

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, August 31, 2006** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 06/08/31
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two very special guests seated in the members' gallery. The first guest is Mr. Dan MacLennan, the very popular president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. With him today is the vice-president, Krista Koroluk, a dedicated health worker who has her roots in Lamont. You can see why she moved up the ladder very quickly with her nice, warm smile and, actually, as my second cousin. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Legislature two exceedingly bright and hard-working young women who are very important to me and, certainly, important to my constituents. I refer to my office staff, who are visiting from Lethbridge. Bridget Mearns, who coincidentally is my daughter, is the constituency manager and MLA assistant. She has experience in political administration at the federal and provincial levels, having served our MP in Ottawa. Bridget is bilingual and this fall will be studying to hone her mediation skills in order to better serve the constituents of Lethbridge-East. My office is very busy and very efficient thanks to her work, and she has lots of experience in keeping track of her mother.

Lisa Lambert was my STEP student this summer. I was very lucky to have Lisa because of her very great research skills. She did a great job for me. She is finishing her master's in political science, and she is the founder of an online newsletter, *Martha's Monthly*, an issue-based site with a focus for women. It encourages the public to express their views to their elected officials. I trust that the experience in my office will help Lisa to proceed towards her PhD.

I would ask them both now to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and honour to rise in this Assembly today and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two fine women from the city of Edmonton, Catherine Obacz and her daughter Jessica. Catherine is the constituency manager for Edmonton-Manning. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Derrick Harrison from Akinsdale, Bernard Riley from Akinsdale, Ed and Joanne Kells from Akinsdale, Fran Preston from Akinsdale, Louise Perreux from Akinsdale, Helen Dempsey-Simmons from the Grandin area in St. Albert, and my trusted colleague and friend Pauline McCormick from St. Albert. Would they please rise – they're a real potent crew – and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Samara Jones. Samara recently joined our caucus as our research director. Samara is a native of Edmonton although she has been working in Brussels with international nonprofit organizations on social justice, housing, and homelessness issues in the European Union. She worked on immigration issues and was an active volunteer with new immigrants in Belgium. Samara received her master of arts from the University of Leuven and a BA degree in history from the University of Alberta. She is fluent in both French and Dutch. We are delighted to have her as part of our team. I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly John Schneider. John is a retired truck driver and has lived in Edmonton for 40 years. He is very concerned with the Alberta government's treatment of seniors. He was injured in a train accident at work 10 years ago and therefore lives on a fixed income of only \$853 a month. He hopes that the government will improve access to affordable housing for seniors as well as improve accessibility issues for seniors, particularly for access to properly maintained mechanized scooters. I would ask that John now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and honour to introduce through you to the members of this Assembly four guests. Kazimierz and Barbara Toryfter as well as their daughter and son-in-law Anna and Mark Chandra are here in the gallery. Anna and Mark were married earlier this month, and her parents travelled here all the way from Poland for that occasion. As a side note, Mr. Toryfter used to work at the port of Gdansk as a crane operator. He was a member of the Solidarity movement in the 1980s during the now-historic strikes that eventually helped topple communism in that country and throughout Europe. They are seated over here in the members' gallery, and I would like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this

Assembly two ladies who do a tremendous job in my constituency office out in Stony Plain. They're here today to witness democracy in action. I'd like to introduce my constituency manager, Lorna Wolodko, and her STEP student, Paula Cornell. Paula's last day in the office is tomorrow. She is going to go finish high school, and tomorrow, she tells me, she is going to go challenge the Alberta road test so that she can get her driver's licence. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask these two ladies to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

[Premier Klein entered the Chamber to a standing ovation]

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Racing Entertainment Centre Project

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It feels like déjà vu all over again, doesn't it?

Mr. Speaker, a huge project involving a mall to rival West Edmonton Mall, a giant horse-racing track, a resort hotel, and a large industrial park is currently under construction just outside the north edge of Calgary. The water demands for this project are absolutely immense, and the developers are planning to draw that water from the Red Deer River, many, many miles away. Very few people in Red Deer or elsewhere in central Alberta, including Drumheller, are actually aware of this. So my question is to the Minister of Environment. Given that the Red Deer River will come under increasing pressure in the next few years, does this minister support using water for a megamall and entertainment project on the edge of Calgary instead of for irrigation and communities in central Alberta?

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the opportunity to table for all members a plan which reflected our Water for Life strategy regarding the recommendations that our government has acted on. It is very important in this way, our blue gold, and to summarize, it says that our plan that the vision of our Premier and our government has implemented reflects a balance between protecting the environment and sustaining it and our aquatic aquifers and also allowing economic development in terms of growing in the future. What we are doing, though, which is an important point of the question, is that we in this 21st century want to manage water better. We are doing groundwater mapping. We are actually taking the water and ensuring that in the future in the South Saskatchewan River basin, in the Oldman River, in the South Saskatchewan River, and in the Bow River there will be no further applications for water.

In the Red Deer River based on the information . . . [interjections] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Based on the information that we have received from, of course, our multistakeholder groups and our watershed councils, what they have said is simply this: there is capacity within the Red Deer River. We want to learn from that to ensure that what has happened over the last hundred years in the Bow, in the Oldman, and in the South Saskatchewan – we want to ensure for the future that our rivers and our aquatic systems and our aquifers and our basins are protected. That is exactly what we are doing and the action of this government is doing in terms of the recommendations this cabinet and government have adopted.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given his fabulous planning, apparently multistakeholder consultations and so on, can the minister explain why city councils in Red Deer, Innisfail, for example, many people in Drumheller have no idea – no idea – of this proposed use of the Red Deer River when those communities' very futures depend on allocations of that water?

Mr. Boutilier: Just as a way of geography of where the water is and where it's coming from and where it's going to, it's important to recognize that this water that we have been blessed with – and I might say that we've been blessed and are very fortunate in our province – as we go forward, we want the best use of water. Our goal under . . . [interjections] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is very important stuff. [interjections] You know what? When your mouth is open, your ears don't hear. So I would like to answer the hon. Leader of the Opposition's question. Maybe the leader can ask some of his members to close their mouths so that they can hear what I'm saying.

The Speaker: We'll move on to the third question, please.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will this minister guarantee . . . [interjections] Thank you. Will the minister guarantee that any proposed allocations for this project from the Red Deer River subbasin will be the subject of full public consultation in all the communities affected?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, this province and the Ministry of Environment have an absolutely outstanding record when it comes to the process that we use for water allocation and the permits that we grant. I also want to thank the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition when he suggested that our plan is fabulous because I agree with him: it is fabulous, and it really is the state-of-the-art public policy that we're doing for the 21st century.

I'll also ask, though, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who is dealing directly with municipalities on this issue because we consult with our stakeholders now, in the past, and well into the future.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Labour Market

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta growth summit recommendations, signed off nine years ago by this government, had many solid, strong ideas to deal with growth, but this government failed to act, failed to take leadership, and failed to implement the solid recommendations that would have helped immeasurably with our Alberta labour market today. In doing so, the government has failed in properly training and preparing opportunities for our young people, our young women, our aboriginals, our new immigrants, and our shrinking farm population. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. With dozens of recommendations for workforce training signed off by the Premier, co-chair of the growth summit, what happened, and where did they all go?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we do have in place as a government a 20-year plan that deals with a lot of these issues. We have one of the best diversified economic action plans in North America, that involves the oil and gas industry, agriculture, forestry, tourism, and science and technology. We are value-adding now in all those areas. That's the job creation side. We're spending

hundreds of millions of dollars in training people to make sure that they fill as many of those jobs as possible.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask the opposition members, not only the Liberals but also the NDs, that if they have any quick answers, please send them to us.

Mr. Backs: Look at the growth summit, that's been sitting for nine years gathering dust, the recommendations there.

The Speaker: The next question is to look at that?

Mr. Backs: No.

The Speaker: Well, I'm sorry. There's no preamble.

Mr. Backs: Sorry.

The Speaker: So how are we going to get around this?

Mr. Backs: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Advanced Education: why did this government fail to act on the huge problem of the apprentice dropout rate identified nine years ago in the growth summit report?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I recall the growth summit. I was caucus liaison, so I remember it very well. But in about the same time frame, I would remind the member, we've gone from 23,000 apprentices to 53,000 apprentices. At that time we had about 200 aboriginal apprentices, and today we've got 1,400.

Mr. Backs: A supplemental to the minister of human resources, Mr. Speaker: given that action recommendation 50 states, "create a formula and process for the annual review of the minimum wage in Alberta," what happened, where did it go, and why is there not a formula today?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course, the minimum wage was changed not too long ago in Alberta, raised up to \$7. I've indicated in the House that I will review it again, and if it is necessary to increase it, then we'll definitely have a look at it. But one thing: because this government does so well in creating and developing jobs and developing a strong, diversified economy, there's only 1 per cent of the people who work close to the minimum wage. In fact, most of the people work at over \$10 an hour.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Northwest Anthony Henday Ring Road

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. St. Albert residents in the neighbourhoods of Heritage Lakes, Grandin, and Akinsdale are up in arms over the proposed northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive, which runs far too close to their homes. They're worried about the road being a dangerous goods route, noise and safety measures, clear-cutting, and most of all they feel that their government isn't listening to them. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: will the minister listen to the residents of St. Albert and move the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive south of the current proposal?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, the right-of-way for the ring road has been in place for a number of years, but what has happened is that the interchange that now has been engineered and designed makes it

very difficult to centre the highway in the right-of-way. As a consequence, there has been a proposal that it would move farther north. I can tell you that with the lobbying that has been done by the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development from that area in conjunction with the council from St. Albert, we have done some modelling, and we have determined that, yes, if the road were to be built where the proposal was, then there could be a problem with noise. The commitment is that we would be putting in noise abatement if, in fact, the road is built there. But I've got to stress that there has been no decision made at this point.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: has the department approached Newman Theological College about the possibility of purchasing its property?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, yes, we have. As a matter of fact, we have advanced some money to the college to assist them in assessing any other location that they might feel is suitable for them.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Minister. To the same minister: given the close proximity of the current proposal to homes in St. Albert, how can the department be confident that the dangerous goods route won't put families in harm's way in St. Albert?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, those kinds of issues, along with noise abatement, are issues that we are currently dealing with. We've had a lot of consultation with the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, and that will continue along with the input from the residents through the department. But I can assure you – and it's extremely important to recognize – that there has been no decision made. There are just proposals.

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

Farm Worker Exemptions from Labour Legislation

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday the Minister of Human Resources and Employment stood in this House in the presence of the widow of Kevan Chandler, a farm worker who was killed on June 18, and told this House that he would "monitor the situation" and "make the necessary changes" that are required "to improve the system." What he did not tell us, however, was that a review had already been completed by his own joint industry, labour, and government committee on workplace safety to the farm worker exemption from the occupational health and safety code. Worse than that, he did not tell us that he had rewritten the committee's report, dropping a recommendation that would have ended the exemption of farm workers from protection under the occupational health and safety code. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. How does this minister justify standing in this House and promising to take all necessary steps to protect farm workers knowing full well that he had already rejected a recommendation of his own committee to do just that?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a good and very important question, and it needs clarification. Of course, as you are aware, you know, we have a very strong economy, a lot of activity out there, and a lot of challenges in relation to safety. In our government safety in the workplace continues to be important.

I wish I could say that there are not going to be any fatalities and in the past have had no fatalities, but I can't say that.

One of the challenges we're faced with in relation to that particular issue is that the committee that was in place – it's a committee that's been around for quite a long time – did not have agriculture represented. What I indicated to the committee was that if there were any changes proposed in relation to agriculture, in relation to any impact it may have on farm families, which is very, very important, I would have to work in consultation with the minister of agriculture – and the minister of agriculture may want to supplement – that we would work together. Also, if it's going to impact the farm family in particular, we would have to consult the farm families out there and the farm industry to ensure that whatever is put in place does not impact the farm family negatively because the farm families right now, as you know, are challenged. There are a lot of bankruptcies out there. A lot of farm families are close to bankruptcy right now.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about protection for farm workers in agribusiness not on the family farm.

To the minister through the chair: given that this minister has now held this portfolio for nearly two years and given also that in the year 2005, 20 farm workers were killed on the job and 1,353 reported injuries took place on the farm, why has the minister not acted before now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Of course, like I said earlier, safety in the workplace, not only in agriculture but generally across the province, continues to be a top priority for our government. Again, I made a commitment. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and I have already sat down. I wanted to start talking about what steps may be taken next in relation to that specific issue.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that this minister has not dealt with major issues brought before him and constantly talks about monitoring and taking action in the future and given that he almost never does, can he now give us a clear and firm answer about when this issue is going to be addressed by his department, and can he give that answer so that the farm workers and the families who have lost loved ones know that the government actually is going to do something for a change?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course, agriculture continues to be a very, very important industry in Alberta. It is the backbone of rural Alberta, and many small towns across Alberta depend on the agriculture industry, the farm families. To make sure that we continue to have a strong, strong rural Alberta economy, you can be assured that any changes that are made by this government to deal with those specific issues will be done jointly with the ministry that's responsible for that area. It will involve the farm families. It will involve other farm leaders. It's an area that's so sensitive that any changes that are made have to be the right changes, and what this government will do is make the right changes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

School Construction in Airdrie-Chestermere

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As everybody knows, Alberta is experiencing unprecedented growth, no less in my

constituency than in many others, for example Fort McMurray. Airdrie right now is growing at an annual rate of 10 per cent. Chestermere and Langdon are growing at a rate of 20 per cent annually. In the spring I had the opportunity to ask the Minister of Education what he was going to do about getting schools for constituencies like mine and dealing with the infrastructure problems throughout the province when it comes to K to 12. I would like to know where he's at with his plan.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to report that we've made some tremendous progress in respect to the response to that question. In fact, today I have announced another \$303.3 million for new school projects across the province, for new modernization projects, and for modulars. This will help deliver on what the school boards have identified as their top priority projects, that address specifically health and safety concerns and crowding capacity concerns in many areas of the province. About \$44 million is heading into the Calgary boundary area, about \$41 million is heading into Grande Prairie and area, about \$40 million is heading into Airdrie-Chestermere and area, about \$30 million is heading into Edmonton, and the list goes on. So we've taken some major steps toward advancing those causes today.

Ms Haley: On behalf of my constituents I'm delighted, Mr. Speaker.

However, my question to the minister is this: in the spring I identified the fact that we required five schools. His announcement will give us three of those five. Could he please tell us when the other two can be expected?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I should also have indicated that today I announced that I will have the schools for tomorrow plan completed later this fall, and that particular plan will be the most comprehensive plan for new schools and modernization projects in about seven years. It will include information about demographics and trends and patterns and so on across Alberta. It will also specify on a year-by-year basis where new schools are needed, including Airdrie, Chestermere, Langdon, and those other areas around Calgary and elsewhere around the province, and why they are needed. It'll do the same in year 2, year 3, year 4, right up to year 5. Where possible I will also allocate what our estimates are for the dollars required to deliver on that.

So that plan is forthcoming. It will be extremely comprehensive, and it will certainly include what the hon. member is asking for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

2:00 Racing Entertainment Centre Project (continued)

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's obvious that straight answers aren't forthcoming from this government. Residents of central Alberta are being kept in the dark about a proposed megamall/racetrack project that could negatively affect their future and livelihoods. We'll try for answers one more time. To the Minister of Environment: will the minister delay the approval of the water diversion from the Red Deer River until after this government finally comes up with this integrated land-use plan or until full public consultations are complete?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I will ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs to supplement. It's important to understand one principle in terms of aquatic protection and also the first in time, first in right.

Under our application process right now the city of Red Deer and all of the citizens in that area and in the county have the first in right. So the decision of any shopping mall or in a farm area will be based on: is there capacity? We have found from our multistakeholders that there is capacity. The application process will quite simply be: the first right will be to the citizens of the Red Deer area. Be it a shopping mall or farm or any other industry, we have a very strict consultation process that we use.

I'd ask the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs to supplement, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Very briefly.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. Sometimes it's important to get a few facts on the line. The facts are in this case that the water in question is coming through the Kneehill water co-op, who in turn have a long-standing agreement in place with the city of Drumheller. So the city of Drumheller has a water treatment facility with excess capacity. They have been treating water for the Kneehill water co-op, which has a waterline that goes for miles. This will simply be an extension of that. The people of Drumheller know very well what's going on because they benefit by reducing their cost of water treatment.

Mr. Tougas: To the Deputy Premier: given that this PC government has refused to implement a lobbyist registry, will the Deputy Premier reveal how many times she or the cabinet have been lobbied by the developers of this project for their approval?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it is a large project – there's no question about it – probably one of the largest projects outside of the oil sands in this province, about a billion dollars in total. I would not call it lobbying. I would call it good interaction between a variety of ministries in this government.

Mr. Speaker, there's been a lot of work done on this project. It is a positive project. Contrary to what the hon. members allude to out there, it is actually at Balzac, which is not exactly on the edge of the city of Calgary. You might say closer to the edge of Airdrie. It is a large development that includes far more than a mall and a racetrack.

Mr. Tougas: To the Minister of Environment again: can the minister guarantee to the citizens of central Alberta that the Red Deer River can support both their growth needs and things like the proposed megamall/racetrack north of Calgary?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues have just indicated, let me repeat one more time but in a more eloquent way. It was said by Mark Twain that "Whiskey is for drinking; water is for fighting over." The comments are suggesting that we should fight over something. We use our energy in a more positive way. We are conserving water. We are ensuring that we can protect the aquatic environment in the basin and at the same time allow this province to grow with what we've been blessed with.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Bioenergy Industry

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bioenergy is a topic of growing interest given the rise in fuel costs and the world demand for renewable energy. Recently the government announced the energy innovation fund, and one of the areas eligible for funding is

bioenergy. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. I appreciate yesterday's announcement, but why isn't your ministry doing more to further the bioenergy sector here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is very true that the biofuel sector – and I will say bioenergy sector – which includes not only things like biodiesel and bioethanol but also biogas from municipal waste or from manure or other waste that might be in the ag sector, is indeed a huge opportunity for us. We want to ensure that we get our programs correct, that we get it so that there'll be a sustainable industry for the future. We believe that there's tremendous potential in Alberta, certainly, with our large canola crop and other fibre sources, that the biodiesel sector is going to be an extremely great opportunity not only for the producers who sell canola but even, perhaps, for ownership in those particular operations.

So we're looking at ways and means that we can help develop that industry in the process and in conjunction with our alternative energy strategies as well as utilizing the environmental aspects of our water management plans, which the minister so eloquently has outlined already, which I won't go into. I believe that in the very near future we are going to be in a position to announce that strategy, and I think producers and the industry will be pleased.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess my only supplemental, then, is to the same minister. You're talking about possible further announcements. How will the agricultural industry be able to capitalize on this emerging sector?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the opportunity in bioenergy exists on a number of fronts for Alberta's agricultural sector. In the first instance it creates an alternative market for a lot of our products, whether that's in canola, whether that's in alternative fibres for ethanol production, as an example, but it also creates an opportunity for us to create an even more environmentally friendly livestock sector, that will help us deal with things like odour management, issues around water recycling, and even regional electricity generation, that will make it perhaps someday an area where municipalities will want to have these types of facilities and livestock feeding operations located nearer to them than they do now.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, there's also the opportunity for producers to diversify their income through ownership in these particular operations. By that, we give a more sustainable agricultural industry for now and far into the future.

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

Policing Resources

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government has failed to protect our sons and daughters from crime. People are afraid for their safety and the safety of their children. This government throws big dollars into sheriffs and expensive computer programs but ignores the best solution: more police officers. My questions are all to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Given that the mayors of major cities and the AUMA want an increase in the funding formula, why is this minister ignoring them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're not ignoring anyone. In fact, we've built a stronger relationship with our policing communities and our policing stakeholders over the last few years, where we have regular meetings with the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police. We really seriously take our direction from the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police in looking at the resource issues that we have and looking at the extremely difficult investigations that have to take place here in Alberta and those intense resources that are required for long-term investigations.

We've assisted stakeholders and policing agencies throughout the province by developing ALERT, the Alberta Law Enforcement Response Teams, which includes Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta. It includes IROC, the integrated response to organized crime. It includes our organized crime strategy as well as ICE, the integrated child exploitation team. These are provincially funded positions, Mr. Speaker, over 160 of them, to assist investigators in an integrated fashion from the RCMP in Calgary, Edmonton, Medicine Hat, and Lethbridge. All work together in an integrated fashion, sharing information, sharing resources. We'll continue to do that in the future.

Mr. Agnihotri: But you ain't seen what's happening on the south side, Minister.

Given one of the lowest ratios of police officers per person in Canada, can the minister explain why and what he's doing about it?

2:10

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, all of our units, our police agencies, the RCMP in Calgary and Edmonton, have culturally diverse relations officers that work in the community. They work with ethnic organizations throughout their municipalities. They work with seniors, the disabled community, the gay and lesbian and transgendered communities. They have officers that are dedicated solely for the purpose of working with those communities. As well, they provide training to young recruits regarding those areas so that young recruits that are joining the police services have that understanding, that knowledge, and the ability to understand so that when they go into a situation where it may be an ethnic minority and the issues that deal with their community, he has a better understanding of that individual's ethnicity and background.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need more police officers. The minister knows this very well. Why is he being soft on crime?

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, I think I'm the opposite. I think I'm one of the hardest individuals on crime. It's the hon. members across the way that want to release individuals back into the community with the lightest offences and the lightest punishments that are out there. We support the federal Conservative government in these tougher rules and regulations and legislation that's going to be coming before Parliament this fall.

Mr. Speaker, we are doing everything that we can. We are looking at the ratio of police officers in this province, but as this member does know because it passed in the Assembly, we have increased our front-line officers by 200, which is the most significant increase in the last 20 years, and for those officers that work in that investigative area we've added another 160 over the last two years.

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

Tuition Fee Policy

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, next week classes will be starting again at universities, colleges, and technical institutes across the province, yet students still haven't seen the details of the government's new tuition fee policy. There have been lots of meetings, lots of discussions, and lots of ideas. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education. When will students know what the new tuition policy is?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the hon. member, I think the students do know what the new tuition policy is. They know that they haven't had an increase since 2004, and in June we did announce that the tuition rates for next year will be maintained at the 2004 levels and that any future increase will be limited to inflation. What we've been doing is dealing with the nuts and bolts of the details of this over the summer. We've consulted with student groups, institutions, and even asked our esteemed critics to take part, to calculate exactly how that would be done.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I met with representatives from every postsecondary institution, all the major student organizations, industry, aboriginal organizations, and community groups to outline what we've heard and what we're planning with respect to overall affordability. I'm very pleased to tell you that the feedback was very positive and that we're on track to seeking approval for the new affordability framework. I'm confident that this packet of changes will result in Alberta having the most affordable postsecondary education system, as our Premier said we would.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister: given that affordable education will still have a price tag that students and parents will pay, what is the minister doing to help future students pay for their postsecondary education?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, we started, actually, a couple of years ago with the 2005 Alberta centennial education savings plan. This program provides a total of \$800 towards a registered education savings plan for any child born in Alberta starting in 2005. Any parent, grandparent, or relative can apply for this program.

It's been quite interesting to see how popular the \$400 rebate was but how little take-up there has been on twice as much money, \$800, to be invested in our children's future. We're looking at the reasons why. We will promote this program again this fall, and we will make sure, Mr. Speaker, that if a new mother can leave the hospital with her bundle of joy along with samples of diapers and baby food, maybe they can take a package with them to apply for the grant.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Fuel Pricing

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Drivers in my constituency and throughout the province are concerned about the price of gasoline in Alberta, especially when compared to other jurisdictions in Canada. While Alberta boasts some of the most abundant supplies in the world, consumers in this province are not feeling the benefits at the pump. To the Minister of Energy: notwithstanding the latest and, most likely, temporary decline in retail gasoline

prices, can the minister explain why our prices in this province are often above the Canadian average and significantly higher than the average price in a province like Ontario, for example? Why do we have to pay more here in this province?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that he said: notwithstanding that the prices are coming down even in Alberta. It's a response to what has happened to oil prices world-wide. It's a commodity. But on average Albertans have the lowest price. [interjections] We do. Across the country, on average. Once in a while, periodically, some markets are lower than any other market. Ontario actually doesn't get all of its oil from Alberta. They import a lot of their oil from other places in the world. It's not all from Alberta that goes to Ontario. There are supply issues. There are refining issues with their own refineries in Ontario versus here. There are retail price wars that happen here in Edmonton, in Calgary, and throughout Alberta from time to time as well. We all experience that volatility sometimes.

The one thing that can be said is that the marketplace responds extremely well to getting that product to the consumer when they want it, when they need it, all the time. You can almost always rely on being able to get to that pump and get the fuel you need in a very competitively priced market.

Mr. Elsalhy: To the Minister of Energy again, Mr. Speaker: given that Alberta motorists feel that the gasoline prices in this province are usually unjustly high, why has this government failed to investigate potential price gouging at the pump and take measures to ensure fairness and restore confidence in the retail marketplace he's talking about?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, first off, you know, a lot of those assumptions and assertions are just that: they're assertions. These things have been studied and studied by all kinds of agencies. If he has the evidence of any wrongdoing, if he has anything to back up anything other than wild assertion, of course, there are agencies that can review any specific details.

The fact is that this marketplace responds to the commodity price of oil. It's a world price for a high demand because you and, I suspect, they are using a lot of the gasoline at the pump. It's because you're using it as a consumer substantially for your everyday needs that's driving up the demand for this around the world. This is what has driven to the higher prices. We are fortunate in Alberta that we continue to have some of the lowest priced gas and electricity, other than potentially hydro, of anywhere in Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This one is to the Minister of Finance. In light of the increased fuel costs here in Alberta, will this government increase the Alberta farm fuel benefit with respect to diesel and gasoline to better support struggling Alberta farmers?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do believe that the question on farm fuel should be more appropriately directed to the minister of agriculture. I would ask that he respond, and I'm sure that in that response he will reflect on the fact that we have the most generous subsidization to all producers.

2:20

Mr. Horner: It's interesting, Mr. Speaker. You know, we have the most generous . . . [laughter]

Mr. Speaker, we are one of the few jurisdictions in Canada that do rebate the farm fuel tax to our producers. We have been after our federal counterparts to do their part on the farm fuel tax exemption. Part of the reason why we recently announced our farm aid package of some \$261 million to producers was also based on the fertilizer and fuel prices. We believe that that has been a sector of our industry that's been hit very hard. They can't pass that on to their marketplace as readily as others can. But we are going to continue to be there to help our farm families and our producers with whatever it takes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Provincial Sheriffs

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We all know that the ill-conceived firewall proposal is a theme that has not yet died among some members of this Tory caucus. One of the assertions of the firewall concept is that Alberta should form an independent provincial police force. These days currents of change are running from the office of the Solicitor General, so I think it's about time that the minister exercised the democratic practice of full disclosure in regard to this matter. My questions are to the Solicitor General. Can the minister reassure the public that his arming and deployment of large numbers of sheriffs throughout the province is not laying the groundwork to establish an independent provincial police force here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely not. We have a firm commitment and a contract with the RCMP that they will be providing our provincial police service until the year 2012. Actually, we're in negotiations right now and working towards those negotiations with the government of Canada regarding the next contract. As well, our provinces neighbouring us across the country will be negotiating that same contract.

I can tell you that the number of sheriffs in the province of Alberta has only increased slightly in the fact that we rebranded the provincial protection officers and a number of names that they had before that to sheriffs to give them the identity that they requested and the identity that they could have in a professional career with the government of Alberta. It also provided them with opportunities like the traffic safety program, which will have 42 officers when training is completed, to work on Alberta's most dangerous highways regarding traffic enforcement and traffic education to make Albertans safer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Well, considering that the force of sheriffs has been expanding and the minister is deploying and training these people throughout the province, could the minister perhaps reassure Albertans that he's not compromising the authority and the integrity of the RCMP throughout the province with this?

Mr. Cenaiko: No, Mr. Speaker, not at all. In fact, we're working in a complementary service with the RCMP. I'm meeting with Deputy Commissioner Sweeney tomorrow in Calgary. We're going to be announcing the southern aspect of the traffic safety program in southern Alberta tomorrow at McDougall Centre. If the hon. member would like to attend, it starts at 9:30.

Mr. Speaker, we're doing this to work with the RCMP, not against the RCMP. This is really a complementary service. This will provide the RCMP with the additional time and the additional focus on front-line policing, investigating criminal activity in their communities. This provides a complementary service where sheriffs that have almost three months' training will be out on the street, will be out investigating traffic collisions, enforcing the Traffic Safety Act, but as well ensuring that motorists have a safer roadway system in Alberta to drive on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. Considering what the minister is asserting here, certainly he wouldn't be averse, then, please, to tabling documentation as to what his ministry's long-term plan is for the police college and his sheriffs program so that the public can know with certainty that the role of the RCMP in Alberta will be strengthened and not weakened.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be more than happy to provide a copy of our business plan to the hon. member, which has everything in there that we did this past year. Of course, the business plans are just coming out, so I'd be more than happy as soon as that's done. It has a full explanation of what we did this past year and where we want to move in the future. I'd be more than happy to give him an autographed copy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Spray Lake Sawmills

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is not about policing, but I congratulate the minister for his initiative on our new police college.

Mr. Speaker, my concern is about the Spray Lake Sawmills forestry management plan in Kananaskis Country. Many of my constituents and many people in the Calgary area are concerned that this forestry management plan does threaten Kananaskis Country. Could the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development please tell us how he responds to those concerns?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, the answer to the direct question is that residents of Bragg Creek and further down into your constituency are not threatened by the logging that is going on or that is planned or proposed by Spray Lake. Spray Lake have been logging in the area for over 60 years, and that shows the company's commitment to sustainability of the natural resource. Kananaskis Country has had logging in it for the past 60 years, and it's on basically less than 1 per cent of the land base. It is important to note that there is absolutely no logging going on in parks or protected areas of Kananaskis Country, and it's absolutely necessary to let you and your constituents know that a detailed forest plan must be put together by Spray Lake Sawmills. It is absolutely important for you to also know that managing the forest – it's a mature forest. As a matter of fact, it's an overmature forest, and it's at great risk from mountain pine beetle and from fire as well. So the risks that are being put forward in the detailed management plan, which had public consultation, are there to address the public's concern.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Morton: Thank you. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Again, my constituents and people that live downstream on the Bow River and the Elbow River are concerned that this harvesting will have an adverse effect on water quality. Could you please respond to that concern?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, in 1986 the integrated resource plan that was put out for Kananaskis Country states that watershed protection, recreation development, and wildlife management are the properties that are valuable to that area while at the same time allowing for the extraction of our natural resources. There are zones set up to make sure that those particular areas and those uses are determined. So the government of Alberta is committed to watershed protection in Kananaskis Country. But more important than that, we are concerned about all the values in the forest in all of those areas right from wildlife aesthetics to soil retention, and it's really, really important for the sustainability of the forest industry to have soil retention.

Spray Lake and its contractors also work under a series of strict regulations to make sure that the ground rules are designated to prevent any negative impact.

Mr. Speaker, one more . . .

The Speaker: Almost sounds like a ministerial statement.

Dr. Morton: My final question is to the same minister. I know there are plans for a FireSmart program in the Bragg Creek area. Will the minister let the residents of Bragg Creek know when they can be expected to have some sort of public consultation or public meeting to discuss the FireSmart program?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, Spray Lake Sawmills in addition to FireSmart has also commissioned a scientific assessment on water quality and water quantity from the University of Alberta, so let your constituents know about that as well. In terms of FireSmarting, it is absolutely central and critical to FireSmart that the residential views are taken into consideration. The municipal district of Rocky View is the lead agency responsible for the FireSmart plan for that community. The municipal district sets up local advisory committees that have a plan that is put into place. They have technical advisors on them. From the point of view of FireSmart the fish and wildlife considerations – and the mountain pine beetle is certainly part of that as well. The local advisory committee must have on it councils, industry. [interjections] This is important to this hon. member.

The federal government and stakeholders of the municipal district have to be invited. The advisory committee in this case, in Bragg Creek, is in the process of being organized. The councillor, Bob Everett, and the fire chief, Trent West, are responsible for that, and your community can get a hold of them to organize a meeting post-haste because FireSmart is important.

2:30

The Speaker: Hon. members, I will be calling on the first of six members to participate in Members' Statements shortly, but prior to that our vignette of the day.

Now, I'm going to chastise myself after I conclude this vignette for violating two rules of the House. One is that I am going to mention the name of a sitting member of this Assembly, and secondly, I am going to direct the pages to move and deliver something to all members while I'm speaking. But I will draw both of these standing orders to my attention when this is all over.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**

**Tribute to the Hon. Ralph Klein
Premier of Alberta**

The Speaker: Hon. members, 12 different men have had the great honour in serving as the Premier of the province of Alberta. Alberta's Premier, the Hon. Ralph Klein, has had the unique privilege of serving as Premier since 1992. On May 18, 2006, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta paid special tribute to this remarkable man who formed four governments and presided over the most dynamic growth period in the history of Alberta. He has received countless provincial, national, and international awards, is recognized throughout Canada and many parts of the world, and is the dean of Canadian governance and political leaders.

For 26 years the Premier has been a servant of the public: as mayor of the city of Calgary from 1980 to 1989, as an MLA since 1989, as a minister from 1989 to 1992, and as the leader of Alberta since December 14, 1992. Twenty-six years of unselfish public service is worthy of praise.

The chair listened attentively to the tributes given to the Premier on May 18 by the hon. Deputy Premier, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, and the leader of the third party. The words spoken were eloquent, sincere, and noteworthy. All members of the Assembly were moved. The day was worthy of commemoration, and to remember it, we have created a special *Hansard* titled Special Edition: Tribute to the Hon. Ralph Klein. The pages will now provide a copy, first to the Premier and then to all members. I hope that all members will retain this special *Hansard* as a keepsake for many years to come. The *Hansard* is a fitting tribute for a most deserving leader.

Mr. Premier, you will leave this Assembly shortly, and when you do, you will leave a legacy of accomplishment. As the cowboys of old traversed the west with their horses, the leaders of today function daily with their loyal chair. The chair that you are currently occupying, the chair of the Premier of Alberta, will go with you, with the appreciation of the men and women of your caucus, who have personally and generously purchased it at full cost from the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. As you sit in it in the future, may you only remember the best of times.

Thank you for your service to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and to the people of Alberta. May you and Dr. Klein experience only smooth times ahead, and may good health be with you both always. Thank you and God bless. [Standing ovation]

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, if I could be allowed to respond briefly. You are so kind. That's what I said in my note to you.

To all of you, thank you for the honour and the privilege of serving this great province.

Thank you.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: In 30 seconds I'll call upon the first of six members to participate.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

35th Anniversary of PC Government Election

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the year 1971 was a very good year. On this weekend 35 years ago I married my knight in shining armour. On this day 35 years ago a new administration began for the government of Alberta. Yesterday our Speaker quoted George Koch, a Calgary writer who described those tense moments

on election day as the Progressive Conservatives won 49 seats to become a new government.

Thirty-five years ago today Premier Peter Lougheed, who declared that Alberta "is the best darn province in the world," proceeded to implement his policies without resorting to negative attacks on the previous government. With wisdom and grace Premier Lougheed began to implement the changes that placed this province on the path of economic prosperity and success. The government led by Premier Lougheed will long be remembered for introducing a new royalty regime in 1974 and for the creation of the heritage savings trust fund. It was during the PC government of Peter Lougheed that Albertans first received the Human Rights Act and the assured income for the severely handicapped, known as AISH. The Progressive Conservatives were re-elected in '75, '79, and '82 under Premier Lougheed's leadership.

In '85 Don Getty was elected leader, and the introduction of Family Day on the third Monday in February, the accord establishing the Métis settlements council, and providing land for eight Métis self-governing settlements are hallmarks of his years as Premier. The Progressive Conservatives were re-elected in 1986 and 1989. It was during this time that the north was opened up for forestry development.

December 1992 marked another incredible milestone for the Progressive Conservative government. Our current, great Premier was elected leader and seven months later was returned by Albertans to govern in the first of four election victories. This Premier will go down in history as the man who slayed the deficit and retired the debt. He will also be remembered for establishing a Ministry of Children's Services, for Alberta's Promise, for making advanced education and cancer research a priority, for promoting partnerships with other provinces, and for being a Premier who gave back to the people.

Today is truly a time to reflect on the many opportunities that exist in this province because of 35 years of good, caring Progressive Conservative government. Mr. Speaker, no matter how loud and preposterous the rants of the opposition may be, Albertans on the street will declare, just as Premier Lougheed declared 35 years ago, that this is the best darn province in the world.

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

2:40 Role of Religion in Building World Peace

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Asked where he came from, the ancient Greek Cynic philosopher Diogenes replied, "I am a citizen of the world." He meant by this that although we are defined by our local identity – as legislators we represent local communities, and we are Albertans – yet with respect to the most basic moral values such as justice, we should regard all human beings as our fellow citizens and neighbours. The Stoics went further and declared that we should give our allegiance to no mere form of government, no temporal power, but to the moral community made up of the humanity of all human beings; indeed, we are citizens of the world.

I want to bring to your attention a very special event that will be happening here in Edmonton on October 20 to 22. I'm referring to a conference at the Shaw centre with the title Building World Peace: The Role of Religions and Human Rights, sponsored by the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights. This is a timely and urgent topic for discussion, focusing on the role of religions in building world peace.

The 20th century was unquestionably the most violent century ever given the staggering statistics of the loss of lives during the

many wars of that century. Now at the beginning of the 21st century the world is experiencing mass murders, suicide bombings, invasive wars, and the continuing buildup of nuclear weapons, with countries like Iran and North Korea trying to join the nuclear club. It is a great tragedy that so many acts of violence in our world are committed in the name of religion. Academic students of religion know from their study of sacred texts like the Quran and the Bible that all the major religions teach the way of nonviolence and peace.

Now it is time for religious people and faith communities to join together with educators and politicians to take the initiative and proclaim to the world that our various religious traditions are the key to the development of a culture of peace. This timely and important conference will remind us that the major world religions have helped to shape the movement of human rights in our world. We must be reminded that it was a Canadian, John Humphrey, who was the principal drafter of the universal declaration of human rights. So I invite all members of this House to check the website of the John Humphrey centre and register for this conference, which will help us as world citizens move toward a safer and more peaceful world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Centennial of Alberta Building Trades Council

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and recognize the 100th anniversary of the Alberta Building Trades Council, which will be celebrated here in Edmonton September 1.

This organization first originated in 1906 as the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council, then grew to become the Northern Alberta Building Trades Council until its present form. This organization currently has more than 40,000 members and is still growing. This group has a lot of history with the city of Edmonton as its members constructed the High Level Bridge. Also, while members of this Assembly may not know, we are all very familiar with the works of members of this organization, as they built this beautiful Legislature Building, of course where we have the honour of serving our constituents.

The Alberta Building Trades Council is not known only for the craftsmanship of its members but also for their support of charitable organizations in the province. Donating more than \$2.4 million, they support a wide range of worthy groups, including STARS air ambulance, the Bissell Centre, Big Brothers Big Sisters, to just name a few.

I would ask that all members of this Assembly join me in congratulating the Alberta Building Trades Council on their 100th anniversary and wishing them well in their second century.

Thank you.

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

Opposition to Northwest Anthony Henday Ring Road

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the most dedicated and hardest working constituents in Alberta, the residents of St. Albert. As you know, the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation is proposing to run the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive ring road dangerously close to St. Albert homes. The neighbourhoods of Heritage Lakes, Grandin, and Akinsdale are most at risk. Residents justifiably don't want a dangerous goods route so close to their homes, nor do they want the noise pollution, nor do they want their children to be in harm's way,

nor do they want to see beautiful trees cut down, nor do they want their property values to decrease.

Instead of lying down and being defeated, the residents mobilized. They packed a government town hall meeting and strongly opposed the proposed alignment. They're writing letters to the editor and to a number of government officials, opposing the route and at the same time keeping their cool. In just four days residents organized and managed to collect nearly 2,000 signatures urging the government to move the proposed highway further south. They're wisely using this short session to bring their concerns to the Legislature. Mr. Speaker, these residents are remarkable.

As their MLA, along with St. Albert city council, I am joining their call and urging the government to please reconsider the proposed route. There are other alternatives. We're speaking in one voice to the government. We hope and pray that the government is listening.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

U of A Partnership with Northern Colleges

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The opportunity for all Albertans to access higher learning through postsecondary schooling, should they seek it, is a priority for this government of Alberta, and it continues to take it very seriously. Enhancing postsecondary opportunities for individuals in northeastern Alberta, particularly those in rural and aboriginal communities, was a goal of two memorandums of understanding signed earlier this year.

The first MOU agreement was signed by Portage College in Lac La Biche and the University of Alberta. The signing allows for students to access the first two years of university studies before transferring to year 3 at the University of Alberta.

The U of A also signed a memorandum of understanding with Blue Quills First Nations College in St. Paul. Mr. Speaker, this particular signing serves to enhance the two institutions' current partnerships and increase the number of graduates of aboriginal heritage. For example, the Blue Quills aboriginal teacher education program offered as part of the Faculty of Education has been very successful. Over 30 students have received their bachelor of education degrees from the university college. Many more will follow in the future as well. This memorandum of understanding between the two schools will continue to build on this success in the future.

Mr. Speaker, the collaboration between these two colleges and the University of Alberta not only enhances the accessibility of postsecondary services in northern Alberta but also helps to maintain the traditions of quality education and ensure that Albertans continue to be among the best-educated people in the world.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Disclosure of Leadership Campaign Contributions

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta should take the lead in keeping big money out of politics. A leadership race is no different from other election activities. There's still a great deal at stake, and politicians have a responsibility to provide full transparency of funding resource sources. This is certainly true of the PC leadership race because the winner will automatically become our next Premier.

Alberta lacks a policy of full disclosure in leadership contests and legislation to limit donations to individuals. Clearly, the PCs and the

Liberals prefer to keep their close connections with big business behind closed doors. In 2005 73 per cent of donations to the PCs came from the corporations. In the same year the Liberals took in 45 per cent of their donations from the corporations. In contrast, 99 per cent of Alberta NDP donations came from individuals.

While the PCs might talk about transparent and open government, Albertans know that corporations who donate to political parties expect that their issues and concerns will be taken more seriously. It's not difficult to trace a line between Tory policies and big-business interests. Let's take oil and gas royalties as an example. When the oil and gas companies provide 16 per cent of Tory party funding, it's no surprise that the PC government has refused to meaningfully review oil and gas royalties.

But the PCs are not the only ones. The Liberals also have friends in big business. A fine example is a fundraiser on September 27, 2005, in Toronto, when the Alberta Liberals charged \$3,000 a plate from well-connected Bay Street CEOs. The Liberal support for corporate tax cuts is a clear indication of the value they put on these big corporate friends.

Albertans deserve better than this. Albertans deserve political parties and a government that are willing to set high standards of transparency. Albertans deserve political parties whose policies are based on the support of individual Albertans. The Alberta NDP is the only party working for full disclosure of political fundraising during elections and party leadership campaigns and is dedicated to getting big money out of politics.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: 2:50 **Presenting Petitions**

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five petitions today for a grand total of 1,921 this week urging the government to move the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive ring road south of the current proposal to reduce noise, increase safety measures, as well as minimize the environmental impact of the road.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies of a letter.

The Speaker: We're just doing petitions now.

Mr. Flaherty: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'm out of order?

The Speaker: No. You had a petition; you did that one first. We'll get you later.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think, as everyone in the Chamber would know, normally at this time on Thursday I'd be giving notices of motions pertaining to written questions and those that would stand and retain their places or be dealt with or whatever, but since there are none on the Order Paper, I won't be making that statement.

Secondly, I should also normally be presenting notice for motions for returns on the Order Paper. However, given that Monday is a statutory holiday and given that the House may or may not rise later today – we'll have to wait and see – my best effort at giving notice today is that when and if the House should resume in the next several days, then at that time I would move to provide proper notice for the remaining motions for returns that are on the Order Paper.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

Bill 219
Electric Utilities (Net Metering)
Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 219, Electric Utilities (Net Metering) Amendment Act, 2006.

This act would amend the Electric Utilities Act to lay the framework for net metering in Alberta.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 219 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a letter from Mr. Bernard T. Reilly to the minister of infrastructure and highways.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate amount of copies of the results of two postcard campaigns that were sent to my constituency office. The first is directed to the chair of the Standing Policy Committee on Education and Employment from Vibrant Communities in Calgary. They're calling for affordable transportation for all low-income Albertans as proposed by Fair Fares' action team.

The second is a campaign undertaken by Public Interest Alberta. They are calling for better treatment of Alberta seniors, including establishing an independent seniors' advocate as an officer of the Legislature.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During debate on the Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations budget estimates I committed to provide some answers in writing, responses to specific questions that I could not fully answer at that time. It's my pleasure, sir, to table the requisite number of copies of those responses, the originals of which have sent to my respective critics.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Varsity I rise this afternoon to table five copies of a letter sent to him by his constituent Steve Hooker. Mr. Hooker spent several hours in the hall outside Calgary Foothills emergency trying to comfort his father as he awaited treatment, and he's calling for more money to be put into the medical system.

Also on behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Varsity I would like to table five copies of a petition signed by 92 Albertans from across the province urging this government to consider increasing funding in order that "all Alberta Works income support benefit levels may be increased."

Then from constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford, Mr. Speaker, the first being a letter from Celeste Ibach, writing to give us a perspec-

tive of what it is like to work in the field of rehabilitation, and she's asking the government to consider giving out higher wages to front-line staff.

Secondly, a letter from a constituent, Baldwin Reichwein, writing with concerns about housing for people with disabilities. In particular, Mr. Speaker, he's writing about the Bader Tower, which was in the news recently, and a resident, Dorothy Heppler, who was, incidentally, one of the founding members, with a former member of this Assembly, Percy Wickman, of the Handicapped Housing Society of Alberta. Unfortunately, Ms Heppler passed away recently, and there is concern that it may have been as a result of some of the stress that was caused by the moves that were being made in that facility.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of a news release from the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board announcing that yesterday they won the Institute of Public Administration of Canada's prestigious award for innovative management. This institute recognizes the Energy and Utilities Board for its role in developing Synergy Alberta. This Synergy group allows members of the public, landowners, industry, and the regulator to come together in a co-operative manner to discuss energy development issues and to create local solutions, another very tremendous example of the great work that the Energy and Utilities Board is doing.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a package of documents. The package includes the March 2006 draft of the Work Safe Alberta three-year strategic plan. The draft includes a recommendation to remove the exemption of farm workers from the occupational health and safety code. I'm also including the July 28, 2006, version of the strategy and a letter endorsing it from the Minister of Human Resources and Employment dated August 23, 2006. The July draft does not include the recommendation to remove the farm worker exemption.

The next document I'd like to table is a backgrounder from the Alberta Federation of Labour, and it clearly sets out the statutory and regulatory changes needed to protect farm workers.

Finally, I have a letter from Gordon Christie and the Calgary and District Labour Council dated August 24, 2006. The letter is written to the Premier and calls on him to end 80 years of discrimination against farm workers that results from their exemption from the occupational health and safety code and sections of the employment standards act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Then, hon. members, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 19th annual report of the Legislative Assembly Office for the calendar year ended December 31, 2005. This report represents the audited financial statements for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2005, and the ninth annual report of the Alberta branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon.

Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Human Resources and Employment, pursuant to the Workers' Compensation Act the Workers' Compensation Board 2005 annual report, the Workers' Compensation Board 2005 Accountability Framework Report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Stevens, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act the Alberta Law Foundation annual report 2006 with attached audited financial statements and other financial information for the year ended March 31, 2006.

head: **Projected Government Business**

Ms Blakeman: Due to the slightly renumbered Standing Orders I think I'm under Standing Order 7(6) now asking if the Government House Leader could share with us whether there is any expected business for next week.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member. I have scoured the pages, and I don't see any projected government business for the upcoming week.

Thank you.

head: **Statements by the Speaker**

Standing Order Revision

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call Orders of the Day, just two items for housekeeping. House leaders, will you take out your Standing Orders, please, and look at 62(1). We've discovered a minor error – I underline the words "minor error" – in the revised Standing Orders, and these standing orders took effect last Thursday, August 24, 2006. In Standing Order 62(1) the reference to Standing Order 61 should not be 61; it should be Standing Order 64. That I should be a 4, not a 1.

Members will note that this standing order concerns the consideration of appropriation bills, and of course that's what we'll be doing in the Assembly this afternoon. If members go back and examine the Standing Orders as they read prior to the revision, they will note that what is now Standing Order 64 was then Standing Order 61. While the number of that standing order changed, the cross-reference did not. So the intention was very clear. At the conclusion of this sitting we'll be making the required typing corrections and providing a corrected page to members and all users of Standing Orders for inclusion in their binders.

3:00 **Chamber Chairs As Parting Gifts**

The Speaker: Just one last housekeeping item so that I'm not inundated with lots of memos from members. The cost of the chair in this Assembly is \$1,835. Number two, a cheque was provided to the Clerk yesterday for the full amount of \$1,835. The cheque is made out to the provincial Minister of Finance to deal with this particular matter. Thirdly, the fund, as I was informed by the government caucus whip, came from personal contributions from members of the government caucus. That's how it was paid for.

Number four, the policy that I've instructed to the Clerk in the future and for myself in the future – not for me but to remind myself as the Speaker – is that should a member, a leader of any other party or caucus in the Assembly choose to leave and if the members of that particular caucus wish to buy such a chair for their leader, we will make it available to them for \$1,835. I'm not aware that this is

happening at the moment, but just so that there is absolute, total transparency with respect to this matter.

I do not need notes from members suggesting that there's an expectation that when I leave, this chair comes with me. No way, thank you very much.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 44

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2)

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 44, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2).

There has been very good debate and some, I think, constructive debate over the past several days on the supplementary estimates. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud that we are recognizing \$293 million to increase operating support to our schools, to school maintenance, renewal, new schools, and preservation projects, and cost escalations – unfortunate but a fact of life – of approved projects. I'm equally proud of \$262 million for medical equipment, auxiliary nursing salary adjustments, and health authority operations, and \$102 million for natural gas rebates to protect Albertans from high natural gas prices. I am especially pleased that this province is in the fiscal position to do these things.

Mr. Speaker, another area, of course, as a rural member of caucus, is to recognize that an industry that is such a part of this province, such an integral part of the growth of this province, that contributes so much to the value added in the small business part of this province is receiving some, I think, very important disaster funding through this.

I commend the minister of agriculture for bringing this forward. I commend him for his consultation with industry. I understand the difficulties in how to process these dollars, but I commend him on his decision to use the most current and expedient methods of getting these dollars to the industry at a very critical time. Most of us who do represent rural ridings know that these costs are weighing heavily on producers, and they affect the very viability of our people who supply fuel and who have outstanding fertilizer accounts. They affect, actually, every coffee shop, every dress shop, every machine agency, every farm supply and include the offshoot into the urban supply chain, to which agriculture is a huge contributor. We're all looking forward to November, when the Canadian Finals Rodeo comes to this town. We know what a huge contribution the agricultural people bring to this city, and that's just one example.

Mr. Speaker, these supplementary estimates were deliberated by our members with great scrutiny. I can say that every member of the government caucus spent an enormous amount of time looking at these estimates, ensuring that they are dollars that are needed, most importantly, that it was important that they come forward now, that in the areas of environment the most pressing needs are met. These are comprehensive. They have been well thought out, well deliberated.

As I said earlier, I thank all hon. members in this House for their comments on the estimates, many of them constructive, many of them useful. I know that every member comes to this House every day with the best intentions of representing their constituents, and I hope that every member comes to this House with the best interests of the entire province on their mind although each of us is elected to look after a number of people that we proudly call our constituents.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage all members to support the passing of this bill.

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

Ms Blakeman: Well, it's sounding like a good afternoon.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in third reading to Bill 44, the second appropriation bill of this year. The hon. Minister of Finance made a really nice comment about how we're here to represent the people who elected us but that we also have to keep in mind the people in the rest of the province and serve them as well.

There are two areas that have really come up on my radar screen that I want to talk about in conjunction with the appropriation bill that is before us today. Of course, in that appropriation bill we have two ministries that are featured fairly prominently for funding. One is health, and the second is Education. I'd like to focus my comments on that.

One of the areas that's very near and dear to my heart is the constituency of Livingstone-Macleod. I have a number of friends there. Part of my family came from nearby, the Turner Valley-Black Diamond area, and I visit southern Alberta and those areas in particular at least once a year. So I was interested in what the school situation looked like in Fort Macleod in particular, and I'm going to focus on that and the other areas that are nearby; you know, schools like Granum and other schools like that. I wasn't able to get the statistics on all of them, but I did notice that there are a couple that are in really tough shape, and I'm hoping that this money that's being injected into the infrastructure is going to benefit them.

In particular, I'm noticing that the raw scores from the 1999 audit were quite high – in other words, indicating a very poor infrastructure situation – for A.J. Nowicki elementary and A.J. Nowicki high school. In the '99-2000 estimate, reaudit as they called it, of the maintenance that would be needed, they were as well quite high: the elementary at \$617,000 and change and the high school at \$837,700. So that's actually quite high. Canyon elementary at that time had a raw score of 540, which puts it just into the fair category, but their expected maintenance was \$1,225,000 – I'm rounding up a bit there – which is also very high. So I'm hoping that those have already been looked after in the last six years.

3:10

One that is still coming up to my concern is F.P. Walshe, which is in Fort Macleod. Its maintenance amounts forecasted between 2000 and then the second one done in 2005: there is an increase there. It's not an astronomical increase, but it is an increase. So that's indicating that there's more difficulty, and it's more expensive to maintain those schools. But when I look at the facility condition index, the F.P. Walshe school was very high, at 14.75. Now, considering that that grid really goes under 5 per cent, 5 to 10 per cent, and above 10, this is almost five full points above that marker, so that's indicating a pretty grim condition. I'm sure hoping that this money is going to result in some improvement in their situation.

The other one that comes up as being in particularly dire straits is W.A. Day elementary. Again, it's had a significant increase, almost double, in the maintenance estimate, going from \$284,000 to \$593,000 and change, which is really indicating a bad decline in the situation there. Its facility condition index is coming out at 10.38 per cent, which is, again, putting it into that poor category. So on behalf of those schools in particular – I mean, there are some others

that have either very high raw scores from six years ago or very high maintenance from five years ago. For example, Willow Creek comp had a maintenance of over \$2 million, which, again, is very high, but there are no other scores that are given, so that either means that they're off the Richter scale or they've already been dealt with. I'm certainly hoping that we're going to see something positive there.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

When I look at the second thing that's affecting Livingstone-Macleod, that's around the health regions and what's happening there. Livingstone-Macleod turns up in two different health regions. The northern part of the constituency is attached to the Chinook health region. No. I have that the other way around; it's the Calgary health region. The southern part is attached to the Chinook health region, which in and of itself is a bit of a strain because it does make for some administrative headaches, but that's what we're dealing with there. So the challenges that we're seeing in the Chinook health region that affect this constituency: it's showing an operating deficit of \$2.4 million this year, with a total of \$9.6 million, including the deficit accumulated from the previous year.

The top issues for the region are shared with a number of others, human resources and their recruitment of health professionals. They are struggling with providing access to all health services. They're concerned with ensuring 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 need for chronic disease management and care: long-term care, diagnostic exams, et cetera.

There is an additional priority of the expansion of the Lethbridge regional hospital to include more space for outpatient programming, and that's including radiation therapy. Of course, since Fort Macleod actually had its hospital closed by this particular administration, they now all have to drive to Lethbridge, so the condition of the Lethbridge wait-lists and infrastructure are of intense concern to those living in Fort Macleod, Pincher Creek, and others.

There is a concern on behalf of the high proportion of aboriginals in that area around preventing and managing diabetes and obesity and all of their complications. It's a major challenge for anybody to try and deal with that, but they are particularly concerned about it. They'd also like to focus on education on the risk factors for diabetes and early testing and diagnosis.

They have identified a need for the latest technology in operating room design and equipment to improve patient safety, shorten the length of stay, and increase surgical capacity, and that helps them to retain and recruit surgical specialists. Thus far the Lethbridge Regional Hospital Foundation has been encouraged to raise its own money, so we'll see what happens to the condition of that hospital and their wait-lists there and for those that are affected in the Livingstone-Macleod constituency with having to work through the Chinook health region.

For those in the northern part of that constituency, which would be places like Claresholm, for example, they're working through the Calgary health region, which, as we know, has a deficit of \$70 million. We've had a number of closures and crises there over the summer. That Calgary region is serving not only its own million but also people coming from over an hour's drive away and pouring in to use their facilities as well.

We had things like the Peter Lougheed Centre that had to leave operating rooms vacant due to a surgical nursing staff shortage. The Calgary health region closed 15 beds at the Foothills hospital renal unit from June until mid-September, the entire late spring and summer. They also cut back on diagnostic procedures. About a

thousand exams were expected to not be able to be done because of the reduction in hours at the Peter Lougheed Centre, the Rockyview, and the South Calgary Health Centre.

At the Rockyview hospital five mental health spaces were closed from July 15 to August 13, and I remember that when the current minister of health took the portfolio, she said that she wanted to place a priority on improving mental health. Certainly, this is again pointing out that this continues to be a deficiency, especially when we're having to close mental health beds in hospitals, which is where the most urgent cases end up. So that's pretty dire.

Emergency room wait times increased the pressure on the whole health system. We've heard a number of stories of people being unable to get from emergency and get into surgical beds or get into the hospital because they just aren't there. So there's pressure everywhere.

The Calgary health region has been pretty clear. They need funding in order to increase capacity. In 1990 there were 2,600 hospital beds to serve a population of 700,000. There are now fewer than 2,000 beds for 1 million people. So on behalf of that particular region I sure hope that they're going to see some improvement. I'm happy to champion on their behalf, and I hope that their needs will be considered and looked after by this government.

The other area that's been of real intense concern for me – and I will be visiting this region shortly – is Grande Prairie. That's covering the constituencies of both Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky. Again, when I look at their school situation, they have one school in the sort of poor ranking, two in the very poor ranking, and one school in the very, very, very poor school ranking. So I'm willing to stand up here and advocate on their behalf, and I'd like to see whether the government's plans for infrastructure in schools are going to address the concerns here.

The school with the poor ranking is Grande Prairie comp. It had a raw score back six or seven years ago that put it in the sort of fair ranking, but then the school maintenance money required was over \$4 million, which is indicating some pretty dire circumstances there. The facility condition index at this point is over 11 per cent. Remember, I said before that you've got under 5 per cent, 5 to 9, and then 10 and over. So that's putting it in the poor ranking.

Then we've got Parkside elementary. Now, this is interesting. You see, when you can see the projected maintenance costs going up between the '99-2000 reaudit and the 2005, you know that there's a problem here. So here we're seeing that maintenance cost estimate going from \$803,000, actually almost \$804,000, to over a million dollars within five years. Again, that increasing cost is an indication of a serious problem. Their facility condition index: 19 per cent. Now, remember, the last marker they gave you was over 10 per cent. This is almost double the category of bad shape, so that's in very poor shape there.

3:20

The other one turning up in very poor shape is Alexander Forbes, and again we're seeing the maintenance costs increase substantially. From '99-2000 to 2005 it goes from – I'm rolling up here – \$922,000 to well over \$2 million, almost \$3 million worth of estimated maintenance costs needed for that facility. Wait for it: the facility condition index is 29.51 per cent. That is triple the cut-off for being considered in bad shape. Triple. Remember, it's 10 per cent and over. This is almost 30 points on that scale.

Then we have St. Thomas More school in Fairview. It has a maintenance cost of over \$3 million, again a very bad sign, and its facility condition index: 38.44, which of all the schools I've looked at has been the highest we've seen. That's almost four times the sort of cut-off mark to get into the poor category. It's four times as bad in the poor category.

So there's a lot of attention that needs to be paid to schools in the Grande Prairie constituencies of Wapiti and Smoky. I'm willing to stand up here and talk about it, and I hope that we're going to see some action as a result of this on that infrastructure.

I've also been working a lot on health concerns in the Grande Prairie region. Yesterday the Leader of the Official Opposition thought it was important enough that I think his first question in the House was on the situation in health care in Grande Prairie. On his behalf I also tabled a letter that was from the president of the Peace Country health regional medical organization, Dr. Bozdech. He had addressed this to all of the surrounding MLAs that have any affiliation at all with the Peace Country health region. The letter is available as a sessional paper. It is an extremely damning and very pointed letter. People there are very, very frustrated. They just feel that they're not being listened to. They feel that they can't get any action, and they really feel that there's a crisis there. I've heard some of them actually say that they think somebody's going to die because their situation has reached such dire circumstances.

When I look at where we're at with Peace Country health region, we've got a deficit of somewhere in the \$8 million to \$10 million range. Well, that's pretty significant. They've got incredible staffing shortage pressures, and these are no question impacting service levels. They require 70 physicians and 250 nurses and other health profession staff there, which is really a very difficult number for them to be trying to recruit and retain. They are working on a recruitment and retention strategy, but recruitment efforts have been hampered by a lack of provincial capacity to assess and credential internationally trained physicians. They have requested new acute-care facilities in High Prairie and Grande Prairie, and that was requested officially from the infrastructure minister in April. We'd sure like to know where that is in the lineup.

The expansion of the QE II hospital emergency department is an immediate priority. The maintenance and facility-upgrading needs include replacing roofs, heating and cooling systems, and other building upgrades at facilities throughout the region. So needs for infrastructure maintenance program funding are close to \$16 million. What they're telling me is that August was a very tough month for them. They had to close their ICU during the first week of August. Eleven patients were flown to Edmonton for treatment, and that increases the burden on the Edmonton region, of course. They're feeling that September is going to be even more problematic.

I hear an argument back from the minister that, well, this is just normal summertime problems with doctors going on holidays and leaving it short. But, you know, doctors go on holidays every summer, and we do not see Grande Prairie and other health regions in the province closing ICUs, closing mental health beds, closing surgery units, reducing diagnostics. That has just not happened as a regular item in our calendar year. So there is definitely a serious problem here.

I had wanted to particularly focus on Livingstone-Macleod and on Grande Prairie. I think my time is close to up, and I'm glad that I got the opportunity to raise those issues. The effect we're anticipating from this budget I think is not what these two areas were looking for. I certainly hope that they are going to benefit from the numbers that we see in this budget, but I am very much afraid that they are not going to and that those schools will continue to have very high maintenance costs. We will have children working in situations that are not optimal to learning, and I think that's the biggest tragedy of all. Health care: we want it to be there when we need it, and certainly we want it to look after our loved ones. But our future is in our children, and if we have them working in schools that are in shoddy repair, that really is a tragedy to me.

So thank you for that opportunity, Mr. Speaker, and I will let one of my colleagues have an opportunity to speak.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've been listening carefully to and reading through comments made earlier during this particularly interesting debate, which in a general sense refers to the estimates that were approved on Thursday and Monday earlier and also to the bill itself, obviously, that we're debating today at third reading. I need to make a few comments. Some of them I hope will be explanatory and helpful in nature, and others might just present greater clarity on what this bill really contains and is all about.

For example, when it comes to the Department of Education serving kindergarten to grade 12 needs in the province of Alberta, we are clearly asking for \$293.3 million through this appropriation supply bill. In listening to some of the speakers – and I'm not going to cite anyone in particular – you would think that perhaps they either didn't read the document thoroughly enough, or they have missed or misunderstood what the points were that were enunciated. So I'd like to just cover that territory briefly if I could.

First of all, we're asking for \$52 million, additional dollars, that are going to go out to our 62 school boards to help them face some additional costs with respect to certain aspects of their budgets. I want to again put on the record that their budgets came to us the very last couple of days of June. However, the final, final budgets from our end, in other words our response to that, won't and can't occur until after September 30 enrolments are known, final enrolments. So we have to pick a cut-off date somewhere.

Specifically, today's bill, once it's approved, I hope, will help provide that \$52 million of additional monies in the following way: \$16.5 million will provide a 1 per cent base instruction grant increase. Now, that is over and above the \$3 billion or \$4 billion that's already being provided to them. I heard some members trivializing this \$16.5 million addition, this 1 per cent base instruction increase, as if it didn't matter. I can tell you from the phone calls and letters and e-mails and so on that I've received directly from some board chairs or trustees, privately or otherwise, that they are very grateful for that because that one alone allows them maximum flexibility on how to utilize it.

I should remind members that we have a renewed funding framework, which is an extremely flexible funding framework that was brought in by my predecessor from Strathmore-Brooks. We worked very hard on allowing maximum flexibility for all of our school boards, and this is one demonstration of that.

Secondly, there's \$5 million more for grants provided to students with severe disabilities, and, Mr. Speaker, this is over and above the tens of millions of dollars already provided there. This is an augmentation of that money. We all know that it's very much needed and very much appreciated by the school boards, and we're happy to provide it.

3:30

The third category is with respect to English as a Second Language. Here we are providing \$2.5 million over and above the tens of millions already going into that area so that those students who are deemed to require or could benefit from an additional year or two years of ESL-type instruction will have it provided to them. To put it slightly differently, we are extending the current five-year cap up to seven years to specifically address those students. That's \$2.5 million over and above what's already there to help in that regard.

Then there's \$28 million more for the class size initiative. Mr. Speaker, you will know that these estimates contain and this bill in particular contains those augmentations so that with the class size initiative we will help school boards, who are the employers, to hire an additional approximately 800 – 800 – more brand new teachers and put them into the system to help educate our children. That's a tremendous injection of instructional expertise to keep our education system the best in Canada. This bill will help facilitate that.

The other part of this supplementary supply estimates and now the culminating bill that reflects the estimates is with respect to school facilities and operations. This bill, when approved, will help provide an additional \$9 million for plant operations and maintenance, or what we call PO and M. That will bring our total PO and M budget up to over \$404 million to ensure that the day-to-day operating costs are there for janitorial purposes, for custodian purposes, for routine maintenance, to pay for those types of staffing costs, materials and supplies. I know that the school boards are very pleased with that.

It will also provide \$119 million more for the infrastructure and maintenance renewal program. I want to clarify again for the record what IMR stands for. Infrastructure maintenance renewal refers specifically to the replacement of major, big-ticket items such as boilers and mechanical systems, roofs and ceilings, windows, doors, walls, and so on. Floors are included in there as well. So that's the type of thing that IMR funding will look after as differentiated from school capital or school capital major construction projects. That is not to infer that IMR doesn't have some construction associated with it because clearly it does, as we all know.

But to differentiate, it takes us to the next part of our estimates and/or supplementary supply bill which is being debated today: \$72.3 million has been allocated "for new schools and preservation projects, modular classrooms and the relocation of portables." I'll just comment briefly on this, Mr. Speaker, because out of that \$72.3 million, as I announced today, we will immediately provide the seed funding, or what we call year 1 funding, for 21 additional new school projects across the province, including modernization and preservation projects. We will also help purchase 130 more new, steel-frame, modular classrooms, the state-of-the-art ones that are being built in Crossfield as we speak. Those modulars will be distributed to communities that are showing rapid changes in their student population numbers.

Finally, the \$41 million written here will help us cope with capital cost escalations on previously announced projects so that we're not abandoning some of those projects. That's extremely important, and it's important for members here to understand that as well.

With these estimates, once they are approved, Mr. Speaker, we will be able to provide brand new schools, and I'm happy to have this moment to just indicate this to members here because it's directly tied to this supplementary supply appropriation act, this bill. There will be a brand new K to 6 elementary school going into Airdrie through the Roman Catholic separate school division in Calgary. There will be a brand new 5 to 12 school going into Anzac. There will be three new schools going into Calgary: K to 6 in Taradale, K to 4 in McKenzie Towne, and K to 4 in Panorama Hills through the Calgary public board. Those three, by the way, total \$44.2 million.

There will be a new K to 6 school going into Chestermere. It'll be called Chestermere Lake elementary core school, and that's through the Roman Catholic school division in Calgary, as well as a new K to 6 school into Chestermere, courtesy of the Rocky View school division. The total monies going into Airdrie/Chestermere, those three projects, will be \$41 million.

In Edmonton the Edmonton public school division will have two major – and I stress the word "major" – preservation and moderniza-

tion projects: one for Balwin school, \$11.4 million; one for Holyrood, which will be \$8 million. Those are the two receiver schools. They were ranked as the number one priority for that school board in terms of this category. There's a third one for Edmonton Catholic. That's \$10.9 million for St. Francis Xavier, a major modernization project.

In Fort McMurray we will provide \$9.2 million for the major preservation/modernization project called Westwood community high school through the Fort McMurray public school, and we will provide Fort McMurray public with an additional, separate \$1 million in funding to initiate a major study on planning and design of a new junior high school there. Once we have that, we'll know what the total costs will be, and then we'll address that. Similarly, \$1 million additional funding is being provided to the Fort McMurray Roman Catholic division to do a similar study and design for a new high school that they require.

As well, this particular bill, once provided for, will help us kick-start several francophone school projects, also an important part of the Alberta advantage. We're very proud of our francophone school system here, and we'll be providing about \$7.3 million for a number of their projects.

Very quickly, in Grande Prairie we'll be providing money for three projects that were identified as their number one request. Alexander Forbes through the public system will receive \$9 million for major preservation and modernization purposes. There will be a new K to 9 school built in Grande Prairie, I suspect either in southeast or in northwest or whatever. We'll wait and see. That will be through the Grande Prairie Roman Catholic board. That will be \$17.5 million. There will be a third one for the Grande Prairie public school board in this case. It will be \$14.7 million to build a new K to 6 school in Crystal Lake. So Grande Prairie will benefit with about \$41.2 million in total new monies.

Of course, we have one going into Chinook's Edge that will be of particular importance, I'm sure, to Mr. Speaker because I know how passionately and how hard this one was advocated for. This is going in as a new K to 4 school in Carstairs. That will be about \$9.1 million.

In Olds we will provide \$4 million to the Red Deer Catholic school board so that they can build a new starter school, and it will be up to that board to determine if it suits their purposes to be a K to 4 or a K to 6. They will determine that, working it out with my officials.

In Slave Lake Living Waters Roman Catholic school division with these monies provided for in this particular bill this afternoon will have the seed money to proceed with the new grade 7 to 12 school, St. Mary of the Lake, \$13.7 million there.

The East Central francophone education region will receive \$6.3 million for a major preservation/modernization project at Racette junior high school in St. Paul.

Stony Plain will receive funding for a new replacement high school, specifically Memorial composite high school, via the Parkland school division, and that one alone, Mr. Speaker, will cost approximately \$42.7 million.

3:40

Finally, over and above that, with the passage of today's bill we will have about 130 brand new steel-frame modulars constructed. As you know, we must pay for all of those up front and get them out to the school systems and to the areas where replacements are needed urgently because of health and safety concerns or because of crowding or capacity concerns or aging infrastructure concerns or whatever it may be. We'll be doing all this as quickly as possible.

So those are just some of the highlights contained in this bill. We're very proud of that. I realize, Mr. Speaker, that there are other

projects that need attention as well. That's why in today's press release, which all members I think have now seen, I included a very clear indication of what the next step is going to be. All of what I've just read concludes phase 2 funding: \$303.3 million new dollars that we are announcing today to facilitate the construction starts on all of those projects or the go-ahead for design, as the case may be. That's over and above the \$207 million new dollars that I announced last September. So over one-half a billion dollars has now been announced within the last 12 months. I think it's a phenomenal commitment to the importance we place on new schools. The schools for tomorrow plan will take it to the next step and go further.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for the next five minutes for questions or comments. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Rev. Abbott: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. minister talked about the schools for tomorrow plan. I'm just wondering if he could elaborate on that somewhat.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. minister wish to respond?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you. I would elaborate on that very briefly to allow others to get their questions in if they wish. The schools for tomorrow plan, Mr. Speaker, will be the most comprehensive plan we've had in this province in seven years. It will reflect everything that we can possibly put into the plan and to the largest extent possible the issues that I've heard from all 62 school boards in the three, four, five different meetings I've had with some of them – at least two or three with every one of them, but some I've had five, six, seven, meetings with. This will reflect growth and development pressures. This will reflect growth management pressures, enrolment increases, enrolment decreases, urbanization issues, population changes, demographic changes, immigrant population growth areas, new subdivisions that are being planned. I know, in talking last night with the chair and superintendent from Chinook's Edge, for example, that some of the areas they are responsible for now are looking at where municipalities are allowing new subdivisions, and they're trying to tailor-make their needs there. So we have to get in front of that, hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, and let these school boards know and see in the plan where we're going to reflect their needs.

So in a nutshell those are some of the things that will be coming forward. As I have indicated, the schools for tomorrow plan will be completed later this fall, and it will show on a year-by-year basis in all five years what types of new schools are needed, where they are needed, and why. It will show on a year-by-year basis what types of major modernization, preservation, expansion, rightsizing, and upgrade projects for schools are needed, where and why, and similarly with modulars.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, wherever possible we will do our best to provide the cost estimates to facilitate that so that government can carefully consider, with the school boards' plans, where and how best to apply the monies entrusted to us.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on 29(2)(a).

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the minister a question, but first off I would like to express my gratitude on behalf of the Holyrood community to the minister for making much-needed funding, \$8 million in total, to the

school. It'll virtually be rebuilt. It was one of the receiving schools when there were four school closures in the neighbourhood. I appreciate that. It shouldn't have come to that, but I would like to publicly thank the minister for that because we brought up here in this House on Monday night the fact that that school was in dire need of repair. The hon. minister had toured that school I believe in June. I can only say on behalf of the community thank you.

I would at this time like to ask a question regarding the spending announcement and commitment that was made by this same government in 2001 in regard to the Victoria school of the performing arts. It was supposed to have been the Juilliard school of the north. There was \$60 million set aside to reconstruct that school. Where does that fit into the future plans of this government?

Thank you.

Mr. Zwodzesky: It's an excellent question, and I'm happy to comment on it because the Premier and I were chatting about it casually this afternoon here. I want the member to know that there is an official committee that's been struck with stakeholders from the groups necessary, and I think they have just about finished whatever their final recommendation is going to be. There is already about \$36 million that has been earmarked and is sitting, waiting to be deployed. It's just a question right now, hon. member, of where and how the public school board, which has jurisdictional rule over this decision with us, sees the needs being met and in the best fashion that they want them to be met. Should it be a new school on one corner of the lot with improvements to the existing facility, or should more of it go into the existing facility and some to an add-on? That's the kind of discussions that are going on. Now, the latest I have, Mr. Speaker, is that I'm supposed to be receiving this plan. I'll then review it with the hon. minister of infrastructure and with our associate minister of infrastructure, and then we'll see exactly what the best course of moving forward will be.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you've got four seconds.

Mr. Martin: Four seconds?

The Deputy Speaker: Now you don't have any.

Mr. Martin: Best speech I've ever made.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize on the debate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to perhaps have a few moments to sum up some issues that are concerning my constituents in Edmonton-Calder but probably, on reflection, most Albertans as well because, of course, we still do have the benefit of some degree of equality amongst working people in the province, from Lethbridge right up to the top in Fort Chipewyan. For regular working people there is quite a lot to be had in terms of change with the recent economic boom that has passed over the province but then some serious concerns as well. If we are to try to serve the most people in the best and most equal way possible, then I think that this is a list of concerns that really do concern us all here in the Legislature.

The boom that we are currently enjoying for many people has the effect of creating inflationary pressures on people's budgets. While there might be more job opportunities, certainly people have to work hard or harder than ever to retain the standard of living which they were used to and, indeed, a standard of living that we would expect at least minimally for all of our citizens.

Looking specifically at what those inflationary pressures are and what we can do to alleviate them with the wealth that we have available to us, I would like to draw attention first to utility costs because, of course, our monthly utility bills – electricity, natural gas, water, telephone, and what have you – often together will exceed or be close to the mortgage payments or the rental payments that an individual or family has on their residence. So we've seen a dramatic increase in utility bills specific to electricity, for example, in the past decade or so in the province of Alberta. My main concern here is to try to provide some relief for people.

Of course, we are producing electricity using our own native energy sources: mostly coal, natural gas, hydro to a small extent, and other sources. So it is possible for us to in fact influence that electricity cost if we do put our minds to it, still using the principles of a market system to some degree but also recognizing that electricity is a necessary part of our modern society and modern life. We can't treat it as anything less than an absolute necessity and make sure that people have an accessible and a secure source of electricity that they can rely on that's not going to break their monthly bank account.

3:50

So looking specifically at electricity charges, one area that we need to regulate and look much more closely at besides the price is these line charges. People are bringing me their electricity bills – I'm sure other people have the same thing going on in their constituencies – and showing me that even if their electricity is not on – like, perhaps they've been away or at the cabin or they are using solar panels – they're still being charged quite a significant monthly bill for line charges.

I've been investigating this to some degree. Line charges do not fall under much purview or scrutiny. So energy companies are giving these bills, saying that we have these line charges, and it's going by pretty much unscrutinized. So, you know, this is a big problem because, of course, we're building these new line systems all across the province. To some degree we do need to upgrade our lines across the province, but at the same time are we getting the value for our money, and who's paying for those lines?

We had a promise, and I think a reasonable promise, from the previous Energy minister here in this House that, in fact, the utility companies would pay for new line systems being built, especially if those lines might involve sales of electricity outside of the province or even outside of the country. Yet to this date we end up having to foot those bills on our consumer bills every month, and this is creating an unreasonable extra amount of cost on people's monthly electric bills. So I would ask very seriously that during the interim – I know that we are closing down the House here today – we do continue to pursue this and make sure that people are having a fair price bill, that line charges are being examined much more scrupulously, and in fact that people have an affordable and secure access to electricity at all times.

Also, this whole deregulation thing is forcing people somehow into considering contracts. I had, myself, the contract people coming to my door on several occasions. You know, I feel sorry for them that they did. I wasn't mean, by any means, but I certainly was giving them a hard time with it. You know, a lot of my constituents are feeling as though they are compelled to sign these things because of the stories that are being told at the door. I know that everybody likes to say "Buyer beware," but it's the circumstances we created here in this Assembly with deregulation and high prices that are forcing people into considering these contracts when otherwise they wouldn't do so.

I have had to deal with a number of people who felt as though they were coerced into buying a contract and then, you know, going

back and having the company come back and rescind that deal. I really feel as though Albertans are being held under the gun to sign long-term contracts when, in fact, that is not necessarily the best way to deliver electricity to individual customers.

There are other concerns in regard to utilities. I think, just briefly, we want to make sure that we have the capacity to maintain electricity and power and gas to people's homes even when they are under difficult financial circumstances. You know, I think that our own power company here servicing Edmonton has improved considerably, but I think that we have to have an independent advocacy group that allows people to submit their problems of being cut off from electricity and from gas. You know, it causes a great deal of hardship. You end up with these bills that are back-billed, and people end up with this debt in the high hundreds or even thousands of dollars owed to the power company. For a person on limited income that's just another hole which they have difficulty getting out of.

Another issue that I think concerns all Albertans in a significant way is education. I've spoken at length about education already, but I want to reiterate the importance for us to make sure that extra fees for students from K to 12 are kept at the absolute minimum. We've been looking at these fees increasing quite significantly, especially in the higher grades, and it's combined with other costs for people on limited incomes that just makes these fees overwhelming. Again, textbooks and things that were otherwise not charged for in years past are now nickelled and dimed onto the parents. If you have more than one child, this can be an onerous, difficult situation come September, this next week. So school fees I think are something that we need to look at closely here to make sure that we're only charging the minimum amount, certainly not charging for textbooks and necessities that people require in order to go to a public school.

The class-size issue I think is something that needs to be looked at. Again, I've spoken on this briefly, but I can see the same thing unfolding, at least anecdotally, at the schools that I had previously taught and at the schools that my children are going to as well. We say that we want to set the limit at 25, let's say, for junior high, but I saw in the junior high where my youngest daughter is going that every single class is over 30: 31, 32 students.

I know that this is not the best circumstance for educating students, and in fact if you can make one single adjustment to a classroom to improve learning for each individual, it's to reduce that class size in an actual level, not in a relative level by averaging out everything across the whole school board but each and every classroom. Certainly, it's not an easy thing to do, but it's the very best thing that you can do for public education and improving students' learning.

Another issue, just very briefly, that I did not speak on is this whole idea of expanding the role and the purview of a community school in any given area. We're talking at length about new schools and new building, and I appreciate the new monies for that, but what we see in more established areas is that the utilization rate makes it difficult for more established schools to maintain themselves on a year-to-year basis. You know, once a school closes in a neighbourhood, it has a ripple effect, which includes real estate values. It includes the capacity for that area to attract new families. It has sort of a hollowing-out effect on an established community.

So I really believe that the value in keeping those schools alive over perhaps some difficult years where there are less students far outweighs the financial gain that you might get on a balance sheet of saving a few dollars by closing the school down. Once you close a school down, dollars to doughnuts, it's never coming back.

So this idea of community schools and somehow accounting for all of the uses that a school is being used for in a community and not

just students in seats from 9 o'clock in the morning till 3 o'clock in the afternoon I think is an idea whose time has come. To be able to use schools, the structures, for community events, for night classes, for perhaps a community police station, a health nurse station – there's just a wide range of things that we could use and be creative about and actually count that as utilization of that facility. The communities would appreciate it. We would be able to retain the family atmosphere of neighbourhoods that were built and have gone through one or two or three generations of children and attract families back to those places later on.

You know, at the very root of all of the public institutions and services that we provide here through the provincial government, that I think perhaps we need to look most closely at and with a greater deal of objectivity, is the whole larger issue of how poverty affects education, health care, neighbourhoods, and security through the Solicitor General and Justice, just the widest possible range of endeavours that we seek to influence here through the Legislature.

What I'm seeing through inflation from the boom is that more people are actually being left behind: people on fixed incomes, people working in service industries. The economic boom is not trickling down, as that famously confused theory sort of purports to allow, but rather people are just hitting and falling out of the bottom at a greater rate. So you have the most embarrassing situation of people working full-time and living well below the poverty line, according to a market-basket measurement of what's acceptable to live in any given place, say the city of Edmonton, working full-time with full-time jobs, unable to meet the basic human needs of housing, good food, and all sorts of basic expenses.

4:00

Certainly, I think this is where objectivity has to prevail. We can't just rely on the ideology of how people should behave, how people should be responsible for themselves, and how the state must pull back from providing these services, but instead look at it in a basic human way and in a way in which we buoy up and bring up the most members of our society in the most equal way possible because that indeed will pay dividends to all of us in ways that are sometimes unexpected.

Looking specifically at poverty, I think the number one issue has to be housing. If you don't have an adequate place to live, a clean sort of a warm place to live and to hang your hat every night, then all other things fall apart. That's the beginning, the foundation, of a decent civilized life. Here we are attracting and trying to entice thousands of new people to come here and work in the province, yet our housing situation is falling short of meeting the needs of these new residents arriving. You know, this is a big problem that we're only seeing the cusp of right now. It's just starting to become apparent.

I think it's absolutely necessary for us to invest in housing that's available at a reasonable price, for rent or for sale. It will pay dividends in every single other department, as I say, that we are responsible for here in the Legislature because once people are established in a reasonable place that is safe and is good to live in, then they can start to make plans for the future. All other things follow from reasonable housing for every single resident in the province of Alberta. It's not just an economic issue; it's a moral issue, and I hasten to see more coming in the future.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I just wanted to quickly ask the hon. member if he was aware of the comments I made in the House the other day

regarding the school fees issue and the fact that that is being looked at thoroughly by the Alberta School Boards Association. They are expected to provide me with a report very soon. I can't remember the date, but I just wanted the hon. member to answer whether or not he's aware of that.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you. I appreciate what is being done. It's like when you're teaching something, you do it seven times and then it happens. Right? It's like teaching my children to eat new food. I appreciate and I did hear the minister's plan for that.

I guess that school fees are due in the next week or so, and that's what I'm looking at. It certainly is part of the annual family thing that you have going on. Nothing bothered me more than to be working in a high school and having the responsibility of adding everybody's school fees together and telling them the news. With some people you could just see their faces turn ashen in colour, and that really, really bothers me. I just want to see it rectified as soon as possible.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on the debate.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity today to speak to third reading of Bill 44, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2) and to consider the effects of the health proposals. When we hear of such incidents as the mother who miscarried in a Calgary waiting room, some will deny that there is a crisis in health care. They will say that the evidence is anecdotal, that this is a necessary cost of living in a high-growth economy rather than one with a surplus of spaces in places that have a shrinking population. While we may not have the full-blown crisis of an epidemic or disaster, we do face a major challenge.

I am reminded that our word crisis comes from the Greek word for decision. We do have a decision on our hands, and we do have choices to make. We have to decide whether the future of our health care system will be based on the needs of people or on the need to make a profit by those who invest in it. We have to decide whether the investment capital we seek for new facilities will be allowed to determine the clientele who get to use the facilities.

When we faced the mad cow crisis, the greatest part of our province's investment went not to the farmers who were hurting but to the multinational processing plants. In health care we must decide whether to focus on the pharmaceutical and insurance companies or on the citizens. We have to choose whether to focus on illness, where the research dollars are, or on wellness, where the gains are less dramatic and more widely spread around. Are we going to continue to be mesmerized by MRIs and other high-tech equipment and research facilities, or are we prepared to invest more in home care, chiropractic, and other therapies that enhance the quality of life? Will our focus be on spectacular surgeries, transplants, ways of prolonging life and averting death temporarily in the name of science, or will we give equal attention to hospices, where those who are facing their end can do so with calm and dignity? We need to decide whether to continue charging our citizens health care insurance fees while advertising that we are tax-free and giving away energy royalties in cash. Fundamentally, we have to decide whether good health is a right all deserve, part of the Alberta advantage, like education, or a privilege to which some by their success and affluence are entitled.

So we have choices on our hands, decisions to make. If we do not face up to this crisis in the Greek sense of thinking and choosing, we

will most certainly face a crisis of mass proportions arising out of our lack of thought in the next few years.

Health care is a unique service that does not respond the same as other goods and services bought and sold on the open market. We have grown up with the notion that all goods and services respond positively to being on the open market and assume that health care is the same. But health care is very complex and vastly more important than many other services because it is one that all of us will use at some time in our lives, and it can mean life and death if we don't get it at the right time. In today's world we have come to expect service immediately, and nobody likes to stand in line for anything, especially if we are willing and able to pay for better service. But one would hope that governments would want to care for all citizens according to their health needs: those that need it the most followed shortly by those who are nonemergent, because health care is everybody's business.

As I look at the supplementary supply funding proposals, I find it necessary to mention the effects of the budgeting process and the uncertainty that it creates. Health care spending was stable before 1993. Since then, it's been very confusing and uncertain. Massive layoffs in the mid-90s created today's staff shortages. Cutbacks led to a shortage of beds and equipment and to the deterioration of facilities and uncertainty for all medical staff and for our population. Health care professionals are demanding a well-planned, well-managed public health care system with stable, predictable long-term funding. We need predictable funding levels adjusted annually for population growth, inflation and, of course, the aging population.

I want to stress the real need to change the fiscal year of regional health authorities so that business plans are approved before the provincial health budget is set. Alberta's RHAs, particularly in the rural areas, face an annual financial conundrum. They must reconcile rapidly rising costs with the meagre increases in their budgets, and often those plans are not approved until several months after the fiscal year. The Auditor General has recommended repeatedly that RHA business plans be approved at the start of the fiscal year. The government's response was to replace business plans with three-year performance agreements, but the problem still remains. They never know what they're going to get until the year begins. Without this information RHAs have no way of coming up with a fiscal plan for the current fiscal year. So RHAs, like school boards, should follow a different fiscal year to eliminate the guesswork and to help create stability and certainty and confidence.

As I look at the supplementary funding that is proposed now and the present process that we do have, I ask: why wasn't this money included in the spring 2006 budget? The needs have been apparent. They have been discussed many times and at great length. Given that health region deficits are well over \$165 million, how did the ministry decide to allocate only \$81 million? What criteria or guidelines were used to determine how much each health region would receive?

4:10

I'd like to draw attention to the Palliser health region, with a deficit of \$3 million to \$4 million. The top three issues for the region are human resources, recruitment of health professionals; infrastructure, space capacity, expansion of diagnostic services, physio services, outpatient services; and improving access. Specifically, I'd like to consider Medicine Hat. Many of the concerns in Medicine Hat would be the same as we are hearing across the province in rural areas. The issues include recruitment of doctors, waiting times and, of course, lack of bed space. The one unique issue that Medicine Hat has is that the pain management clinic is closing in September. I don't know why, and I don't know the

circumstances for the closure, but it's a serious decision that has been made.

In addition, there was an issue where a doctor left his practice suddenly, and patients had difficulty accessing records. Certainly, finding another physician was a problem. These particular patients appeared to be high-needs because they required triplicate prescriptions for pain management. Their records were apparently lost, and they had difficulty finding a doctor. That's a sad story, indeed.

Another issue there is the shortage of pharmacists at the regional hospital. I'm wondering how we are going to address that issue. Is it being considered at this time?

Now, as I look again at my own region, the Capital health region, with a deficit of \$65 million, the challenges there are similar: the growing and aging population, the emergency room wait times, bed shortages, health professional recruitment and retention. I look at the fact that there are going to be some construction projects which will result in the earliest beds being available by mid-2007, and that is wonderful news. It is great. I'm looking specifically at more beds and the increased ICU capacity at the Grey Nuns. I'm also, though, aware of a shortage of mental health beds, and I don't see anything addressing this great need. But this is a good-news item for my community that fought to keep this hospital, the Grey Nuns, open, and I'm grateful for that.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Mrs. McClellan: I just have a question for the hon. member, and I hope that I heard her correctly in her comments. It doesn't really totally relate to these estimates, but it was used as an example of hoping that the money went to the right places. I thought I heard her say that the majority of the assistance in BSE went to the multinational packers or something to that point. If I heard her correctly, I'd just like to ask her where she got her information. There was a list comprising every cheque that was written under the BSE programs tabled in this Legislature. Even when you take the feeder cattle that were owned by those packers or by a subsidiary of the same name, that comment would not be accurate.

The reason I raise it is because the industry themselves designed these programs. With the exception of the first program, which the federal government refused to take their advice on, on the extension of the 30 days to allow time for adjustment, we accepted their recommendations in all cases. I feel strongly that that industry did yeoman service. There may be a small group of people that think that too much money or that none of it should have gone, which none of it did in the last program. That was by agreement of the industry. I think the majority of people in this province today would tell you that without the support of this government and the quality of the programs that were put in place, we would not have a beef industry, let alone a packing industry, in this province.

So I wanted to make sure that I understood her correctly. I wanted to understand where she got her information. If I could be of any help to you in clarifying that information, I would be pleased to do that.

Mrs. Mather: I appreciate your clarification. I think that probably I was reacting to what I am hearing.

Mrs. McClellan: I'll get you the answers.

Mrs. Mather: I would like that because I will share it with the people that talk to me.

Mrs. McClellan: I'd be pleased to do that.

Mrs. Mather: It's farmers that have been talking to me.

Mrs. McClellan: I mean, I talk to these people myself. I actually live with one.

The Deputy Speaker: This conversation is very nice, but it would be nice if the comments were directed through the chair.

Mrs. McClellan: I'm sorry. I said that I would be pleased to get that information and through the assistance of the hon. minister of agriculture so that she does have this. She said that she was talking to farmers. I said: "Well, I do that too. I actually live with one, even though he doesn't have any cattle."

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. I appreciate that. The chair was feeling a little left out.

Mrs. McClellan: We apologize.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any others on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, on the debate the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour and a pleasure for me to rise today to speak to third reading of Bill 44, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2). I have been fairly quiet up until this point, although I have said a few comments off the record, I guess, about some of the things that have been going on during the debate of this bill. But I would like to get a few things on the record. It's a great opportunity for us to talk about what we think as government backbenchers about this spending and about what's happening here with Bill 44. So I'll take a few minutes to do that.

First of all, I'd like to say that it's great that we even have this opportunity to come back into session in the summer and have the, quote, unquote, problem of having a large surplus that we have to find some places for and some areas to spend it on. It's a, quote, unquote, problem that many provinces would love to have. We're very blessed and very thankful that we have this opportunity, which is what it really is, here in Alberta to be able to have such a large, unexpected surplus so that we can go back and reinvest in some of the things that are important to Albertans. That is why we're here, I believe, Mr. Speaker.

A few months back or several months back now we talked to Albertans, and we asked them what they wanted us to do with unexpected surpluses. They basically said three things. They said that they wanted us to save some, they wanted us to spend some on needed infrastructure and emergent programs, and then they wanted us to give some back. So, of course, we've done that. We've given some back through the form of the \$400 resource rebate cheques. We've certainly put a lot of money away into the different endowments and the heritage savings trust fund. Now we're also spending some.

Let's just talk about that spending because that's the main issue of the bill that we're debating here this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Well, where are we spending? We're spending on education. We're spending on health care. We're spending on agriculture. We're spending on infrastructure. We're spending on the environment and many other important areas. I think it's almost a neat coincidence. If you look into Bill 44 and you look at the dollar figures, you see where we're spending the most money in this supplementary supply

bill. We're spending the most on education. I really believe that's appropriate. I really believe that that is reflective of this government. We have made education our number one priority.

I know, Mr. Speaker, from my first three or so years sitting in the Legislature, that it was always health care, health care, health care. Certainly, health care is very important. But to be honest, I think that to build a good health care system, to build a better Alberta, to build the province that we want to build, education has to be number one. It really is reflective of the spending of this government. We spend more on education than any other province, as has been said.

One of the things that thrust me into politics was the need to see education get more funding and to be more emphasized by the government. I started out, as many people did, in municipal politics as a trustee. I was a school trustee for the Wild Rose school division. We would go do our annual, or actually biannual, pilgrimage to our MLAs and ask for more money for education. We would do that a couple of times a year.

I'm sure that the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House – I see him smiling there – remembers me coming to his office several times and asking for some dollars. We always put together a good plan to say exactly how we needed the money and why we needed the money and where we were going to spend the money. Thankfully, pretty much every year that we went to him, we did see some form of an increase in the education budget.

Then I remember that when my predecessor, Tom Thurber, was retiring, I thought: if I really want to help education, I've got to go where the money is. You know, show me the money; follow the money. So I stepped up and let my name stand for the nomination and got into politics, and here I am.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, it's an honour for me to be able to support this spending on education. It's an honour for me to be able to stand here and say: "We're investing more in our children. We're investing more in our future. We're investing more in schools, infrastructure, and programs. It's going to make an even greater Alberta." So that's exciting. I believe that if we spend on education, we're going to see less needed spending on health care. We're going to see less needed spending on some of the other social programs that we spend on. We're going to see less of a need for putting money into some of these other departments because it's no secret that a well-educated province is a province that is healthier and is more productive, harder working, and the list goes on and on. So I'm really happy to support that, and I think it's excellent.

We're going to see some new and renovated schools. We're going to see some modulars go into these rapid growth areas. Hearing the minister talk about the schools for tomorrow plan is even more exciting. I know that the school in Thorsby will one day be announced with that schools for tomorrow plan. We desperately need a new school in Thorsby. I've heard some of the other members talk about where they need new schools. I know that in every province in Canada, in every state, I'm sure, in the United States of America you could go around and say: this school needs to be improved, and this one needs to be replaced. Well, that's why we exist as a government, that's why we as taxpayers pay taxes: so those things can be done, so they get done in a systematic and an orderly fashion.

I'm glad to know that I do have a couple of schools coming. I'm very thankful for that. We have a new junior high school coming in Drayton Valley, and we're probably going to have to build it bigger than we originally planned because our community is growing so fast. We're also getting a new Catholic high school, which is much needed. I really love the choice that we have in education. It's so

important that we fund all the different levels and all the different aspects of education. It really does make our education system the best in Canada. So that's education.

Health care. Of course, our RHAs are coming to us as MLAs, and they're constantly asking for more money. Why? Because they want to provide better care. They want to be able to do better for their patients, for their constituents, for their clients. Again, as an MLA I'm proud to support that. I know that our RHAs are very well managed. They do a really good job. I believe they're very fiscally responsible. Again, when they come to us with requests for money, they don't just say, you know, that they want to throw money into a black hole. They always have very, very specific places where they're going to put that money, where they're going to invest that money to see a healthier Alberta and a better Alberta.

So that's exciting, Mr. Speaker, and I'm very happy to support the investment in health and education.

If I look at the other priorities in this Bill 44, I see that sort of tied for third and fourth are agriculture and infrastructure. Again, I believe that's really reflective of Albertans. That is reflective of where Albertans want to see money spent by this government. They would like to see our agriculture industry supported because it is, as has been said many times in this Legislature, the backbone of Alberta, and it truly is. The very food we eat comes from our agriculture sector. So you know how important it is to make sure that our agriculture people are supported, that the department has enough money to function properly and to be able to do some of the support programs that they do to keep the agriculture industry not only alive but thriving and growing and adding jobs and doing value-added in our province.

Infrastructure and Transportation. Well, it goes without saying that this is a necessary area to be investing our dollars, Mr. Speaker. Quite frankly, there are a lot of people moving to Alberta. There are a lot of roads that are getting to that sort of 20-year-plus stage, where they need to be rehabilitated. There are a lot of new bridges that need to be built.

In Drayton Valley we need a bridge really badly. We have a nice bridge there that served us well for about 50 years or so, but it's time for that bridge to be replaced and, hopefully, twinned. We need a bridge. We have about 10,000 cars a day that go over that bridge. Certainly, when that bridge was first built, it wasn't 10,000 cars, I can assure you of that. It might have been 1,000 or 2,000. We've just done some recent traffic counts, and today we're between 8,000 and 10,000 vehicles a day crossing over that bridge into the busy little community of Drayton Valley in Brazeau county. So we do need a new bridge.

I know that we're not going to get it out of this \$171 million or this \$139 million that's mentioned here in Bill 44, but I'm hoping that as we tick off some of the smaller projects and as we complete some of the smaller and larger and even medium-sized projects in Alberta, my bridge will work its way up the list and will eventually get done. And I can be patient. I can wait for that, Mr. Speaker. I know that we can't do everything overnight. Rome wasn't built in a day. I can make sure that we're meeting priorities. I can make sure that we are doing the most needed areas first, and certainly I do believe that we're doing that. So I think the spending plan that has been outlined here is an excellent one.

I could mention several of the other departments. I think we're doing some great work in the SRD department. We're doing some great work in Solicitor General. We always need more officers. Again, probably the one word that we've maybe heard more than any other throughout this sitting of the Legislature, this summer session, is "more." I think it's pretty obvious that you can always spend more. You know, pretty much everybody can say: "Here's an

area that's a need. Here's an area where we can spend more." I think we do try to do that in a fiscally responsible way as the government. We do try to invest more, and when I say more: as much as is possible in every single area.

The thing that is probably pretty obvious, though, is that there really is no right amount. There's no amount that you could say: "Well, this is the right amount. If we could just spend this much, it would be enough." I think of the education system again, and I know that however much money we can give them, they can find ways to better educate and better spend that money for maybe technology or maybe other things. They can make it a better system than it is. So there really is no magic number, but I think that, certainly, as a government we're working towards making sure that we can do the best possible based on our economy and our GDP and the amount that our taxpayers can support and the amount of dollars that we have. So it's good to be sitting here. It's good to be having these opportunities to reinvest some of this money.

Advanced Education. I should have talked about that. Almost \$50 million going into there is very good.

You know, Mr. Speaker, what I see here as I look through this Bill 44 is solutions. I know that the Liberal and the ND opposition often point out problems. They often point out shortfalls. They point out some gaps. But they very, very, very rarely offer any solutions. I think that what we have here in Bill 44 is a bill of solutions. It's a bill that is paving the way and planning the way for a brighter future, a better Alberta, a better place for all our citizens, new and old alike, to live and to enjoy.

I'm excited, Mr. Speaker. I know that it's the 35th anniversary today of our party having the privilege of governing, and I believe it's only maybe the halfway point. I think we have many, many more years of governing. I know that today we have given accolades to our Premier. I believe he probably has been one of the best Premiers, if not the best, so far. I have to say so far because there are a lot more great things that we can do in the future. We have nine excellent leadership candidates that are going to work to make this province even better. I really do believe that the best is yet to come, and it's exciting to be in the Legislature, to be a part of it. I'm excited about some of the new visions and plans that will unfold and just really looking forward to being a part of that and helping to build the future of our great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. To the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. Last night I had a look at the website of one of the Progressive Conservative leadership hopefuls, Mr. Jim Dinning. There is a list of 27 Members of the Legislative Assembly, of Alberta Progressive Conservative government members, who have publicly pledged their support to Mr. Dinning. I don't see the hon. member's name on that list. Also on this website was a story from the *Edmonton Sun*. It headlines, "I don't believe in oops budgeting." This is Mr. Dinning. Mr. Dinning appeared before the editorial board of the *Edmonton Sun* and said this: "I don't follow the adage that has occurred where . . . come November we said: 'Oops, we're off track.' We start by saying what is realistic budgeting." Mr. Dinning goes on to say: "In my view, you don't need a leadership race to fix leaky roofs or to prevent the laying off of teachers. That's governing." He has some concerns – Mr. Dinning – about this habit of this current Progressive Conservative government of what he calls oops budgeting. Does the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar think that Bill 44 is oops

budgeting as described by Mr. Dinning in his comments to the *Edmonton Sun* editorial board earlier this summer? Does he consider Bill 44 oops budgeting?

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member wish to respond?

Rev. Abbott: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I would respond to that question with a question back, and that is: does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar own a mirror? Because if you do own a mirror, my guess is that you look in that mirror from time to time, and when you look in that mirror, you're going to see certain things on your person that may need correcting. You're going to see certain things on your person that may need a little bit of fixing up or a little bit of sprucing up. Maybe you need to comb the hair every now and then or trim the mustache. In that mirror you will see things that you need to fix about yourself. That's called a self-criticism. That's called a self-evaluation.

I think one of the excellent things that's going to happen throughout this next few months in our leadership race is that we will have people from within our own party who will be taking a look at the mirror and saying: "Where can we improve? Where can we make ourselves look a little bit better? What can we do to fill in some of the gaps, comb the hair, trim the mustache so that we can go out there and face the public and be ready for the next four years?"

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar again, I would like to remind the members that under Standing Order 29(2)(a) you still have to direct your comments through the chair. The purpose is not for personal conversations between one another.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on 29(2)(a).

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I have another question for the hon. member, and this is certainly also in regard to the visit by Mr. Dinning to the *Sun* editorial board when he stated that – and Mr. Dinning, we have to remember, served as the Provincial Treasurer during the 1993-1997 term – public health and education ministers have a responsibility to sit down with their respective officials and determine the true costs. Do you think there was a meeting and the true costs were determined when the last budget was discussed in this Assembly in the spring, three months ago?

The Deputy Speaker: Would the hon. member wish to respond?

Rev. Abbott: Sure. I guess how I would respond to that, Mr. Speaker, is that I would say that, certainly, all of us had opportunity to sit down in the spring and to talk about the monies available at that time, to invest the most that we could into education, into health, et cetera, et cetera. As I mentioned in the beginning of my speech, we've had some extra monies come available, and we now have an opportunity to reinvest some of those, so we're trying to do that in a careful and in a balanced way.

I believe that all of us as MLAs hear from our constituents on a daily basis – certainly on a regular basis through phone calls, through letters, through meetings, when we go out to the public gatherings, et cetera, et cetera, when we talk to constituents one-on-one – and we hear constant feedback. That's why it's not unusual, the moment that you pass a budget, to start tweaking it and to start saying: "How could we make it better? If there are some additional dollars that come in, where should we invest?"

I believe that Bill 44 is a response to that. It's a response to the last several months of hearing our constituents asking us in a very

thoughtful and a very educated way, saying: "Here's where we feel that we need to put more money. If you guys get that opportunity, we'd like you to do that." That's why we're here. We're here to represent our constituents. We're here to be responsive to their needs. You cannot predict the future and say that we think they're going to want all the money here, so you have to be doing this on a balanced and on a monthly and yearly basis.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on the debate.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tempted to say that there aren't enough mirrors around to fix the problem that we have here.

To begin, I want to just talk generally about the budgeting and the budgeting process, Mr. Speaker. I guess Mr. Dinning called it an oops budget, but I would say that part of the problem goes back to Mr. Dinning's time as the Treasurer. I, unfortunately, was here during that time when it became a battle between the massive and brutal cuts. What we forgot at that time, Mr. Speaker, is that clearly we were running deficits in the early 90s that you couldn't sustain over a period of time, but there should have been a balance between the revenues and the cuts because the cuts were severe. They were popular at the time. No doubt about it. The result was that we forgot, frankly, about our social infrastructure, and we forgot about our physical infrastructure, if you like, and we concentrated only on the economic deficit.

Well, for a while that seemed to work okay, Mr. Speaker, because the reality was that we were in a bit of a recession at the time, and people didn't notice it as much. But we were going to come out of the recession. That's why I'm saying it was shortsighted at that time not to find a balance because we're still playing catch-up. The reality is that for our physical infrastructure we need billions, it's been acknowledged, not only in schools – and the previous speaker talked about the infrastructure – but it's happened all over the province. We have a social infrastructure problem that we're still playing catch-up with in terms of health care, education, help for vulnerable people. What is now making it worse is that because of the economic policy of this government we are now in an overheated economy. We hadn't caught up with the physical and social infrastructure from the past, and now the pressures are immense, and this government, frankly, has no idea about what to do about it. That's why we're having this budget.

Now, the reason I haven't spoken before is that we need this money, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to vote against this budget because most of it makes some sense. It has to be there. That's absolutely the case. But I'm saying to you that this is the wrong way to budget. I'm sure I speak back in the past in terms of the way the Lougheed government and even the Getty government budgeted. The budgets meant something. So think about this: we brought in a budget in March, we passed it in May, and now we're coming back and asking for over a billion dollars in August. Now, if this was any other government, you would think – I can see these people screaming about that if it was an NDP or Liberal government, if it was the other way around. "Oh, what bad budgeting."

We can't continue to do this. The budgets we bring in in March don't mean anything. They don't mean anything at all. When I look at this budget that we're bringing through, the supplementary estimates now, in some of the smaller provinces this is probably more than their total yearly budget, Mr. Speaker. So what's the point of the debate in March about the budget, going through all this process, going through all the estimates, when we know that there's

going to be another budget coming down in the summer? Maybe there will be another one in the fall.

What I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, is that the government is out of control. I know that the Treasurer disagrees. She says she's being proactive and being conservative in the estimates. Well, look, if this was any other household budget – I say that either the people who are advising her are incompetent or they're deliberately underbudgeting. How can you be underestimating the price of crude oil by 42 per cent – and we're talking about the five years – and 80 per cent off the mark in terms of your revenues? Now, I recognize that it can't be an exact science, and I recognize that it's difficult to always predict the price of oil and gas, but you can't be 80 per cent off the mark and have realistic budgeting in this province. I look at natural gas prices, almost the same: 39 per cent off the average. This translates into being 65 per cent off the mark for natural gas revenues.

Now, I can understand if maybe one year something happened, but this is over a five-year basis. So I say to the Finance minister: is it deliberate? She says: "Well, we're being, you know, conservative in our estimates. It's better to be that way." I even accept that. But 80 per cent off and 65 per cent off? If that's the best that you can get from the officials, they should be sacked. Or is this a deliberate process that we underbudget, then come back to these and make all these fancy announcements as the Minister of Education did today. Is this a deliberate political policy, Mr. Speaker, to do this? That's the reality of what we're facing at this particular time.

4:40

I want to say again about Bill 44 that the money is needed. I've said that already, Mr. Speaker. But part of the problem is that this government does not know how to manage growth. Their economic policies are creating an overheated economy. That's the reality of it. If you're going to move – and now we know it's happening in the Peace River – and your whole economic policy is to get in the tar sands, rip it out as quickly as possible, and move ahead to get into the American market, an economy like that, that is going to overheat the economy dramatically. That's what's happening.

So now we're not providing the backup service. Now we're playing catch-up. Mr. Speaker, that's what's happening. Now we have problems in housing, problems in rents, problems in health care, problems in education, trying to keep up. We're not managing growth, because we're moving too fast. As I say, we cut too drastically in the early '90s, and we're still playing catch-up there. Now we've got an overheated economy.

Then we turn around in a budget, Mr. Speaker, in an overheated economy and say to the corporate elite, mainly in the oil industry: gee, we've got to give you more of a tax break. Tax break? For what? They're doing the best they've ever done. They can't do any better. So we lacked \$360 million in revenues that could have gone to some of the same problems that we're talking about in our last budget.

I mean, the whole process is just out of whack. It's out of whack, Mr. Speaker. Again, we'll be having this budget. I guess we're not coming back for the fall because we're preoccupied with the leadership, so we're going to I suppose not deal with this again. Then we'll come back and theoretically bring in a budget in March or pass one, and it probably won't mean anything then either unless the new leader starts to change this around.

It's just a terrible, awful way to budget.

Dr. Morton: I agree with you.

Mr. Martin: You agree with me. The hon. member agrees with me. Well, I'm glad, Mr. Speaker. We might vote for you yet, you know.

The reality is, Mr. Speaker, that this is what's happening. You know, the problem is when we look at housing, this is the impact it's having in housing. We've talked about this. Twenty million dollars the mayor has come and asked for, and the minister of seniors says: yeah, it sounds like a good idea. Well, it was a good idea a while ago. It shouldn't have taken the mayor. It should have been self-evident that we've got these problems. The 2000 count of homeless persons found 3,436 people that they can identify as homeless in Calgary, a 30 per cent increase. There have been media reports of rental increases in Calgary as high as a thousand dollars per month. The average rent in Fort McMurray is \$1,500 per month for a two-bedroom apartment.

In the city of Edmonton Boyle Street community service has begun a program. I see it because I live down in that direction. Two hundred to 600 people estimated to be living in the river valley. What's going to happen to them in the winter?

I've received heart-wrenching letters from constituents. I mentioned one before, and I've mentioned Reverend Keith Loewen, who works with the community health centre. We know the welfare rates. We've just had that discussion. It's a double whammy. People on the marginal incomes are getting hit, Mr. Speaker, by a higher cost of living because of the boom, yet we have the lowest rates. What are we doing about it?

The Minister of Education: yes, glad to see some money coming forward today, Mr. Minister, for the schools. But this is over a four-year period. It's desperately needed. Again, Balwin is in my area, and I know that it's definitely needed, but this is still not going to play catch-up.

I know from being a trustee in Edmonton – I'm only going to speak here for Edmonton – that half of our schools are 50 years of age or over. Many of them are crumbling apart. You used Vic comp as an example. Well, they had a plan for the \$36 million. I was there. Remember, they were promised \$62 million at one time. [interjection] Thank you, \$63 million. Okay. We got that right. Now it was down to \$36 million that the board had to make because there was \$60 million altogether, and now that \$36 million won't allow that plan to go ahead. So the \$36 million – I know you're waiting for something – but it keeps shrinking, that amount of dollars, because of the overheated economy again. That's the point that we're making. I'm glad that the minister is taking a look. That's what we're talking about: planning over a longer period of time down the way. This should have been self-evident.

That's what my frustration is, Mr. Speaker. It's that we were raising these questions about needing more education money in the spring session, and we were told that we didn't need to do it. Now, the minister says that he didn't know all of the results until he got what was coming in from the school boards. Well, I understand that to some degree, but they were all telling all of us that it wasn't enough. The minister has now acknowledged that it wasn't enough. That's why we have this money here.

The same in health care. I mean, we could have a battle of figures like we did yesterday, but even though the Calgary health region says that there have been some increases in beds, there have been a few but not nearly enough to deal with their population growth. So we're going to keep playing catch-up here, Mr. Speaker – catch-up, catch-up, catch-up – because of what happened before and the fact that we haven't planned for growth.

I would just sort of conclude near the end with this: the problem with this government is their ideology. They now recognize that they have a problem. They're on the Holy Grail of the marketplace, Mr. Speaker. I watch across the way that when you say private, they almost salivate with excitement; when you say public, somehow that's bad.

The reality is that you have to provide for your social – the marketplace works well where it's supposed to work, and I've worked in the private sector much more than you did, my friend. I worked in the financial business. It works well where there's economic competition. It doesn't work well where there are monopoly situations, and it doesn't work well when you're dealing with human needs. That's the reality. But if you're going to push ahead with an economic strategy, Mr. Speaker, that's going to overheat the economy, the very minimum you can do is provide the proper public and social infrastructure. That's where this government has failed, absolutely failed.

Mr. Speaker, it's going to be difficult. I mean, even if we start doing the things that we need to right now in health care and housing to catch up, we can do some things quickly and have to do them quickly, but even if we do start now to change what we're doing to catch up, it's not going to be easy because of the growth that we're having. I see no evidence that the government is going to change their economic strategy, as some people have asked them to do. Even former Premier Lougheed said that you have to control the rate that you're moving ahead. It doesn't make sense. But even if we start to do that, we're still going to have these problems.

Mr. Speaker, I would just urge the government to take a more serious look at this. Let's make our budgeting realistic, and let's recognize that we have an overheated economy. What are we are going to do about it?

I have my timing here, and I realize that I have about 12 seconds left, so I've probably said enough. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, under Standing Order 29(2)(a), questions, Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and comment briefly on the issues raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in his remarks on third reading of Bill 44, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2). The hon. member seemed to agree that the spending is required, and his criticism was mainly directed at the process of the budgeting. The Minister of Finance and the government in my view are to be commended for responding so expeditiously to a number of dynamic factors which have given rise to the necessity of further spending.

4:50

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. Is the hon. member participating under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the question-and-answer segment?

Dr. Brown: Yes.

The Speaker: So we will get to a question?

Dr. Brown: It's a comment.

The Speaker: You're supposed to sit down.

Dr. Brown: It's a comment.

The Speaker: You're supposed to sit down.
It's basically question and answer.

Dr. Brown: I'm commenting on his speech.

The Speaker: Yeah, but not for five minutes.
Proceed. Let's find a question in this, okay?

Dr. Brown: The factors, as I was saying, that arise and necessitate the fact that we need additional appropriation are the incredible influx of over 90,000 people into the province of Alberta creating new demands and the rising costs of some of the public projects which are under way. There are a number of emerging issues with respect to school capacity and maintenance, with the needs of the regional health authorities, and there's a critical need for the agricultural community, so I agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that additional spending is needed.

The fact that we do have these additional, surplus monies now to meet some of these emerging issues with revenue of \$1.2 billion higher than estimated in the spring budget means that this is an appropriate time to bring this bill before the House. I would say in particular that the bill is good news for the children of Alberta, with an additional \$293 million being spent on important school improvements. It's good news for Albertans who rely on health care facilities, with an additional \$262 million, and it's really good news for Albertans, especially the agricultural community, which is suffering in hard-pressed times.

I strongly support the additional appropriation, and I would encourage all members, including the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, to support this appropriation bill.

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

Mr. Martin: Is there a question?

The Speaker: Well, I guess it was under the comments side.

So the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford under 29(2)(a).

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I promise you I have a question. I'm wondering whether or not the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview shares with me the concern that I have about escalating costs. Wholly \$170.8 million of this supplementary supply bill is for escalating costs. At that rate I can imagine us coming back here in March, six months hence, and they're going to be asking for another nearly \$400 million due to escalating costs. Can't we budget properly? I think that was your point in your speech, hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. member to respond.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's precisely the point. I agree with the member from Calgary that there is an influx of people. That's the point I was making. It's the economic strategy of this government to move ahead that fast. They're not providing the backup services, and because we're not, we're going to be playing this role again and again and again. All I'm saying is that we have to look at this realistically in the budget. We probably should be looking at the pace of development, but this is just going to keep going over and over and over again. We're out of control here, Mr. Speaker. That's the point I'm trying to make.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I listened very attentively to the hon. member, as I did a number of years ago when he was, I believe, the leader of the third party, and he waxed on eloquent at that time as well about the budgeting process and how terrible it was to run a deficit and how the budgeting was then when we were overestimating the revenue, so of course we want to correct that situation. He mentioned about the Lougheed government and the Getty government and how they seemed to be able to budget more accurately even though I remember huge deficits, but the way that things were covered off was with special warrants. I was wondering if the hon. member really prefers the special warrants to what we're doing

today. We're coming back before the Legislature. We do not use special warrants like they did back in those days, so the whole Assembly has an opportunity to vote on the expenditure of the money, not just the cabinet.

Mr. Martin: That's a good question, actually, Mr. Speaker. The point I was trying to make . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but I must now call on the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to be given the opportunity to rise and join the debate on Bill 44. There have been a great deal of new situations requiring further expenditures since the last time this Legislature was sitting. I feel that this bill will help to deal with these new developments effectively and most appropriately. These new cash infusions will ensure that Albertans continue to enjoy the same quality of life as they had and help minimize the effects of the disasters and emergencies.

One area where this new cash infusion will be of great service is the agriculture industry. Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly support the injection of the \$261 million to the Canadian agricultural income stabilization, or CAIS, program. This has been a difficult summer for grain and oilseed producers, with the challenges of hot weather and low levels of moisture or moisture at the wrong time making up the growing environment for the majority of the province. This has resulted in the prospect of lower-than-expected crop yields for producers, a situation which is further challenged by high input costs and low commodity prices. The \$261 million will be used to index the 2004 fuel and fertilizer costs by 25 per cent and, of course, to increase the 2004 CAIS reference margins by 15 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, this addition to the CAIS program recognizes the difficulty that the agriculture industry faces and helps them deal with these hard times. While harvesting is already taking place in many parts of the province, the timing of this support for farmers could not have been better. Not only does this enhancement to the program help these grain producers, which have had less than a perfect growing season, but it serves to help all of those in the agriculture industry. It will also therefore be a benefit to all Albertans.

As we discussed during Monday night's debate on Motion 512, the effects of BSE and the closure of international borders to beef and beef products are still being felt by cattle ranchers and the entire industry. The cash influence into the CAIS program will help to assist producers who are still working to make the industry stronger than ever.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development has their finger square on the pulse of the agriculture industry and its needs. It is committed to continuing to monitor and review its programs. I applaud the department for all its good work. I also commend the government for the \$261 million increase to assist the Alberta agriculture industry, a much-needed enhancement in reflection of this summer's difficulties.

The increase in spending on Alberta's infrastructure is yet another good example on how this bill will affect Albertans. With \$303 million being allocated to increasing the operating support to schools for maintenance and renewal of new schools and to address the cost escalation of projects already approved, Alberta schools will be well prepared for starting the school year.

Mr. Griffiths: It's about the children.

Mr. Danyluk: It is about the children.

Bill 44 also allocates funding that will be used for our provincial highways. Thirty six million dollars has been allocated for provincial highway rehabilitation, \$12 million for highway systems and safety, as well as \$12 million for strategic economic corridor investment initiatives to deal with increases for highway construction projects.

5:00

As well, \$308 million will be used to create a new Edmonton remand facility, replacing the old facility which is nearly 30 years old and much too small to house all the inmates that are held there now. With Alberta's growing population this new remand centre is greatly needed. It has been estimated that by the year 2010-11 there will be approximately 1,200 inmates to be housed. This new remand centre will have a capacity to hold 2,000 inmates. Money well spent, Mr. Speaker.

These are just some examples of how Albertans' money would be put to good use through the adoption of Bill 44.

Recently Statistics Canada reported that last year Alberta's population grew by more than 90,000 people – 90,000 people. This unprecedented growth presents a great deal of challenges for us as legislators. While the opposition feels that members on this side of the House have not predicted Alberta's needs, well, I have to disagree. How one predicts the future, as members across the way seem to think the government should be able to do, I do not know.

Mr. Speaker, this government does not have a crystal ball, yet it has done a commendable job of getting funding to areas that need it based on recent developments. Our mandate as elected officials, all of us on both sides of the House, is to sit and debate these new situations and respond to our constituents' issues as they arise. While we could not have predicted some of the situations that have arisen over the summer, it is our responsibility as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to deal with them. That is what this government and our Premier have done by calling this summer session.

I stand today in support of Bill 44, the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates, and urge all of the members of this Legislature to do the same. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

I then recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak in third reading to Bill 44, the appropriation supply act, and I believe it's called number 2, if I remember right, because it's the second time this year that the government has come back to us asking for more money. There are actually some good things in here. Certainly, I talked yesterday and many members talked about education and how important it is that we are giving more money to education.

I lamented on and on about the lack of foresight and why three months ago we should have been able to predict this. In a question a minute ago to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview I mentioned again that some \$180 million, I think, of this supplementary supply bill is actually for cost escalations. You know, the cost escalations are not a surprise to anybody. We've all seen this for the last couple of years. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation knows about this. Some of the other departments that are facing cost escalations are all aware of this, yet for some reason we weren't able to predict this three months ago and include it in the main budget estimates. I have trouble with that. I am completely convinced that three or six months from now we're going to be back

here again, and you're going to be asking for \$400 million or \$500 million further for cost escalations that for some reason you weren't able to predict today when we dealt with this bill. I find that very frustrating, and I know that most Albertans find that very frustrating. Most Albertans don't have the opportunity to just simply write themselves a cheque if they spend too much money, yet that's in effect what this government is able to do.

Now, I mentioned that there are some good things, and I do want to point out, aside from the money for education, a couple that I have no problem with, despite the fact that I have a problem with the process. In the area of Community Development I see that we're spending \$15.537 million to fund site reclamation at various historic sites and provincial parks. I'm on the record many times, Mr. Speaker, as being in support of provincial parks. In fact, I don't think we do enough for provincial parks, and I believe that at both the federal and the provincial levels there is a distinct methodology at work that's actually trying to deter people from using the parks and keep them away from the parks. That bothers me. I think we should be doing everything within our power as a government to encourage people to get into the parks and use them more as opposed to trying to discourage use of the parks. So in this case we're spending some money on cleaning up parks and improving parks, and I am all for that.

Certainly, one of the ones that I wanted to applaud, and I recall doing this last year, is Municipal Affairs and the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Mr. Speaker, \$2.5 million dollars for the southern Alberta disaster recovery program relating to flooding June 14 to 16 of this year and a million dollars to the city of Edmonton relating to flooding on the 15th of June this year: now, this is what supplementary supply is for. This is unpredictable. You people across the way were telling us the other day, when we were talking to the Energy minister about the blackouts on July 24, that you can't predict lightening strikes. You can't predict lightening strikes, and certainly we know that you can't predict floods. So this is where I have complete understanding when you come to us and say: we need \$3.5 million to look after some flooding that took place in June because of storms that, clearly, nobody could predict. That's what supplementary supply is for. Nobody in this House could reasonably expect that you would know that those storms would take place.

There are other examples in here. There's disaster assistance for farmers. Now, depending on how you define disaster, I suppose, certainly I know many small-business people that would argue that they're facing some of the same hardships caused by some of the same factors that were cited when the government declared a disaster for farmers. Specifically, I'm thinking of a higher Canadian dollar. There was another factor that was cited in the press release too, and I can't recall what it was. There are factors that contribute to the disaster in agriculture, in farming, that certainly are relevant and contribute to great hardship in other areas of the economy, particularly small business, home-operated business, and so forth. So others might want to question how a disaster is defined. Again, something like that constitutes a legitimate reason for the government to come back to this Assembly and ask for more money only three months after a budget has been passed.

I do want to follow up a little bit on some of the comments that my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar was making a few minutes ago when he was referencing Jim Dinning, the former Treasurer of the province of Alberta, and the number of members of this Assembly who have publicly declared their support for him. In reference to the oops budgeting that was discussed in an Edmonton newspaper article back on the 29th of June, I find it interesting, Mr. Speaker, because when I go through this list of government members, some

backbenchers and some who are currently sitting as ministers in this government, not one of them got up in the past five days to speak against this oops budgeting that we're dealing with here this week. Not one of them.

I see that the Member for Calgary-Shaw is one of those who has publicly declared her support for Mr. Dinning, and she certainly hasn't spoken out against the oops budgeting that the current government has saddled this province with. The Member for Calgary-East is another one. The Member for Calgary-Nose Hill: well, he did get up and speak a few minutes ago, but certainly he didn't speak out against the oops budgeting. In fact, he actually spoke in favour of the oops budgeting. Yet the gentleman who this member is supporting to be the next Premier of this province doesn't like oops budgeting, and he says he will not oops budget. So, Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, you might want to have a discussion with your preferred candidate and just find out whether we're going to oops budget next year or not if he happens to be the successful candidate.

5:10

The Minister for Human Resources and Employment is one who has publicly declared his support for Mr. Dinning, yet oops: guess who's asking for more money in Bill 44? The same minister who has publicly declared support for a fella who is portraying himself as being fiscally disciplined and doesn't believe in oops budgeting. Oh, would you look at this, Mr. Speaker? I'm not terribly surprised, but we also have the Solicitor General publicly declaring his support for the candidate who is considered to be the front-runner to be the next Premier of this province and who doesn't believe in oops budgeting. That same Solicitor General has asked in Bill 44 for a total of \$13.6 million. The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development happens to be on the list as well of those who have publicly declared their support for Mr. Dinning, who doesn't believe in oops budgeting, yet for some reason, oops, \$251 million required for SRD.

Moving down the list I see, oh, Advanced Education, another minister of this government, another minister who has asked for some money because there was an oops, an oops to the tune of \$49.2 million, yet he is publicly supporting the man who wants to be the Premier of this province and doesn't believe in oops budgeting. It's going to be a very interesting year in here next year, I'm going to suggest, given this . . .

Dr. Brown: Point of order.

The Speaker: We have a point of order. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, please.

Point of Order

Third Reading Debate

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has digressed on a tangent to the contents of this bill, and I wish to point out page 533 of *Marleau* with respect to debate on third reading. It says as follows: "Debate on third reading is designed to review the legislative measure in its final form and is strictly confined to the contents of the bill." It is a stretch to say that the contents of this bill relate to who some members of the government side might be supporting in a potential leadership campaign that may be coming up. So in my view it's irrelevant.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on this point of order, please.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that in probably every second sentence I'm referencing the bill and the amount of money that is being asked for in this bill. In several instances, in fact, I've cited what the money that's being asked for in supplementary supply is to be directed towards. So I think that I'm well within the confines of third reading in my comments.

The Speaker: So I take it, then, hon. member, just so I can be assured, that when I come up with my ruling with respect to this matter, we're not going to have just a listing of 25 members' names with comment, but we're going to just tie it all together in a final point that you're going to be making?

Mr. R. Miller: I'm working towards pulling it all together.

The Speaker: Sure. Absolutely. Well, you go right ahead with your debate on third reading here now.

Debate Continued

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will attempt to work through the remaining names on the list a little more expeditiously so that I can tie it all together and then, hopefully, allow somebody else to speak.

There are two more ministers that I wanted to reference: the Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, whose department is asking for \$171 million in oops budgeting, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Well, actually, I'm not going to mention him because a good chunk of what he's asking for is, in fact, as I suggested, for legitimate disasters. However, several other members of this government have yet to speak against the oops budgeting that has taken place here today.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member, but with sincere regret I must now interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. In accordance with Standing Order 64(5) the chair is required to put the question to the House on the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a lead-up to the motion that I will present very shortly, I want to briefly offer a sincere thank you to all members of the House for their participation in this important summer session, and a special thank you to you, Mr. Speaker, and to your Deputy Speaker and our table officers for the enormously great work that you all do.

Today, as it turns out, will be noted as an even more historic day than was May 18 since it will be recorded as our Premier's last sitting day inside this Chamber as our leader and our Premier. When the Assembly next convenes, Mr. Speaker, it will be with a new Premier, perhaps even a new cabinet and a new administration and so on. Therefore, on behalf of myself as Government House Leader and our Deputy Government House Leaders from Calgary-Glenmore and Medicine Hat and our entire caucus, we thank our current Premier once again for his enormous work on behalf of all Albertans. It's been a pleasure and an honour, Mr. Premier. Let me just end that by saying, "Thank you, Ralph."

Now, Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Government Motion 26, agreed to on Monday, August 28, I move that the Assembly stand adjourned.

[Motion carried; pursuant to Government Motion 26 the Assembly adjourned at 5:17 p.m.]