find that increase very problematic. It concerns me a lot that some kids might end up now walking to school in a situation when they wouldn't normally have to, and perhaps it may cause safety concerns. I'm not sure. But I really do think that's quite telling, that we're now charging \$38 for a bus pass.

3:30

Printing. Ten dollars each student has to pay for access to printers to print off homework that is assigned by the school. Now, I understand that when this was questioned at this school, they were told: "Well, you can print your work off at home. There's nothing that says you have to print it off at school." I'm not sure that all children have access to a printer at home. Most families, I'm sure, probably do have computers and, perhaps, printers at home, but not all do, and certainly the families that would least likely have printers and computers in their home would probably be the same families that could least likely afford to pay \$10 to the school to have their homework printed off. I really question that.

A wellness fee. Now, we've talked an awful lot – and, in fact, the Minister of Finance acknowledged earlier today that prevention is the best medicine. Again, I don't think too many members would disagree with that. This particular high school – and it's not unusual; I know from experience with other high schools – is charging \$40 in terms of a wellness fee to allow students access to their health and wellness centre. So for these kids to go and work out in the gym, use the treadmill or use the free weights, they have to pay \$40. I think that absolutely flies in the face of government initiatives to get children more active. We've mandated physical activity in the schools now, yet we're turning around and charging them 40 bucks if they want to go work out in the gym.

Phys ed 10. Thirty-five dollars for transportation to the aquatics and arena units. Now, again, we've mandated that kids be physically active. We're encouraging them to do things like swim and play hockey or floor hockey or indoor soccer, yet we're charging \$30 for them to have that opportunity. A \$75 fee for phys ed 20 and an \$85 fee for phys ed 30, and no indication as to what those fees are for.

Science. There's a \$30 charge for introduction to engineering and a \$15 charge for marine biology. I'm assuming those are for workbooks. I'm not sure, Mr. Chairman. But it causes me concern once again that parents of kids taking science are being hit by these extra charges.

Here's one that blows my mind. Math 14, 24, and math 10 applied: a \$15 charge to cover the cost of student workbooks. To cover the cost of student workbooks. My colleague from Lethbridge-East is shaking her head, and you should all be shaking your heads. Student workbooks. Would it not be fair to assume that a student workbook in a math class should be covered by Alberta Education? We're asking parents to ante up separate for that?

I look forward to the opportunity to carry on, Mr. Chairman. I have a lot more.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak on Bill 44, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2). I want to start by making some observations on the peculiar nature of this session. I have spent nine years in this House and started on my 10th, a few months into it. First time in those years that a special session such as this one is being held. Supplementary estimates have been a yearly exercise, but usually this House has dealt with them a couple of times a year during the fall session and then again during the spring session, when monies have been spent as part of the appropriation and supplementary supply estimates.

This session I said is unique certainly in the last nine and a half years that I've been around. I would not be surprised if this kind of session is unique in the entire 100-year history of this Assembly. Mr. Speaker, who certainly has a flair for historical vignettes, probably can dig up this information and inform us one day if, in fact, this session stands out as the lone and only example of the kind of session that has been called, especially less than four months after the primary budget for 2006-07 has been passed, to deal with additional monies needed for that budget.

Why is this? Why do I make this point, Mr. Chairman? I think it is important to begin to grasp the significance of this happening. It seems to me that it certainly looks like a lack of any idea in terms of planning, in terms of forecasting costs, and in terms of ensuring that for the areas in which public services are to be provided by this government, there is adequate funding committed at the appropriate time in the year; that is, at the beginning of the fiscal year during the debate on the budget.

This is poor governance, Mr. Chairman, extremely poor governance. If one needed any evidence of this, it's right here. People have called it a band-aid budget, a remedial session. Others call it an emergency session. Why the emergency? No one has made it clear. But it certainly feels like sitting in an emergency room in a hospital, trying to have the problems arising from a stroke that may have occurred three months ago being addressed in the hospital emergency room. Just as going to an emergency room three months after a stroke is not very helpful, will not likely lead to much remediation in terms of returning to good health, similarly I think this kind of exercise in an emergency session, or a remedial session, as the leader of my caucus has called it, is no guarantee that the government is about to learn to return to appropriate budgeting practice and forecasting. It has all the tools. It has all the resources, all the experience, but it looks like there is an evident inability to learn from experience.

The two arguments that are given are, one, rapid population growth. Well, that's been happening in this province not for the last three months but for the last three to five years. So nothing new about that. The second is, of course, the cost escalation when it comes to capital costs, that those costs are rising very fast, and therefore there was no way possible to have estimated effectively, appropriately the budgetary requirements for the capital projects which were being funded under the budget.

I think both of these arguments are fallacious. They don't hold water because the cost escalation issue is something that has not happened just all of sudden over the last three months. We heard this reference to it during the debate on the budget in April and May. We have heard that argument for several years now. We have got the same news from various public institutions in the area of health, education, seniors, and others, who have been telling us that costs have been growing.

3:40

We on this side of the House have drawn attention to the pressures and the sources of cost escalation for years, including deregulation policies and the inability and failure of the government to bring in



cost controls by way of establishing a pharmaceutical policy in place which would help reduce the ever-growing costs on the health care side. So it's not that there have not been ideas put forth as to how to deal with the cost escalation. It's not that this news has not been around for some time. It's just that this government has either not been listening or is unable to use the information available to factor into its estimates that it brings forward in the form of a budget. It's bad news for Albertans to have a government that's unable to really effectively deliver on one of the most key and core responsibilities that it has; that is, the budget and the public monies that it requests in order to meet its obligations by way of budget estimates.

The second argument that's given is in terms of increasing population due to rapid economic growth. Well, again, this government has been of course boasting about the rapidity of the economic growth, the high level of economic growth year after year in this province. So it's not something new. It's not news that the government didn't know anything about. In fact, it has been trying to stake its whole reputation on the fact that it has achieved this rapid level of growth regardless of warnings that it has been receiving from municipalities, particularly in the Fort McMurray area, regardless of advice they have been receiving from the likes of former Premier Peter Lougheed that there's a need, perhaps, to slow down, to take a look where we want to go, how fast we want to get there, and why it is that we want to go to that point rather than some other.

This government has been absolutely, totally not so much oblivious but determined not to listen to advice, regardless of where it comes from, whether it comes from the opposition benches here or whether it comes from people who in principle are philosophically in agreement with the government but say that something has gone awry.

We need to slow down. The government needs to take some action to make sure that they slow down so that they have a chance to look carefully and plan the activities for the next few years and bring outside the major economic players, including the corporations, the oil and gas industry, and others, who are the wheelers and dealers and the main actors on the economic side.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

The economy and the economic growth are not the only thing that governments need to pay attention to. They need to pay attention to the society at large and know the consequences of this rapid escalation of costs and growth in population. The rapid rate of economic growth, primarily due to the headlong rush to expand oil sands projects as quickly as possible, is disastrous for many segments of our society. Housing is one issue that has come up here in the last three to four days in question period again and again, yet the Premier says, and his cabinet colleagues seem to agree: we will not intervene; let the market take care of the chaos that's before us.

Mr. Chairman, that's not good enough. The market must always be a tool, not a sacred cow not to be touched. The market must submit to the needs of society rather than society being dragged along by the market. What is a market after all? You know, this abstract notion of the market doesn't really help us debate the issues, whether government intervention, government's ability to take autonomous action in spite of the market are desirable things, unless we know what the market is. Those who talk about free markets and free trade and all of that stuff need to, I think, take cognizance of the fact how markets fail and how market actor, some that act so badly, make not only decisions that are technically disastrous but make decisions that are deliberately planned to rob some others in the market of their assets, of their investments, and engage in acts of

what can only be called piracy or plunder. The collapse of Enron, the case of dot-com, the litigation and civil and criminal investigations that Lord Black, the great hero of the free market in Canada, is implicated in: all of these are clear pieces of evidence which suggest that if we want to rely on markets, we better be careful what we mean by markets.

Especially in this House, Mr. Chairman, to continue to harp that markets will take care of everything is to ignore the historical experience of Albertans during the Great Depression and the following years. Albertans learned not to allow markets. At that time, of course, the question was the speculators from the east and the banks and how their decisions and policies and interests came into direct conflict with the interests of ordinary, hard-working folks living on the prairies, including this province, where we learned to in fact deal with markets with a grain of caution. Often Albertans urged their own elected governments year after year, election after election to in fact develop alternative strategies to reduce this reliance on the so-called markets or market players, which at that time, of course, seemed to be situated, you know, thousands of miles away in eastern Canada. Ottawa and Toronto became the targets because that's where this powerful concentration of wealth and corporate headquarters was, so Albertans became, I think, appropriately critical and suspicious of these big market players. So the market wasn't something so sacred, an icon that you never looked at with some degree of suspicion and tried to develop some ways of controlling the decisions that markets will make, nevertheless decisions which will negatively impact Albertans.

I've been hearing here and during the question period references to the market again as if markets are supreme, markets are sacred, markets can never do wrong, and therefore this government uses this terribly indefensible reason to fail to act, to justify its failure to take action, whether it has to do with housing, whether it has to do with infrastructure, whether it has to do with the lack of spaces in a postsecondary institution, or whatever have you.

So, Mr. Chairman, this supplementary budget is in a way I think the result of poor governance, poor governance which fundamentally is rooted in these flawed conceptions of the market, conceptions of the market which are out of date, conceptions of the market which Albertans have learned not to trust, not to rely on. I regret the fact and deplore the fact that this government is not willing to learn from the bitter experience of Albertans themselves over the years in how markets have failed them and, therefore, for this government to hitch its wagons to the market without question.

3:50

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I'll use the few remaining minutes that I have to draw attention to the fact that the other evening when I was talking on the supplementary request for Advanced Education for \$49.1 million or something, I asked some specific questions of the minister on where this money is going, whether the minister has asked the appropriate questions. What I didn't get were any answers from the minister. He said that he will reply in writing. I'm surprised when a special session is to be called for a minister not to be ready with the answers that are obvious and that will come up in the debate. We didn't debate all 15 departments. We had no time to do that. We debated only perhaps five or six departments altogether, and even those for which we had some time to ask questions, the House got no answers when the questions were asked. The questions are seen as legitimate but no answers.

We can't really sort of support the request that's before us simply because the questions that we asked, asked in all seriousness, have no answers given to them. This leaves the House in limbo, and the expectation that the House will simply rubber-stamp \$1.39 billion or

something in additional funds without addressing those questions is unfair. I think it's inappropriate. I think we need to take the House's input into budget making and budget approval seriously. If we are to do that, then I think we need to allow sufficient time for budgetary estimates, whether they are primary or supplementary, to be debated appropriately and given enough time for members of this House and the ministers responsible to engage each other in serious debate and address some of those questions.

So, Mr. Chairman, these are some of the questions that I asked the other day about this \$49 million. The minister said that . . . [Dr. Pannu's speaking time expired] I think that I will have to take my seat.

Thank you for the opportunity.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. My honoured colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford brought up the concern over school fees and questioned why students were having to pay for a whole variety of circumstance. In Calgary the school board has taken a different tack, and it's having a very direct effect on programs. The Calgary public school board for a large part has done away with school fees, and for a high school in my area, Sir Winston Churchill high school, that means a loss of \$98,000. School fees should not be required when parents and taxpayers in general already pay income tax. They pay property tax; they pay health care tax. They should not have to be paying school fees for essentials. But now Calgary parents more so than ever before are going to have to be forced into heading out to the casinos, and of course that's an unfair circumstance because when you're working three jobs, you don't have time to give extra support for casinos. So, again, the parents who have the most time, the greatest degree of wealth will be able to go out to the casinos and raise funds for basic education that this province doesn't cover. Education obviously isn't a priority.

Last night in my comments with regard to the infrastructure deficit for Calgary schools I talked about the half billion dollar infrastructure defrayed costs that Calgary schools are facing. For whatever reason the constituency I represent of Calgary-Varsity was hit hardest in the entire city of all the constituencies when it came to either school or program closures. The school that I began my teaching career in 35 years ago, Jerry Potts elementary school, a relatively new school, only 35 years old, was unfortunately forced by this government's infrastructure and school size regulations and restrictions to close.

Another school very close by, Varsity Acres school, was required, because of burgeoning enrolment, to go French only and shut down its English program. Unfortunately, the board, I'm believing with pressure of lack of funding from the province, decided that instead of taking the hundred-plus kids from Varsity Acres school, that was approximately three or four blocks away from Jerry Potts, and the 35 regular kids living in the community – instead of putting those 135 kids into Jerry Potts school, which is a very small facility to begin with, the board, unfortunately, made the decision to require kids to hop on a bus to go to another neighbouring school across a 70-kilometre stretch of traffic. So what's happening is that these kids who went formerly to their local schools, Jerry Potts and Varsity Acres, are now joining the over 40,000 kids, when you combine the Catholic and public schools, that will spend over a hundred thousand kilometres each day on the bus. Of course, with the bus driver shortage in Calgary and the scrapping of routes in the Calgary board, that hundred thousand kilometre bus ride per day will increase.

At this moment I just want to give credit to Janet Ross. Janet Ross years ago was a former student of mine at Jerry Potts. She is now the very hard-working chair of the school council at Calgary Varsity. Janet along with her colleagues, both from Calgary Varsity and Jerry Potts, tried desperately to appeal to the province and appeal to the school board to keep Jerry Potts school open. Both schools were in agreement that the best solution for their kids, if the English program had to be closed at Varsity, was that they be moved over to Jerry Potts. Unfortunately, that decision got nowhere.

One of the ways of judging how badly a school is in need of repairs is called the facility condition index. The way that is calculated is by determining the amount of cost it would be to repair the school by the cost of replacement. Under 5 per cent is considered good, 5 per cent and over is considered fair, and anything over 10 per cent is considered poor. In the neighbouring community of Mountview, Terrace Road elementary is at a 10.24. Montgomery junior high is at 12.82.

Now, my wife taught at Montgomery junior high school for a number of years with electrical transformers dripping onto students' desks, with tiles missing on the floor and tiles missing in the ceiling. The fact that this school is rated at only a 12.82 amazes me. Branton junior high in my area is listed at a 6.03, slightly above satisfactory. St. Jean Brebeuf junior high is listed at an 8.99, so it's well into the poor category.

4:00

What I find most interesting is that the constituency that has the greatest collection of schools in the saddest condition just happens to be Calgary-Elbow. For those of you who aren't familiar with who represents Calgary-Elbow, it's our Premier. I would suggest that when the Premier takes his rubber boots off, finishing his fishing trip, and when they clean the think tank down in the States, he trade in his rubber boots for workboots. Maybe he could go over to Elbow Park elementary, which is FCI percentage of 19.15, or maybe he'd like to lend a hand at Elboya elementary/junior high school, 40.34. Rideau Park, at 13.3, would love to see him in work pants and with his hammer. Sir James Lougheed elementary could sure use his help: 43.39. Glamorgan elementary, 20.09; Chinook Park elementary, 10.95; St. James, 9.53. Those are just the worst ones.

In Calgary-Buffalo our Solicitor General might want to in his spare time lend his assistance to Sunalta elementary. This is the school he wanted to protect from the halfway house. It's got an FCI of 23.46. Alexander Ferguson elementary, 10.01; Connaught elementary, 25.94. If he's got some extra time he could go over to Sacred Heart and help out. They're at a 15.25.

Over to Calgary-Bow. This area is represented by one of our leadership contenders. She might want to provide some assistance at Westgate elementary, where the FCI is 21.33. She might want to help out at Vincent Massey, 21.07. I'm sure Bowcroft elementary, where a very good friend of mine, Ted Woynilowicz, recently retired, could use her help because it's at a 12.61. Keep in mind, above 5 per cent is considered poor.

Our Lady of the Assumption. That's a good name for a school. They're still assuming that this government is going to come to their rescue: 13.44.

In the Calgary-Glenmore constituency: Haysboro, 9.51; Bishop Kidd, 7.42.

I don't want to bore the House with details, but the point is that that's why Calgary is at a half billion dollar infrastructure deficit.

I would like to see the kids off the buses, and I would like to see them in the new schools. Forty communities without schools. The answer is not: put them on the yellow bus, short of bus drivers, fill up the tank with Alberta's nonrenewable resources, and send the kid off to school.

**An Hon. Member:** That's only for the rural kids.

**Mr. Chase:** No, it's not. For the rural communities there is a large, spread out area. There is a need for schools and so on, but the rural areas don't have the concentrated population and need to the same extent for large composite schools. The rural schools that I've travelled to – and I should have the statistics to share with you – are suffering as well. It's not an either/or. It's not urban schools versus country schools. All schools are suffering.

Among the 40 districts without new schools and where parents are looking for help is the Royal Oak school. Tuscany recently received a K to 3 school. They're grateful for anything, but the older children, the grades 4 through 6, still have to hop on the bus.

Last spring my colleagues from Calgary-Currie and Calgary-Mountain View and I participated in the homeless count. When the figures came through, it turned out that homelessness in Calgary had risen by 30 per cent. We have a problem, and unfortunately this government is not addressing it.

I recently toured the food bank in Calgary. They have the good fortune of receiving, thanks to the kindness of a company, an extended lease for a fantastic facility. It's a large warehouse with many bays and a large walk-in freezer. There is no problem in terms of the generosity of Calgarians contributing food to this facility. One of the greatest expenses that this facility has is having the goods transported to the facility and the waste products transported from. The Calgary Interfaith Food Bank would very much appreciate support from the government in taking over its lease, providing it with sustainable funding as a recognition of the job they do.

The lack of support for other outreach programs such as Meals on Wheels. Lou Withers of Meals on Wheels together with the Ismaili community, who put forward a wonderful parade float, recognized the importance of Meals on Wheels. The facility that Meals on Wheels is currently in is completely inadequate given the demand. We think of Meals on Wheels as traditionally just dealing with shut-ins, helping people that cannot get out of the house. They do that, but they do much more. They provide school lunches for three schools; they've got 17 schools on a waiting list. Not only do they provide lunches for schools, but they provide bag lunches for working men and women at the Calgary Drop-in Centre. These people are without a home, but they do have jobs, and Meals on Wheels recognizes the fact that to do their daily work they need their daily bread, something the government has failed to recognize.

In terms of infrastructure shortcomings Mayor Bronconnier has said that up until last year the city of Calgary was holding its own. That's no longer the case when it comes to infrastructure. The mayor has called upon the province to give back the property tax portion that they currently collect in the name of education although it never makes it into education; it disappears into general revenue. He said: give us some flexibility. Municipalities have called for a \$20 million relief fund over the next five years. Hopefully the government will consider this. The problem with the property tax is: if you give it back to the cities, will you then recognize the underfunded situation that the school boards face, or are you going to put the schools and the municipalities into warfare, tugging at those lost property tax dollars that should never have been taken away from the boards originally in 1994? What are you going to do? How are you going to fund it?

4:10

Other delays and 41st anniversaries: 41 years ago the city of Calgary, a much smaller city, began negotiating with the Tsuu T'ina for a ring road. Forty-one years later we are still waiting for those negotiations to come through. We have heard that an appraiser has

been agreed to by the Tsuu T'ina, the province, and the federal government. I look forward to an answer as to when we can expect an environmentally sound and structurally appropriate six-lane bridge across the Elbow river. I know that the DFO, the federal government, is responsible for approving the structure. I hope they use a similar structure like the Stoney Trail bridge. It's high, it's got six lanes, it's effective, it doesn't interfere with either animals or humans, and it serves a great purpose. If we're looking for a style of bridge to go for, let's go for that one.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

In terms of infrastructure concerns I brought out the fact that in my community of University Heights the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation in its infinite wisdom built a sound barrier in a ditch. As a result, while you walk by the sound barrier and look up, way above the sound barrier you see the wheels of passing trucks. Then you look, as the Friendly Giant would say, "way, way up." You see the smokestacks, the exhaust pipes from which the noise comes, and, oh yes, all above the sound barrier; well thought out. Unbelievable.

When it comes to parks and protected areas, I would like to hand off a great big bouquet to the Harvie family, a family that has got a history of philanthropy. They come from ranching stock, the true Albertans, the first Albertans, a pioneer spirit. They had the fortitude, the wisdom to provide land, very valuable land, which they gave to the government considerably below the price so that we could have our Bow watershed protected, we could have some pristine land to recreate in, hopefully of the walking variety, and we could have our watershed protected. This is a major concern because the Bow River provides Calgary with half its water.

It is my hope that this similar type of protection will be afforded to the Bragg Creek area, the area through which the Elbow River flows and which is responsible for the other 50 per cent of the water that Calgary receives. The government has in its power the ability to thumb up or thumb down the forestry management plan, which, basically, if I were to summarize, means: in order to save the trees for future generations, we will cut them down now. I guess they'll save them in log piles.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to address the health issues that are in my region. I'll be talking about the debt that's been created by trying to eliminate the debt in this province. There are actually common themes that really run through the province in terms of the problems within health care, and the main thing, of course, as we all know, is the shortage of health care professionals. It is a huge, huge issue. It is something that came to the fore – it was the most prominent thing that was a problem – when we were talking about the MLA task force. It was staff, staff, staff. I think it's very, very important that we put an emphasis on the staff for health care because we are losing them to doughnut shops, and I think that's wrong.

Each region has the responsibility for coming up with plans and carrying out the projects designed to overcome their challenges. In my region the deficit is \$2.4 million this year; however, it's \$9.6 million total, including the accumulated deficit from the previous year. From the knowledge that I have, I believe that this is probably an honest deficit. They have done everything that they can to cut. I think part of it is that people are working overtime again because labour is such a huge, huge issue.

Three of the other top issues in my region are human resources recruitment of health professionals, that I've referred to, but we not

only have to recruit them; we actually have to be able to increase the seats at the Lethbridge Community College and the U of L so that we can turn out RNs with baccalaureates. Certainly, in the year 2007 the Lethbridge Community College is anticipating having the enhanced licensed practical nurse program, the LPN program. That will help, but we must open up more seats.

We need to provide access to all health services, and that has to be increased in our region. We have to ensure that the funding formula continues to be based on population with adjustments for age and gender. Southern Alberta has a higher percentage of seniors, which increases the overall burden due to the increased need for chronic disease care management and long-term care diagnostic exams.

When I refer to long-term care, it is an entity unto itself. In the Chinook health region they have definitely made a concerted effort, one that I think I would debate. It is a concerted effort to decrease the number of actual long-term care beds, taking some people who don't belong in long-term care and creating other designations: designated assisted living, assisted living, lodges, enhanced lodges, et cetera.

Regardless of where these people are housed, they simply must have properly trained people to care for them that are trained to be able to assess when these people are in trouble or if things have changed. Good staff can recognize changes in the people that they care for almost instantly if they've been trained and if they are consistent. They can't work in three and four and five different places and be consistently aware and have the full knowledge of the people that they care for.

Another priority is the expansion of the Lethbridge regional hospital to include more space for outpatient programming, but one of the things that it has to include – and certainly the conversations have been held – is to include radiation therapy. There was an article in the December '05 journal of *Current Oncology* called *Access to Radiation Therapy: Modelling the Geographic Distribution of Demand*, by Michael Taylor, P.S. Craighead, and P.B. Dunscombe. It concluded that a move away from a centralized service delivery model would “be beneficial in some form for the 28% . . . of rural Albertans who currently live more than 100 km from existing radiation therapy services.” They estimate that about 400 Lethbridge area patients travel to Calgary for treatment every year, and this number is expected to increase as people age.

The Cancer Society in Lethbridge funds between 50 and 60 people a year that are low income and must travel. They pay only 10 cents a kilometre, but I must admit that this is under review. I hope that they will see their way clear to increase this, especially with the price of gas, that has gone through the roof following this 10-cent-a-kilometre designation. So it by no means covers all the costs, and it is limited to low-income people to a maximum of \$500 a year per person. This really doesn't adequately cover some of the costs that they do incur.

Every Monday my fellow southern Albertans drive north on highway 2 to the Tom Baker cancer centre in Calgary in order to receive the radiation treatment. These cancer patients spend most of the week in Calgary getting treatment, and then they drive back to their homes on Friday afternoon. Those patients who are unable to make the gruelling trip back and forth must remain in Calgary, and it's often for weeks at a time. So many families have had to make this trip that the demand for radiation treatment in Lethbridge is overwhelming. In fact, last year 15,000 people signed a petition asking for radiation treatment in Lethbridge.

4:20

Given the devastating impact of cancer and radiation treatment, I would hope that the Minister of Health and Wellness would take a

very serious look at this for southern Albertans and move forward on the Lethbridge project to be able to provide radiation treatment outside of the two urban centres. Alberta's growing population and the increase in the cancer rate is contributing to the mushrooming demand for radiation, and the Tom Baker cancer centre is feeling the upswing on that one. As a result, again, there is a demand for the satellite centre.

Residents in Lethbridge – and it isn't just the residents in Lethbridge; it truly is everyone probably south of Calgary – are demanding that we have this radiation treatment centre and have it established at the Lethbridge regional hospital. There has been knowledge that the Lethbridge satellite cancer centre is further advanced than the Calgary planning, and Calgary's planning is, I understand, five years off, with a possible \$600 million price tag. However, as we all know, with this labour market and materials these costs I'm sure will go up over the next five years. Lethbridge's planning and Lethbridge's need is now, so what I would like to ask the minister is to take a very careful look at the Lethbridge centre and to please put it ahead, actually, of the Calgary one. I realize that Calgary has to be increased, but if a lot of the people from southern Alberta weren't going to Calgary, it would take some of that pressure off.

The region has an exceedingly high population of aboriginals. We have two of the largest reserves in the country. We have the Bloods and the Peigan very close to Lethbridge. Many, many, many of our aboriginal, First Nation people are moving into Lethbridge. We must be working with them to teach and prevent and manage obesity and diabetes, which is running rampant, unfortunately, through their populations. Not only do we have to help them prevent it, but when it does occur, there are huge complications that happen if these are not managed in a very professional manner and on a very regular basis. We have to focus on the risk factors for diabetes, and certainly there has to be early testing and diagnosis. To be able to actually have our aboriginal citizens recognize what's going on, we need to be able to go back to the reserves. It would have to be done in conjunction with the federal government because they are on the reserves, but we have to teach them at a very early age how to recognize the symptoms of early-onset diabetes and how to have the testing done because it can be done very simply.

We need to identify a need for the latest technology in operating room design and equipment to improve patient safety, shorten the length of stay. I believe that the Minister of Health and Wellness actually referred to the difference from when she was nursing, how long it took for a gallbladder operation. Because I nursed later than she did, I know that it can be done very simply: probably a day and a half, and you're out. So we need to shorten those lengths of stays.

We need to increase the surgical capacity certainly within the regional hospital and retain and recruit surgical specialists. It looks good on paper, but it is exceedingly difficult to be able to do. Again I would say – this would probably go to the Minister of Advanced Education – that we simply must open up more seats for health care professionals in this province. The cost of an i-Suite operating theatre is approximately \$1.5 million.

The Chinook health region realizes that with the deficit they have, even if they got the money from the province, it's not helping them go forward. We have a very good hospital foundation, and I know that they're working very hard toward raising this money for our operating theatres; however, I don't believe that that should let the government off the hook because they can get other people to raise the money that truly they should be providing for the people in Lethbridge for our health region.

I would like to leave those thoughts with the Minister of Health and Wellness. Please really consider giving us the radiation centre that we need so badly.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my privilege to stand and speak to the appropriations. As I've indicated in the House before, my key issues have to do with water and environmental investments, natural capital as well as human capital and financial capital. I guess I'm concerned, in the light of the tremendous surpluses and wealth of the province, that we do our diligence in relation to longer term planning. Specifically, how can we make some of the development decisions we're making without the benefit of a land-use plan?

We're continuing to make decisions on the basis of the assumptions we've made relatively safely until this last decade that we will have unlimited resources to draw from. But as things are unfolding, particularly in southern Alberta, as evidence mounts that climate change is going to have a significant impact on the various aspects of our natural capital and our ability to sustain some of our communities – and, certainly, the business climate will be affected – it's imperative that some of these investments be used in a smart and intelligent way that recognizes the need for long-term planning and a strategy based on land use over the next 50 years. We continue to wait for that, Mr. Chairman, and I think all of us on this side of the House and, I'm sure, on the other side are eagerly anticipating the investment that's needed and the invaluable assistance that our residents and our municipalities can contribute to a plan that will be both science based and value based in the communities around Alberta.

It's clear that water will be the issue limiting development in southern Alberta. We've already recognized overallocations in the Bow River, Elbow River, and South Saskatchewan basin, yet proposals continue to come forward and be approved, most recently in the area of Balzac for a racecourse, a huge mall infrastructure that has the potential for serious compromise to water supplies and water treatment programs if it's not adequately planned for and if the research isn't there to ensure that we will have water and land-use opportunities to do the development and to protect the people and the businesses that intend to locate there. Recent evidence has indicated that groundwater in the area has been dropping steadily for the last decade. We don't know why, and we need to know why. The kind of decisions that are being forced upon this government without the benefit of a land-use plan, without a real understanding of our water inventory, without science-based cumulative impact assessment, and without meaningful public consultation places us in a very untenable situation.

My strong sense, coming from the perspective of sustainable development, is that we need a clear plan and that we need to have indicators of when we're moving in a sustainable way and when we're not, when we're exceeding the carrying capacity of a particular bioregion. We simply don't have the research to make those decisions, and we haven't done the planning. So I would press the government very seriously to move forward as quickly as possible on those fronts so that we can have confidence that the kind of boom we're experiencing now will not compromise future generations, will not compromise specific bioregions and render them unsustainable, in fact permanently damaged in some cases. That means looking at all of the ways that we manage our water. It means looking at the ways in which we have continued to focus on supply as opposed to demand management in this province, and we continue to allow water to be used without measurement and without full-cost accounting. This leaves us, again, in a totally untenable situation, comparable to someone drawing on their bank account without ever having any feedback about what's left in the bank account. Albertans expect better, they deserve better, and we on the

Liberal side commit to providing better when we form the next government.

4:30

The options that are open to us if we fail to do that are rather ominous. I think that across the province, across the country, across the globe people are saying that water is going to increasingly be a contentious issue. Already we're seeing conflicts between Calgary, for example, and the developers and communities around Calgary, where 19 communities will be involved in a public hearing next month in dispute, basically, with the city of Calgary, who refuses to give its share of allocated water to these communities to sustain their own growth. As a result, we are paying through the nose to the tune of \$80 million for water supplies coming from far afield from these communities, from the Kneehill water system, when for a fraction of the cost the city of Calgary, if the planning were in place, could supply adequate water to the areas around Balzac, Irricana, and Acme. So that is a pressing issue that I'm hearing concerns expressed about in the immediate rural areas.

Within the city of Calgary and my own constituents there are concerns being raised about water quality changes, about the decline in our glaciers, and the diminishing flows in the Bow. We've already lost 85 per cent of the flow in the Bow River over this last century with the loss of our glaciers, and the prospects for the next 30 years are very significant. So water management is critical for some of the issues that I have to deal with on a daily basis.

The questions continue to be raised in the area of the Horseshoe Canyon formation in southeastern Alberta where coal-bed methane is being developed at a record-breaking rate despite the fact that we still do not have the information related to some of these damaged aquifers and damaged wells. There remain serious questions that scientists at the University of Alberta are saying are not being adequately presented to the public. The Alberta Environment department continues to block access to some of the isotope testing and continues to reassure people in the Rosebud area that all is well and that these water wells are the fault of poor maintenance by farmers. That gets to be a tired tune when science shows us that there is, indeed, significant gas migration.

In fact, in the Lloydminster area about 50 per cent of water wells have been shown to be contaminated to varying degrees by some of the SAGD developments up there. There's growing evidence in the Horseshoe Canyon formation, based on the science of some of these U of A researchers, that we are not acknowledging some of the changes in our groundwater, both volumes and quality, that relate to some of the activity that's been going on for a hundred years in this province. It may not all be related to coal-bed methane. It may be a cumulative impact from shot holes, from boreholes, from the seismic lines and clear-cutting that is occurring in some areas, from the conventional and the unconventional oil and gas activity.

So making plans, making decisions on developments in the areas of south and eastern Alberta in the absence of real understanding of what's happening to our groundwater is a shame. A very strong message that I'm getting from landowners and from environmentalists and scientists is that we need to do better in terms of our water use planning. It is the issue of the decade. It is the issue that must be addressed before some of these major decisions are made about land use. I would strongly encourage the government to get the best of science advice, move forward quickly on getting the results of some of these putatively damaged wells, establish which have been damaged by resource activity, which are a natural phenomenon or poor maintenance in some cases, and be very clear about what our resources are going to be over the next decade.

In the area of my constituency there's also a strong message that in the centre of the city housing is a critical issue. It is not only

creating hardship, physical hardship, for people in my communities among those who are least able to deal with it: the handicapped, people impoverished, single mothers. It is also creating a tremendous mental stress and adding to the tremendous burden on our health care system as a result of not being able to provide the basic necessities of life in the context of safe, secure housing and the basic needs of adequate, balanced food and shelter and educational opportunities that we need to be able to do as a caring community. I note with interest that the government has made some important headway on the housing issue. I'm glad it's being a strong focus. I acknowledge that it needs to be and that this budget will go some distance in trying to alleviate some of the pressures. Clearly, it's the issue pressing most on our most disadvantaged in the communities, and I'm getting a lot of pressure on it.

In relation to the health care system, too, there is a need, again, to step back from the crisis that we're in and begin to look at the whole question of management of our health care and management of our resources and examine just the extent to which we're identifying outcomes from the burgeoning expenses and the growing stresses and strains on the health care system. My sense is that after regionalization we haven't necessarily looked carefully enough at what the impacts of regionalization are, on the bureaucracy. What kinds of decisions have had what kinds of outcomes? Are we, in fact, creating bottlenecks and inefficiencies and a failure to shift responsibility from various professional groups to where they can more sustainably be managed?

I spoke with a pharmacist today who feels that pharmacists could be doing a lot more than they're given at this time. Physicians need to be looking at the bigger picture and relinquishing some of their authority to both pharmacists and nurses, and nurses need to play a bigger role in the system. They clearly have a tremendous knowledge and experience with people and are underutilized to the detriment of the whole health care system and to the detriment of the long-term well-being of our residents because in some cases, indeed, nurses can address individuals' concerns more effectively than physicians.

So with that I would leave a few comments on the health care system: a need to review outcomes; review top-heavy administrative loads, which have not necessarily translated into better and more efficient delivery of health services in this province; a failure of delegation across the board in terms of our health professionals; and a profound failure nationally in bringing foreign medical graduates, foreign dental graduates, foreign professionals into the Canadian milieu and allowing them to practise and serve the community, reducing their own dependence on our support systems, improving their own mental health. It's a win-win situation to recognize that we have wasted, squandered, the resources of many of these foreign graduates by what I would call petty politics in our professions, putting up unnecessary barriers to some of these foreign-trained workers who are eminently qualified, eminently capable to step into some of these important positions of great need.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I think I'll take my seat. I appreciate the opportunity to address the Assembly.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

4:40

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to get this opportunity again to discuss supplementary supply, this time through the bill. I had the opportunity previously to ask questions regarding the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, and I'll certainly read with interest the responses that, hopefully, I will receive from the minister in regard to

questions. There's a significant amount of money here. There is certainly a need, and everyone recognizes the need for income support for farmers, particularly those in grain production at this time. As I said earlier, we discussed this whole issue in the Assembly last winter. Again, hopefully this money will reach the farmers that need it.

When we look at this entire budget or this entire request, and we see where it is certainly in excess of \$1 billion . . . [A bell rang] That may be the answer to my questions right there. When one looks at this and one considers that we've just gone through the budget process and you look at the \$1.366 billion estimates, you couldn't blame the taxpayers of this province if they were concerned about this government's inability to plan. I was so pleased to hear the Minister of Human Resources and Employment yesterday state that he admires how the Alberta Liberals have an ability to plan. I'm glad that is recognized by someone on that side of the House. Certainly our ideas are adopted by the government on occasion, many occasions. But when one looks at the plan of this government, there is cause for concern.

Now, we look at each department and we look at the size of government and we see the growth in government. One of the checks and balances that we used to have on this government as opposition members and as taxpayers was the fact that we could have a look at the annual reports of each and every ministry in a timely fashion. The government was always very proud of the fact that they would present a draft copy of the annual report. Each minister would go before the standing policy committees, and these are committees where opposition members are not allowed to participate. These are Progressive Conservative government-members-only committees. Each and every minister in the month of August – the occasional time it would be into September – would appear before that respective committee and present the draft annual report from their department for the fiscal year that ended the previous March.

This year – this year – all the ministries have to date not even approached the standing policy committees with their draft annual reports. It hasn't been done yet. No. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development looks up, and I know that he is thinking: was I there? No, he wasn't there yet. He was certainly there last year. I believe he was there on this date precisely last year. There were seven if not eight ministries that appeared a year ago today, August 30, before a respective standing policy committee.

So there are two questions here. Has this government completely lost direction, or have they scheduled the release of these draft annual reports after this mini summer session ends so that the bad news that's in there will not be used by the opposition members during question period? Is it mismanagement, or does the government have something to hide? Is there a waste of tax dollars in there that not only would the opposition parties discuss but that taxpayers would be outraged about? There are two things possibly here. It's never happened in my time in this Assembly that we haven't had these draft annual reports presented at this time of the year through the standing policy committees. But this year here we go. It hasn't happened. Hopefully, it'll happen here right after Labour Day, Mr. Chairman, but I don't know. I haven't seen any press releases to let me know when the minister of agriculture is going to make his presentation or when the Minister of Energy is going to make his presentation.

I used to enjoy so much going to the former Minister of Energy's presentation. Even the Conservative members on those standing policy committees would grill the Minister of Energy on the failures of electricity deregulation. In the summer a lot of them would go to their constituencies, talk to their constituents, and realize the folly of

electricity deregulation. It was interesting, to say the least, to sit there and watch that minister try to dance around that particular flawed policy. It got so bad that some of the performance measures that used to be in that department's annual report, comparing electricity prices in various places, were removed because it was a total embarrassment to this government.

Now, that's only one example. But we've got to have a look at this, and we've got to consider: is it mismanagement, or is this government hiding something, hiding the misspending of funds? If we had sort of an open, transparent system with this government, if we had a public accounts system that was more open and more transparent – and I must say that I did some historical research this summer on the previous Progressive Conservative government. The Speaker today, Mr. Chairman, talked about the Peter Lougheed victory in 1971. If one looks at how the government at that time reported to the citizens on how they spent the tax dollars, it's totally different than what it is now. It's totally different. It was much better. It was much more open. It was much more transparent.

I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly, including the hon. Member for Drayton Valley–Calmar, to go to the library downstairs and have a look at some of the public accounts documents going back to the first years when the Progressive Conservative Party formed the government. I admire their open, transparent method of reporting to the citizens. I'm sorry; I can't admire the current Progressive Conservative Party's method because it is certainly not open and it's not transparent.

For instance, contracts, all contracts from each department, would be listed. There was no end to the valuable information for taxpayers in those public accounts documents. You don't see that now. You're just given this blue book. Each contract is in there, and each amount in a grant is listed in there alphabetically, not by department. You have to wonder why. When you go through the blue book and you see some of the amounts, some of them are quite extravagant. You wonder if perhaps we couldn't have spent a little less there so that we would have money to spend on education and on health care now. If we were spending all this money wisely, would the Minister of Education have had to go back and rightfully ask for more money for the schools of this province? I don't know the answer to that. The Conservative government certainly should be able to help out and answer that.

I don't know how much time I have left, Mr. Chairman, but I have some specific questions in regard to this that I would like to get on the record and, hopefully, get an answer. Now, with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development could I please have some details on this \$715,000 that's requested here? What exactly is the government's position on these legal actions initiated by aboriginal groups? Who are these First Nations groups? Is this \$715,000 to pay for legal fees or lawyers' advice? What is the nature of these disputes? I would appreciate a little bit more information on that if I could.

4:50

Certainly, with Infrastructure and Transportation I was interested to read in a recent edition of one of our newspapers – it may have been the *Edmonton Journal*; I'm not sure – that there has been an \$11.2 million allocation here for the purchase of two new aircraft to replace the aging King Air 200s. Well, if something has been used in this province in the last few years, it's certainly been those King Airs, and if they're worn out, I can see why. This government has certainly been fond of using them.

Now, I would like to know what sort of cost-benefit analysis has been done on these new planes. I used to hear former members of this House on the government side complain about these King Airs. They were quite noisy, and whenever they were going across North

America, they had to land in Duluth for fuel because the tanks weren't big enough to go from, I assume, Toronto to Edmonton. But what are the details on the purchase of these new planes? I'm certain that one of the features besides probably leather seats is long-range fuel tanks so that they don't have to land in Duluth anymore.

I would like the details on this because it perplexes me why a government that is so vigorous sometimes in promoting the private sector – and it's nothing that I think they should be worried about or ashamed of. I think a good private sector is excellent. A good, strong private sector that develops jobs and creates prosperity is excellent. But why, when you're so anxious to get involved in all these P3 projects with the private sector, would you buy your own airplanes? Why don't you let the private sector do this?

If you're not so confident that the private sector can do it in a cost-effective manner, why don't you just retire these King Airs and try the private sector? Give them a chance for maybe two years, maybe three years to see if they could provide flights in a timely, economical fashion and save the taxpayers a few dollars. Why don't we try this? If we have so much confidence and so much faith in the free-enterprise system, why don't we see if some of these charter outfits in the province can do just as good a job or maybe even a better job than our own fleet? See what happens over a two-year period and then explain to the taxpayers: well, this hasn't worked out, so we're going to go on the market and maybe buy an airplane or two somewhere else.

I heard that Enron had a couple of jets for sale. I don't know if this government is interested in second-hand airplanes, but certainly there are a couple of those jets. I can give them the tail numbers of those planes if they wish, if they want to check it out. But I don't know why the private sector wasn't given a chance in this case, why we're spending this kind of money on two airplanes.

That amount would build two complete new elementary schools. Whether they would be located in fast-growing communities in Calgary or Grande Prairie, it really wouldn't matter. I was up in Grande Prairie this spring, and the parents up there were really frustrated.

**An Hon. Member:** How much money, Hugh?

**Mr. MacDonald:** How much money? Eleven point two million dollars would build two good cinder-block construction elementary schools. It certainly would. I know that whenever I was in Grande Prairie, the parents that I met up there were quite frustrated, and they were concerned not only about class sizes but the condition of the schools.

So, you know, if we don't have any money for Grande Prairie for a new school, perhaps we could look at this as an alternative. I'm sure there's a opt-out clause on the purchase of these two new airplanes; I'm sure there would be.

But there's certainly not an opt-out clause for consumers whenever they get rooked into these high-priced energy contracts, whether they're electricity or natural gas. There should be. There should be an opt-out clause for consumers. I keep asking and hoping that the government would give consumers a chance, but, no, they will not. With all this deregulation, this market system that's been set up, the consumer has been forgotten about. The consumer has to dig deeper and deeper every month into their pocket to pay for heat and for lights, and that's not right either.

There are a lot of different line items in this request. Certainly, in conclusion, I would like to urge the hon. Minister of Finance to be very cautious in spending. I know that the majority of them at least are needed items, certainly in education and certainly in health, and I'm sure that there's a justification somewhere for each and every

dollar that's being spent. But we're spending a lot of money here, and I don't think we're being open and transparent.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and cede the floor to another hon. colleague and hope that at some point in the future I can get some more time to express my concern about this government's expenditures. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for giving me an opportunity to rise again to deal with some issues that I haven't dealt with before, and that is some concerns around central Alberta.

Certainly, as Environment critic I've received some questions about and admonitions to press for better water protection in the area of Pigeon Lake, Big Island Lake, that has been under threat for a number of years. Actually, it's been proposed over the last 15 years that the Big Island Lake be reclaimed after being illegally drained and used for domesticated animals. So I've been passing that pressure along to Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. Great concerns again about water, and I neglected to mention them in relation to human activity, animal activity, and confined feeding operations, which are increasing pressures in the centre of the province.

I notice in the budget that a lot of the increases have to do with waste management assistance, erosion control. I think that's appropriate, but it's, of course, inadequate given the tremendous strains attendant with the vast growth that's going on in the province.

So I think we need to look seriously at a longer term investment in infrastructure, which, by the way, should not be included under Environment. We have a false sense of investment in our environment when we continue to put budgetary items that are truly infrastructure – water supply, water treatment, water transport do not strictly belong under Alberta Environment. Again, it obscures the fact that this department is grossly underfunded and completely incapable of doing the jobs it's been tasked to do in terms of monitoring, enforcement, education, and research.

5:00

I note the \$2.6 million within the supplementary estimates for the oil sands research on reclamation and groundwater assessment: again, vitally important but long overdue. Oil sands development is going ahead apace without any understanding yet about how well we're going to be able to reclaim the sites, how well we're going to be able to remediate the soil and return the land to equivalent land use, which is under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, the ultimate goal of all reclamation and remediation. We do desperately need more research, and \$2.6 million is important, but where is the long-term plan for establishing the criteria ensuring that we have the best possible protection for the environment before we allow the unfettered development, especially in the oil sands and, increasingly, I've mentioned, in southeastern Alberta in the Horseshoe Canyon formation, where there's evidence of negative impacts on some of the groundwater?

In relation to central Alberta a number of schools have raised concerns in the Red Deer area, in both Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South. I will simply here, Mr. Chairman, highlight the major liabilities that some of these school boards have, both the Red Deer Catholic regional division No. 39 and the Red Deer public school district No. 104. École Camille J. Lerouge school, a raw score of 980; over \$1.5 million in maintenance expenses has been brought down to \$207,000 in 2005. That deserves a credit to the Alberta

government for investment in that important school, a big school in Red Deer. St. Patrick community school, however, is creeping up and has not been substantially addressed in the last five years, standing at a score of 420, with roughly \$450,000 in deficit maintenance awaiting attention.

The Annie Gaetz school, with a score of 310, has \$285,000 in maintenance deficits. Aspen Heights elementary school, with a score of 360 and a maintenance deficit of \$1,052,000, clearly a very high priority in need for reconditioning. Fairview school, a score of 660 and a maintenance deficit of \$1.15 million. George Wilbert Smith school in Red Deer, \$769,000 in deficit maintenance and a raw score of 510. The Hunting Hills high school in Red Deer, a raw score of 330 and a deficit maintenance need of \$843,000. Lindsay Thurber composite high school, the highest raw score on the page, 1,320, with \$5 million in deficit maintenance expenditures. Finally, West Park middle school with a raw score of 510 and a deficit maintenance budget of \$938,000, Mr. Chairman.

Well, just to return briefly to some of the Environment budget expenditures and needs, I was disappointed not to see some investment in climate change initiatives. There's no mention of any new money. There is, again, a tacit commitment to a fossil fuel addiction that continues in this province, and we continue to look for leadership on energy efficiency and managed growth in the area of fossil fuel development. From a budget of 2006 estimates briefing the government states that it will "initiate actions that make Alberta a leader in energy efficiency improvements, carbon management strategies and adapting to climate change." But what specific programs? We see nothing new despite the growing awareness that we have to reduce in Alberta.

We are the prime producer of greenhouse gases in this country. People are looking to us for leadership not only within this province but around the world. The scientific consensus around man-made activities, fossil fuels being the prime contributors to climate change, is staggering now. It's unavoidable. We have to make the changes. We have to move towards energy efficiency. We have to move towards renewables. To do that, government has to show leadership in providing incentives and setting the standards for building codes and level the playing field for some of the newer technologies in renewable energy development that will actually move us into the leadership role that we deserve and must aspire to and away from our unhealthy dependence on fossil fuels.

Given recent statements by Dr. David Schindler, the water expert out of the University of Alberta, he indicated that climate change as a major factor will threaten our long-term water sustainability. I've indicated earlier that without a better inventory of our water in relation to climate change and our serious commitment to reducing fossil fuel use in this province, we are not going to be credible, and we are not going to be showing the leadership for our children and our grandchildren that we all want to do.

I'd like to know from the Minister of Environment what he's doing to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in Alberta, especially from the large emitters. Will he commit to a real plan to decrease emissions and not simply focus on this intensity target that is relatively meaningless and simply talks about more and better technology as opposed to new ways of doing business in this province? What is the commitment to CO<sub>2</sub> injection and, again, to renewable fuel development?

The Water for Life strategy again continues to suffer under the lack of investment for some of these public advisory committees that are having huge expectations placed on them about water management in their areas and no resources to deal with a meaningful plan and sustainable management. This puts tremendous pressure on



these people, very caring individuals in our communities that have stepped up to volunteer on these public advisory committees on the watersheds and find their hands tied by lack of resources and lack of technical support to make some of the decisions that they are.

Clearly, also, we're getting the message that full-cost accounting must be instituted in this province if we're actually going to be serious about conserving water, focusing on demand management as opposed to supply management. I would again strongly encourage the Minister of Environment to look at ways to more sensibly conserve through demand management, and full-cost accounting is one of the most effective ways worldwide that has been used to help people value appropriately the monies that we are needing to pay to discover the water, to develop the water, to transport the water, and to treat the water.

So I'll close with those remarks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. When I last had the opportunity to speak in this Assembly, I was talking about school fees and some of the surprising fees that showed up at a local Edmonton area high school on their 2006-07 registration forms. I'd just like to touch on one more that I didn't quite get to speak about earlier, and that was music. There is a hundred dollar fee for the rental of band instruments and guitars to take a music class in that high school. Again, this is not to pick on one particular high school because my understanding and recollection from other schools I've dealt with is that it's actually quite normal to have such fees. So that concludes the concerns I had about those particular school fees at that particular high school, but it's indicative of what's happening across the province, and I think that it's a sad comment on the budgeting that we provide to the school boards when we see schools having to charge for parking, as I indicated earlier, or the use of gym facilities or workbooks for math classes.

5:10

Now I'd like to talk about some of the schools in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, in particular some of the maintenance concerns that have been raised by those schools in their capital planning and where it leaves them. Louis St. Laurent is a combination junior high/senior high school in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. It's a wonderful school with great teachers and an excellent reputation within the Edmonton Catholic system. In 1999-2000 the forecast for repairs at that school was \$5.1 million. Some work has been done there, Mr. Chairman. The forecast now for the next five years in terms of maintenance at that school is \$1.25 million.

Interestingly enough, several speakers have referred earlier to what is known as the FCI, or facility condition index. This is a rating that's calculated at a school indicating the amount of work that's required in terms of maintenance relative to the overall value of that building. In the case of Louis St. Laurent the score there is 5.75 on the facility condition index, which means 5.75 per cent of the value of the building is what's required in the next five years just to maintain it. That's not a particularly bad score, but indications are that anything over 5 per cent is high, so certainly that causes some concern.

Another Edmonton Catholic school, St. Stanislaus, which is again a wonderful school, very close to my constituency office, has great programming. Their score back in 1999-2000 was 450. Again, Mr. Chairman, anything over 400 points shows that the school was in fair condition, so this school was not in particularly bad shape. But the

most recent estimate for maintenance over the next five years is \$613,000, and it actually gives it an FCI, or facility condition index, of 14.45, which is quite alarming. Again, 14 per cent of the value of the building is what's required for the next five years just to maintain it at its current condition. So this is certainly a concern for the parents of the students that attend St. Stan's and something that we have to watch carefully.

Perhaps, the most alarming in terms of the Catholic schools in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford is St. Augustine, which is currently showing more than \$1 million in required maintenance over the next five years. That gives it a facility condition index of 25.14, Mr. Chairman, which means that more than a quarter of the value of this school is what's required in maintenance over the next five years. This is the highest score of any school in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford and certainly, again, a concern.

We're hoping that some of the dollars that have been provided in this supplementary supply bill will find their way into those three schools. Clearly, they need them.

Another school that I would like to highlight in terms of need is Duggan elementary. Mr. Chairman, Duggan is, again, a wonderful school with a very diverse mix of children, in fact one of the schools that was on the hit list, if I can put it that way, of Edmonton public in terms of its low utilization numbers. Duggan is now bringing in students from south of Ellerslie Road. Those kids in the newer parts of the riding of Edmonton-Whitemud don't have a school, so they're actually being bused all the way up to Duggan to enhance the enrolment of that school. This school is one that, unfortunately, is showing its age.

One of the fears that I have is that it hasn't been kept up as well as we would expect it to be, perhaps due in part to the fact that it is on the hit list, and its future is certainly in doubt. Yet the parents I've spoken to who have children there think that the educators in this school do a wonderful job and would certainly like to see it continue. We've talked a lot in this Assembly about the need for maintaining community schools, how valuable they are to a community, how they are, in fact, often the lifeblood of a community.

Certainly, you know, we're not talking about inner-city schools, where nobody lives anymore. We're talking about schools in very mainstream communities that have been rejuvenated. That particular community is at this point about 40 years old. There are still a few families living there who purchased there 40 years ago. I met a lot of those when I was door-knocking through the constituency. But there are also an awful lot of young families moving into that community, several of them with children that are perhaps not of school age yet but will be soon. The thought of closing their local community school and then perhaps at some point having to bus their kids down south of Ellerslie Road into a new school when they have a perfectly fine facility there if only we maintain it and keep it alive for a few more years until these kids reach school-going age and we can get that enrolment back up: it would be a real shame if they were to lose their community school.

Now, I want to just talk a little bit about Cold Lake and Bonnyville because, Mr. Chairman, I recently had the pleasure of visiting Cold Lake and Bonnyville. Myself and the hon. Member for St. Albert toured that area not more than three weeks ago. We were fortunate enough to go up and be a part of the local Seniors Mini Summer Games for the northeast Alberta region and just had a wonderful experience meeting not only people from that area of the province but throughout the northeast region of the province. Particularly fun were a group of seniors from Fort McMurray, who I became quite enamoured with and who I'd like to think enjoyed my company as well.

We spent two days in Cold Lake discussing various local issues with the residents and managed to learn quite a bit about the community. I have to say that I hadn't personally visited Cold Lake since I was a teenager. What a wonderful community it is, and what a wonderful resource that lake is. I had quite frankly forgotten just what a treasure we have there.

One of the interesting things, Mr. Chairman, is that we spent an absolutely engaging hour speaking to a local schoolteacher about some of her experiences, and I was quite surprised and taken aback at how fearful she was that somebody might actually see her speaking to the Education critic from the Official Opposition. Without a word of a lie, she literally looked over her shoulder several times as she was speaking to the Member for St. Albert and said: I can't let anybody see you talking to me. It speaks to a culture of fear that I have noticed across this province, where people are outright afraid to share their concerns with members of the Official Opposition for fear of retribution from either this government or agencies that depend directly on this government for funding. I think it's a sad comment that we live in a society where people are afraid to express their concerns about their government, but this was very clearly the case in Cold Lake. So, unlike some of the questions that were asked earlier today in question period, I'm not going to be mentioning her name, not because she can't be here to defend herself but because she was so fearful of the retribution she might face if it were known that she was actually sharing some of her concerns with us.

5:20

I'll just go through some of the schools in that particular constituency that are definitely in need of looking at. L'école Notre Dame, a high school in Bonnyville, over the next five years needs \$406,000 in routine maintenance and has a facility condition index of 5.83, which again is not particularly bad, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, most schools in that constituency have somewhat less need than that, but again anything over 5 is a red flag or an alarm bell that we have to be watching carefully and making sure that these concerns are addressed.

We have H.E. Bourgoin middle school in Bonnyville, where \$324,700 is required over the next five years. Now, that's not a particularly high number although it's about the same as what was identified five years ago. The concern is that we really haven't done anything to catch that school up to where it needs to be in terms of maintenance.

A couple of the Cold Lake schools appear to be in a little more need. Cold Lake elementary school is facing \$459,726 in maintenance over the next five years, which gives it a facility condition index of 9.42 per cent. Nearly 10 per cent of the value of that particular building is going to be required in the next five years just in terms of routine maintenance to keep it at where it's at today. So these are certainly concerns for the residents of Cold Lake.

I see the R.A. Reynolds school, a school that's located on the base at Cold Lake and has a tremendous reputation for providing education to the students of our military families, has a requirement of nearly half a million dollars. Actually it's much more than that. I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. It's \$741,000, almost three-quarters of a million dollars in terms of upkeep. Now, they've received some money over the last five years, so it's not that we haven't paid attention to this school, but clearly it hasn't been adequate in terms of getting them back up to where they need to be. They still need nearly three-quarters of a million dollars over the next five years to bring them back up to snuff.

Now, I happened to look at another constituency here, and I hope I can find this information because I thought this was quite interest-

ing. In the constituency, Mr. Chairman, of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, which happens to be the constituency in which our Speaker resides and represents, surprisingly it appears as if most of the schools are doing quite well. The only reason I reference that is because earlier this afternoon my colleague from Calgary-Varsity was highlighting some of the needs of the schools in the Premier's riding of Calgary-Elbow. There appears to be an awful lot of need in Calgary-Elbow, yet Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock seems to have done fairly well.

The Fort Assiniboine school, a community which I know quite well – I spent a fair amount of time in Fort Assiniboine as I was growing up – has a need of \$448,330 in maintenance and upkeep over the next five years, which gives it a facility condition index rating of 10.05 per cent. That is the highest, as near as I can tell, of any schools in the Speaker's riding. It's a lot of money, but, as I've said, surprisingly Calgary-Elbow seems to have somewhat more need than Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. Now, you can draw whatever conclusion out of that you wish, but I found it to be an interesting little tidbit.

I'm just going to look at some of the other departments, Mr. Chairman, in terms of this supplementary supply bill. The first one that attracted my attention – and I know the people in the horse-racing industry are going to be phoning tomorrow morning because the Official Opposition talks an awful lot about \$66 million for horse racing this year and how that's gone up dramatically over the years.

Members opposite will argue that it's not really taxpayers' dollars, that this is only money that comes out of the slot machines that are in the horse-racing facilities. I understand that, but the bottom line is that if it's money that comes into the province, it is taxpayers' money. It belongs to all Albertans, so it's relevant in terms of the conversation. It really becomes a question of priorities as opposed to just picking on the horse-racing industry. However, they happen to be an obvious one. People do have a problem at times when you put this on the scale and you compare horse racing against education or horse racing against health care. Always it raises alarm bells. Again, perhaps the horse-racing industry is an easy mark, but it is one that jumps out at you.

I'm going to pick on them again, as it were, I guess. I note in the supplementary estimates for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development that there's \$4.8 million for infrastructure assistance for municipal waste water to support a project in the municipal district of Rockyview that includes a horse-racing track and an equine centre. Now, anybody who's driven along highway 2 just north of Calgary recently will have seen this development taking place, a huge development which is now under way between Calgary and Airdrie just on the east side of the highway. And here we are: not only giving \$66 million to the horse-racing industry but now a total, actually, of \$8.3 million more to facilitate waste-water management for this particular project. There's \$4.8 million that the minister is asking for today in supplementary supply and another \$3.5 million which apparently will be paid from the approved program budget or reallocated from lapses in other programs, so a total of another \$8.3 million for waste-water management for the horse-racing industry.

Again, that might not be a problem until you start balancing it off against other things. We know from reports that were made to the government's standing policy committee by the municipality of Wood Buffalo that they have huge problems up there. We hear daily about the concerns coming from Wood Buffalo, and Fort McMurray in particular. One of their problems, not surprisingly, is finding the money to either upgrade or replace their waste-water treatment plant. They're having trouble funding this project.

Now, I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, but I'm sure that the average taxpayer of this province, when they look at \$8.3 million going to

look after waste-water management for this complex that's being built between Calgary and Airdrie to accommodate the racing horses and then they look at Fort McMurray, who can't get the funding they need to either upgrade or build a new waste-water treatment plant, when you put those two on the scale, there's something wrong with the picture. Clearly, there's something wrong with the picture.

Another question I have when it comes to that particular request for money is why it appears in Agriculture in the first place because when I flip through the bill and I come to the Department of Environment, the Minister of Environment is asking for \$3.7 million for the Alberta waste management assistance grant program to support waste management contracts and commitments. The obvious question is: why? Why are we asking for money here for waste water, money there for waste water? Why is it not together? I think it's an obvious question.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to participate in the debate again this afternoon, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I listened with a great deal of interest to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford's comments in regard to this amount of money that is being used to subsidize . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 8 p.m., at which time we will reconvene in Committee of the Whole.

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

