

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 13, 2007**

**1:00 p.m.**

Date: 07/03/13

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

**The Speaker:** Welcome.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in your gallery we have two guests who ensure the security of our colleagues in Ontario. They join us today to observe our legislative security operations and to share their practices from back home. They are Staff Sergeant Steve McGowan, technical services unit, legislative security service in Ontario, and Staff Sergeant Kathy Seymour, investigative/liaison unit, legislative security service in Ontario. I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon to introduce some special guests that we have from the Energy department. They're seated in the members' gallery. As I read their names, I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly: Hilda Royer, Tami Peacock, Mary Bahry, Linda Humeniuk, Mary Burrows, and Donna McBee.

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

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three Albertans from my constituency of Stony Plain. With us today are Des King, Sheila King, and Lorne King. I believe they are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

**Ms Haley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to be able to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a school group from my constituency. They actually made it through the heavy snowfall from Airdrie to Didsbury, and the rest of the road was good, thank God. There are 22 people in their group. There are 20 students from the Airdrie Koinonia Christian school, one of my truly favourite schools. They always have a wonderful, positive attitude, with great teachers, a school just filled with enthusiasm. They are accompanied today by their teacher, Mr. Dean Hughes, and a parent, Mr. John Fleck. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of our House.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Service Alberta and President of the Treasury Board.

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have some guests in the gallery. One of them is Graham Wetter, who's with Credit Union Central Alberta in Calgary. The other gentleman is Mr. Darcy Peelar. Darcy's wife, Judy, is our very able constituency manager in Vermilion. I'd ask these two gentlemen to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce two groups through you to the members of the Assembly. The Neil Ross community school and Mr. Jamie Robertson and Mr. Bruce Brown, both teachers, and Mrs. Julie Richelhoff. They are sitting in the gallery. Would you please welcome them.

Mr. Speaker, thank you again. Through you and to you to members of the Assembly I have a group of students and parents from the school district of Parkland, and I'll go through the list. It's about 11 people: Jo-Anne Robotka, parent, Curtis Robotka, grade 9, and Helena Robotka, grade 7, from Stony Plain Central; Lorraine Dressler and David Graham, also parents of a grade 11 student from Spruce Grove composite; Margo Kienlen, parent; Carolyn Howatt, parent, Courtney Howatt, grade 8, Ailsa Howatt, grade 3, Jared Howatt, grade 2, from Graminia, I guess it is. Please welcome them.

Thank you, sir.

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 40 brilliant grades 5 and 6 students from Holy Family Catholic school in my riding accompanied by their teachers Mr. Oberst, Mrs. Romeril, Miss Wecker, and a parent, Mrs. Kruszewski. They are all seated in the private gallery, and I want to thank them for coming to the Legislature. I request them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My guests have been previously introduced.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Reverend Adelina Pecchia. Reverend Pecchia is an ordained minister who has been working for the United Church for the past six years. She has worked as far away as Tanzania, in Vancouver's downtown east side, and has spent a number of years presiding over the United Church congregation in St. Paul, Alberta. Her extensive antipoverty and social justice work has helped many people in our community. Reverend Pecchia is seated in the public gallery. I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly John Ashton. John is a new Albertan, having been born and raised in Ontario and B.C. In his youth he was very active with the Presbyterian Young People's Society in southwestern Ontario. He graduated with a bachelor of arts from the University of Windsor in 2003 and went on to serve as an administrative assistant for NDP Member of Parliament Brian Masse. We are very delighted that John has agreed to join the NDP caucus as part of our caucus administrative staff. I would now ask that he rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Nameer Rahman. Nameer is originally from Dhaka, Bangladesh, and came to Canada to pursue his university education. Nameer was educated at the University of Windsor, where he received his MA in political science. While there he also served as the vice-president for university affairs for the students' association. Following graduation, he was the national canvass director for ACORN, a tenant advocacy group based in Toronto. Nameer has joined us as sessional researcher for the spring session and has already impressed us with his work ethic and excellent research skills. He is seated in the public gallery, and I will now request him to please rise to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: 1:10 **Members' Statements**

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I'll soon be calling on the first of six, but yesterday in the House I recognized those members who were elected six years ago yesterday on the sixth anniversary of their first election to the House and those members who were elected 10 years ago two days ago for their 10th anniversary in the House.

Today I'd like to recognize a member who has been in this Assembly for 15 years. To the hon. Member for Little Bow, congratulations and well done. It's a special day.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

### **Black History Month**

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to recognize Black History Month. This is my first opportunity to speak to this event, which occurred last month, before the House was in session.

Black History Month is an annual opportunity to celebrate the contributions made by members of the black community in Canada, which predate Samuel de Champlain's first voyage down the St. Lawrence. The Canadian Parliament officially recognized February as Black History Month in 1995 following a motion by the first black Canadian woman elected to Parliament, the Hon. Jean Augustine, MP for Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

Locally I would like to thank the National Black Coalition of Canada, Edmonton chapter, and all of the volunteers who put on various events profiling black history. In particular, I would like to commend Movements: the Afro-Caribbean Dance Ensemble, which staged a spectacular event at the Citadel Theatre that attracted over 500 people, Mr. Speaker.

The local celebrations culminated in the awards of distinction banquet on March 3, where a number of members of this region's black community were recognized for their contributions. I'm proud to say, Mr. Speaker, that one of those people was from my constituency, and that is Dr. Gwen Hooks, originally from Breton. Dr.

Hooks is a retired teacher and has written extensively about black history and black pioneers in Alberta. Another honouree is a man well known for his presence on the football field as a former member of the Edmonton Eskimos but who is also a dedicated staff member of our own Children's Services ministry, Mr. Rick Walters of Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, Black History Month is a great opportunity for members of the black community to both celebrate their history with pride and educate the wider community about their many contributions to Canadian society. I'm very proud to stand here as a member of this community.

Thank you very much.

### **Red Deer College Kings Volleyball Team**

**Mr. Doerksen:** Mr. Speaker, I stand in this Legislative Assembly today to honour one of the great teams in Alberta and Canadian history. Over the past 13 years the Red Deer College Kings men's volleyball team has won 10 Canadian college championships, including the last eight in a row. The Kings' postseason winning record is now 50-0.

This is a dynasty, Mr. Speaker. This is an Alberta Sports Hall of Fame team like none other. The Kings hold the Canadian record for the most championships and for the most consecutive championships. What makes this most remarkable is that seldom does the team field the same lineup from year to year. During this amazing run there is only one consistent factor: their coach, Keith Hansen. We are so proud of you, Keith.

This year's version of the Kings includes tournament MVP Gavin Schmitt, first all-star team power hitter Andrew Tallas, first all-star team setter Tanner Nault, and first all-star team libero Jason Waddell. Other members of the team are Pierre Rocque, Gilles Plouffe, Andrew Reed, Peter Shaw, Barrett Wenkowski, Jody teBulte, Kris Inglis, Spencer Leiske, James Sangster, and Colin Tajcna. Mr. Hansen is supported by assistant coaches Bob Rutz, Trevor Pikkert, Jeff Anderson, Adam Sillery, athletic therapist Heather Fletcher, and student trainer Cole Dziatkewich.

On behalf of myself, my colleague from Red Deer-North, Mary Anne Jablonski, and all Albertans we thank you for representing our province so well and for so long.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### **P3 or Not P3**

P3, or not P3: that is the question:

Whether 'tis nobler in the bind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous private fortune,

Or pay now to avoid a sea of future troubles,

And by planning end them? To prolong: to repose;

No more; and by our accountable action we end

The backlog of a thousand public project debts

That Albertans are heir to. To hose, to haze;

To evade: perchance to scheme: ay, there's the rob;

For in that creep of debt what schemes may come

When we have shuffled off this political coil,

Accountability gives us pause: there's the public expectation

That makes political calamity of so long life;

For who would bear their party's whips and scorns of time,

The opposition's right, the proud government's wrong,

The lack of government conscience bullies us all;

And enterprises of great pith and moment

With this regard their currents turn awry,  
And lose the name of action. – Soft you now!  
The Speaker tolls! Referee of these environs  
Be all their sins remember'd.

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

### Climate Change

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A hard act to follow.

Climate change and real progress. For over a decade the Alberta government has not done its job in addressing climate change. What is its job? Simply the job of governance: one, to outline the specific goals and justifications for its policy; two, to investigate objectively, without bias, what is known about the science of climate change; three, to scope out options and consult with experts on prudent action; four, to implement measures that first and foremost protect the health and well-being of people, the environment, and the economy into the future.

This government has repeatedly failed to do this. It has placed narrow, short-term economic interest above all other values, confused money and jobs with real progress. Genuine progress has to do with healthy, caring communities, clean rivers, bountiful environments, and a diverse, creative economy that supports people and the environment. Genuine progress does not result from blind faith in markets determining all outcomes.

Rather than consider the obvious and growing health and environmental impacts from burning 1,000 barrels of fuel per second on the planet, impacts that the public are bearing through our tax dollars, this government continues to subsidize fossil fuels and marginalize alternative clean energy. Successive environmental ministers sworn to protect the environment have spent millions of taxpayer dollars to attack the science of climate change and convince Albertans that reducing our emissions would destroy our economy.

To the contrary, Albertans are increasingly aware of the tremendous business opportunities in conservation as well as the value of carbon in enhancing agriculture, capturing methane, solar, wind, and geothermal power for our world. It's time to give these options, along with distributed electrical generation, the same incentives fossil fuels have received for decades. The rest of the world is leaving us behind, and it's time for government to do its job, including participating in global carbon markets and capping carbon emissions.

If this government is not prepared to face and reject its mindless addiction to fossil fuel, do the hard work of governance, and invest in genuine progress, it's time for people whose vision extends beyond the short term.

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

### Wheelchair Curling Champions

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour today to rise and recognize all the wheelchair curlers in Alberta. On March 2 through 4 at the Garrison Curling Club in Calgary four teams competed against each other for the second Alberta wheelchair championships. These teams were composed of individuals from northern and southern Alberta. It was a weekend filled with high spirits and lots of fun.

Wheelchair curling as a competitive sport is relatively new in Canada and around the world but is growing in popularity. Team 2 from Calgary was composed of Robert Johns, Dale Keith, Martin Purvis, and Andrea Wojcik and was coached by Bonnie Simons and Brian Rivers. I am pleased to announce that team 1 from Calgary

won the provincial championship. That team, Mr. Speaker, was Bruno Yizek, Bridget Wilson, Anne Hibberd, and Jack Smart and was coached by Ernie Comerford. They have won the honour of competing in the national championship over the Easter weekend in Ottawa, Ontario. I would wish all members of Calgary team 1 the best of luck next month.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud that three of the curlers and their coach, Ernie Comerford, reside in Calgary-Hays. These three individuals and all curlers involved are models for Albertans. They work hard, have an active lifestyle, and they have fun while they're doing it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:20

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

### Warner Girls Hockey School

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to rise to tell you about a small community where they truly love hockey, a community where hockey rules and where everything they do is hockey. A unique feature in this community that sets it apart from other communities on the prairies is that girls hockey rules, and everything they do is girls hockey.

This community of no more than 350 people has accomplished an amazing feat by being one of the five finalists from all across Canada for Kraft Hockeyville 2007. In fact, they're the only community from the prairies to be in the final five. Their dedication to hockey is what allowed them to beat out so many other great hockey communities to become one of the last five standing.

The Warner hockey school is doing great things, Mr. Speaker, for youth in southern Alberta, raising more than \$2 million in scholarships and financial aid since its inception. They've also been able to place every girl in the program in a college or university program, all with scholarships. In fact, one girl from last year and one from this year are nearly assured berths playing for Canada in the next Olympics.

Mr. Speaker, it's with great pleasure that I congratulate the community of Warner, Alberta, on being a finalist in this year's Kraft Hockeyville challenge. Their love of the sport is what has made their bid such a successful one, and it's my hope that all members of this Legislature and all Albertans will join with me in taking the time to vote as many times as possible to get the village of Warner crowned this year's winner. Please visit the website [hockeyville.cbc.ca](http://hockeyville.cbc.ca) from now until March 16 to vote for Warner. The winning community will receive the title of Hockeyville 2007 and the trophy as well as an opportunity to host a special NHL event and \$50,000 of upgrades for the arena. The winning community will also be featured on CBC in the fall.

Please vote and vote often for Warner. This little community has worked hard and is representing this province's proud tradition of community spirit.

hand: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a report called Alberta Needs Students. The report was produced by the University of Alberta Students' Union and makes a compelling argument for why tuition fees need to be significantly reduced in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table 12 letters that I have received urging the minister of health to fund Gardasil vaccinations for any woman aged 9 to 26 who wishes to have it. The vaccination is highly effective in preventing HPV infections, which can lead to cervical cancer. If Texas can do it, surely Alberta can.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is the Alberta Environment and Fisheries and Oceans Canada Water Management Framework: Instream Flow Needs and Water Management System for the Lower Athabasca River. Hopefully, this report will be read and it will be an important document in further approvals of oil sands projects in Fort McMurray.

The second document I have is a letter dated September 13, 2006, that I wrote to the former Minister of Finance, the hon. Shirley McClellan. It is in regard to the public accounts and excessive government grants to golf courses throughout Alberta totalling \$1.4 million.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from Ms Fay Becic. She is a single parent raising two daughters, 13 and 15, and also a guardian of a 12-year-old. She's not receiving child or spousal support. She's concerned about the legal aid system. Her legal costs are greater than her legal aid.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of petitions being tabled because of the wording, with the requisite number of copies, supporting Gary Hunt in his efforts for his son, Josh.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

head:

### Statement by the Speaker

#### Amendments to the Standing Orders

**The Speaker:** Well, we have an interesting situation that's already developed. Under the Standing Orders that were passed and approved last night, it says that the Oral Question Period should begin at 1:30, so we're ahead of schedule. So let me make some comments on these Standing Orders.

First of all, hon. members, you have on your desks green sheets of paper, and these green sheets of paper incorporate the orders that were changed and approved last night along with the existing ones. The ones that are new are the italicized parts, so that it gives you an idea of following through on them. As all members will know, we started today at 1 o'clock, and we'll rise tonight at 6 o'clock according to the rules we have.

The order of business, of course, is that the daily Routine will remain exactly the same – we went through the daily Routine today – save the Oral Question Period, which the Standing Orders that were passed last night said will commence at 1:30 p.m. There will be some discretion, obviously, that will have to be dealt with with respect to this matter, and if we arrive at this point in the agenda in the ensuing days, then we will begin the Oral Question Period ahead

of schedule. There also may be a situation where in the Routine we will arrive at situations where hon. members may be in one of the points in Routine, particularly Members' Statements, where the chair would not want to interrupt an hon. member if he or she has not concluded their ministerial statement, and we might just begin a few seconds or more after the fact.

This is going to cause some confusion for all of those thousands and thousands of people who tune into the Oral Question Period daily at 1:30 in the afternoon because they'll find that the whole proceedings are disrupted. If the television coverage does not begin until 1:30 p.m., they will not know what I'm saying right now. At 1:30 p.m. we will be into something, and the phones in my office will light up very profusely this afternoon, so we will have to convey to those thousands and thousands and thousands of people out there that there was a modification in the rules yesterday.

Tomorrow I'll make mention of the written questions and motions for returns change that was made last night as we approach that item of business tomorrow. Essentially what will happen is that if members of Executive Council have accepted a written question or a motion for a return, they will advise, the clerk will notify, and there'll be no further discussion of that particular written question or motion for a return. It will simply be dealt with by a member of Executive Council in the ensuing days and ensuing weeks. If, however, a written question or motion for a return demands an amendment or a rejection, then that will of course be dealt with on the subsequent Monday in the afternoon.

Now, this afternoon when we get into Orders of the Day, we will be getting in committee, so committee will not rise at 5:30; it will rise at 6 o'clock. Of course, in our provisions it says that the vote must be taken by 5:15. Well, effective today, the vote will be taken at 5:45. Because the Government House Leader has provided no advance notice and hasn't gone through the process yet of dealing with the House sitting tonight, it's impossible for the House to sit tonight unless unanimous consent of the hon. members is requested and given some time this afternoon to do that.

This is the start of the changes that are occurring in the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta, and there was a good discussion on it last night. Not all members agreed with the direction being taken by the majority of members. The *Hansard* deals with that. Applying these rules may require some flexibility, but most of all it will require the goodwill and the cooperation of all members, particularly in these early days. The chair would look forward to that, and he looks forward to working with all members as we apply these rules in a courteous, respectful, and professional manner.

At this point in time, Mr. Clerk, despite the fact that the television will not come on for another 30 seconds or so, I'll ask you to stand and make your announcement to the Routine item.

head: 1:30

#### Oral Question Period

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

#### Royalty Review Panel

**Dr. Taft:** Mr. Speaker, the principle of ensuring that private interests don't interfere with public duties is a sound one, one which Albertans expect to be upheld. With the government taking in over \$80 billion worth of nonrenewable resource revenues in the last 10 years alone, surely the stakes are high enough to defend this principle when it comes to the Royalty Review Panel. My question is to the Premier. Why is the Premier allowing panel members with clear conflicts of interest to be involved in the biggest policy issue facing this government?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday I thought I was clear in my response to the question raised with respect to the individuals that have been selected for this panel. They are professionals. They all have professional ethics when they do a review of this sort. I said that their job is to lay out all of the information for all Albertans to look at to decide for themselves whether the royalty regime that we have in place today is fair both to all Albertans in terms of owners and also to industry, that is investing billions of dollars.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A letter from the Minister of Energy just last month restated that the goal of the royalty regime is to, quote, encourage development, apparently without regard to whether this development is hurting Albertans' quality of life. So much for managing growth. My question is to the Premier. Given that the royalty regime is designed to ensure profitability of investments for oil companies, will the Premier admit that the outcome of this review could have a substantial impact on the future value of the stock options and other investments held by panel members?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, there was some comment made with respect to managing growth. Part of the growth pressures, of course, in the province of Alberta are related to the critical human resource shortage, some to infrastructure, obviously, and to housing. Those are three clear priorities that this government is moving very quickly on, and we will report to the House on the progress on those particular areas.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A complete and utter dodge. I'll repeat so that he can hear and think. Will the Premier admit that the outcome of this review could have a substantial impact on the future value of the stock options and other investments held by royalty panel members?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, again, the purpose of this review is to gather information, assess the information that comes from Albertans in terms of the royalty regime, and lay it out on the table so all Albertans can have a look at it. But if the hon. member is concerned that there may be changes in the investment climate, it may be because of the lack of clarity in terms of rules with respect to greenhouse gas emissions, and that in itself may drive away substantial investment. That's why last week our Minister of Environment tabled a bill with very clear emission targets, and at least that in itself is stabilizing the investment climate in the province of Alberta.

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

### Red Deer River Water Transfer

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Environment is currently reviewing an application for a water licence from the Red Deer River to service a massive project in the MD of Rocky View, just on the north edge of Calgary. This development will require large-scale water servicing, and the source of the water is the Red Deer River. This development is already proceeding at full tilt despite the fact the developers don't have a water licence. My question is to the Premier. On the leadership campaign the Premier called this project ridiculous and promised the people of Drumheller

that nothing would happen until he fully investigated the situation. So has the Premier investigated this, and what message does he have for the residents of Drumheller, who were never consulted and oppose the development?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I don't recall any comments made with respect to an application before the Minister of Environment or the quasi-judicial authority that's looking at it. With respect to this particular application I'll have the Minister of Environment answer because it is very specific to Balzac.

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to this particular application, but actually with respect to any application, there's a very specific process. The application is considered by a director within the department. That director considers all of the relevant factors related to stream flow, related to the amount of water that's being requested, related to the possible impact on directly affected persons and makes a decision. That decision has not yet been made on this particular application. When it is, it is appealable to the Environmental Appeal Board, and the appeal board then makes a recommendation to the minister, who will be responsible for making a final decision. For that reason, I cannot become embroiled at this stage. At the end of the day I may have to make the final decision.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The developers, the United Horsemen of Alberta and Ivanhoe Cambridge, started work on the project last summer and are moving ahead on construction fast, probably spending well over a million dollars a week. But there is, of course, one glaring problem: they have no water licence. To the Premier: will the Premier, who repeatedly makes claims of being open and accountable, tell the people of Drumheller, of Red Deer, of Stettler, of the whole Red Deer River basin who in his government has promised the developers that they will get their water?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. Leader of the Opposition just heard a very good explanation in terms of the process. There is a process followed. I guess the best way for me to explain it is that if there's a quasi-judicial authority and, as well, appeal, elected members, especially the minister, cannot make comments with respect to the question before the quasi-judicial authority. It would be similar if you were sitting as a judge in the courtroom, and you saw somebody come in and give the verdict without even hearing the evidence. There's a process to follow.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In September 2006 the MD of Rocky View approved a memorandum of understanding with Ivanhoe Cambridge and the United Horsemen to confirm in writing the MD's intent to deliver water, but it is actually the province, not the MD, under the Water Act who is responsible for all the water in Alberta. A municipality cannot make commitments to deliver water they do not already have through an existing licence. A second key piece of evidence pointing to a secret deal: members of our own caucus were told flat out that a water guarantee had been made by the province to the MD. My question is to the Premier. The evidence is clear, so it's time to be open and accountable with

Albertans. Will he make public the province's secret deal to provide water to this development?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, how could it be secret? All of a sudden he's quoting some internal documents. Let it be clear that with respect to the issue of the MD of Rocky View, whatever business they've conducted with a developer is their responsibility. That's their bailiwick. That has nothing to do with the province. The province has a completely different process. Again, if the opposition has not heard clearly, then the Minister of Environment can reiterate the whole process.

#### **Speaker's Ruling Preambles to Supplementary Questions**

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, before I recognize the third Official Opposition member for a question, I think that there needs to be some clarification in here. The rules that dictate the question period remain Standing Order 13(1). There's no provision for preambles in second questions or third questions, and on three occasions in those last two preambles were provided. There's no change. Question period operates the same way it did yesterday and the day before, and until the Standing Orders are changed, nothing – nothing – changes that.

Third Official Opposition main question.

**Ms Blakeman:** A point of order under 13(2).

**The Speaker:** Sure. We'll deal with it at the end of the time.

Hon. Member for St. Albert, you were to be recognized as the third Official Opposition main question. Just remember what I've just been saying.

#### **Teachers' Labour Dispute**

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The backdrop of every strike is the fact that school boards are continually asked to do more with less. As we head into the summer, when as many as 80 per cent of the school boards will be in contract negotiations, we need to know now whether the school boards will be empowered by the government to make the best possible choices for students and staff, who are crippled by the perpetual lack of funding. To the Minister of Education. School boards have a lot of responsibilities and not enough funding. How important a role does the minister think overall education funding plays in whether or not a strike happens and how long it takes to resolve it?

1:40

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure I understood the last part of the question, but I will say that the budget will be coming out on the 19th of April. At that time we will know exactly what the funding is for the coming year. But let's make one thing clear: currently education is funded in this province to the tune of around \$5 billion, 97 per cent of which goes to the school boards. So the comments made by the hon. member, frankly, are not correct.

**Mr. Flaherty:** Well, I failed that achievement test.

Let me try another one. Will the minister consider lobbying for funding adequacy in the upcoming budget, a strategy that would make sure that all necessary costs, including instruction, are funded properly so that school boards are not left battling with teachers over inadequate resources? Will you help us, Mr. Minister?

**Mr. Liepert:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I did.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me try the Premier. Maybe I can get a little more insight from the Premier. I'm going to switch my focus. Mr. Premier, the people in the Parkland school division have been hearing one thing from the Minister of Education, who favours mediation, and something else from another minister, who is pushing for the disputes inquiry board. Can the Premier share with us the province's position and how this government plans to proceed as we nearly hit one month into the strike – can you help us? – and what direction the government is going to take?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I believe it's not one month. It's day 17, if I hear correctly. We are paying attention very carefully to the issue in Parkland. I do, though, believe strongly in, of course, the role of school boards. They're elected for a purpose, and that is to ensure that our students are educated. They also have a role to play in terms of administering the dollars that are available to them. We're watching the situation very carefully, obviously, but the ministers are in close contact, and so are the two MLAs that answer to the Parkland school board as well. So we'll just watch this as it unveils over the next few days.

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

#### **Holy Cross Care Centre**

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health and Wellness admits that for several weeks he ignored safety code violations, including the failure to conduct an annual fire inspection, which placed 42 seniors at risk in the Holy Cross Care Centre in Calgary. The Holy Cross situation is an example of the Tory government's failed experiment in private health care. One of the private shareholders of that institution is John Huang, who is also running for vice-president of the PC Party. To the minister: why did the minister fail to take immediate action to ensure the safety of 42 vulnerable seniors by ordering their evacuation as soon as he received the report?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, the Calgary regional health authority has taken all appropriate steps in this circumstance. When they were made aware of the fire and safety code inspection, they followed up with the owner of the building, and appropriate steps were taken, as I understand it, as I've been informed, to ensure that fire and safety concerns did not endanger the residents. Some of the steps that have been taken, to my understanding, would be as is normal in a case like this: to post a fire watch, to have people there 24 hours a day to be able to have that fire watch in place. As I understand it, that is what is required by the fire and safety code if the sprinkler and fire alarm systems are in question.

So they followed up. They've done what any business would do, what any prudent public institution would do. They made sure that while the owner was being requested to make corrections to deal with the violations that had been identified, the safety of the residents was not in question. When it got to a point where they felt that they needed to take the residents out of the situation – again, it's not an emergency that they need to do an immediate evacuation. But they felt that the violations were not being dealt with on a timely basis, so they took the next logical step, which was to consult with the residents and let them know that over a course in a prudent period of time they would be moving them out of the residence. It's not something that anybody is in peril. There are procedures in

place, but as I understand it, they believed that the owner was not moving fast enough to deal with the issues, so they took the next step available to them, which was to talk to the residents about moving them to other locations.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, the minister is very blasé about a fire hazard affecting vulnerable seniors. Will the minister admit that this government puts the interest of wealthy and well-connected Tories such as Mr. Huang ahead of vulnerable seniors, patients, and their families?

**Mr. Hancock:** Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. That is an absolutely fallacious statement and quite inappropriate. The Calgary regional health authority has been on top of the situation, has been monitoring the situation, and has been taking every step that they felt was appropriate and necessary to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of the residents in that facility. It has nothing to do with the politics of any individual. It has everything to do with the health and safety of the residents. This hon. member should not be drawing that inference.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, it's their health and safety that this minister has ignored.

When will this minister admit that the government's experiments with private health care have failed and bring the Holy Cross back into the public system?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, there are a number of circumstances around this province where private operators, where nongovernmental organizations, where not-for-profit organizations provide long-term care to citizens of this province and do it extremely well. Lots of situations. There is a mix of service delivery, and long-term care for Albertans is delivered in many different models across the province.

This situation has nothing to do with profit and nothing to do with delivery. It has everything to do with making sure that that facility has the appropriate sprinkler system, the appropriate fire alarm system, and the appropriate attendants there to care for the individuals involved. If there was any question that any of those individuals was in imminent danger, they would be moved immediately.

Mr. Speaker, the health authority has taken the appropriate steps, and they've taken the appropriate steps in the interests of their patients, not in the question of profit.

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

### Physician Supply

**Rev. Abbott:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that a tentative two-year amending agreement has been reached between the Alberta government, the Alberta Medical Association . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, sorry. I'll let you repeat your whole question once we can have some calm return to this Assembly. It is only day 4.

Hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, begin right at the start, please.

**Rev. Abbott:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that a tentative two-year amending agreement has been reached between the Alberta government, the Alberta Medical Association, and the regional health authorities. My question is for the Minister of Health

and Wellness. Will this agreement cure the shortage of physicians in the province, and specifically how will rural physicians benefit from the agreement?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, no agreement is a cure-all for the challenges that we face in terms of physician supply or, for that matter, the supply of all health care professionals, but I really believe that this agreement will take us a long way in the right direction. Every province is experiencing a shortage of physicians. This agreement will help us build on our past success in retaining the physicians we have, making it appropriate to attract and retain physicians at a much higher rate than we have.

Mr. Speaker, we have over 6,000 practising physicians under the trilateral master agreement, and we attracted about 250 new physicians this year. There's a retention component in this agreement which will encourage physicians to stay in practice and to stay in Alberta. There are provisions on the clinical stabilization which will help us deal with specific, targeted areas. So this agreement will allow trilateral partners to respond more quickly to areas that are under pressure.

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

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will the new clinical stabilization initiative that you just mentioned in this agreement address the extraordinary increases in physician practice costs across Alberta, and how will it help communities with very serious health system pressures, such as Drayton Valley has?

1:50

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the clinical stabilization initiative is a very, very important part of this agreement. It's new, and in agreement with the doctors, the health authorities, and Alberta Health and Wellness, the government of Alberta, it will allow us to target specific areas where there's a need. If there are barriers to success because the local climate will not support a full physician/clinic process or where there needs to be some support to help pull together a primary care network or if costs have gone through the roof, there's an ability to direct resources in that area.

It's not just about rural areas. It's also in areas where community clinics or physicians in the community are meeting an exceedingly high rate of growth in their costs. Let's remember that they're all paid out of the public purse, and they have not the ability to raise their own rates, so we need to be able to have the flexibility to go back in the system with those extra costs.

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

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: how will this agreement advance the attraction and retention of young doctors in Alberta, again, especially in rural Alberta?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of pieces to the agreement. One is the provision which will help physicians join the electronics health records process, to set up their office and put in place the necessary computerized equipment so that they can be part of a comprehensive electronic health record. Secondly, it will help locate physicians in rural areas. If there are costs of establishing, costs of attracting or building the practice, it will help us to target resources in those areas. The details of the

program still have to be worked out. We have an agreement with the AMA to do that and hopefully to do that prior to the beginning of June, but it will be targeted to retention and attraction.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

### Red Deer River Water Transfer

(continued)

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the stated goals of the new Premier is to govern with honesty and transparency, consulting with Albertans and listening to the wishes of Albertans. Here's the problem. This government has tried to push through the Balzac water transfer without consulting anyone in the Red Deer basin, and that's undeniable. Just ask Red Deer, Drumheller, and Stettler, none of whom were consulted and have publicly stated so. However, I quote from *Hansard* the Minister of Environment in this House on August 31: "The people of Drumheller know very well what's going on." To the Minister of Environment: since the town council has stated in Drumheller that they had no clue as to what was happening at the time of his statement, where is the honesty and accountability in this process?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, I'm more than happy to deal with questions that arise from a statement of fact that's within *Hansard*. I do have to advise the member that the context of the answer was when this individual was minister of municipal affairs, not Minister of Environment. As such it was my understanding and it still is my understanding – and I stand by my words – that the town of Drumheller had been contacted and was aware of the issue.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With climate change and the real fear of water shortage, including groundwater, in this province Albertans want to know that your department is not simply relying on staff reviews. What experts are being consulted in the Red Deer River watershed around groundwater impacts, climate change impacts, and cumulative impacts along that course presently and in the future to protect future generations?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, what the member refers to is precisely what the government is moving forward on with our Water for Life strategy. There are a number of different factors that come into dealing with allocation of water on a long-term basis within Alberta. In this specific application the process that is being used is the same process that is used with any other application. The director whose responsibility it is within Environment makes his decision based upon a myriad of different factors, many of which the member has referred to, and then makes a decision based upon whether or not the issuance of an additional licence would impact on either the ecosystem – the aquatics, nature of the stream – or directly affected persons.

As I explained earlier, that decision has not yet been made. Those factors are being taken under consideration as I speak.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is again to the Environment minister. What experts are being consulted in climate change and groundwater impacts and cumulative impact assessment beyond your staff to assess the true impacts of this into the future?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the answer in short is none of the above, the reason being that this is being dealt with in the context of one application. We don't go into that degree of research in dealing with individual decisions. That's why the Water for Life strategy is so important, and that's why we have just recently announced that the in-stream flow targets for the Athabasca River have now had that degree of consideration, and we have made the necessary decision for that. In time we will make the same kind of in-stream flow analysis needed for the Red Deer River.

**Mr. Doerksen:** Mr. Speaker, the users of the Red Deer River are, in fact, very concerned about the water licence application, that is going to be used to support the development at the MD of Rocky View. What's particularly disturbing is the fact that there is a waterline that goes 500 metres from the city of Calgary right by this development, and there's sufficient capacity in their water licence to service this development. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Does the minister have the authority under the Water Act to intervene in this licence application and insist that a solution be found from the existing Bow River water licence?

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated earlier, there is a very specific process involved in the granting of water licences, so the short answer to the question is no.

The longer answer and the explanation, as I explained earlier, is that it would be inappropriate for me to step into this situation and try to influence either the director or the Environmental Appeal Board when at the end of the day I as minister am responsible for making the final decision. So how could I be seen to be influencing those who are responsible for making this decision if I'm going to be making some kind of an impartial decision at the end of the day?

**Mr. Doerksen:** Mr. Speaker, also to the Minister of Environment: in the unfortunate event that a water licence were to be granted for this, what appeal mechanisms are in place under the act for users of the Red Deer River to appeal a decision?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly the appeal mechanism has been outlined in my answer to previous questions. Any decision whether to issue the licence or not to issue the licence, as the case may be, can be appealed to the Environmental Appeal Board, and that will then result in a recommendation that would come forward to the minister.

I want to point out to the hon. member, though, that I recognize that there are unique circumstances in this application because this is the first application that has come forward for water out of the Red Deer River since the allocation has been closed down for further licences out of the Oldman and South Saskatchewan and Bow River basin. It's for that reason that I have asked the Water Council to have a look at the existing policies to determine whether or not those existing policies should remain in place given the new circumstances that we're dealing with.

**Mr. Doerksen:** My final question is to the minister of municipal affairs. Can he tell me what authority he has to intervene in the impasse between the MD of Rocky View and the city of Calgary to find a solution to this issue?

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The



intermunicipal dispute resolution initiative was introduced in 1999. This is a voluntary service which includes mediation, financial support, and mediators that are made available in a dispute resolution type of situation. To access the program, one of the municipalities must send a request to the ministry requesting such a service. I want to suggest to you that that has not happened, but if there was such a situation where the request was made, our mediators would come in. They would assist the feasibility of the situation and deal with the issues.

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

**2:00** **Holy Cross Care Centre**  
(continued)

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This may sound like an echo, but it is not. The problems at the Holy Cross Manor illustrated the consequences of this government's decision to deregulate long-term care. As the health minister pointed out yesterday, the assisted living residents are not technically under the jurisdiction of the Calgary health region. To the health minister: will the minister explain why these assisted living residents aren't receiving the same safety protection by the government as the long-term care residents living in the same building?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the whole area of assisted living is outside the scope of the health department, so the minister of seniors and community programs may want to supplement.

In essence, the relationship between people in assisted living is a relationship where people have, as I understand it, contracted with the owner of a building like they might in any apartment building, but they've contracted for a living accommodation with some supplemental services. That is a private relationship between the people that have moved into that assisted living facility, renting space to live with supplementary services, which is quite different than long-term care, which falls into a health and accommodation facility.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you. Then in light of that, is this the position of this government: that residents housed on the floors that receive public funding should receive different levels of care than residents housed on the floors that are privately funded?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, when one builds a building, one may have a multitude of uses for the building. You might have a building where you could have normal apartments that anybody might rent, and then you might have another level. In fact, one of the key innovations in housing for seniors and others in this province and elsewhere is the whole idea of integrated aging in place so that you can move through the types of accommodation that you need and the support services you need. There are many seniors and others in this province who rent apartments or own their own homes and might need some assistance in terms of care coming in, and others live in facilities that have intensive care. There's absolutely no reason why that full continuum can't exist in the same building.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the answer has clearly indicated how complex this question is after deregulation.

Will the minister commit to legislating clear standards for anyone in care to apply equally across this province?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have standards of care, but it should be clear that just because a person is living in what might be called an assisted living facility doesn't mean they're in care.

**An Hon. Member:** You don't care.

**Mr. Hancock:** I care very deeply about Albertans, and one of the things that we want to do to make sure that Albertans have the opportunity to stay healthy is to respect their individual desires and wishes and their ability to care for themselves. There's a full continuum of housing, and it's not for the government or anyone else to take away people's independence when they can have it.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Provincial Park User Fees**

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fish Creek park is the only provincial park in the country that is located in an urban centre. Thousands of Calgarians enjoy this park 12 months of the year for its beautiful walking and biking trails and Sikome Lake. Recently there has been some musing about establishing a user fee to access this park and other provincial parks in this province. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. On behalf of my constituents and the many Calgarians that enjoy Fish Creek park, are you, Mr. Minister, looking at establishing user fees?

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

**Mr. Goudreau:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, as the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek indicated, you know, she has a right to be concerned. I, too, have been receiving a number of calls on the musings that were spread that we might charge user fees for day use of our provincial parks. I need to say that we are certainly not contemplating day-use fees to use trails in our provincial parks, including Fish Creek provincial park. We do charge some fees for camping, including some additional fees for some services, including electricity, water, and sewer services, sometimes horse corral utilization. I need to say that those fees are very comparable to other public parks across the province, but it's certainly not our intent at this stage to charge day-use fees.

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

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Mr. Minister, do you have plans to undertake a review to introduce fees in provincial parks?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to improving Alberta's quality of life. We want people to get out in nature, and we want people to enjoy the beautiful spots that this great province of Alberta has to offer. As part of ensuring that outdoor recreational opportunities are available, I will be developing a plan for provincial parks to accommodate population growth and the increased recreational needs of our people. There will be a review of fees but certainly not to indicate that we will be charging day-use fees. As well, we're incorporating and going through the land-use framework, and certainly that will no doubt be part of the discussion.

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

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is also to the same minister. Given that Albertans take pride in their parks and they think of them as tourist destinations, what priority is this government placing on our parks?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Well, Mr. Speaker, since 2004 the Alberta government has invested a considerable amount of money in our provincial parks. We have spent some money to help repair and replace park facilities and some of the infrastructure within the parks. I need to say that this year marks the 75th anniversary of provincial parks in Alberta. In addition to hosting a number of special celebrations, including Robert Bateman prints commemorating Alberta parks' 75th anniversary – these prints will go on sale fairly quickly – we will be having a lot of activities in support of those parks.

Thank you.

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

#### Oil and Gas Activity in Rumsey Natural Area

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to protecting Alberta parks, this Tory government preaches about improving quality of life and respecting the environment, but then a foreign company is granted approval to drill for coal-bed methane in the Rumsey natural area, which is protected parkland. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Why is this minister allowing the interests of a foreign company to be put ahead of the environment and Albertans' enjoyment of their land?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, I think I did cover that yesterday. Again, I need to reiterate that the Rumsey block that the hon. member is talking about includes two protected areas. Certainly, no oil or gas activity is allowed in the ecological reserve of the Rumsey park, but in the natural area of Rumsey energy commitments are subject to the conditions that were established in 1993, and we will honour those conditions.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** How does this plan fulfill the minister's mandate from the Premier to develop a plan for parks and improve the quality of life?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Well, Mr. Speaker, if we go back, from 1995 to 2001 you will notice that we put over 2 million hectares of land under protection and 81 new and 13 expanded areas. Certainly, I need to re-emphasize that for the areas that were established under special places, we also agreed to honour the existing oil and gas commitments as a matter of fairness. We are continuing to add to our parks area. We are interested in expanding our parks and camping facilities in the province, and we'll continue to do that particular work.

2:10

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Well, if this area is not protected from drilling wells, what exactly is it protected from? What's the point of designating land as protected if American companies are given permission to plunder it? Is that the plan to protect Albertans?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, certainly, we need to, as I had also indicated yesterday, strike a balance between protection of our parks

and the economic activity that needs to go there. Part of it is to honour the existing commitments that we had before we started preserving additional acreages, and the honouring of those commitments is extremely important to Albertans as well.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

#### Postsecondary Education Costs

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last May, following an extensive review of the postsecondary education system, the government released a report called A Learning Alberta, the final report of the steering committee, which was followed a few months later by a much-trumpeted affordability framework for postsecondary education. As the months have passed, however, we have seen only the most minimum possible steps toward implementing elements of that framework. Meanwhile, students are going further into debt, accessibility eludes most postsecondary institutions and many students across the province, and a tight labour market continues to bleed students from pursuing advanced education.

My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. I suspect this might be the first question the minister is going to be addressing. Given that the affordability framework promised last November to reduce interest rates on student loans, will the minister commit to reducing interest rates on student loans to prime without further delay? Yes or no.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member. This is my first question of this session, so I'm pleased to respond.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member refers to the A Learning Alberta framework and the affordability framework, which we've been working on since November. We've brought in a few elements of that framework, including what was a key element, being the tuition policy, and something that was brought forward by medical residents in the province, being the deferment of interest while they were in residency, as well as for maternity periods of time for students studying, the interest being waived. I might add that we recently announced a tripling of the bursary amounts for disabled students under the affordability policy.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, the items which the hon. member is asking for are really budget items. They're items where we don't want to be doing a whole bunch of in-year spending and a whole bunch of in-year announcements. We want these things to be budgeted out for the whole year.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll wait for the budget and hold our breath.

Given that the cost-of-living allowance for a typical student living away from home doesn't even cover the cost of residence at either the University of Alberta or the University of Calgary, what steps is the minister taking to eliminate the gap between actual living costs and student finance assistance living allowances as promised in the framework?

**Mr. Horner:** Again, Mr. Speaker, these are items that are ongoing, long-term type commitments that the government would have to

make as they relate to our fiscal position, i.e. the budget. It's tough for me to talk about what might or might not be in the budget.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think students have waited long enough for these steps to be taken.

Given that this government's tuition fee policy leaves mandatory fees in postsecondary institutions totally unregulated, will the minister assure close to 200,000 students in the system that he will not allow rampant increases in their mandatory fees?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we're in the process of reviewing all of the recommendations from the affordability framework as well as other items that the student councils and student bodies have brought forward to us. I might say that the council of presidents of student unions told me that the cost-of-living allowance that's involved in the affordability framework was probably the number one priority for them. We are going to work with the institutions to try to keep our costs down as much as we possibly can. We are going to work with the institutions from a Campus Alberta approach, you know, as it relates to a plan to manage growth pressures, so that we can increase the quality of life for all Albertans.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

#### Enhanced Feed Ban for Cattle

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent years Canada's beef industry has faced many challenges. Last year the federal government announced that they would be implementing an enhanced feed ban effective July 12 of this year that would ensure that no more potential BSE materials or SRM, specified risk materials, could be used in any animal feeds, pet foods, or fertilizers. This left the industry scrambling for a desperate solution. Yesterday there was a joint federal and provincial announcement committing about \$40 million to Alberta to help our beef industry to comply and adapt to the federal government's enhanced feed ban. So my question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Can the minister tell us what the long-term benefits of this funding will be?

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

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very quickly, I'd like to kick off with three short-term benefits. The first one is helping industry comply; the second, reducing costs; and the third one is adding value to what might otherwise be just waste material. That in itself extrapolates out to a long-term benefit.

But this is also about increasing market access for Canadian beef. The bottom line is that we want to speed up the elimination of BSE in Canada. This comes on the heels of some pretty good news, which are steps to fully restore the U.S. beef trade and towards controlled risk status under the OIE, which gives us the same control status as the U.S. Perhaps more importantly, though, the cost of compliance will not be piggybacked on the primary producers.

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

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. With the federal feed ban starting on July 12, which is not very far away, does this program come in time to help the industry to get ready for this event?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the enhanced feed ban is a federal initiative, and they have set the deadline for us. We didn't wait for a signed agreement. We worked with the industry for months to get their input and build a program that makes sense to the industry. We will however have to grandfather in some investments that these people have already made. We're moving first on the most immediate piece: infrastructure for the main facilities for the SRM.

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

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the same minister. I would like to know if the government of Alberta is going to enhance or supplement this federal initiative.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, Alberta is recognized as a leader in this area. It shouldn't surprise anyone that we're going above and beyond the usual commitments. This is a 60-40 cost-share program with the federal government. Alberta's commitment to that is \$13 million, but we are investing an additional \$7 million. We know that the industry also has operational costs that aren't covered under the federal program, and funding research for a new value-added solution is always a cost. But the primary producers need that relief, and Alberta is here to assist.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

#### Health Workforce Strategy

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the health minister guaranteed in conjunction with the advanced education minister that an aggressive health workforce strategy was being produced that would be released in spring 2006. But in June 2006 the health minister told Grande Prairie doctors that releasing a workforce strategy by the fall was the number one priority. These promises were made almost a year ago, and shortly before the Tory leadership race led to a six-month hiatus in health policy decision-making. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Can the Deputy Premier explain to Albertans why this government let Tory party business interfere with making essential improvements to the health system?

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, unfortunately, in the order of precedence provided to me, there's no individual identified as the Deputy Premier. Perhaps the member would direct it to a particular member.

2:20

**Ms Blakeman:** How interesting: there's no Deputy Premier.

Well, then I will direct a question to the minister of health. Knowing that the work . . .

**The Speaker:** Okay. You've directed the question to the Minister of Health and Wellness. We've heard the question.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay.

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the hon. member will know that on my appointment as Minister of Health and Wellness and upon being sworn in, I was delivered a mandate letter by the Premier, and one of the mandates had to deal with the implementation of a workforce strategy. It is one of the four

mandates that I have to report on within six months and within 12 months report progress on. So there's a structure in place to make sure that we accomplish that.

I can assure the hon. member that a considerable amount of work has been done on health workforce strategies with the RHAs and other service providers across the province but also in collaboration and co-operation with the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. We are working together to ensure that a workforce strategy is implemented, and in fact projects have been undertaken already in that regard.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Maybe he should have been the Premier.

To the minister of health. Can the minister then tell us: now that we've had all of these delays, and we've had repeated announcements of when we're going to get a health workforce strategy, when do we get a health workforce strategy? Give us a date.

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there are number of elements to the workforce strategy. One, of course, is a budgetary element. Another is with respect to placements, which the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology will be making announcements on in due course over the spring. Some of the issues in the workforce strategy are being worked on as we speak. But I can assure the hon. member that I with my two colleagues am taking the workforce strategy through a policy process in government as we speak, and it will be tabled in the House once it's gone through the review of cabinet policy committee, caucus, and government in the same careful and prudent way that we deal with all policy issues in this government.

**Ms Blakeman:** Careful, prudent, and much delayed.

All right. Again to the same minister, standing in for the Deputy Premier, standing in for the Premier: can the minister guarantee that all of the plans for expanding spaces for health workers in postsecondary institutions will include the necessary infrastructure, equipment, and faculty to get the job done?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not, in fact, standing in for the Premier or a Deputy Premier or anyone else. I was answering questions in my capacity as Minister of Health and Wellness because they were questions which were appropriate for the Minister of Health and Wellness, and I'm certain the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology may wish to answer questions with respect to his department.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'd love to. As the hon. minister of health has stated, the three departments are working collaboratively on developing the plan of what is the demand, what is the current capacity, what is the gap that we have to fill. Indeed, we've been talking to the regional health authorities. We've been talking to the occupational community. We've been talking to industry as a whole to figure out and to make sure that what we're designing as our plan is going to be long-term sustainable and, more importantly, is going to fill the need. That's something that the three of us have to work together on, and in due course, as my colleague the minister of health has mentioned, we'll be making some announcements on the progress.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, today that was 78 questions and answers. We had 84 on Thursday, 88 yesterday, and 78 today. So the chair apologizes that he could not work in more members because that's certainly the intent.

Now, the Official Opposition House Leader on a point of order.

#### Point of Order

#### Preambles to Supplementary Questions

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the House leaders' agreement should be in effect as of today. It was tabled last Thursday, and the motion that was debated and accepted last night does specifically refer to the House leaders' agreement. I'll quote from page 22 of *Alberta Hansard* from March 8, which was when that motion was put on the floor: "the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, in order to give effect to the March 7, 2007, House Leaders' Agreement." So I would argue that that is the totality of the agreement, and the Standing Orders changes were only needed to bring them into line with what was proposed in the House leaders' agreement. That should not cancel the remaining clauses of the agreement itself. I know that the Speaker had concerns, but under 13(2) could he explain his reasoning for not implementing the full House leaders' agreement today?

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, this parliament makes its decision on the basis of motions that are presented to it, motions that are provided to the knowledge of all members, motions that are there for all members to see, study, and review, motions that are debatable in the Assembly. Once those motions are approved, in essence that becomes the rule of the Assembly.

There was nothing in the motion last night which refers to a House leaders' agreement. In the House leaders' agreement, which was signed by three individuals, there is no motion that has been presented to the House that this chairman is aware of that would suggest that the totality of the House leaders' agreement must be put into play. There is a section in the conclusion of the House leaders' agreement that there may be several motions that may be required to deal with any particular matter. Until those other motions come forward which may deal with certain things, the current provisions will apply.

Very clearly, even if the House leaders' agreement was to be intended, there is absolutely nothing in the House leaders' agreement which provides for preambles in secondary or supplementary questions. There is one section, 3(a)(ii), I do believe, which basically says that we should try and apply a 45-second rule. That's what we've been doing in this House. On March 3, 2005, I believe, and on March 8, 2005, the chair made long statements, which are recorded, that basically say that we try and abide by a 45-second rule. Nowhere in any of this does it suggest that there should be preambles in the second or subsequent questions. That has never been the case.

In fact, most rules and most provisions you'll find are very clear that there are no preambles on secondary questions. That was certainly reiterated by the chair in the memo that he sent to all members just a few days ago. Certainly, if one wanted to highlight and review *Marleau and Montpetit*, it very, very clearly says that preambles are not to apply to supplementary questions.

So how that could have been extrapolated today, from yesterday to today, that is beyond this chair. The chair did point out in a memo to three House leaders that he would welcome an opportunity to raise a number of questions with them for clarification, but at the moment the only thing that has changed in the operation of this House is the motion that was approved by all members after debate in this Assembly. If members choose to will themselves to three

individuals and then have a motion to that effect, then that will become the rule of the House and that will be applied in the rule of the House.

But in this particular situation there are 82 members in this House who are viewed by the chair to be equal – equal – no one more important than the other, no one less important than the other, all with rights, all with privileges, and each and every member must understand that their rights and privileges will be protected by this chair all of the time. There will never be an opportunity, as long as this chair is the chair, to allow individuals to become secondary citizens in this particular Assembly. The MLA is supreme in this Assembly.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

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

**The Sergeant-at-Arms:** Order!

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits interim supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, I now wish to table the 2007-08 interim supply estimates. These interim supply estimates will provide spending authority to the Legislative Assembly and the government from April 1, 2007, to July 1, 2007, inclusive. During that period it is anticipated that the spending authorization will have been provided for the entire fiscal year ending March 31, 2008. When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$9.1 billion in expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$401 million for capital investment, \$45 million for nonbudgetary disbursements, and \$463 million for lottery fund payments.

2:30

Interim supply amounts are based on departments' needs to fund government programs and services until July 1. While many payments are monthly, other payments are due at the beginning of each quarter and at the beginning of the fiscal year. Some payments are seasonal.

head: **Government Motions**

10. Mr. Snelgrove moved:

Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2007-08 interim supply estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. Shall we call the question?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Government Motion 10 carried]

11. Mr. Snelgrove moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(9) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2007-08 interim supply estimates shall be two days.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, this motion under Standing Orders is not debatable, so I will call the question on the motion put forward by the hon. President of the Treasury Board.

[Government Motion 11 carried]

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

head: **Supplementary Supply Estimates 2006-07, No. 2  
General Revenue Fund**

**The Deputy Chair:** As agreed, at 5:45 or before that if there's no one wanting to speak further, a vote will be held.

I'll now call upon the Government House Leader to move the estimates.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would move the estimates as set out in the supplementary supply 2006-2007 estimates, No. 2, and in particular move the estimates of the Department of Advanced Education and Technology in the amount of \$107,100,000, Agriculture and Food in the amount of \$50 million, Finance in the amount of \$46,570,000, Health and Wellness in the amount of \$147 million, Municipal Affairs and Housing in the amount of \$42,846,000, and the transfer under section 2 of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 from Infrastructure and Transportation to Service Alberta in the amount of \$530,000.

The amount of expense and equipment/inventory purchases to be voted under section 1 of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007, \$393,516,000, and the amount of capital investment to be transferred under section 2 of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007, \$530,000.

Members of Executive Council are here to respond to any inquiries by members or questions by members of the House or to receive any comments with respect to the estimates of each of those departments. Of course, I'd be more than pleased to deal with the estimates as set out for the Department of Health and Wellness.

In brief, with respect to that particular set of estimates I can indicate that the \$147 million that's requested as supplementary estimates for Health and Wellness applies entirely to a provision for the trilateral agreement, and I'm very pleased to say that we have a tentative agreement in place, subject to ratification by doctors. The agreement was approved by the AMA's representative forum on Saturday for sending out to its members.

We participated in a joint press conference today with the chair of the health authorities board, the president of the AMA, and myself announcing some of the highlights of the agreement. The \$147 million that we're talking about here applies to the increases and changes which would be in place if that agreement is approved for the period covering the 2006-2007 fiscal year. Of course, the remainder of it will have to be in subsequent estimates.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, the chair does not have any priority identified as to which department goes first, so it's open. At

this stage I guess we'll recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, thanks for the promotion, but probably just the House leader.

**The Deputy Chair:** Sorry. The House leader.

**Ms Blakeman:** There we go.

My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Now, I'm curious because you have just confirmed that essentially the money that you were talking about at the media conference this morning with the trilateral agreement is reflected here in the \$147 million. As set out on page 22 of the supplementary supply, it actually says, "This Supplementary Amount of \$147,000,000 is requested to fund the higher-than-budgeted cost of physician services," which is a pretty sweeping statement, so I'm going to try and nail you down to a bit more detail there.

Now, I noticed in the media release that on the second page it notes that in fact this agreement has not been accepted. The Alberta Medical Association's board is recommending that the membership vote for the financial agreement, and I'm quoting directly: "The ratification process is expected to take seven to eight weeks because of the time it takes to mail the tentative agreement and a ballot to each physician, and then have the ballot returned."

Now, if I look at the calendar and I go forward by seven to eight weeks, I'm looking at the very end of April. This is a supplementary supply budget, so if this trilateral agreement is not ratified by one of the parties, how is it in effect and expending \$147 million inside of the fiscal year 2006-07?

I noted the monies that were talked about this morning: \$47 million for the retention benefit, which essentially is \$8,000 bonuses for full-time or part-time physicians to get them to stay working; and another allocation of \$56.5 million for the clinical stabilization initiatives, although I'm wondering how that's included in this \$147 million because, in fact, this morning they said that there were no details on that program. They didn't seem to be sure about how it would actually work. The final portion of what was announced: I think the money this morning was \$103.5 million. Then there was the physician office system program to provide for the continuing computerization of the physicians' offices and the support for the 19 primary care.

So there's a bit of a timeline problem for me here, and I'd like the minister to outline how that works and on which side of the 31st of March this money is falling. What exactly is covered by the \$147 million? I would argue that much of what's in that trilateral agreement does not apply to that \$147 million, but I'm sure that the minister will tell me.

2:40

The second part of this is: where was the money – perhaps it's in the \$147 million – for the special initiative in Fort McMurray in which doctors were being paid I think it was \$1,200 a day to go up there for a period of time to stand in as the doctor for the day at the local hospital? Now, that was \$1,200 a day plus the travel plus their board and accommodation. That program, as far as I know, has been running, I think, since the 15th or 16th of February, although I'd be interested in hearing from the minister how many doctors actually have been organized to take that doctor-for-a-day shift, if you will, through this program.

I was up there just a few days before this program started. I know that at that time they didn't have anyone lined up that was coming to be able to start on that – I think it was Saturday the 16th – so I'm

interested in how many have taken advantage of the program between then and now, how many are projected until the end of the month, which would tell us the money that was spent on that particular project.

The final question in that cluster of questions about Fort McMurray is: if that money is not included in this \$147 million, then the minister anticipated this as part of his budget and it was included in the budget amount that came forward as part of the '06-07 budget amount? I'm interested that he was able to see that far into the future that he would require that money for Fort McMurray then.

I look forward to his responses to that set of three questions. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. No, I'm not that omnipotent that I could see that far in advance, particularly as I wasn't Minister of Health and Wellness at the time.

I think I could explain what the hon. member is interested in in this way. Under the trilateral agreement there are funds set aside on a fee-for-service basis and for some other program spending; the physician office systems program, for example. Under that agreement we were able to get an agreement that there needed to be some funds that provided for the provision of doctors to Fort McMurray in the circumstances that they were in. That was done while we were contemplating because negotiations, as the hon. member might know, had been going on for a considerable period of time, and there had been agreement to the concept that there would be a critical stabilization initiative. We had agreement to utilize the resources that were in the fee-for-service payment pool to assist in the payment of doctors in that manner.

The \$147 million is being requested in anticipation of the obligation that will be incurred under the agreement. As I understand it, under appropriate accounting practices we will have an obligation going back to a 4 and a half per cent fee increase. I'll have to check as to when that actually would come into effect. There's a 4 and a half per cent increase to the fee schedule for 2006-2007. The exact date is not at hand, but suffice to say that as soon as that agreement is met, we will owe for past services rendered. So in calculating the amount of funds that are needed to deal with the retroactive adjustment, that's where the \$147 million comes from.

I believe the total amount is \$579 million for the whole package that was talked about under that agreement, but \$147 million of that primarily related to the fee-for-service package. Increase in fees and increase in utilization, I think, covers that piece.

#### **Chair's Ruling Speaking Order**

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, just for clarification. As I had indicated, we do not have a precedence of which ministry goes up first, so this is more like a free-for-all, and people are asking for clarification. The chair is not necessarily going to recognize a particular minister to make a statement then followed by questions. Really, at this stage if anybody wants to raise a question, let the chair know, the chair will recognize you, and you can direct your questions to any minister that you want to direct yourself to. So the chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. The chair does not have clarity on which ministry goes first. That has not been clarified; therefore, until that issue is sorted out, if it is an issue, we will recognize the person that identifies himself or herself as wanting to raise a question.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

### Debate Continued

**Mr. Tougas:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I could, I'd like to address a few of the items in advanced education, so I'm just sending a little alert to the minister over there. You know, Mr. Chairman, I remember being quite shocked and appalled when I was a rookie MLA, back in 2005, when we were presented with supplementary estimates for the first time. I was amazed that we were going to debate and approve millions of dollars in a few minutes with little or no information to go on. Well, nothing shocks me anymore, but I reserve my right to be appalled, and I have to shake my head as we approve such a huge sum of money without adequate information about where the money is going. That's my requisite political statement. Now I'd just like to ask the minister a few questions while he gets his papers in order.

First of all, I would like to thank the advanced education minister. We had a meeting before the session began, and he did promise that he would provide information if we just made a phone call. He did come through, and I'd just like to thank him for his professionalism in that regard. He may live to regret it yet, but I'm going to give it a try.

Mr. Chairman, supplementary spending has been the norm for the advanced education department over the last few years, and these numbers have skyrocketed. We've seen supplementary requests in my time in the Legislature for \$19 million, \$49 million, \$99 million, and now, continuing with that trend, over a hundred million dollars in advanced education alone. [interjection] That's not really worthy of applause. Before we get into specifics about where this money is being spent, I wonder if the minister in his response would spend a couple of minutes explaining why supplementary spending is increasing at such a rate in Alberta.

Now, I understand that there are extraordinary pressures on advanced education in Alberta. I've heard it in my visits across the province that everybody wants money, and they want it now. I'd like to hear from the minister if this increasing need for off-budget spending is a result of poor planning in the postsecondary institutions or a lag time from his department in making decisions, particularly since we're on our third minister in two years, or perhaps chronic underfunding of advanced education in the budget itself.

Now, for instance, we have a \$15 million expense in additional apprenticeship technical training spaces. There's no doubt that these are desperately needed spaces, and \$15 million probably doesn't even put a dent in how much we really need, but surely the government should have seen this shortage coming for sometime and budgeted it properly in the first place.

There is also \$15.7 million for nursing degree programs at Mount Royal College and Grant MacEwan. Again, this is welcome news, and we're fully supportive of it, but I wonder why Mount Royal had to wait until the last possible minute to find out that they were going to get funding for this program.

On a smaller budget item there's \$2.8 million for the WorldSkills Calgary 2009 competition. It's my understanding that we've known about this event for about three years, so why is it a supplementary spending cost instead of being in the budget?

Perhaps most importantly, I'd like the minister to explain the \$34.5 million in grants to match private donations. Now, the bulk of this is of course made up of \$24 million as the initial payment of a \$37 million donation of rare Chinese artifacts by the Mactaggart family at the University of Alberta. My question is: is this not what the access to the future fund was supposed to be for?

Now, if I can go back to the Speech from the Throne from 2005, the access to the future fund will "support innovation and excellence

in postsecondary education." For example, it will provide matching contributions to help create a new centre for Chinese studies at the University of Alberta. In April of 2005 the then minister of advanced education said:

The collection will provide the basis for the university's new centre for Chinese studies, which will house the world renowned expertise on Chinese culture and history.

Members will recall that in the Speech from the Throne the new access to the future fund is intended to support innovation and excellence in postsecondary education, and the creation of this new centre for Chinese studies at the University of Alberta was specifically referenced in anticipation of this gift.

So what we have here, it appears, is money coming out of the budget that is supposed to have been from the access to the future fund. My questions regarding that are: what has happened to the access to the future fund? Why is the money not going out? Why are we using budgeted sums for this?

I threw quite a few questions at you, and I'll sit down.

2:50

**Ms Blakeman:** Keep going. Once you sit down, you won't get back on.

**Mr. Tougas:** That's okay. I want to hear his answers anyways.

**The Deputy Chair:** The minister wishes to respond?

**Mr. Horner:** Sure, and I'd be more than happy to take some more questions later if you think about them.

First of all, as it relates to supplementary estimates, obviously, if we had a crystal ball – I know that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition in his alternate throne speech claims that he doesn't have a crystal ball either – to project what might be coming down in the future, we probably could have had capacity and space for everything that we need because it would be there based on our crystal ball. But we don't have that any more than the Official Opposition leader has one or anyone else.

Part of the problem that we have in terms of spaces that are coming online is that it isn't as simple as just saying: "Here's the money. Now you've got the spaces." I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark knows this. You need the facility. You need the classroom. You need the faculty. You need the equipment. You need all of those things, especially in health care. On the health care side is where we have the health workforce plan, and the intricacies of that are that you need medical practitioners to actually be teachers as well as to deliver medical aid and care to Albertans. These things take some time to plan.

We're working with the postsecondary institutions as we plan the rollout of their capacity increases. I think the hon. member mentioned: "Well, you've got \$15 million. Is it enough?" No, it's not enough, but it's the capacity that we can build quickly. We want to plan the capacity that we can build over a longer period of time. There will be more dollars to move with that, and we'll wait to see how the budget rolls out on that one. So, I mean, it's difficult. It's easy to say: couldn't you have seen the shortage coming? It's another thing to say: well, you tell me how many spaces we'll need five years from now. It's very difficult to do, very difficult for any vocation or in any of the other postsecondaries. In fact, we had a meeting on February 26 with all of the postsecondaries in the room, and we asked that very question. We said: you guys tell us what we need. That was the most difficult question for them to answer.

We had a really good discussion, Mr. Chairman, about roles, responsibilities, and mandates at that time. Part of what we're doing here today is catching up on some of those things that the

postsecondaries see as being very, very important, that the industries, whether that be health care, whether that be education, whether that be our trades training, see as very important. So that's part of expanding the access to trades training.

As it relates to the access to the future fund, obviously, if we again had that crystal ball that none of us have, we would have anticipated the amount and the totality of the generosity of Albertans over the last year and a half. Unfortunately, we weren't able to predict that. We have a huge amount of very generous Albertans who are wanting to match their dollars with universities, postsecondaries, and technical institutes to see good things happen in our facilities. So we're trying to keep up with that. However, as we plan out what we're going to be doing with the access to the future fund, we can start to add more dollars to that fund to generate more dollars every year. As the hon. member well knows, it currently is generating about \$45 to \$50 million per year. We then by formula put it out to all institutions, not just one or two, and then they work on their matching arrangements with whoever is going to provide them with dollars.

There were a few that came in very, very quickly in very, very large amounts that didn't fit the formula that we had established through the committee and the council after the fact. So we felt that it would be prudent that we try to match those donations as quickly as we possibly could so that the council and the access to the future fund could deal with the dollars that are coming in on a regular basis and work with the institutions on the philanthropy that's going to come towards them and is coming in a very big way from all Albertans. So are we catching up? Yes. Do we hope that we're at one point down the road going to be basically matching, you know, the amount that we earn out of the access to the future fund to the amount that Albertans are willing to give? That's the plan. That's where we're headed.

Just like everyone else, Mr. Chairman, I have probably 20 minutes of opening comments here that I could give, but I think that in the interests of where we're going with all of this stuff, I'll just try to keep my answers to the questions that are coming from members opposite and members behind me.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to have this opportunity to participate in the debate this afternoon. Certainly, as we review another supplementary supply estimate, it is with interest that I note where some of this money is going, where it was, and now where it's going. There are many hon. members that want to participate in the debate, so I will start with my questions in regard to the CAIS program.

Now, we realize that the Department of Agriculture and Food is requesting a total of \$50 million, and the purpose of these funds, as I understand it, is to fund Canadian agriculture income stabilization, CAIS, the Alberta reference margin initiative. We know that there are going to be changes to the CAIS program. Certainly, there has been an ongoing issue with CAIS. I was left with the impression last fall, Mr. Chairman, that the government here was quite satisfied with the CAIS program. I was surprised to learn by observing question period in the federal House of Commons that your Conservative cousins are not only contemplating changes to CAIS; they are changing the CAIS program.

I wonder how this will affect the overpayments that have been made, specifically for the 2004 CAIS year. There have been many farmers contacting us confused and frustrated. [interjection] Yes. The hon. Minister of Service Alberta says dazed.

Certainly, I find it a complex calculation to determine a payment.

Now, the producers that have been contacting us are complaining about the fact that they have to pay back money. I know that there have been some adjustments made to that. This side of the House made some suggestions last summer to the department. The whole program is confusing. How confusing is it, Mr. Chairman? Well, in fact, I think the hon. minister of municipal affairs should give a course or give advice to farmers across this fine province about the CAIS program, and I'm just referring to the selected payments to Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Other payments listed here under the hon. minister's name include hay and post-harvest assessment payments, moisture deficiency assessment payments, crops spring price endorsement assessments, waterfowl assessment payments, crop revenue insurance coverage payments, and of course the Canadian agriculture income stabilization payment made by the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. All these payments listed are the total of \$118,000; \$93,000 of it comes from the CAIS program. That adds up on that page to \$332,000. Then other family members also have made application successfully to the CAIS program in the year ended March 31, 2006, of \$51,000. I would certainly think it would be advantageous for all farmers to get some advice from the hon. minister as to exactly how this program works.

3:00

We're looking at an additional \$50 million for CAIS funding here, and I would ask the minister: what details can the minister and the department provide to the House in regard to this money and how it is going to be used? I would be very grateful for that, Mr. Chairman. Can the minister also tell this Assembly the details of the additional funding, specifically how the federal grains and oilseeds program, the payment program, relates if at all to this funding.

Again, getting back to the federal Conservatives, last week the Prime Minister announced \$1 billion in funding for Canadian farmers. Can the hon. minister please tell this Assembly how the federal government's plan to replace the CAIS program will impact Alberta farmers, specifically again in relation to these funds. We need to know how this \$50 million will be distributed. We know the program has been cumbersome. It has been frustrating. How is it going to work now? This is a lot of money we're asking for, but at least it's less than what the overpayments initially had been. With the CAIS program, again, I would just say that I think all hon. members should seek advice from the minister on just how this program works and how to effectively fill out the application form because the producers that are contacting our office, they're not getting payments like that. Thank you.

Now, I have another issue. I'm not going to talk about the aircraft and the \$530,000 payment. I just expect that the hon. minister in charge of Service Alberta will explain to the House how this oversight was made. There was a currency fluctuation, and that necessitates the increased expenditure. It's a transfer. It's a transfer of funding. Also, if I could get answers in regard to the transfer of funding that's on page 29.

Now, people accuse this government, Mr. Chairman, of being slow, but in this case they're really fast because it's not three weeks since the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, thought that we should take money that we're using now for energy rebate programs and turn it into a fund that encourages conservation and encourages the construction of public transit. All of these are good ideas.

I notice with a great deal of interest that some money that was left over from the energy rebate program is now being used. Ninety-one million dollars, in fact, has been provided to support the public transit programs. Hopefully, the city of Edmonton, the city of Calgary, and our other expanding municipalities will all get a share



of this money. I would like to get a breakdown of that, please, because I think our municipal officials will be using that money wisely, and it would be a follow-up as to what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was talking about. I'm surprised at how quickly that was adopted – I shall use the word “adopted” – by the members across the way because usually it takes them a little longer.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, I'll use the public accounts as an example. In the fall I requested that the public accounts be put online on the government's home page, on the website. I thought it was a good idea. If we were going to be open and transparent, well, this was a good place to start. I was so disappointed in the hon. Minister of Service Alberta when I got a letter indicating that, no, that wouldn't be done, but quietly the government went ahead. They never wrote me another letter – I was so disappointed – to inform me that this was going to be completed, but it's a good idea. You can feel free to take any ideas from this side of the House if they'll make this province a better place.

I'll be interested to know in the future from the hon. minister if they are monitoring that website to see how many hits they get on it. I know that they get quite a few on the Alberta heritage savings trust fund website, so it would be interesting, I'm sure, to find out how many Albertans are keen to look up and see where the money has either been spent in supplies and services or just given away in grants. In fact, with the grants I think there should be just a separate section there on golf courses. I can't understand why we're granting so much money to golf courses that restrict access by requiring members to buy a membership.

But getting back to the supplementary estimates now, Mr. Chairman, I notice that in mid-October 2005 the province of Alberta decided that they would assist northern Alberta, the Wood Buffalo district, with \$136 million in bridge financing to help cope with growth pressures, and we all know the pressures the municipal government is under in the municipal district of Wood Buffalo. This was a loan that was made to ease the financial costs of a water treatment plant, a new waterline to Anzac, and a new solid waste treatment facility, which the municipality had previously identified as critical infrastructure to accommodate the expanding economic and population growth not only in Fort McMurray but in surrounding areas.

I see on page 29, the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, where part of the money that wasn't utilized in the energy rebates, \$11 million to be precise, is being provided for regional water systems projects. “The funding is required to enable municipalities to begin preliminary engineering work to develop regional water and wastewater systems.” Now, is this \$11 million just being granted, and if it is being granted, why is there a double standard here? Why are you granting some municipalities money? “Here, spend it on a very worthwhile engineering project.” Yet you are forcing the Wood Buffalo district to borrow money. Why make one municipal district borrow money and just give it away to the others?

Now, my last question in regard to this matter would be: does it depend on in which area of the province the project is occurring? Now, certainly, one of the current Premier's first trips after he was sworn in was to southern Alberta, where the support for his campaign was the most modest. Some would say the weakest. I will say the most modest. Off he goes. The first place he goes is to southern Alberta to shore up his political support, right? You can't fault the guy for that, you know. You can't fault him at all. But this money, the \$11 million: where is it going and why?

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Would the minister wish to respond? The hon. minister.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and perhaps, seeing that this is a free-for-all, maybe I could just read my Committee of Supply speech. I think it would answer. If we'd have done that first, I don't think he'd have had to ask the question. Is that permissible?

#### **Chair's Ruling Speaking Order**

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, in the past a preference list or a priority list was provided to the chair, and the chair would then recognize the minister. The minister would make remarks up to 20 minutes, and then there would be questions that would follow.

Under the new rules there's no priority list that has been provided to the chair, and therefore the chair recognized the Government House Leader to move. Thereafter it is open to any member to rise and ask the question, and any minister who wishes to speak can also speak. So there's not a restriction of a priority list, but there is an open process, and anyone can participate. So at this time, hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food, if you want to speak, you're welcome to.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** I'm going to read my speech, Mr. Chairman.

**The Deputy Chair:** You have 20 minutes.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** And a good one it'll be.

3:10

#### **Debate Continued**

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to present you with the supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. It's common for the agriculture sector to have to deal with changes. There have always been many factors that impact how well a farmer does from year to year, but in the past few years the field of agriculture has been hit hard and hit harder and seen a lot of change. The impact of drought, BSE, high input costs, and an expanding global market are just a few of the examples.

Farmers work in a climate of change. This demands that the industry and government work much harder, and we need to work together. We want programs to sustain agriculture in this province, and we have done a great deal of work to make sure that the programs we bring forward are effective business risk management programs. Rural communities in Alberta depend on agriculture, and even people who live in urban areas are impacted by what happens on the farm.

It's important to note that our agriculture sector does have a strong foundation. We couldn't weather the storms if we didn't. To borrow from an old saying, in today's climate we must be strong enough to bend. We need to be more innovative, more adept, and I'm proud to report that our growers and producers are becoming more expert business managers despite these changes. Even with the best planning and financial management there is a need for support following some unpredictable disasters. Many farmers look to the Canadian agriculture income stabilization program, or CAIS, for that support. Unfortunately, many producers have expressed concern that the funding is not responsive enough or that the formula for determining who qualifies for the funding is too narrow.

In support of the new Alberta agenda, building a stronger Alberta, our ministry plans to address these concerns with two changes related to the CAIS program. To accomplish this, we are requesting an additional \$50 million, and the changes would be as follows. This year CAIS payments are expected to be another \$20 million below forecast, which will allow us to redirect funds. Our payments will be lower due to a federal government payout last fall to our

grain and oilseed producers. In late December Alberta decided to treat these payouts as income under the CAIS program. That will reduce CAIS contributions by \$20 million and reduce the federal contribution by \$30 million.

We will extend the Alberta reference margin initiative. A reference margin is an average used to determine profitability. Through CAIS an agriculture business can get funding if they are below the average, which means they are facing financial risk that year. The problem is that the national CAIS program uses a five-year average after dropping both the highest and lowest years, and with unprecedented back-to-back disasters profits have been steadily eroding. This initiative allows producers to use the five-year average or to look at their last three years, whichever is better for the producer.

Our plan is to extend the Alberta reference margin initiative one year, at about \$70 million. We recognize that this is a short-term measure to help supplement the CAIS program, but it is a necessary measure. Through this initiative Alberta producers will not fall between the gaps, and I want to assure all hon. members that the prosperity and sustainability of our agriculture industry is a priority of this government. End of my speech.

Now, to touch on some of the questions that came before I got here. As I think probably the hon. member is fully aware, CAIS is only a part of the insurance program that we along with the federal government provide to our farmers. He talked a little about the overpayment possibility that's out there right now. I think probably we're not going to have a whole lot of changes to that because I think that to be fiscally responsible, we have to collect that money. Now, having said that, when the people filled out these applications and even when the cheques were sent to them, they were warned that they could be in an overpayment position because, at best, there were only estimates out there. I'll admit that the system is far from perfect, but we have to keep putting what we can out there for the farmers. So I think that that portion of it isn't going to change.

Now, if the hon. member was in question period yesterday, we talked extensively about the new program that was out, which of course is giving over \$1 billion through the CAIS program. That's all federal money. That's not a 60-40 component. That is all federal money. However, it is contingent on the federal budget passing, which throws a little different light on it, of course. Out of that \$1 billion, \$600 million is going to an investment-type program which goes onto the top end of CAIS and which is very much like the old NISA program, where farmers can invest money and the government will match that money. The farmers have certainly been asking for that for quite some time.

The \$400 million, I understand, is for the increasing cost of production and if passed will start to pay out to the farmers immediately. The hundred million that is left on a year-by-year basis is available in the fund so that when cost of production is not met, there's an available fund of money, so we don't have to go through the usual channels of going to Treasury Board and the time that it takes to implement such a plan. How many farmers is this going to affect? I think the devil is still in the details on how that's going to work. It will certainly make it a more attractive program. Will it make it an easier program to understand? I doubt it very much. That's something we have to work on.

But I think that just to get past that, if the hon. member looks in the books – and he did allude to the fact that we're talking \$50 million this year. It's because of the nature of the beast that the ag department works in with these programs. Last year was an exceptionally good year, and we actually lapsed just about \$291 million back to the government, but to get this year's program going again, we have to come up with \$70 million, of which we already

have \$20 million. So it leaves us a shortfall of \$50 million, which, of course, we have to understand is only to tide us over until the budget is passed. This is not new money that we're asking for over and above anything. In fact, it's less money than we have been asking for in the last couple of years.

I hope that answers the hon. member's questions.

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

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to be able to get up and participate in this debate on the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2. I have a few different questions that I would throw out. I guess I'd like to start with just an overall view that once again we're into supplemental supply, and it's pleasing to see that the list of the number of ministers that have come forward is so short.

**An Hon. Member:** It's the second one this year.

**Mr. Hinman:** Yes, number two, but thank heavens it's only four or five and not 18. That is pleasing.

I guess perhaps I'll start with my first comments towards the hon. minister of agriculture, seeing as how he was the last one up. I would like to know exactly the breakdown of the \$50 million and how many farmers in the province he feels that that's going towards.

The number one thing, Mr. Chairman, that I get farmers asking me is: why is this so complicated? What's the percentage of the people in the CAIS program that they're reassessing and going through and coming back? Is this \$50 million because they've acknowledged that they misjudged how they assessed these farmers, or are they changing it? There are still a lot of farmers that are up in the air not knowing where they're going and where CAIS is coming from. The absolute necessity is to have this become a more simplistic form that even the accountants might be able to read. Anyways, if he could just update us on where this \$50 million is going and how many they think that it's going to.

I might mention that at the top of page 15 it starts – and each of them do – details of supplementary supply estimates. Yet this is so vague. I don't know how we can use the word "detail" to debate and to question where this money is going. So I hope that he can answer that.

3:20

I would like to go on briefly, in order that more members can get up and ask their questions, to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. We have a breakdown here on the enrolment planning envelope, \$31 million, and other program support, \$34 million. If we could get some details on those numbers. How many more openings are we getting for that \$31 million? Is it a thousand? Is it 500? What are the details that they've come up with these numbers that we're to be voting on?

Other program support: what exactly are those? We see here that there's \$15 million for additional apprenticeship technical training spaces. What are the details on that? Is it a hundred? Is it a thousand? I'd be very interested to hear where this money is going.

We have \$15 million for nursing degree programs at Mount Royal College and Grant MacEwan College. Again, I ask the question. It would be so much more helpful, when they bring these supplemental supplies, to have a spreadsheet to show us what the details are so that we could be informed and know rather than just have a big question. Fifteen million for the nursing degree program: I'd like an expansion on what that is.

We have \$900,000 for the development of social work, the Cree

language and aboriginal artist programs at Blue Quills college. What is the estimated number of students that are going to enrol in that? Do we know the size of the faculty that's going to be involved? Is there additional infrastructure that's going to be needed for that program? Obviously, the minister has the details – that's why they've put them down here – and I would appreciate the details on that.

The \$34,500,000 to match private donations to the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. I probably should be able to remember what those are for, but are those specific areas that we're matching and know exactly what they're going to, or is that kind of an open, unconditional match that the universities can use in their own discretion?

Anyways, we can continue to go on. The \$1.5 million for enhancing science literary awareness programs. Again, what's being enhanced? Is it the number of students that can get in there? Is it equipment? Is it a new facility that they're adding on?

The \$500,000 for enhancing awards and promoting the annual gala event at the ASTech Foundation. Again, what are some details on that?

The \$3 million for the genome centre. Is that completely just for the pine beetle infestation? Do they have some breakthrough technology that's exciting that this Assembly and the people of Alberta would love to hear? We do most agreeably understand the devastation of the pine beetles and where that is going to.

Turning over again – the minister has somewhat answered this, but I wasn't clear on it – to the \$147 million. That's just to the physicians? It says here: "is requested to fund the higher-than-budgeted cost of physician services." I'm not right up to speed on the agreement that they're trying to sign, that trilateral agreement, but how many physicians are we talking? What are some more details on that actual transaction and if that's going to fit in there?

If I could skip over to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. On line 6.3.3 we have \$15 million for affordable housing programs. Again, if we could have the numbers there. It says that this spending would be offset by a transfer from the federal government. What exactly are the details on that? Above it on page 26 it says that we have a \$2 million fund for up to 600 additional units under the rent supplement program. What are the numbers that we're going to get of affordable housing programs? Some details there. I'm sure Albertans would love to know the breakdown.

Again, for the 16-plus million dollars for off-reserve aboriginal housing, what kind of numbers are we talking? Is that throughout the province, or is it in one specific area? Then we have 9 million plus dollars to assist homeless and near-homeless people through outreach teams administered by seven major community-based organizations, a total cost of \$16 million. Do we have a number on how many people are in those homeless and near-homeless situations? What's the breakdown? Are we doing a good job spending that \$16 million? Once again, a spreadsheet showing the details and where that's being split would be very helpful to the members of this Assembly in going over the details of those.

Perhaps my final question would be to the Minister of Finance: that we have a breakdown here of the \$47 million. We've got \$7 million going to reimburse the public-sector pension plan. I see that he's gone, so I don't know if he'll be answering this, but perhaps he can write it and give a written one back. Will this update it, and will it become fully funded then and we've met all of our obligations? What are the details on that one?

The \$40 million lump sum for the government's share of the management employees' pension plan unfunded pension liability. Does this now fully fund that? The question is: why are we addressing the unfunded liability on one part of the sector? I'd love

to know why we're not addressing the unfunded teachers' liability fund at this time with a supply estimate and trying to get on and repair the conditions between the government and the ATA, but I'll wait to hear that.

**An Hon. Member:** That'll never happen.

**Mr. Hinman:** With that attitude, you're correct. It'll never happen with this current government.

**The Deputy Chair:** Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, do you want to respond?

**Mr. Horner:** Sure. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to touch on a few of the questions there. There were a number of them rattled off in fairly quick succession. I'm still trying to get a little bit used to our new format as we roll from one department to another.

I can provide the hon. member with some of the detail that he was talking about. I would also point out specifically as an example the apprenticeship spaces. When we announced the \$15 million, it was put out in a fairly broad and lengthy press release that we were providing 3,600 new apprenticeship spaces across the province, that these apprenticeship spots were located in a wide range of areas of the province: north, south, east, and west. I would encourage the hon. member to perhaps check his press releases for the detail on that one as well as some of the other donation items that we've done. I would encourage the hon. member to read *Hansard* tomorrow as to my answer on the matching donations because we've done that one already as well.

The genome component of what we're doing is indeed for what is, as my colleague the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development has classified it, a war against the pine beetle. That \$3 million request is for research and development at Genome Alberta related to the pine beetle infestations. The project is going to contribute to defensive solutions and progressive management practices to the mountain pine beetle based on the in-depth understanding of the relationship between the pine tree, the beetle, and the blue stain fungus.

Alberta's response to the mountain pine beetle has to date been operational, so a research response prepares Alberta to best deal with the existing problem. Again, Mr. Chairman, we're talking about timing here. The pine beetle's critical months are going to be coming up in the next three or four months. It's going to be very critical for us to actually have a plan in place. Therefore, these dollars were put out there fairly quickly.

He mentioned the enrolment planning envelope, and I'll refer back to my response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who had some very good questions at the start of this session about the enrolment planning envelope and why we are planning the spaces the way we planned the spaces. It's because you've got to have the capacity. You've got to have the teachers. You've got to have the faculty and the facilities and the labs and all of these things in play as you roll out the new spaces. That's working in conjunction with the postsecondary institutions to ensure that, you know, when the student shows up, there's actually something there for them to be a part of and to participate in.

I think, Mr. Chair, that answered most of those questions.

3:30

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Agriculture and Food minister also wanted to respond to the questions raised?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Yes. I'll be very quick, Mr. Chairman. Unfortu-

nately, like my colleague down the way there, “A” comes too soon in the alphabet, and I guess we get shot first. So with any luck, if I answer a question again, the rest of them won’t have to. I think that maybe the question was here, and I guess that reading my little story didn’t help because that told you exactly what the \$50 million was going towards. It was to extend the Alberta reference margin initiative, and of course doing that keeps the reference margin up. Consequently, more people will be able to qualify if they have a disaster year.

The other part of the question, of course: I can’t tell you how many people it’s going to affect or are going to benefit from this because it depends on the disaster. It depends how the year goes. But the program is a little more palatable that way; it will cover more people. I would be the first to admit that it’s a complicated program. We are working on that, and we certainly will do our best to bring that around.

I think that, basically, that covers the questions that the hon. member was asking, Mr. Chairman.

**The Deputy Chair:** I had the Minister of Health and Wellness as well as the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing both indicate to me. Did you both want to respond to questions raised by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner? Is that correct? Okay.

The Minister of Health and Wellness, followed by Municipal Affairs and Housing.

**Mr. Hancock:** I’ll be very quick. The question was raised again about the \$147 million. I thought I’d answered it previously, but I’ll do it very quickly again. There are over 6,000 practising physicians in Alberta under the trilateral master agreement. We’ve attracted about 250 more over the past year. The \$147 million that we’re requesting is additional money to the trilateral agreement line in the budget, which provides payments for fee for service. Obviously, a good chunk of that, in fact about \$128.5 million, will go to fee for service, for rate increases, for volume increases, and for some of the existing programs, like the physician office system program and the primary care initiative. But most of that \$128 million is really for the 4 and a half per cent retroactive fee increase that we’re anticipating, so that’s accruing for that.

The balance of \$18.5 million will go for the clinical stabilization initiative, some things that we can do and will do even prior to the end of this month and have done in terms of working towards making sure that the physicians are available and supported in areas where there’s a high need or critical issue that has to be overcome. Obviously, the Fort McMurray issue is one of those.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member made mention of some of the programs or some of the funding that was in place. First I want to say that the affordable housing program, which you referred to, a funding of \$15,173,000, is required to increase the availability of affordable housing units in the province. The surplus neutral funding was received from the federal government. This program provides one-time grants for eligible capital costs to municipalities, local community housing providers, nonprofit organizations, and private-sector groups to address the community housing needs. Those are looked at on a priority basis and, therefore, selected on a priority basis to address those needs.

The same holds true for aboriginal housing, the \$16 million, which is a federal program as well, and the homeless support. After

reallocating \$6.5 million internally to this program, I still need about \$9.5 million to fund a \$16 million pilot project to assist the homeless through outreach teams administered by the seven major community-based organizations. This program provides funding for a pilot project with municipalities and community groups to provide outreach services for the homeless.

The last one that I believe you made mention of is the funding of \$2 million, which was required for 600 additional units under the rent supplement program. The rent supplement program provides assistance to low-income families, seniors, individuals, and families with special needs who cannot afford the sustainable rent accommodation.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This deals with money, and it’s on page 36, Reconciliation of Adjusted Gross Amounts. Maybe the President of the Treasury Board or someone over there dealing with dollars could help me with this. Anyway, I think it’s very appropriate when you have a number of dollars – I believe that it’s approximately \$38 million – returned to Treasury. It’s dealing with education, and sometimes that suggests to me that there’s a transfer of vote problem or maybe also a lack of insight into some of the needs.

Because school systems across the province are desperately in need of such things as support services in terms of guidance counsellors, reading clinicians, specialists in helping with special education students is one area that certainly is in great need. Another area is the whole question of operation and maintenance for schools. Across the province, specifically looking at Calgary, for example, we know the tremendous infrastructure problem there in terms of shifting populations, in dealing with older schools that are having problems.

The whole question of the elementary schools. They are certainly in need of more dollars in terms of the PUF grants, that cover children that are in early childhood or kindergarten, but many of these children now, a large percentage, are going into grade 1, and there’s no way that they can be assessed. There’s no money for that. So schools are many times extra resourced to provide that service. One of the government’s noble goals was: stay in school, complete high school. The completion of school, in fact, I believe was one of the Minister of Education’s goals.

The other thing that I had noticed: a question of busing in Calgary, the whole question now of a very serious problem all across the city of Calgary, the question not only of busing, because many times there is not a community school, but of acquiring bus drivers. Hopefully, there could be some use of that dollar, if it was available, to look at ways of recruiting and training bus drivers.

So, Mr. Chair, I’m trying to seek out information. My question is: that \$38 million, could it have been used for services across the province, for schools that need money for different kinds of things? I’m sure that there are many more than I’ve identified. Could I maybe get someone to try and take a kick at that one?

Thank you.

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Chairman, a lot of the accounting methods have to do with satisfying the Auditor General. But the process today is supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, that don’t deal with anything directly in the Department of Education. So you make a very good point, you know. If we can track this money to keep the Auditor satisfied, that’s fine, but I can’t help you with that broader picture on this particular day.

3:40

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

**Mr. Taylor:** Mr. Chairman, it is my pleasure to be able to rise today and engage in debate around the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2. By way of comment, first of all, it's been a bit of a disorganized debate thus far relative to the traditional approach to supplementary supply, I guess, and I don't know if it's going to be possible to engage in an actual exchange with the minister or ministers or whether, if the answers that I seek don't satisfy me this time, I'm going to have to go to the back of the line and get back in the queue to ask another question. I'm not quite sure why this is other than I have the sense that it has something to do with a decision made on the government side not to provide a list of priority ministries or a list that in some way provides an order in which we're going to discuss these. In any event, we'll try and bring some order to chaos here.

My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. First of all, I want to commend him on spending extra money on homelessness and affordable housing. For many years in this province we have lacked collectively, I think, the political will to move affordable housing to the top of the political agenda, and there has been much movement in recent months. I like to think that I and my office were a good part of the momentum, a good part of the drivers behind this movement because, certainly, as we went through late spring, summer, and early fall, in my constituency office in Calgary-Currie I got more calls, more questions, more pleas for help around the issue of affordable housing than any other single issue, right down to the point that we've actually helped quite a number of people find new places to live because they were losing the places that they were in either because it was an apartment that was being converted to a condominium or the rent was in some cases doubling or tripling. That sort of thing. It is, beyond question, a crisis in Calgary. In fact, it's been described by at least one person with very intimate knowledge of the situation in Calgary as beyond a crisis. He says that it's a catastrophe. But it is an issue in cities all over this province and in a surprising number of towns as well.

So I commend the minister for what he has done thus far. I hope that it's just a start. I look at the throne speech and see a commitment to continue with the Affordable Housing Task Force and a commitment to continue examining the problem. I think that's good as well, but I think that simultaneously we can consult and talk and learn about the problem and also start swinging some hammers and digging some basements and making some real on-the-ground progress on this file.

So with that in mind I'm going to ask a couple of specific questions about the numbers in here, and the minister is not going to get any opposition or push back from me on the overall concept of spending this money. I am very much in support of that, but I'm curious as to what he intends to do with some of this money and how he's thought it through and whether he can provide some specific answers. For instance, on the \$2 million – sure, I'll just take this in order as it appears in the book. The Government House Leader earlier indicated that the only priority I need is right here in the book if I just take it in order, so I will, although we haven't yet. Someone has to start, and I'd be pleased to.

The \$2 million to fund up to 600 additional units under the rent supplement program. My question to the minister would be whether he has any kind of estimate as to how many more units might be needed to be covered under the rent supplement program as we go forward in this province. Of the \$15,173,000 for the affordable housing program and the \$16,142,000 for the off-reserve aboriginal

housing program, in both cases I note the sentence, "This spending would be offset by a transfer from the federal government," and I just want to make sure that I'm clear on this. Because it's federal/provincial matching funds, are we talking about an initial outlay of \$15 million and change for the affordable housing program and \$16 million and change for the off-reserve aboriginal housing program, of which 50 per cent then would be rebated by Ottawa, or is this Alberta's half of the program? In other words, is there another \$15,173,000 coming from Ottawa for affordable housing under this program and another \$16,142,000 in matching dollars for the off-reserve aboriginal housing program?

It clearly makes a difference, Mr. Chairman, because – and this will lead into my next question – as the minister well knows, the definition of affordable housing is a bit of a moving target, and the cost of building a unit of affordable housing, for those of us who've been around a few years, is really quite astounding. It's been estimated, depending on the jurisdiction that you're talking about, that the cost of building one unit of affordable housing can be in the \$130,000 to \$150,000 range. That's per unit. I'll be very interested in the minister's comments on that, by the way. But, of course, at \$130,000 a unit, \$15,173,000 would only give you 116 and a half units of affordable housing across the entire province, and as the minister knows, we have to do much, much better than that. That's building from scratch, of course.

I guess the question that follows from that is whether the minister and his staff have done an estimate yet of how many housing units in each of these two programs they would expect to produce and also where those units will go, if there was a breakdown municipality by municipality. I may be getting way ahead of myself here. I don't know. I'm just curious to see how far along the program is, at least in the conceptual stage.

If I can just go back very quickly to the rent supplement program. There is a program going on in the city of Edmonton, which, I gather, is not exactly a pilot project but might turn out to be applicable in other jurisdictions, involving a sizable property management company, the city of Edmonton, and I believe there's provincial involvement as well, which involves a portable rent supplement of a sort. I'm just wondering if any of this \$2 million actually includes some of those units or whether that's a separate program altogether.

One more thing, Mr. Chairman, and then I look forward to hearing the minister's responses. There's \$9,531,000 to assist homeless and near-homeless people through outreach teams administered by seven major community-based organizations. The total cost of the pilot project is \$16 million, and the balance of the funding has been reallocated internally in Municipal Affairs and Housing. I just want to comment on the excellence of the idea but remind the minister, of course, that these sorts of outreach programs involving outreach teams of support workers are only half of the equation. They're a very necessary half. The research indicates that they're a very necessary half of the equation to provide supported housing for individuals who need that kind of support, and they can be wildly effective.

A team or an individual who works with someone who is a hard to house individual, once he's in a unit of affordable housing, can quite literally do such things as check in with that individual a couple of times a week on the phone, make sure that they've got food in the house, that they're taking their medication if that's an issue, that they've paid the phone bill, et cetera, et cetera. That kind of arrangement, we've seen in a number of jurisdictions, can work very successfully, and this addresses the support side of supported housing. Of course, it's only successful if there's affordable housing at the end of the program.

3:50

This is one of the things we've found in Calgary, of course. The Calgary Homeless Foundation has done a wonderful job of sort of pulling together various agencies in providing all kinds of support – programs, services, individuals, outreach – for people as they climb the staircase, if you will, from being utterly homeless and helpless and without hope to dealing with everything from addiction issues, mental and physical health issues, literacy issues, job skills issues, job training, et cetera, et cetera, get them through the transitional housing phases, and we get them to the top of the staircase, Mr. Chairman. In Calgary, because there is virtually no available affordable housing, we kind of say: “Good work. You've completed the program, and now we're going to push you off the back of the staircase. You're going to fall back down into a cardboard box in the river valley because we have no affordable housing for you.”

So this part only constitutes 50 per cent of the program, and I would merely remind the minister of something that I'm sure he already knows: that we need to work very diligently, very actively on creating affordable housing in the province of Alberta so that we can meet the other 50 per cent of the need.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie for his questions and observations. First of all, I need to talk about observations because your observations in Calgary are absolutely right. You know, there is a great need, but that need is also throughout Alberta in high-growth areas, in high-need areas. I also would say that those challenges are for municipalities, they are for communities, they are for agencies, but they are for all of us as well. So the solutions not only need to come from one side of the House but from all sides of the House.

The task force that we implemented with very much a narrow time frame – and I say a narrow time frame of consultation, of solutions – was done for a couple of reasons, the one reason being that the individuals we have on that committee have expertise in some of the challenges. I want to say one other thing, that a lot of the members on that committee are very much visionary and looking at positive, proactive directions that need to be taken in order for ourselves to look toward a solution to try to address the success of low-cost housing and the homeless.

Mr. Chairman, as the hon. member probably knows, we hope to have the report from that task force by March 19, give or take a day, on the recommendations that came from people all throughout Alberta. I don't have the figures in front of me, but we went to nine communities and, I would say, got a very excellent response and very good suggestions and solutions to issues and to some of the hardships that are felt in the high-growth communities.

I want to also say in trying to be a little bit more specific on your questions about the funding – and I'm going to talk about the funding of the affordable housing program on one hand and also the off-reserve aboriginal housing program – that it is federal funding that was brought into the budget and that we are utilizing. You have to wait for the new budget to look at how that will become matching.

I also want to say that I agree with you because I do believe that, on top of the other programs that are there for the homeless, the \$16 million is an excellent program for seven municipalities to gather, to assess what some of the major challenges are, and also how to deal with it. I think that is the essence of that program. The first one is having the communication. The second one, of course, is the

collaboration of the seven communities and the co-operation on how to deal with some of the issues. I would say that that is on top of programs that are already there.

Specifically on the comment that you made that it is a two-sided challenge: it is exactly that, a two-sided challenge. You cannot provide housing without providing some sort of a vehicle for an individual that is homeless to get from the homeless entity to maybe affordable housing to independence. I think we very much need to look at that in the solution direction.

Mr. Chairman, on the comments on how the funding allocations or the decisions are made, we do have a criteria framework for communities, agencies applying for the affordable housing program and also the off-reserve aboriginal housing program. We try to fit everybody into that criteria, and we choose the people from the highest down. Is it enough? No, it's not enough. I'm very much looking forward to the report that's coming from the housing task force to look at some of the presentations that have been made and their report on how the solutions should be implemented.

Also, I could speak about the \$2 million required for the 600 additional units, and that's 600 additional units. If you look at it, you say: that sounds like a lot. It's not very many at all. The rent supplement program definitely has a lot of needs, but I stress to you also that the solutions to affordable housing, the solutions to homelessness need to be a co-operative effort with government, with municipalities, with agencies, with communities. I think that that's the only way that we'll be able to have a successful direction.

So I hope that I answered most of your questions. What I will do, if you would like, is send you more details. I don't have that report, but I can send you a more detailed accountability of how that funding will be spent, if you would so desire.

Thank you very much.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I rise to join the debate that has been under way for the last almost 90 minutes now on the 2006-07 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2. I believe that we dealt with No. 1 in the very short sitting at the end of August last year. This is the first opportunity since that time, since the long absence from this Chamber by hon. members, that we have now before us these supplementary supply estimates second time around.

Mr. Chairman, some general comments. Over the last three years we have missed the full fall session twice, I think, in 2004 because an election was called and then last year because of a change in the leadership of the party in power and the leadership contest. Some of these estimates, some of these numbers, some of these requests may be attributable to the absence from their work of ministers in charge of their portfolios because they were busy campaigning for one candidate or another.

4:00

Now that we have these supplementary estimates before us, it becomes a little more difficult to address them also because the ministries that were there until December of 2006 have been either reorganized, merged with each other, or disappeared from the roster. So this reorganization and restructuring of the cabinet has also resulted in leaving their imprint on the estimates as we see them: some transfers from previous departments to new ones, and whatever have you. The reconciliation of numbers at the end of this booklet therefore does show how those funds may have been transferred.

That being said, I have a couple of questions for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, who now is responsible, in addition to what used to be the department of advanced education,

for innovation and science. When I look at the supplementary estimates, it's obvious that some of the numbers relate to the work that used to be the responsibility of the department that was merged into this one. If the minister would take a minute to say exactly what those numbers are that are coming from that merger in the estimates.

I should note that the minister was very courteous and helpful in inviting me as well to the first meeting, and we went over some general issues. The minister told us what his agenda was going to be for the session in general and extended the invitation to this member and others to get in touch with him if we need more information. So thank you, Mr. Minister, for that initiative.

Now, to a specific question that I have here. It relates to some numbers on page 12, the department summary, expense and equipment/inventory purchases vote. Under expenses, item 5, support to postsecondary learners, I notice that there's an underexpenditure of \$31 million with respect to that item that's being reported here, \$31 million that was not spent. Normally I would applaud if various ministries and departments underspend their estimates and the money goes back into the general revenue at the end of the year. This particular item, however, causes me some concern. There are some questions which I want to put to the minister, and I hope he will address those.

Support to postsecondary learners, I trust, includes financial assistance to postsecondary students, which includes loans and others. I've been hearing from student representatives as well as from individual postsecondary students who may have stopped into my constituency office to complain about the difficult and almost impossible to meet qualifying requirements that are in place in order for many postsecondary students to access loans and financial assistance in the province. Those conditions are so onerous, so demanding. The bar is set in such a way that many people simply find themselves disqualified.

I wonder if some of this underexpenditure under support to postsecondary learners is a result of those unacceptably stringent and high qualifying conditions for accessing financial assistance and this support. If that is so, then I want the minister, of course, also to perhaps comment as to whether he is willing to review those conditions to make those conditions less demanding, if there is, in fact, some need to revisit and review those student loan arrangements, thereby increasing access of students in financial need, knowing as we do the need for us to do everything that we can to attract more Albertans to our postsecondary system, to attract more high school graduates to choose to come to postsecondary institutions before they join the labour force if they can, knowing that our participation rate is fourth or fifth in the country, and we want to be number one.

Secondly, I also hear, of course, from students, many of whom are in pressing need of assistance. If there's a growing need, as I suspect there is, given that the costs of going to school have been escalating over the years, and if it is true that we have targets set for us as a province to have our enrollments increase and participation rates increase, and if it's also true that we want to make our postsecondary system more responsive to the labour market needs, which we are now trying to meet by inviting people from outside the province and outside the country to come here and join our labour force, then I think the answer is clear that we must make more support available to postsecondary students to attract them to our schools and to keep them there until they complete their programs. So I hope the minister will address that question.

The other item on the same page is 8, innovation implementation. I think this comes from the other ministry that's been merged with the ministry of advanced education. Again, there is an

underexpenditure in implementation – I suppose of increasing innovation capacity? I don't know exactly what innovation implementation means. So I think that probably will require only a very brief comment by the minister.

Some other questions. There is \$34.5 million for a grant to match private donations to the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. If I heard the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and the number that he quoted, that \$24 million of this will be going to the University of Alberta to the China Institute, then my question to the minister is the following. The donation from the Mactaggart family to the University of Alberta was \$37.5 million. I was present at the opening of the institute in the Telus centre on the university campus. Mrs. Mactaggart was one of the speakers, and I recall vividly her expressing both frustration and disappointment over the fact that the government of Alberta had not delivered in matching their generous donation to the University of Alberta with respect to the China Institute.

Now, \$24 million certainly goes some ways towards meeting it. The question to the minister is: has some money on top of this \$24 million already gone to the University of Alberta towards matching the Mactaggart donation, or is this the first allocation towards matching that? If it's the first one, then there is a balance of some \$11 million to \$13 million, depending upon what the total value of the donation from the Mactaggarts is, and my question to the minister then is: if there is sort of a gap of \$11 million, \$12 million, \$13 million, when is he hoping to eliminate that gap? When are you going to address that concern that Mrs. Mactaggart expressed rather passionately at that opening meeting of the institute?

#### 4:10

Genome Alberta: is this a group of researchers located across Alberta or at one institution or at one research institute? I must confess my ignorance on Genome Alberta's location or how it operates. Is this the first allocation to this particular research entity to do research on the mountain pine beetle? The mountain pine beetle has been around across our borders now for some two or three years, and it has already wreaked havoc in the neighbourhood of \$60 billion in B.C. alone. So the threat to the economy of Alberta, that part of it which relates directly to forestry and the industries associated with it, is serious and large, a very, very serious threat. I wonder if this is the first allocation, and if so, why we have been remiss in not proactively engaging our research community to find the answers to the problem to the extent that they are scientifically available.

One last question. The minister answered this question about the supplementary allocations of \$15.7 million for nursing degree programs at the Mount Royal College and the Grant MacEwan College. Now, my understanding is that these programs start either in September, when the fall session starts, or in January, when the second semester starts. The minister had an answer that confused me, that you make funds available only when these programs roll out.

Now, is it because we missed the fall session – we didn't sit then – that these funds are being requested now, when in fact they should have been requested at least in November-December so that they would become available to these two institutions at the beginning of the term in January, the second semester term? Or am I not able to see through the complexities that the minister is privy to, and if so, will he share his ideas about how this thing really works? Why is it now that his department realized that this additional money is needed if in fact those programs started either in September or in January?

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I'll be fairly brief. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona had some very good questions. I know, given his history, that he has a very strong passion for postsecondary and has spent a lot of time there, probably more than I did. He was obviously more successful at the academic side than I was.

The innovation and science component of what used to be innovation and science, which is now the technology part of our department: I actually don't look at them as two different sides of the department. We are trying to blend the two of them together because they make a very good fit. There is a tremendous amount of research that is done at our postsecondaries right from the technical side all the way through to the university research that is being done in, you know, globally recognized institutions in this province, so a lot of money that goes to our postsecondary is part and parcel of some of our innovation and science package, if you will, because of the research that we do. Things like the WorldSkills competition, where we've got 850 competitors from 47 countries coming around the world to showcase Alberta's talent in the apprenticeship and trade sector: that's part and parcel of where we had the applied research as well, in some of our trade and technology institutes.

The life sciences component is also part of our innovation or technology portfolio. The genome research: they are not the first dollars that have gone to genome research for mountain pine beetle. It is a top-up. As I know the hon. member is very aware, you get to a certain point in your research, and you need to take that next step in order to try to get the benefit of the stage that you're at. So what we see is that this is taking that next step because coming up this spring, we could have a very, very serious problem. We want to be as prepared as we possibly can.

The Science Alberta Foundation. Again, I know the hon. member is aware of this foundation. It's a great foundation to get science into the classroom and helps adult learners understand what science is really all about. More importantly, it gets young people interested in pursuing a career in the sciences, so obviously helping us to fulfill the ranks of our postsecondary in our sciences curriculums. We just view that as a great way to tie the innovation or the technology side of our portfolio and the research and development that's going on and show kids why it's important that they should actually be looking at the sciences, so that they can achieve and be part of that new generation.

The Alberta science and technology awards. It's a very important step, I think, and I believe the hon. member would agree with me here too, that we have to reward excellence. We have to reward achievement. We have to reward good science. As part of that program we help leverage dollars, and these are really leverage dollars. It's not the total cost. We help leverage dollars with industry to recognize excellence in research and excellence in technology development, and that's what that's all about.

Not a lot in the package of supplementary estimate for the technology side because we're doing some very good work there. A lot of it is endowment-based, so a lot of it has already been funded and flowed through. It's my hope that, you know, when we see the next budget, we'll see some other things there.

In terms of line 5, that the hon. member referenced in the department summary, the \$31 million, he is very correct. That has everything to do with student finance. At the beginning of the year the student finance system estimates what the potential loan volume is going to be. It sets a number. That's the number that's in the

budget. If by the end of the year we have not reached that amount – really, it's a net cost. This is really a cost of what we have reimbursed to students or given out in bursaries or grants or those sorts of things, so it's the cost to the government. It's not the total borrowing; it's the cost to the government. This is an amount that represents what students did not borrow.

So what happens is that we lapse it into our department. We requested that these dollars be utilized in this supplementary estimate, so the dollars are utilized back into the things that we're putting forward today in our supplementary estimates. The hon. member asked the question: "Well, why? Why would we not have more students taking part in the student finance system?" There are a number of reasons, I found out. I initially thought, as a businessperson and a parent of postsecondary students, that it was because of the complexity or the cost. Having gone on to the web-based system that we have and made the application and gone through the system, it really isn't all that complicated.

Based on this needs-based system, we have some issues, and it was brought forward in the learning report last fall. We have some issues where we need to bring up some of the things under the cost-of-living basis. The student cars, these sorts of things, I think we probably need to address down the road, and we're going to look at that. We are working on that.

One of the things that came to me from a number of different sources was that part of the problem – these complexities are nationwide. We're not the only ones that have this type of student finance system. In fact, many places in Canada would tell you that ours is actually less complicated than some of the other provinces, which is almost hard to believe but true. What they are telling us and what some of the numbers would indicate: in a very robust economy where part-time employment is very easily had, with very good incomes from part-time employment, you will see students not wanting to borrow as much but perhaps doing more part-time work. That lowers our portion of the borrowing.

**4:20**

The other thing that you'll see is that because they have other income, they may actually borrow from somebody else. Not a wise move in many cases because we have a lot of remission and bursaries and grants that are included in our package, and students should take a very, very, very close look at what is best for them financially. But it is something that we've seen in the numbers, that in a good economy there's less drive for student finance. Now, we need to make our student finance more applicable to the current economy, and we are working on that, Mr. Chairman.

The access to the future fund. The original Mactaggart family donation was \$37.3 million in value, so that means that we have, by rough calculation, \$10 million to \$12 million yet to go. There was and is some discussion between the family and the university about how they were going to match. The hon. member may remember that we did announce \$12,500,000 as a match last fall. We haven't actually announced the other \$12 million, but I guess we just did. We will be chatting with the Mactaggart family – it's amazing how this works – about changing and actually speeding up the matching that they had done with the U of A, with their program. So we expect that we will actually speed this process of matching that and hope to have it done within the next year or two. That's my hope. That's the goal that we have.

The reason – again I go back to the response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark – is that this was announced at the same time that the access to the future fund was announced but not when we had the guidelines and the formula that we were going to actually use with all of the postsecondaries on the revenue that was going to



be generated from the fund. Even when the fund is fully funded, none of the institutions would be getting enough in one year to match this type of donation in one year. The intent is that they would then match it over a period of two or three years.

So this one was an upfront one that kind of was very much off-the-mark as well as a couple of others. We are endeavouring at every opportunity we can to ensure that the families are okay with how we're matching and ensure that the postsecondary institutions understand where we are financially in the access to the future fund as well as working with the council to say: you know, how can we make this thing work, and how can we fix the issue and move forward as well as plan for the access to the future fund going forward? That will be announced in the next little while.

Now, the nursing spots. Obviously, Grant MacEwan College is currently doing a four-year degree program. Mount Royal College actually is currently providing a four-year program as well. The degree comes from Athabasca University, I believe. We have been working with both institutions. This is partly a dollar value that is attributed to the health workforce plan because the nurses are a part of the health workforce plan that we have working with Health, working with immigration, EII, whatever. It is part of that plan, and as part of that plan – and I'm sure the hon. member would recognize that – it's not only the institution, the labs that have to be in play, the faculty and the teaching, but then you also have to have the spots in the health care facilities with mentoring and teaching personnel there for their – I forget the word now. When they go to work in the workplace.

**Dr. Pannu:** Practicums.

**Mr. Horner:** Practicums. Yes. Thank you. For their practicums. So we have to make sure that we have those spots available for the nurses as they're coming off the stream. Indeed, we're also currently talking to both institutions about how we might be able to expand the number of graduates that we get out of those institutions, and we hope to get some good news out of that fairly soon.

I think, Mr. Chairman, I've covered most of the spots.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to supplementary estimates 2006-07. Let me say that I acknowledge the extraordinary growth in the province and the challenging times that the government has in budgeting, and I recognize that supplementary estimates are a necessary but unfortunate consequence of that. However, extra funds are obviously not the whole answer.

I wanted to say a few words about where I think we're not spending supplementary estimates that we really should be. That, for me, is very clearly in the area of the environment. Environment is sorely lacking in resources to do the job that we've asked it to do, especially at this time of extraordinary growth and demand, clearly unable to fully fund one of the most critical areas, which is Water for Life, and have adequate inventory of our water resources so that we can manage them sustainably and groundwater mapping to assure that we know the impacts of water withdrawals on the surface as they relate to the groundwater.

I would have loved to see supplementary estimates addressing the sustainable resources and environmental management department that's been burrowing away for almost a year now to try to get some semblance of planning into the provincial land use and balance the needs of agriculture and energy, forestry and municipal growth. I would love to have seen some injection into full funding for a green

plan for this province addressing some of the energy conservation opportunities, the real business opportunities, I would add, including the business opportunities related to renewable energy, which is starting to tick along but needs at least equal incentives to what the fossil fuel industry has been receiving for decades.

I would love to have seen a little supplemental support for taking a full inventory of our contaminated sites and an adequate approach to ensuring upfront funding capital to ensure that the corporations actually pay for the damages that naturally do occur. Clearly, we need a comprehensive monitoring and enforcement system in the province that empowers our staff in Alberta Environment to do the challenging, everyday work of assessing whether our environment is in fact improving, whether it's staying the same, or in many cases clearly getting worse in terms of its quality.

So with those comments, I just needed to remind us that giving Alberta Environment .5 per cent of the provincial budget does not reflect the priority in most Albertans' minds that it should, and I would hope that this government in its upcoming budget will seriously look at doubling the funding for Alberta Environment so that it can truly reflect the high priority that Albertans, indeed all Canadians, place on protecting and enhancing the environment for future generations. That's doubly a concern with climate change and the tremendous and somewhat unpredictable devastation that's coming as a result of the climate changing: extreme weather events, new infectious diseases, droughts. Clearly, we have to show significant vision and leadership in this area.

I want to turn now, Mr. Chairman, to some of the health issues just because I'm particularly connected there and have interest in it. I'm pleased that the government has been able to settle with the physicians. That's going to go a long way to ensuring that we retain and even attract new physicians to the province, and we are direly in need of that.

Clearly, money is not going to solve all the issues, and there are a number of issues that I'm hoping the new health minister will address, including the full scope of professional practice, that have not been adequately addressed: the unhealthy work environments that staff are coping with and in some cases poorly coping with; the inadequate investment in prevention, in early intervention; the inadequate investment in home care, which could reduce the struggle with code burgundies in hospitals and move people more quickly into home-care situations, which are much more efficient and effective and satisfactory for individuals; strengthening the mental health services and their connections to the health authorities and their front-line support to address the increasing stresses and strains and concerns of people in this rapidly expanding economy with new Canadians and new residents of the province; and an area that I haven't heard discussed at all, which is the need for new experts in health impact assessment, relating to some of the massive developments that are going on in the province.

4:30

When I have consulted with health officers in the province about new developments in their area, asking them what health impact assessment is being done before some of these great developments like upgrader alley, there is a bit of discomfort, and what I often get is the health impact assessment done by a consultant for the company. We don't have the expertise, it seems, or at least our health authorities are not requesting resources to get health impact assessments independently done, to try to anticipate and mitigate the significant health impacts that many people are certainly concerned about. Some of it may be imaginary, but some of it may indeed be very real, such as those people in the upgrader alley concerned about the very high levels of fluoride being emitted from one of the plants

and now an advisory against eating vegetables in their area because of the high fluoride levels.

Without adequate expertise in the health regions, it's very difficult for people to have confidence that the government is approving projects with the full knowledge of the health impacts. We need experts, new people in the province to help us to do some of those impact assessments.

On more usual issues I wanted to raise the question of whether there is any appetite in the health minister's office to examine whether we're getting value for money in our health care system and, to that extent, whether we need some supplemental investment. Looking at exactly what has happened since regionalization occurred over 10 years ago, it's not clear to many of us that we have actually increased or improved . . .

#### **Point of Order Relevance**

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-West, are you rising on a point of order?

**Mr. Dunford:** Yes. Lethbridge-West. Yes. There are no doubt many, many people on the speakers' list today, and I am one of them. I believe that under Orders of the Day we are here to discuss specifically the supplementary supply estimates. This is not a forum to draft and deliver a speech on general government policy. I would ask the chairman's direction to the speaker if I am right or to me if I am wrong.

**The Deputy Chair:** Clearly, you are seeking clarification and not necessarily raising a point of order. At the estimates level we have a wide latitude for debate, and members are able to raise other concerns. We have never constrained them in expressing those concerns. I also believe the hon. member is raising issues with regard to health and wellness, which is part of the estimates that we are dealing with currently.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, you may proceed.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have one more question, and it relates to this new funding and the extent to which this may be helping to relieve some of the health pressures in Fort McMurray.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Minister for Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To deal with the question that was specific to the estimates: as I indicated earlier, of the \$147 million about \$28.5 million is intended to be allocated towards implementation of a form of the clinical stabilization initiative that I mentioned earlier and that was discussed earlier today as part of the new agreement.

The resources for the program that we put in place with respect to taking doctors up to Fort McMurray came out of the fee-for-service process, but this supplemental estimate will help to provide some of those funds. In any event, whether the agreement is approved or not, we still need to deal with some of the issues, and that one was one that we were able to negotiate with the regional health authority and the AMA. So in response to the earlier question from the Member for Edmonton-Centre, about 50 physicians applied to assist with the issues in Fort McMurray. Approximately a dozen have been hired, so to speak, to engage in that. All shifts have been filled until the

end of April. We've had good take-up, good support for the region through that program, and freed up the pressure on the local physicians through that process, so that proved to be a good interim measure.

Some of the other things that you mentioned I think are worthy of discussion, but I am conscious of the fact that others want to talk about the estimates that are before us. A full scope of practice, obviously, is something that I've been championing for a long time, not just as Minister of Health and Wellness. The concept and, I think, the government policy that a health care professional should be able to practice to the full extent of their capability, expertise, and training is something that we don't have yet and that we need to work hard on implementing. Simply put, we want to make sure that health service is provided by the most appropriately trained, least-cost provider so that we can lever the value of all of the health care professionals we have in the system.

That's really one of the concepts behind the primary care networks, for example. Yes, you have doctors offering primary care, but they're also able to work with other health care professionals to truly provide a full range of services and lever the health resource that we have, the people resource that we have, to make the best use of it.

A healthy work environment is absolutely a very important issue. In fact, I just spoke at the health boards of Alberta conference at noon today and noticed on their agenda that a healthy work environment was one of the topics for the conference. Healthy workplaces are very, very important. As we come through with the workforce strategy that your colleague was asking about earlier, one of the pieces of workforce strategy has got to be about healthy workplaces. How do we make sure that the people that we have are well treated, working in healthy environments, and are in fact able to fully participate because they are healthy? So that's important.

Investment in prevention. I wish you'd heard the text of my speech today and so many other times since I've been appointed. I absolutely, fundamentally believe that the way to make sure that we have an affordable, sustainable acute-care system that's there when our parents need it and when our children need it is to ensure that Albertans have the opportunity to be and stay healthy. That means living in healthy communities, having healthy activities, and being supported with the advice and assistance they need to promote their own health. That doesn't mean that we won't need an acute-care system, but if we want an acute-care system that's there when we need it, we have to promote health.

Strengthening mental health is absolutely a part of that. I think my predecessor made a very good start last September when she announced the children's mental health strategy. I'm going to do everything I can within the resources that I have available to support that initiative and to make sure that mental health support services are there. We'll be talking more about that even over the course of the spring as we bring in amendments to the Mental Health Act that allow for community treatment orders. Of course, community treatment orders are only one piece of the process. You really need to have the assertive community treatment available for people in the community. Again, I'm going to be working to make sure that we can resource that as well as possible.

Increased stress and strains. I think that's part of the workforce issue, but it's broader than that. We can reduce the stress on our acute-care system if we reduce the stress on us as individuals. The environmental impact on us in terms of what that does to our health needs to be part of the equation, and it needs to be part of the discussion.

New experts in health impact assessments. I'm very pleased to be working with Dr. Roger Palmer, the new dean of the public health

faculty at the University of Alberta. Actually, last week he was good enough to bring together a group of public health professionals, both public health officers and people who've been doing research and support in areas of public health. I think that's an area that we really need to encourage and support: how we do health assessments, how we look at the environmental impact, the environmental load, how it impacts our community and personal health. So I'm going to be interested in pursuing that. That's obviously an embryonic area for us because, as you well know, most of the pressure on the health system is to continue to fund the acute-care side. It's very difficult to move resources and focus to the wellness side, but that's one of my formal mandate statements, and I'm certainly going to try and fulfill that mandate.

4:40

Value for dollars is obviously very, very important. When you have, you know, in excess of 36 per cent of the provincial budget and a budget of the size that this province has, if we want to have more resources to do more things, we've certainly got to be able to say to Albertans that we're using the resources we have effectively and efficiently and we're using them well. So I have met with the stakeholders from the health system, with board chairs and CEOs and others that are in the system. In January I met with them. I followed up with individual meetings in certain areas, and we're meeting with board chairs again next week. Certainly, that is one of the primary concern areas that I want to bring forward, that we need to be open and accountable. The public needs to be able to have confidence that the dollars that are going into the health regions and into health care delivery in the acute-care side are being used in the most effective manner.

We need to make sure that although we have nine health regions doing delivery as well as the Cancer Board and the Mental Health Board, they are working as part of a province-wide system, we're borrowing best practices from each other rather than competing with each other, we're not duplicating in areas of chronic disease management or other areas where we can do things together, and we're making an effective use of the resources that we have.

Your questions, actually, really fed into the full scope of where I hope to go, so I appreciate that.

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

**Mr. Dunford:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin by congratulating the government on bringing forward the estimates. Not only are they aligning, of course, with the Premier's five priorities of govern with integrity and transparency, manage growth pressures, improve Alberta's quality of life, build a stronger Alberta, and provide safe and secure communities, but at the same time they're also addressing the 20-year strategic plan that this government brought forward to the people of Alberta a year or so ago.

Now, I don't want to drill too deeply into any of the five departments that are involved but just indicate that Advanced Education and Technology, of course, is important to every member here in the House and, of course, to government members particularly because of the pillar in the strategic plan, wherein we talk about leading and learning.

Agriculture and Food. I don't have any specific questions for the minister but just remind him that agriculture is not our past; it's our future. My BlackBerry just went off, and it caught a touchy spot there. [interjection] Actually, I thought it was the BlackBerry; apparently, it was the minister of Agriculture. He gave me a nice little pat for my comments. You folks might be wondering about relevance at this point, but I'll bring that into context.

The finances here: I don't want to spend any particular time on that.

Health and Wellness: we have heard from others today about some of the issues there.

Then, of course, the housing concerns in municipal affairs.

I want to spend my time, though, in Advanced Education and Technology. I appreciate the numbers that have been put forward in this particular area, but they have raised some concerns. Specifically, in terms of additional apprenticeship technical training spaces \$15,100,000 is a significant amount. What worries me is that the money may be directed to the seats themselves, forgetting entirely about the kinds of equipment, the kinds of curriculum that in the modern Alberta need to go along with those particular seats. I would like the minister, when he has an opportunity, to perhaps indicate what amount of that particular total will be for basically, then, the enrolment of Albertans but, also, what amount of that money is required to build capacity within our postsecondary system in order to accommodate the learning. Now, I can recall in previous days in advanced education that a great deal of money was required on the part of the taxpayers of this province in order to keep the colleges current with the kinds of equipment that they would then use within the particular programs. I'd hope that the amount of money that is being spent would also go toward streamlining the delivery of apprenticeship programs.

One of the things that I'm experiencing from an anecdotal situation is people calling the office indicating that their son or daughter or husband or wife has been unable to move forward in their apprenticeship program because the fact is that the employer is not in a position to let them go do their institutional training on a timely basis, that the employer is so stretched for the skilled labour that he or she is looking for that they're simply unable to allow the person to go for the other portion of their program. Now, this would be working against, then, the stated goals of this government, of course, in providing that education. So we need to be looking at the kinds of things that we can do to provide flexibility in how the program is delivered. I think that this would pay side benefits to the fact that maybe with more flexibility, if we could do it at work sites, then we're actually using equipment of real employers and real contractors rather than being required to equip a postsecondary institution.

Mr. Chairman, \$15,700,000 is there for nursing degree programs. I don't know of anybody in this Assembly that would argue with that. I've tried to listen as closely as I can to other members that have spoken, and I believe – at least what I've heard – that many, if not all, of them have been supporting the minister in this particular request. I would, though, again because of some experience in this field – it's not all-encompassing; I, like everyone else, have lots to learn. What we're finding, I believe, in many of these programs and, I think, nursing specifically is that we have to be cautious of something that is labelled credential creep.

We have to be very cognizant, I think, that the kind of training that is going on is actually meeting the demands that we have – and in this particular case, we're talking about nurses – that it actually meets the demands of the type of care that we need within that system. I mean, it's fine for a two-year nursing program to become now a bachelor's degree. I am pro-education, but I'm wondering if we're spending \$15 million in order to bring nurses with two-year programs up into four-year programs, or just what is happening. I am encouraged by the advent of the Health Professions Act where people are able to work in areas where they have the technical expertise, so I congratulate doctors as they recognize nurse practitioners. I congratulate those doctors that are involved in pilot projects. They recognize now that nurses have some understanding of the

kinds of services that someone just coming in off the street to the clinic might require, and I want to congratulate the learning system, then, providing nurses with that kind of expertise with which they can do it.

If we are ever going to get to a position of controlling costs in our health care system, we have to have a payment methodology that is not based solely on the doctor being required to touch you in order to get paid. You might have a situation that you don't need to see the doctor at all. Of course, fees for services will have to be paid and usually directed through the physician, but we need to have flexibility throughout this area.

4:50

I wanted to raise an objection somewhat tongue-in-cheek. I sit beside a Cree. I'm wondering where the Blackfoot stuff is. Where else was I going with this? Is this a video *Hansard* or just the written *Hansard* so that any of my wise remarks will go unknown because black words on white paper will hardly pick up the witty repartee in which I'm involved.

**Ms Blakeman:** It's audio streamed, so they get to hear every word.

**Mr. Dunford:** Oh, they do? There'll be thousands and thousands and thousands of people that will be listening to me right now. Hi, Alberta. You're doing good.

Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Chair:** Any minister wish to respond?

The Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

**Mr. Horner:** Just very, very briefly, Mr. Chairman. I have to agree with much of what my colleague from Lethbridge-West had to say, certainly, on the importance of postsecondary and how critical it is to our success and what these supplementary estimates are doing to help us along that path.

I just want to talk a little bit about the apprenticeship side of things. Of the allocation that we have, \$3.3 million has been allotted to equipment to help us make it more worker friendly, if you will, to help the employers find better spots for their employees to take the apprenticeship training when they can and when they need to. We're also looking at a number of more mobile training spaces because I agree with the hon. member that it's better to take it to where they work so that they can either utilize the equipment of the employer or the equipment that we can provide through a mobile space.

The credential creep issue. It's not just in the nursing component. It's also in other components of the health professions or in some of the other professions. It is critically important, and it's a critical component of our health workforce plan that the scope of practice has to be reviewed and has to be looked at so that if you have – and the health minister has said this on a number of occasions too – a nurse with a four-year degree or a five-year degree, that nurse is doing the things that she was trained to do with that four-year degree or five-year degree and not doing things that, well, she's overtrained to do, let's say. I think it's very, very important that we get our scope of practice and those types of rules right.

Other than that, Mr. Chairman, I'll answer any other questions in writing.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much. It only took me an hour and a half to get back to complete my short round of questions with the

minister of health, just to complete that series. Mr. Minister, thank you for the information about the number of doctors that were recruited in Fort McMurray, the 50 doctors, of which 12 were put into the program. I'm wondering if we had a smooth transition between each of those 12 doctors as they came and went on their doctor-for-a-day shifts.

The way it was described to me was that, essentially, a doctor for the day admits to the hospital patients that don't have a family physician, so they become, then, the doctor on record for those admitted patients. Now, at a certain point that doctor for the day is going to leave town; whatever it is, three days later, four days later. Well, doctors have a code, and they're not allowed to just walk away from or abandon patients. They're responsible for making sure that the patient has been transferred to somebody else.

The issue that arises is that if you don't have the next doctor for the day that's come up from somewhere, what are you going to do with those patients? So this doctor may well have admitted, let's say, 15 people to the hospital over the course of four days. Now he's got to hand these 15 patients over, but you are already oversubscribed with the local physicians. That's why you were brought in as doctor for the day. The next doctor for the day is not there. Now what are you going to do with these people? You can't leave until you get them handed over to somebody. So if you can't hand them off, which you can't, then you're going to have to medevac them to Edmonton. Well, Edmonton won't take the medevacs unless they've got room. That makes sense too.

So they could end up sitting up there in Fort McMurray, and I don't know if they'd still be on the \$1,200-a-day deal if their time allocation was over, but they're now trying to transfer their patients through to Edmonton. So I'm just wondering: one, have we had direct linkages from each doctor to the next with no time lapses in between, and two, if we didn't, then what accommodation was made? You know, how many medevacs into Edmonton have we had as a result of those doctors having to transfer the responsibility of those patients to other doctors? If they weren't able to in Fort McMurray, then how many had to be medevacked out to Edmonton?

The other issue I'd be interested in hearing from the minister about – and I take it that they're not specifically addressed in the \$147 million that appears in the supplementary estimates for Health and Wellness – is the situation with the doctors in Grande Prairie, which I'm sure the minister is aware is very similar to the situation doctors in Fort McMurray are facing. Now, I've been up there a couple of times and talked to a number of them repeatedly, and they were quite at the end of their tether. I think we all became alive to this back in the summer when they had to start closing the ICU. This was at one point sort of, "Well, this is the usual summer holidays," but in fact they had departments closed for extended periods of time over the summer.

As was pointed out to me, if you don't have an operational ICU, that restricts a number of other things that you can do in your hospital. For example, you know, you can't necessarily take people into emergency because if you had to perform surgery on them and they then required an ICU to care for them following that – well, if you don't have an ICU, you can't take them into surgery because you can't put them in that position where they'd require it and you can't provide it. So I'm wondering if the minister contemplated inside this money any additional assistance for Grande Prairie. I'm aware that the most intense part of their situation is around recruitment, which isn't really addressed in the tripartite agreement. That's essentially directed towards retention. But I'm wondering if anything was anticipated here, and I feel obliged to ask on behalf of the doctors in Grande Prairie.

One of the other issues that's involved in this, and it moves

outside the scope of this minister's riding, but this is one of the occasions that I find often happens where you need a cross-ministry initiative. You've heard me talk about the need for child care spaces in Alberta. One of the places that this was brought into a very sharp relief for me was by some nurses in Grande Prairie who said: "We've got nurses here that want to work. They want to take the shift. They can't get child care, so they can't come in." So other nurses were having to double shift or to work repeated double shifts throughout the week, yet there were nurses there that were trained that wanted to work, but they couldn't get the child care relief to come in. So has the minister looked at any cross-ministry initiatives?

You know, the innovation fund – sorry; let me just find that media release. There was a section that sort of might be able to be classified as an innovation fund, the "clinical stabilization initiative," on which there weren't really any details, but it says that the "communities will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis" and finalized by June 2007. So it's outside of the parameters of the supply estimates, but maybe some work was done on it inside of this year that would allow you to do that kind of innovation cross-ministry to be able to make more of this work.

5:00

I think that also stacks up with things like advanced education and distance learning to train people in their home communities. One of the things that we know works is that if you take people out of rural areas, train them as health professionals, they're very likely to return to those rural communities to practise their particular health profession. Increasingly I think there's some innovation happening to actually deliver the health worker training out into the rural areas in the hopes that they would just keep people out there and retrain them as they continue to live in the community, and then they can serve the community as a trained health worker.

That was my series of questions to the minister of health.

Minister of advanced education, I know a number of people have questioned you, and I did try and make note of the questions. I'll maybe go back to one of the questions I asked earlier today, which was around the support, and again this becomes cross-ministry. What work has the advanced education minister done to ensure that the infrastructure, equipment, and faculty needs to support the new space creation are there for the universities?

We know that Grant MacEwan, for example, has a whole new facility that they're building in the Robbins centre for the new health diplomas and certificates and degrees that they're offering there. I'm less worried about their space needs and equipment needs and faculty needs, but I have heard from three of the universities – Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge – that that's a concern for them.

You know, I'm pushing the government hard to create more spaces in postsecondary institutions that will train health workers – and I'm talking doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals – but obviously it's more than just sticking a bunch of people in a room. You've got to have the faculty to teach them, you've got to have a room to put them in, and for the purposes of health you've got to have the equipment that they will need to use or that they should be trained on.

I'm looking to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology for what support is anticipated. Is there anything anticipated in the supplementary supply for those universities specifically? Is there additional money in here for Mount Royal and Grant MacEwan colleges for the rest of their medical programs aside from the nursing degree program?

That's good. I'll look forward to getting a response from those two ministers. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to respond to some of the questions, and I'll have to look to see whether I can get additional information. The whole question of the operation of the program in the detail that you're asking for isn't something that I have at my fingertips, so I'll check.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

I think I can say this with some degree of certainty: if there was a problem with the program, I would have heard about it. I haven't, so I'm assuming that it's working well, that doctors are going in to cover the shifts pursuant to the program that we put in place and that they're not having problems transferring patients.

I'm very conscious of the fact that what's happening in Fort McMurray can be a model for what can happen in other parts of the province as well, and that is that we are learning better how to use the full range of health care professionals, being able to deal with a patient and use the skills of the nursing staff and the other health care professionals as well as the doctors. I think we'll find this as a good incubator of a stronger model of that.

I can't answer, specifically, your question as to whether there's a problem with doctors handing off patients. I'm sure that if we were using resources medevacking patients to Edmonton or elsewhere just because of a hand-off issue, I would have heard of that. I'm going to suggest that it's not a problem, and if it is a problem, I'll get back to you and let you know.

Similar problems in Grande Prairie? Yes, there are similar problems. We have a shortage of doctors, and we have a shortage of specialists in various areas, and that's manifesting itself right across the province and, as you may have heard earlier in the day, right across the country and perhaps across North America and the world. There is a shortage, and we're feeling the impact of that shortage because our economy is strong and our province is growing.

Fort McMurray was a special case and needed immediate assistance because of its high rate of growth over an extended period of time and its relative isolation. In Grande Prairie or Edmonton or Calgary you have at least the possibility of picking up some of the issues relating to growth through infrastructure that's there, and you can absorb the impact more appropriately. Now, certainly in Grande Prairie there are issues and, as I say, right across the province. I signed a lot of part five letters in the last month. There's a lot of recruitment happening, and we're certainly working to help health authorities and regions recruit doctors and other health care professionals for their areas and working in terms of how we make sure that accreditation is not a significant problem in doing so.

There's no easy answer to it. We will be doing more to help with recruitment. There's not a lot built into the trilateral agreement related to recruitment, but part of recruitment, of course, is people having the expectation that they'll be paid fairly or that they'll be able to draw on resources in a fair way and that we'll be able to compete with other jurisdictions which pay northern bonuses or rural allowances and those sorts of things. Using the clinical stabilization initiative, we'll be able to deal specifically with issues in various communities.

As you rightly point out, the issues are not just a direct issue of saying: we need more nurses, doctors, health care professionals. It's a question of how we make the best use of the people we have and how we help them be as productive as they want to be. So whether it's child care or whether it's additional educational opportunities or whether it's allowing people to practise to the full scope of their

training and expertise, whether it's promoting primary care networks so that they can work as teams, as the bone and joint project showed us so well, getting a much greater degree of efficiency and better effectiveness for patients by working in a team approach, all of those are very important.

It can be as simple, quite frankly, as making sure that the right equipment is in place so that nursing personnel and other personnel in the hospital don't have as much back strain as we're seeing. We have an aging workforce, and we have patients that are getting heavier. It can be as simple as trying to provide resources so that we have the appropriate lifts in place and the appropriate personnel in place so that we don't lose as many people to simple things like back strain. So working on all of those areas: very important.

That's the first one I've heard about child care in Grande Prairie as being an issue, but it's indicative of a number of the things that we have to look at in the workforce strategy and why a workforce strategy is not as simple as saying: "We need more; we're going to go and get them from somebody else who also needs them" or "We need more; we're going to raise the wages in a certain area" and then have the problem that they're attracting people from another area so that we have to raise the wages there, and then eventually we're going to buy them from somebody else who needs them. It is a multifaceted approach of growing our own, making sure that we have the advanced education positions necessary so that our own Alberta students can get the education they need here at home, making sure that they come back if they've gone elsewhere for their education, offering the opportunity to repatriate Albertans who've gone elsewhere for either education or job opportunities, opening the doors for those that want to come without actually going and taking people from other people that need them but opening the door for the people that want to come, to make sure that they can practise here.

But as with any program it's got to start at home in terms of keeping the good people you've got, making sure that they're valued, making sure that impediments to them practising at full scope, if they wish to, are removed, making sure that they can give full value into the system.

I hope that covers all the issues that you've raised in terms of the health side.

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

**Mr. Horner:** I was going to respond.

**The Acting Chair:** Excuse me; I'll have the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology reply first.

5:10

**Mr. Eggen:** Sure. Absolutely.

**Mr. Horner:** I'll be brief, Mr. Chairman, because really the question centred around having the infrastructure faculty. I know the hon. member actually listed off all of the things that we do have to have in place before you can actually start putting bums in the seats and having the students learn and be a part of whatever program they're at.

As the hon. health minister mentioned, we are working on the health workforce strategy. It isn't just doctors. It isn't just nurses. It's LPNs. It's health care aides. It's the whole gamut of the health care workforce. We're making sure that we find the spaces that are all scattered throughout this province, actually, for those courses.

Infrastructure is critical to it. We have right now an approved capital list within our postsecondary system that is well over \$1.3 billion that is either in construction, in planning, or is moving

forward. Those are approved projects that are on the books right now. There's a lot of construction going on in postsecondary. Is that enough? No. There's a fairly substantial ask out there. The need/ask is something we have to determine.

As I mentioned when I responded to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark earlier this afternoon, we recently brought all of the postsecondary institutions to Government House for a round-table discussion not only about roles, responsibilities, and mandates but also about: what is the current capacity of our system, and where are the gaps? So the health workforce side of that was brought into the discussion but also all of those other things, all of those other gaps that the institutions are telling us we have a gap and a need in.

Then we took that and looked at it as opposed to the capacity that we have and then started to look at the asks that we have from the institutions. Does this fit with what Campus Alberta is really all about? That's really where we're going. We're talking about a Campus Alberta approach, that takes the needs that we have as a government and takes the needs of industry and the postsecondaries into consideration.

So the creation of more spaces? Yes. The creation of more infrastructure? Yes. But we want to make sure that we plan it in the right places, in the right institutions, in collaboration with the institutions. That's really where we are right now.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words in regard to these supplementary supply estimates for March 2007. I've sort of divided the comments between myself and my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona. However, I just wanted to say a couple of things in regard to Health and Wellness.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

We're always putting significant supplementary funding into the health budgets here in this province, and I think it's indicative of a systemic problem with the way that we choose to fund health care in the province of Alberta: not recognizing both the true costs of not dealing head-on with the root causes of people's health problems and then, secondly, I believe, looking to always go on the cheap in regard to treatment and preventative health and community health and long-term care and the like. So while certainly this is the single biggest appropriation here this afternoon, again it's symptomatic of, I think, a problem in the way we deal with both acute community health and preventative health measures here in the province of Alberta.

You know, we somehow have come to this conclusion that reducing or moving people out of hospitals is in the best interests of running a public health care system, and I beg to differ just on both the economic and the health sides. We see in our large hospitals both in Calgary and Edmonton this single-minded push to get people through the acute-care beds and out of the acute-care beds as fast as possible, but so often secondary health concerns result in that mad rush to empty beds and create turnover. What we're seeing in large hospitals now, say at the Royal Alex, is that you're having so many people returning, so many people requiring acute care and the amount of beds being reduced over time that they've had to go into an emergency mode of storing and of keeping patients in the Alex and other hospitals in Edmonton as well, putting four where there were two and three where there was one. It's not a tenable situation for delivering acute health care in the best of situations. It creates this permanent state of triage where we're having to evaluate and re-

evaluate patients not on the health care that they need but how their problem relates to the person who is next to them. Right? Looking at comparative problems – who's the sickest, so to speak – is not necessarily the best way to deliver health care.

When I look at the numbers there, again it's a very significant amount of money in terms of building bricks and mortar and equipment and purchases of that nature, but, you know, I think we need to supplement that with all of the other elements that go into creating a strong, healthy public health care system in this province.

My main comments here this afternoon will focus on the money that is being devoted to Municipal Affairs and Housing. Of course, the minister has created this task force, which I think he should be applauded for. It's interesting to see where the money is going, as perhaps a determinant of what we should do with both the results of the task force, which will be imminent, and this upcoming budget and shaping a housing strategy for the next two or more years.

We can just look to see where some of this money is going specifically. Two million more to fund 600 rent supplement program units. While this is a 12 per cent increase, I can say with personal anecdotal experience as well as from looking across the province in a more systematic way that this is not even a drop in the bucket in regard to the requirements of people who have found their rents being increased very significantly over the last six or more months to the point where many Albertans are being forced out of their rental accommodations because they simply can't afford it.

The increases that we've seen in my own constituency of Edmonton-Caldor have been, I think, unacceptable. Many people are viewing this as an opportunity to really cash in. You know, when you're making investments, certainly you expect a certain gain and return, but you have to temper what you expect to get from an investment with what commodity you're dealing with. When you're talking about real estate and rental accommodation on real estate, you're not just dealing with bricks and mortar, but in fact you're dealing with people's lives. It is the responsibility of not just the landlord but, I think, of this Legislature as well to ensure that rental increases do not exceed the capacity of individuals to pay.

I hope that we can consider that in a more global and systematic way here in these coming weeks and months. I think that the vast majority of Albertans would certainly praise that sort of honest effort. Certainly, we don't begrudge the desire and the need for a landlord to make a buck, but we have to temper that with the people who rely on affordable rental accommodation to hang their hat and to make their homes.

There are several line items here. Fifteen million dollars more for an affordable housing program that's in partnership with the federal money; again, this is a very welcome sign. We all know and face in each of our constituencies the shortage of affordable housing, not just in the major cities but spreading right across the province in smaller centres as well. I think, again, this has to just be something that guides us to a more fundamental project for building affordable housing over a longer period of time. We must use our intelligence with this, and we must use our imagination because, of course, building a volume of affordable housing projects across the province has the potential to really be problematic. Like I say, we need to think about putting affordable housing projects in different places that we might not have thought of before. We need to build a variety of affordable housing projects as well so that we are aiming to satisfy the diversity of the population, that is growing so quickly here in Alberta.

5:20

Sixteen million dollars more for off-reserve aboriginal housing. This is in partnership with the federal government. Again, a very,

very crucial, I think, direction that we need to consider. This is a good start. There is a vast movement of people from the north in this province to the major urban centres. This population must have assurances that there is safe and affordable housing available to them when they move to Edmonton.

Affordable housing is not just the roof over your head and keeping warm at night. It is a way to stabilize a person's life in the very broadest possible way. You know, when a person is affected by addiction problems or if you're affected by unemployment problems or any number of health problems, all of those things can be alleviated by putting an affordable and reliable roof over somebody's head. It really does go a long way to stabilizing a broad, broad spectrum of social problems that we face today here in the province. So it's just like investing a penny in to pay a huge return. If someone has a stable place to stay, they can start to deal with all of the other issues that might affect the quality of their lives.

Nine point five million dollars for homeless outreach programs. Of course, just by looking at this number, it's an acknowledgement of a crisis that we are facing here in the province of Alberta. Again, you don't have to go further than outside the doors of this fine institution to see that our homeless population has simply exploded in this province like never before. It's creating a sort of tension in our society, again, that we have not seen before.

One of the reasons that I chose to enter into politics was to bridge those divisions that do exist in our society and to seek answers to assist people in all socioeconomic groups. You know, as the homeless population of each of Edmonton and Calgary and other centres grows exponentially, I can see that we are in fact losing ground on that front because people that become homeless become disenfranchised in the broadest possible way to the majority of society. It creates this real gap which becomes a chasm, and that chasm has serious implications in regard to security and safety and in regard to health concerns and all of these other things that we have to spend and plan for here in this provincial Legislature.

Once again, \$9.5 million for homeless: that's a 61 per cent increase. It is an indication, Mr. Chairman, that we've got something desperately, terribly wrong in regard to our homeless strategy outreach programs here in the provincial Legislature. I just would like to ask this question specifically: how is it that we missed the boat? In what specific area of our homeless strategy program did we miss the target so significantly that we had to put in this 61 per cent, which is only sticking our thumb in the dike of a very much larger problem, I would say? The problem is far outstripping even this significant increase. I would like to ask the minister: how are we going to redirect our homeless strategy, and what can we do to help?

The government is spending \$15 million on capital grants to build new, affordable housing units. I would be curious to ask if these units will have a fixed price, or will they be based on a market system to determine their rental or purchase prices? I would be curious to know that. Certainly, both possibilities have some merits, but I would just like to seek clarification on that.

Again, in regard to this housing/homelessness crisis, we had an estimate by the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness that suggested that 2,600 or more people are currently living without a home in the city of Edmonton. However, I think that a more telling number is that more than 6,000 people have serious difficulties being able to make their rents every month. You also have, not in those statistics, a large group of the population that is semihomeless. They live in various places at various times along the way, again a destabilizing sort of way to live.

So those are my main questions in regard to housing. I'm glad to see that we are putting forward more monies into this area.

The other area that I wanted to comment on very briefly is just in

regard to agriculture. The budget is calling here for an increase of \$50 million towards the agricultural insurance and lending assistance program. This is a managed way by which we can forward assistance to agricultural producers, which certainly I always do encourage. However, I just want to put in there that, you know, the more we can do to supplement and to assist family farms, probably the better off we are in regard to the security of our food supply, the integrity and diversity of our rural population, and a way of continuing that direct link between the past, the present, and the future here in this province, in which agriculture has played such a significant role.

You know, as we spend significant money to ensure the stability of our agriculture industry, with which I have no quarrel at all, I'm struck by the counterproductive tendencies that we engage in here in this province in regard to not supporting family farms and, in fact, encouraging large industrial farming operations. The list goes on in regard to those counterproductive measures. Perhaps we could actually save money if we were more specific in targeting family farms and looking for their individual specific needs rather than flying off willy-nilly to default to the protection and subsidization of larger, factory/industrial food operations.

Again, the issue that's just coming out right now is with the Wheat Board. You know, we can spend all this money to help out family farmers and independent operators, but then if we actively seek to undermine a basic means by which these operators have been able to pool their resources and, in fact, have a stable market for grain for so many years and take a direct attack against that, then I think that we are in fact paddling in different directions. I think that it's not the place or the jurisdiction of this provincial Legislature to be encouraging the destruction of the Wheat Board. I would ask very much for all members to stop in that endeavour.

Anyways, thank you very much.

**The Deputy Chair:** Any minister wish to respond? Are there any others who wish to participate in the debate?

Are you ready for the question?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

#### headVote on Supplementary Estimates 2006-07, No. 2 head: General Revenue Fund

**The Deputy Chair:** Those members in favour of each of the resolutions not yet voted upon relating to the 2006-2007 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund, please say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed, please say no. The motion is carried. Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? Carried.  
The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report the supplementary estimates, No. 2, 2006-2007 as considered.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.  
5:30

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports as follows.

All resolutions relating to the 2006-2007 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund have been approved.

Advanced Education and Technology: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$107,100,000.

Agriculture and Food: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$50,000,000.

Finance: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$46,570,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$147,000,000.

Municipal Affairs and Housing: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$42,846,000.

Infrastructure and Transportation: capital investment transferred to Service Alberta, \$530,000.

**The Acting Speaker:** Does the Assembly concur in the report?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker:** Opposed? So ordered.

#### head: Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Ducharme moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Renner]

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to have been given the opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne as a proud member of the constituency of Calgary-Fort.

I thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for reading the Speech from the Throne. He is an exceptional representative of the Queen, and I commend him for that role.

Under the leadership of Alberta's 13th Premier this province is heading in a new, upward direction. The Speech from the Throne was a good indicator of what Albertans can expect within the coming months. I'm looking forward to it.

I would like to take this opportunity to praise the new Premier on setting out the government's priorities. As the Member for Calgary-Fort I can tell you with confidence, Mr. Speaker, that my constituents will greatly benefit from the new direction of their government. My constituents are vibrant, diverse, and industrious. Calgary-Fort is endowed with young families, and I have senior citizens alike and citizens having cultural roots from all over the world. These citizens stand to gain tremendously from the enhanced education, resources, and health care services.

I'm happy that I can return to my constituents to share with them that their government is not only looking out for the economic



prosperity of the province but that it is also concerned with the safety, quality of life, and integration of its citizens. Their government not only plans on what to do but on how to do it.

As it was outlined in the throne speech, the new Premier and cabinet will be focusing on building a stronger province. To begin this process, the Premier has addressed a need to govern in an inclusive way. The government is going to open the door to invite all Albertans to join in the process. By governing with this kind of transparency, Albertans will be truly satisfied with the direction that the province is taking and that they will have a strong role in the process of governance. This government knows that Alberta belongs to the people and that we in the Assembly are only here as representatives of Albertans. We are here to serve and to represent them with their ideas and solutions.

As a resident of the Calgary-Fort constituency I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the level and the speed of growth we are witnessing is like none other. Every day it seems like there is a new building being opened for business and a new family moving in. It's just amazing. As we have witnessed, measures need to be taken to ensure that this growth happens in a co-ordinated manner, and that is why I'm pleased that the government is focused on governing responsibly for the future of Alberta as well. We call this managing growth pressure.

Mr. Speaker, I'm extremely proud to be part of the government which has committed itself to enhancing its citizens' quality of life, and I believe that this commitment is an investment in the province. Just as investing in the infrastructure which gets us home safely from work, enhancing Albertans' quality of life will lead us to a more prosperous Alberta.

In this time of labour pressures Alberta is seeking to increase its workforce. I can tell you for certain, Mr. Speaker, that investing in education, health, and wellness will provide people with an added incentive to come to Alberta. Furthermore, the quality of these services will make them want to stay in Alberta, participate in our communities, and raise families here. That is what I want for Alberta. I want Albertans to love being Albertan. I think that the hon. Premier's priority will bring us closer to that goal.

This government is also very mindful of supporting those who have supported us for so long. With the emphasis on providing health care services to senior citizens, they can trust that they will have the care they need. They will also be pleased that this government is working to expand long-term care capacities and improve standards of care for Alberta's senior citizens.

Mr. Speaker, as a representative from a multicultural constituency, I would like to commend the hon. Premier for creating the Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. We are so pleased that our government has placed emphasis on promoting culture and recreation in Alberta. As Albertans drive themselves to perform economically, I feel that it is more important than ever to take time to enjoy Alberta's diverse culture. We must take advantage of our beautiful landscape by visiting the parks that we have. It is healthy to enjoy culture and recreation, and I would like to lend my support to the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Achieving a balance between hard work and enjoyment is crucial, and there are many opportunities to enjoy Alberta's culture, be it visiting one of Alberta's many libraries or going to diverse restaurants and concerts. I urge all Albertans to take time to enjoy life. They've worked so hard to achieve their goals.

5:40

The new government has also dedicated itself to providing safer and secure communities for Albertans. As I see it, this priority is linked to enhancing Albertans' quality of life. Alberta's senior

citizens should not have to be fearful of walking about in their communities. As the government works to provide an enhanced sense of security, Albertans' quality of life will also be enhanced as they will also be free to sleep with comfort, knowing that they themselves and their family are safe. That feeling is invaluable.

The commitment to education is a commitment to the future, and this government's drive to enhance Alberta's education system will benefit Alberta's children for years to come. I want to congratulate the Minister of Education on his effort. With the availability of resources they need, there is no limit to what they can reach and how they can contribute to our province's well-being.

The new Premier's priorities are truly all-encompassing. They move past the basics, and for that reason they will be successful. I also want to add a point here about the area that I represent – and it's probably an example of how much growth there is in the whole province but particularly Calgary – the growing population.

I learned from the city estimate that there are currently 90 people arriving, taking up residence in Calgary each day. So if I'm here for a day, I come back, and I have 90 more neighbours or friends. That's also talking about the need of those 90 people each day and also talking about the increase in the number of vehicles travelling on the streets of Calgary.

So the pressure of growth is tremendous in Calgary, and I want to emphasize that point and represent it in the area. I see businesses booming. New construction is growing. Many cranes – I could say this – are private business cranes. The construction of offices and private residences is growing fast and in a large number in Calgary.

Sometime I would like to ask members who live outside of Calgary to visit Calgary, make a tour. I am ready to be a tour guide, take them up to the Calgary Tower. Probably they could not see much because all the tall buildings have covered the sky there.

I look forward to the Third Session of the 26th Legislature under the leadership of our 13th Premier as we work to further Albertans' quality of life. In closing I would like to thank the constituents of Calgary-Fort for allowing me to have the honour of representing them in the House here, and I have the honour to be among my distinguished colleagues in this House.

Thank you very much.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to slide in under the deadline of our new 6 o'clock end of sitting day and have the opportunity to address some of the issues that were raised and not raised in the throne speech. Of course, as you're aware, Mr. Speaker, the response to the throne speech is an opportunity to bring up some of the issues and the way our constituents have reacted to the priorities that are outlined in the throne speech.

I, of course, have a fabulous constituency, which I am so delighted also includes the Legislative Assembly building. In fact, I don't need to welcome many of you because I know that your home away from home is in Edmonton-Centre, and I'm delighted to be host to you when you are travelling away from your homes. So many of you will know, but for the benefit of others I'll just go through a quick reminder of who my constituents are.

I have a high percentage of seniors. I know the highest rate in Alberta is generally thought to be 15 per cent, and we do find that in some southern Alberta communities and in a few other special places in Alberta. Camrose, I think, is one of them. But about 15 per cent of my constituents are seniors, most of them independently living. I only have one long-term care facility, and that's in the old General hospital, although we have some very interesting special

wings in that building. One of them is the Ming Ai wing, which is a special one for Chinese-speaking seniors in long-term care. They have the food that they choose to have. All of the attendants and nurses that work there speak either Cantonese or Mandarin. It's decorated to suit that particular cultural taste. It's a really innovative and very cool place to visit.

I also have developing in the constituency and promoted a great deal of fundraising done by the Polish community, who's building an aging-in-place facility. Now I'm hearing from the Jewish community that they're looking at converting a small apartment building to seniors' residences and further from that into a long-term care facility for them. So seniors' issues are really important to me.

I also have a lot of students who take advantage of the rental housing stock that's available in Edmonton-Centre. My students are attending, obviously, just across the river the University of Alberta. The Grant MacEwan downtown campus is in the riding. It's not that far to NAIT. Alberta College is in the riding. NorQuest College. So we're quite blessed with access to postsecondary institutions here, and with that we get a lot of students.

There are a number of people living in my constituency who deal every day with mental health challenges. Many of them successfully deal with those challenges. Some of them are on AISH, but we also have a number of other people that are on AISH for other reasons.

You've heard me speak often and lovingly of my fabulous arts community in Edmonton-Centre and also a very active GLBT community.

In the centre of the community is where the refugees and new immigrants and new Canadians tend to come when they first reach Edmonton. Once they've settled and sort of found their feet, they tend to move into the outlying communities, but they start with us, and we welcome them.

We have a wide range of faith communities, ranging from St. Joseph's Catholic Basilica, the All Saints Anglican Cathedral, several synagogues, the Robertson-Wesley United, and of course a very high number of social service agencies because they cluster in the downtown area. This tends to be where their head offices are, and as a result people needing those services also tend to cluster downtown.

Interestingly, I now have less than 500 single-family homes in the constituency.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Say that again.

**Ms Blakeman:** Less than 500 single-family homes in the constituency.

Everybody else lives in – what do they call them? – a high-density multifamily unit, which is either a condominium or rental apartment of some kind. I'm pushing the 40,000 mark, so that gives you some idea of how many multifamily dwellings we have in Edmonton-Centre. I often joke that it's 20 blocks by 20 blocks by 20 storeys high, and I'm not far off the mark there.

I, of course, listen carefully and spend a great deal of time talking to my constituents and attending community events, so they feel comfortable talking to me. Here are some of the issues that have been raised over the last six months that I would like to raise in this House in relation to what's been put in front of us with the ideas in the throne speech.

**5:50**

For the students: student tuition. They continue to feel truly burdened with the high level of student debt that they are graduating with and really do look to us here in this House for assistance with that. It doesn't help to just make more loans available. That just

makes them come out of universities with much higher debt loads. And there are consequences to that. Right now we're experiencing that consequence in the health field, for example, where we can't get students to choose to go into family practice, even though they may want to do that, because they need to choose a speciality in which they can make more money and pay off their student loan faster or they're going to be, you know, paying off these huge student loans for a much longer period of time. So there are consequences to doing this, and I think we need to be alive to that and try to make policies that are more accommodating to students. It's a knowledge economy. We need more people graduating from postsecondary education institutions. We also, frankly, need more people graduating from high school.

So the students continue to be concerned with the debt burden, and they also have raised with me the issues around rent and utility costs. We don't see anything in the throne speech that is addressing any kind of assistance for rent other than, I guess indirectly, the programs that municipalities have come up with where they're subsidizing certain people up to, you know, a couple of hundred dollars on their rent every month. So, again, that's something that I think we need to do.

Speaking of rent, I would recommend to the government the Liberal policy which my colleague from Calgary-Currie shepherded through quite a good consultation process over a number of months with a feedback loop in it going back to stakeholders. I'll let you read the full text of that on our website. But certainly, as it involves rent, two of the things we were recommending that, really, people are asking for several times a day in my office are to hold the rent increase to once a year and to hold it to 10 per cent. I continue to advocate for that. I think a 10 per cent profit margin, or markup margin, is well above any kind of inflation rate or cost-of-living rate and should satisfy most entrepreneurs that they're making money off of their investment there.

We're experiencing people that are ending up with several hundred dollars' worth of increases several times a year. It's creating huge trauma, and that has consequences because then we end up with problems with people in unsafe housing and the stress of having to do that, and there are health problems. Then they end up in the health system. You know, these things are all linked together.

Affordable housing. I think the government has now come to understand that there needs to be government involvement in that. Expecting the private sector to volunteer, to not make money and build houses, just wasn't going to make it. We do need to have the government involvement in that if we're going to have affordable housing schemes or make it accessible to people, so I encourage them to continue to look at that.

The government has tried to do a number of things on the homeless front. I continue to encourage them to look at the transition factor here, where we're trying to transition, for example, battered women, victims of domestic violence, out of the short-term emergency shelters and into transitional housing and then beyond that into third-stage housing even and then out of the system. But if we keep insisting that they only get three weeks in a shelter and then they're dumped back out again, guess what? If they don't have economic security and they don't have anywhere else to go – please refer to my previous two topics about rent costs and affordable housing – they go back to their abuser. What other choice do they have? There are consequences to the decisions that we make in this House and that the government makes. These transitional accommodations are particularly important to women coming out of battering situations, to people trying to recover in drug and alcohol rehab

treatment. All very important, and all with very high relapse factors if we can't get them stabilized. So, very important.

Utilities. Electricity has just been a complete and total chaotic mess from start to finish, and it really needs to be addressed. It's a rip-off, and it's causing huge misfortune for people. I'm going to let my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar expand on that, which I'm sure he will in the future.

Downtown revitalization is an issue. We've being very successful. We're struggling a bit right now because we were successful. I think the municipality needs to work in partnership with the province to make sure that that continues to be a successful thing.

Arts support is the next thing on my list, and I continue to recommend to this government: you cannot go wrong with supporting the arts. You will not regret investing in the arts. Double that arts budget. Triple that arts budget. You will be paid back in so many ways in quality of life, in employment, in the ancillary factor that puts money into the communities, in the vitality that it creates in all of your communities. You cannot go wrong investing in the arts.

The environment is raised many, many times by my constituents. It's consistently the third most talked about issue there, but I'll let my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View expand on that issue.

Some very specific things now. A request to please bring forth service dog or service animal legislation. We did redo the guide dog act, but we didn't keep that open and actually make substantive changes to allow service dogs. So we still have people who, for instance, have seizure alert animals with them being barred from taxis, being barred from malls, being barred from community league halls, and that sort of ridiculousness. We really should be able to deal with that in 2007.

We have a huge issue around wages for caregivers. A number of people have raised that in the House now. It's really affecting my seniors. It's really affecting people that are on AISH. We've got to get out in front of this one. We also need to look at respite for volunteer and unpaid caregivers. I don't know how many of you are aware but certainly with older patients 80 per cent of their caregivers are their spouse. So we tend to have 80-year-old women looking after their 85-year-old husbands, and they are the only and primary caregiver. That's an awful lot of work for somebody that age. They

need some help. We need more home-care services there because that affects everybody.

Interestingly, I had a phone call from Bonita Davidson, who's a constituent and was a home-care worker, so-called self-employed. No. She was working for one person actually but didn't have WCB coverage, so when she got injured on the job, that was it. She couldn't do the work, which really put the individual that hired her in a bad position. She had to use all of her savings and sell her car because she wasn't working so she didn't get paid, and there was no WCB. That's a gap that we should be addressing.

There is a huge issue with the fragility of the not-for-profit/charitable/volunteer sector right now, which is affecting everybody in my community and, I would argue, in every community in Alberta. You're going to hear me talk about this an awful lot through this spring and fall sitting here in this House. This is dramatically affecting our whole quality of life, our delivery of social service, recreation, arts and culture, children's services, seniors' services, right across the board.

A couple of last things. Privacy issues continue to be raised, having Telus and other companies contracted as the human resource and cheque payer for a number of different groups and concerns about privacy of personal information there. And if I can put in a final plug for serious consideration of a high-speed rail link between downtown Edmonton and downtown Calgary. I think if we're going to grow up and be a big province and join the rest of the countries in Europe, for example, we need to get some rapid transit that goes across the province and is public transit based.

So, with those issues I'm happy. I will go back and report to my constituents that I've raised them in the House. I look forward to seeing what the government can do to try and address the issues that I've raised. Thank you.

I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. members, I see that the clock is striking 6, so the House stands adjourned until 1 o'clock tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

