

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, March 15, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/03/15

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for our abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you a special guest that we have today in your gallery. Victor Buffalo is the chief of the Samson Cree nation and was recently inducted into the Aboriginal Business Hall of Fame as a 2006 laureate honoured for his lifetime contribution to aboriginal businesses in Canada. This is a significant acknowledgement of his accomplishments for the Samson Cree nation. I will be speaking more about Mr. Buffalo's accomplishments later in a member's statement. However, in the meantime I'd like to ask Chief Buffalo to rise and receive the warm wishes of the Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly individuals who have helped keep Alberta's public library service strong, accessible, and part of our community fabric. First, we have several representatives of the Legislature Library here today. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them to stand when their names are called: Sandra Perry, Valerie Footz, Eileen Cardy, Heather Close, Nancy DeJager, Vivianne Fagnan, Christina Liggins, Philip Massolin, Warren Maynes, and Sharna Polard.

Mr. Speaker, I also have representatives of the Alberta public library system here today. They are also seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I'll also ask them to stand: Muriel Abdurahman, chair of Strathcona county library; Ernie Jurkat, board member, Strathcona; Heather Belle Dowling, previous director of Strathcona; Peter Moloney, St. Albert library board; Dr. Sheila Bertram, Edmonton public board; Patricia Jobb, associate director, Edmonton; Maureen Wilcox, chair of Yellowhead; Clive Maishment, director of Yellowhead; Lucy Strobl, the chair of Onoway library; Yvonne Slemko, board member, Onoway; Karen Lester, the chair of Didsbury; Inez Kosinski, library manager, Didsbury; and also two last representatives from my department, Patricia McNamee and Kerry Anderson.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

The Speaker: Hon. members might wonder why there was such a long introduction permitted. Today is the 100th anniversary of the first Libraries Act in the history of the province of Alberta. These individuals are here today to commemorate that. An hon. member will provide additional information in a moment or two.

One of the people in the Speaker's gallery today, though, I'd like to point out, is a former Member of this Legislative Assembly. I'd like Mrs. Abdurahman to stand again, please.

The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some bright, shining stars, 46 grade 6 students joining us. Accompanying them are their teachers, Mr. Larry Neville, Mrs. Amanda Hetchler, Ms Niki Fulton, and Mr. John Ferguson, as well as parent volunteers Kelly Campbell, Geri Shier, Peter and Shelley Lawrence, Terry Davidson, Helen and Paul Overwater, Colleen Hovey, Penny Johnson, and Laura Biggs. I'm pleased that they could make their way up to Edmonton. I've visited Delburne school many times as both of my sons went from K to 12 there, and they had some very good teachers. They're joining us today in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a former employee of Health and Wellness Alberta and a famous non-Métis harvester, Mr. Mark Kastner, now an employee of the Calgary health region, and next to him his boss, a constituent of mine in Foot-hills-Rocky View but better known to most of you as the director and CEO of the Calgary health region, Mr. Jack Davis. Welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: My guests are not quite here yet, but they'll come in during question period, so what I'll do is introduce them for the record now.

I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly a group of 62 visitors from Lacombe upper elementary school, about 50 students and, I believe, about 11 or 12 parents here. First of all, the teachers are Mrs. Heather MacKay-Hawkins and Mr. Derek Rankin. The parent helpers are Mrs. Carrie Scott, Mr. Stacey Scott, Brent Brookes, Cheryl Court, Brad Johnstone, Kim Johnstone, Shona Karas, Debbie Sissons, and Mrs. Lavina Stewart. I'm not going to ask them to stand, because they're not here, but we will welcome them as they come in.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Christine McMeckan and Don Crisall. Christine and Don are United Food & Commercial Workers representatives who are currently on the picket line with workers at Palace Casino at the West Edmonton Mall. These workers went out in September, and the members are still fighting for decent working conditions and a livable wage. Christine has been a full-time union representative with UFCW local 401 since 1998, was a vice-president with the Alberta Federation of Labour for 10 years, and also chaired the Health and Safety Committee for the AFL. She has volunteered for many years to help raise funds with the UFCW for leukemia research. Don Crisall is a union organizer with UFCW local 401 in Calgary and has been for the last eight years. Most of his union experience has been with organizing workers without a union, including the Shaw Conference Centre and Lakeside Packers. They are seated in the public gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would now ask that they 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'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Mark Wells. Mark was born in Bashaw, and he lives in Edmonton. He is a graduate of the University of Alberta with a BA in English. He has volunteered with IHuman Youth Society, helping them to produce their first play at the Citadel, and Mark was a 4-H Beef Club member in Stettler as well. Mark has now joined our staff as a sessional assistant. We're very excited with the communications and research work that he's been doing for us, and we look forward to his contribution. I'd now ask him, please, to rise and to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to be able to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Dr. Gloria Keays. Dr. Keays is a deputy provincial health officer with Alberta Health and Wellness. As part of the public health division Dr. Keays works with her colleagues to provide leadership in disease control and prevention, wellness strategy development, and health surveillance. Equally important to the work done behind the scenes is the role our provincial health officers play in communicating with the public, raising awareness of health concerns affecting the province, and calming concerns by providing Albertans with medical facts and tips to keep citizens healthy. I'd ask Dr. Keays to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

1:10

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly I think it's 50 to 60 people from Parkland county, Parkland school division: teachers, parents, and students. They are in the public gallery, I believe.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Centennial of the Libraries Act

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring recognition to the 100th anniversary of the Libraries Act. March 15, 1907, marked the start of a century of knowledge, imagination, opportunity, and history thanks to Alberta's public library service. From Zama City in the north to Coutts in the south, from Bear Canyon in the west to Lloydminster in the east, Albertans have access to the world through their local library.

Alberta's libraries have grown and changed over the last 100 years. Originally referred to as reading rooms, libraries in Alberta began as a simple collection of books and documents. Over the years libraries have evolved to include computers, audiovisual material, and a variety of new online and digitized information sources along with the traditional book collections.

Libraries are also places where learning opportunities abound, from story and craft sessions for young children to online courses for adults. Last year Albertans visited their libraries more than 17 million times in person in addition to the more than 15 million visits they made to library websites and online catalogues. This reflects the passion that we feel for our libraries and the opportunities that they hold. Albertans have access to nearly 9 million books and 1.4 million other items such as CDs and DVDs, and Albertans aren't shy

about borrowing these materials, with more than 32 million items borrowed from public libraries in 2006.

Let's not forget the efforts of library staff when it comes to seeking out answers to the questions that we have. In 2005 Albertans asked 4.8 million reference questions within libraries, and they asked 2.8 million reference questions online. Public library staff are knowledgeable, talented, and top notch when it comes to finding and sharing information. *They truly are the gateways for all that libraries have to offer.*

Mr. Speaker, many Albertans use their libraries to make their lives easier. For example, workers from crews come in to the Manning library to do their banking online. The library is the only place where they can go to do this, and it makes it easier for them to work away from home and still look after their personal business. For other Albertans their local library opens up a world of information. Patrons of the Hinton municipal library can read newspapers from all over the world online and have access to a number of databases thanks to the Alberta public library electronic network.

Libraries have been a part of Alberta since it began and, like the province, have grown and changed to meet the needs of our citizens. Whether you're looking for a book, searching for a job online, or learning how to use a computer for the first time, your local library is there for you. If you've never been to a library or even if you visit often, take the time to stop in and see what your library has to offer. You'll be glad you did.

*We have to acknowledge the members of that first Legislature for their forward thinking in passing that first Act To Provide for the Establishment of Public Libraries.**

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

Chief Victor Buffalo

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise to recognize a distinguished Albertan and Canadian. Chief Victor Buffalo was inducted into the Aboriginal Business Hall of Fame on February 13 in Toronto. This honour is a result of Chief Buffalo's numerous contributions to the aboriginal people over the past four decades.

Chief Buffalo has actively encouraged economic development for the Samson Cree nation. In the 1970s as Samson grew, it was discovered that there was a need for financial capital to support the development of businesses. As a result, Chief Buffalo led the creation of the Peace Hills Trust in 1981. Today Peace Hills Trust is a very successful financial institution with \$400 million in assets and is involved in oil and gas development, insurance services, real estate, and retail ventures.

Chief Buffalo believes in education as the key to ensuring a strong future for aboriginal youth. This vision has undoubtedly allowed his community to take an active role in the economic life of the province. He also was active in the creation of the Hobbema cadet corps to engage young people in positive activities, keeping them away from the temptation of drugs and gang activity.

In 2005 Chief Buffalo created the ki-son-i-ya-mi-naw, and that's Cree for "our money heritage trust fund," to manage \$340 million received from the government of Canada. This fund will support the ambitions of present and future generations.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, Chief Buffalo has shown significant leadership for the aboriginal people. He has created a legacy that emphasizes self-reliance, which will secure the future of his people for many generations.

Once again, all members of the Assembly extend congratulations to Chief Buffalo for his outstanding leadership and accomplishments. Thank you.

*The text in italics exceeded the time limit and was not read in the House.

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

Dr. Robert Stollery, CM

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great sadness and regret that I rise today to mourn the passing of a true gentleman, Dr. Robert Stollery. Few other men have lived a life as exemplary as Dr. Stollery's. His service to the community began early in his life, when he was a member of the Royal Canadian Navy in World War II. In 1949 he graduated with honours in civil engineering from the University of Alberta and joined Poole Construction. His first project was building the Aberhart sanatorium here in Edmonton, and once Bob Stollery started building, he never stopped. The many impressive projects he worked on included rebuilding the Jasper Park Lodge after it was gutted by a massive fire in 1952, the town of Inuvik in 1957, and the Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre at the University of Alberta from 1977 to 1985. He helped set the stage for Alberta's current prosperity when from 1980 to 1984 he oversaw the construction of the state-of-the-art Scotford refinery project, that produced synthetic crude oil from Alberta's oil sands, the first refinery of its kind in the world.

What Dr. Stollery helped build is more than bricks and mortar, Mr. Speaker. It is our community. In recent years he graciously gave his time, money, and considerable talent to the Winspear Centre for the performing arts, Grant MacEwan College, the University of Alberta, the Edmonton City Centre Church, and the United Way. He founded the Stollery charitable foundation, which since 1994 has given hundreds of grants to community programs and charities here in Edmonton and in Kamloops, British Columbia, and he revived the Edmonton Community Foundation, which annually contributes more than \$8 million to charities in the Edmonton area.

His biggest legacy is the Stollery children's hospital, which Dr. Stollery took the lead in creating. *Each year 140,000 patient visits occur at this hospital, a world-renowned centre that offers the best pediatric care to children from all over western Canada. With his passing it seems ironic that a man who built so much has left such a hole in our hearts. He will be missed.**

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

Grant MacEwan Griffins Volleyball Team

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to rise to recognize an outstanding Alberta women's volleyball team. The Grant MacEwan Griffins came home national champions this past weekend. The Griffins entered the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association tournament at Capilano College in Vancouver as underdogs. They had to defeat the number one and number four ranked teams just to make it to the final. They were up against the hometown team, but the Griffins did not let a partisan crowd get in their way, winning their very first national title.

It takes a great deal of skill and dedication to win a championship banner. This achievement builds on Alberta's outstanding reputation for good sportsmanship and excellence in athletics. They've made their school, their community, and our province extremely proud, and I want to thank them. It is with great pride that I ask the members of this House to join me in congratulating the athletes, coaches, and training staff of the Grant MacEwan Griffins.

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

Foster Parents

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a word in French,

"parenté," that looks like our word "parent" but means more. It's more than mothers and fathers. It's more than parentage or ancestors too. Probably, the closest in English is extended family. "Foster parent" is a term that pushes the envelope too. It means more than those who parent and more than those who take care of someone else's kids. It goes beyond the limits of the word "family" as we usually use it.

Families are those who will always take you in, who take all kinds of stuff from you, whether they deserve it or not. We do that supposedly because they're our flesh and blood, because we're biologically programmed to. If the ties are of adoption, they're still strong, growing out of a need to have ongoing significant others. We talk of the family as a pillar of society. They're bonds that are more than DNA, more than self-interest, more than natural need.

That is what foster parents bring, what they do, and what they are. Foster parents are the leading edge of what makes us civilized, extending next of kin to the human and global sphere. They give love and attention to those who may be with them only a short time. Mutual bonds and emotional rewards develop, but these may be cut as children move back to their own or others' homes. Foster parents show us a world where self-interest is not ultimate. They deserve far more than we give them: more in money, though they're not in it for the money, and more in respect and in recognition as role models, though most would shy away from this.

We give awards for those who rescue, who give long service, who put their lives on the line. Foster parents do all of this. In the province that pioneered Family Day, they deserve to be seen as family extraordinaire.

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

1:20

Parliamentary Democracy

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today to speak in favour of our great Alberta parliamentary tradition and in defence of democracy. In our Alberta we are elected by the people, and MLAs represent their constituents. Members of this Legislative Assembly are members first, and nobody can take that away from us. From Magna Carta to today our Legislatures and Parliaments stand on the principle of representation. They rest very much today on the bedrock principle of democracy. Autocratic and controlling elites will spring up in corners of our system, but they cannot exercise total control. Albertans and all Canadians will not countenance control by the few.

In our Alberta the Alberta Act, the fight for Alberta's resources in the early 1900s, and then the energy wars of the '70s and '80s – we have clearly shown our disdain for elitist domination. But it is in the nature of some of our fellow humans, when they get even a little power over others, to exercise that power as if they can do so without restraint. In industries we see that sometimes in the phenomenon of the firing foreman. That was the guy who would use his power to fire at will or by whim. If they had to, innuendo, character assassinations, set-ups, and other deeds would be common tools. These guys don't care about the effects on the families of those at whom they take aim. In elected politics these types of characters do not care about or understand democracy, and we do see them. I have personal experience of that.

There are those in a democracy who will question the right to dissent, the right to think differently or put forward ideas in a different way. But a dissenting view may show the way to a better way to go. That different view may show the way to truth. We must respect dissent. Indeed, our parliamentary democracy, in the way it enshrines the right to dissent, in the way it protects the right to

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dissent, in the way that it safeguards our freedom of speech and to say what we think is right, is the true guarantor of our freedom in society.

I will close with a short updated quote from John F. Kennedy. It was given at Amherst College a short time before his fateful visit to Dallas, Texas.

The men [and women] who create power make an indispensable contribution to the Nation's greatness, but the men [and women] who question power make a contribution just as indispensable, especially when that questioning is disinterested, for they determine whether we use power or power uses us.

*MLAs must speak for their constituents. Thank God we have our Alberta Legislature. Thank God we can vote. Long live democracy.**

The Speaker: Hon. member, sorry. Please have a chair. Yesterday the chair was severely criticized for allowing some members to go a few seconds beyond. Today I'm getting notes because I interrupted at two minutes. You can't have it both ways. The rule is two minutes.

head: **Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees**

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I hereby submit five copies of the report of the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts covering the committee's 2006 activities during the spring and summer sittings of the Second Session of the 26th Legislature.

Thank you very much.

head: **Notices of Motions**

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 30, I wish to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to move that the ordinary business of the Assembly be adjourned in order that we may hold an emergency debate on a matter of urgent public importance, namely the urgent need for the Premier or the Minister of Education on his behalf to protect the educational needs of the students of Parkland county and to foster goodwill between teachers, parents, and students and the school board by appointing a special mediator to help resolve the current Parkland school division labour dispute.

Thanks.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 203 Service Dogs Act

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill, being Service Dogs Act. This bill will prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities using a certified service dog. It also makes provision for a mechanism to identify service dogs.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents

today. The first is a news release from the Alberta Teachers' Association, filed on March 8 of this year. In this release the ATA is asking the government to appoint a special mediator to help resolve the Parkland dispute.

The second is a very heartfelt letter from Ms Cheryl Sneath. In the letter Ms Sneath notes that her daughters miss their teachers, miss their friends, and want to go back to school.

Thanks.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of the recruitment and retention survey done by the Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families related to the crisis in the child and family services sector related to retention and staff.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from my constituent Jim Sexsmith. He wants to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, the landlord to be "responsible for keeping their property in a safe and environmental condition."

Thank you.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Mr. Lindsay, Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, pursuant to the Gaming and Liquor Act: the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission 2005-2006 annual report.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Chair: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to the Standing Orders I would now ask the Government House Leader to please share with us the projected government business for the week commencing March 19.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under our new Standing Orders, of course, there is no opportunity for government business on Monday, so government business would continue on Tuesday, March 20, after Orders of the Day with the supplementary appropriation bill in Committee of the Whole, the interim supply bill in second reading; Bill 1, Lobbyists Act, in second reading; Bill 3, the climate change act, in second reading; and address and reply to the Speech from the Throne.

On Wednesday, March 21, under Orders of the Day the interim supply bill; supplementary supply bill; Bill 1, Lobbyists Act, second reading; Bill 3, climate change act, second reading; Bill 4, Child Care Licensing Act, second reading; and Bill 5, Health Statutes Amendment Act, second reading; and address and reply to the Speech from the Throne.

On Thursday, March 22, the interim supply bill, third reading; address and reply to the Speech from the Throne; Bill 4, Child Care Licensing Act; and Bill 5, Health Statutes Amendment Act, both in second reading.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the rule says that we should proceed

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with question period at 1:30. We do have another matter in the Routine that we have to deal with; that is, we have a Standing Order 30 application. The rules also say that we should proceed with the Routine till 1:30. So the Chair is going to exercise some discretion today by not calling and recognizing the member with the Standing Order 30 question in the event that this would be approved. If the Standing Order 30 application were upheld, there would be no question period because the House would go immediately into the discussion and the debate.

So the chair will take it that there is approval of the House to proceed with Oral Question Period and that nobody will rise on a point of anything.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: We will now recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Red Deer River Water Transfer

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been trying for the past few days to get straight answers from this government about the water transfer from the Red Deer River to the big development in Balzac, but we've received nothing concrete at all. Answering this question shouldn't be an option for this government. This is a serious matter of great concern for the people of central Alberta. Right now everybody is waiting for the decision on the water licence to be made. So my question is to the Premier. When can the people of the Red Deer River basin expect a decision from his government on issuing this water licence?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I will have the Minister of Environment give us a bit of an indication of how it's proceeding through the process. I have stood in this House, I think, three, four times answering a question with respect to the process. It's very clear. As to the timing of the decision, our minister will answer that.

Mr. Renner: The most direct answer that I have, Mr. Speaker, is that the applicant has asked that the decision be deferred until April, and that's the latest that I've heard.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Premier and his minister talk about process, but this process has resulted in delay after delay. The deadline's December 1, December 31, February 28, now apparently sometime in April. At that rate this whole project is going to be built and up and running before the water licence is issued. Can the Premier tell this Assembly why, in apparently such a well-established process, there have been so many delays? What's going on?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's up to the parties that, of course, make the application. There may be more information; there may be more evidence coming to the board. I'm not quite sure, but perhaps the minister has had further correspondence or knowledge of why the delay.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, there's a very clear process that's involved in applications of this nature. Most go very smoothly. Most are not as controversial as this one. There is a requirement for advertising and receiving of public input. That has constituted much of the delay that's been involved in this particular application. As I indicated, at this point the applicant has asked for a further delay.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier stated yesterday that the people of the Red Deer River Valley shouldn't be concerned with this. "They can trust us to do the right thing," he said. But he isn't giving the answers. Indeed, we have a government that's put millions of dollars into this project, a government in which ministers have stood in this very room and defended it. So, my question is to the Premier. Why in the world should the people of central Alberta trust this government on this decision?

Mr. Stelmach: Because, Mr. Speaker, I do keep my word.

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

Racing Entertainment Centre Project

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to quote from the horse racing journal of November 2004. I'm quoting the CEO of the United Horsemen of Alberta, and he said, quote, we will have an agreement in place with the Alberta government such that if the government ever changes its philosophy on gaming and horse racing, there will be a commitment for a buyout. End of quote. The CEO of United Horsemen of Alberta. To the Premier: is there such an agreement?

Mr. Stelmach: I didn't catch the month of whatever the leader said, month of 2004. My responsibility at that time was Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. In terms of whatever is brought up today . . .

Mr. R. Miller: You're the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: He asked a question; I'm giving an answer. So please allow me to complete the answer.

I'll get more detail on what the hon. member has brought up.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: will the Premier bring an answer whether this agreement exists or not to this Assembly by Monday?

Mr. Stelmach: Who knows? It might be even earlier. You know, I'll just check to see what the issue is, and I'll get back to the Assembly.*

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the backers of this project have publicly claimed they have an agreement with the government for a buyout, or they will have an agreement as of 2004, is the Premier's flip-flop on this project from calling it ridiculous to now seeming to defend it because he now knows that Alberta taxpayers are on the hook if this project does not proceed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, this hon. member has brought forward, first of all, the secret deal. He hasn't been able to provide any evidence of this alleged secret deal. Now he's onto another tangent. His member sitting next to him seems to know a lot about horses and when they drink water. Maybe ask your neighbour; maybe he can tell you.

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

*See p. 188, right col., para. 13

Highway Bypass Project in Grande Prairie

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The residents of the Grande Prairie region are deeply concerned about the quality of life in their area, about the impact of growth on a wide range of things. We were recently up there for a town hall meeting. People were in tears over the cost of housing. Traffic congestion is overwhelming. Schools are struggling, as is the college. My question to the Premier: will the Premier finally commit his government to funding the much-needed bypass connecting highway 43 to highway 16? It's a mere two miles.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the bypass he's talking about is a temporary bypass. The two miles that he's referring to, it just happens to be an issue between the county of Grande Prairie and the city of Grande Prairie. The actual long-term bypass planned goes right around the whole airport, and that is a project that will take a few more years to complete. What the member is referring to is just trying to tie a short piece of road so that we don't have the hundreds of trucks passing through today's Grande Prairie bypass, which has numerous lights on it.

Dr. Taft: Clearly, he understands exactly what I'm referring to, but my question wasn't: what am I referring to? I'm looking for a decision from a Premier who wants to lead this government. A decision, please, Mr. Premier. Will your government support this bypass project, which you know so well?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I am leading the government. Not "wants to"; I am.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, not much leadership – not much leadership. One more time: will you commit your government to building this pass, or won't you?

Mr. Stelmach: I think the question was whether we're committed to looking after many of the issues around Grande Prairie. I spent a considerable amount of time with both councils, very fully aware of their needs. We are going to introduce a very thorough capital plan, and that'll be in conjunction with the budget. Many of these growth pressures that we're experiencing not only in Grande Prairie but in other areas will be addressed.

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

Royalty Review

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans know that they're being fleeced by the oil corporations thanks to the sweetheart deal they get from the royalty regime provided by this government. With oil prices pushing \$60 a barrel, billions of dollars in unearned profits are leaving Alberta every year, yet this Premier has already broken his promise to conduct an open and independent review of Alberta's royalties. The question is to the Premier. How can he justify a royalty review which is dominated by friends of the oil industry and which will meet with private interests behind closed doors?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe I answered this question quite thoroughly when the Leader of the Official Opposition asked it the other day. These are professionals. They have to follow codes of ethics. They're people very proficient in the business, especially economics. They come from a very wide variety of backgrounds, and their purpose is to present the information, put it on the table, so that all Albertans can assess whether the current oil sands royalty review – and also conventional oil and gas – is fair and just both to the companies investing and to Albertans as owners of the resource.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Pembina Institute has established four criteria to determine whether or not a process is open and transparent. Guess what? This process fails all four. Albertans are not actively involved. There are no mechanisms for meaningful public input. There's been no insurance about giving Albertans full access to details, and there are clear conflicts of interest on the review panel. Will the Premier come clean with Albertans and admit that his so-called royalty review is a sham designed to deflect criticism from the government's sellout of Alberta's resources?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, shortly after the swearing-in I met with the Pembina Institute in Calgary. We had a thorough discussion, and from the meeting we had, I thought they were very supportive of the position we're taking and the fact that we're doing the oil sands royalty review. But if there's any further information, the Minister of Finance can finish.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would just add that each and every Albertan has the ability online to put in their opinions. That online service will be up shortly, will be available within probably the next two or three weeks. There will be four public meetings around the province, at which anyone in this Assembly or anyone, period, is more than welcome to come and make a presentation, that will be public to everyone.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier overrule his minister and require the committee to have public hearings around the province and to not meet with private interests behind closed doors? Will he do that?

Mr. Stelmach: I just heard the minister say that we're having four public meetings in the province of Alberta. Those are public. Unless you have some other definition, I don't know, but these are four public meetings where Albertans can present evidence to the panel.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Federal Equalization Formula

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of Alberta are worried and confused because this government is confused and sending out conflicting messages. On the equalization formula the minister in charge of intergovernmental affairs was quoted in the *Calgary Herald*. He is very worried about having resource revenue included in the calculations, while our Finance minister is quoted that he could care less whether the new formula incorporates resource revenue. Albertans care. Could the Premier please clarify if this government cares?

Mr. Stelmach: The government does care. It certainly cares about its people. With this particular issue it's very clear. The Council of the Federation has received a letter from the Prime Minister that indicated that there will be no inclusion of nonrenewable resources in the calculation of the equalization formula. We have moved, Mr. Speaker, as you know from a five-province standard to a 10-province standard. We've come a long way, but we'll see what happens on Monday in the budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government claims it had to shut down hospitals, schools, and delay maintenance on infrastructure along with putting off building new schools, hospitals, and roads to be fiscally responsible. Will the new equalization formula account for such things as infrastructure deficit, unfunded liability of Albertans to the Canada pension plan versus the Quebec-funded pension plan, that is very lucrative?

Mr. Stelmach: I think that question we'd better ask the federal minister responsible for treasury because they're the ones going to be responsible for splitting the pool, the equalization pool, amongst the have-not provinces.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Credible economists like Brian Lee Crowley from Atlantic Canada point out the problems of equalization. After decades it's obvious the regions are becoming more reliant on transfers. It's not a hand up; it's an addicting and entrapping handout. It is not working. Does the Premier have the fortitude to fight for all Canadians and pursue a policy that insists on a sunset clause with the federal government on a new equalization formula?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, equalization is part of the Constitution, and it will require a constitutional change. The actual allocation of the equalization pool is still the responsibility of the federal government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Private/Public Partnerships

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister of P3 education stated, "The research I did was that every time a P3 was unsuccessful, it was commenced by a Liberal or a socialist government." I would suggest the minister study harder in his social studies class. For example, let's review his Conservative government's failed P3 Calgary courthouse, the sweet private deal on the south link urgent care centre, and the cost overruns on the Anthony Henday. My questions are to the Premier. Was former Premier Klein, under whose watch these P3 failures occurred, a socialist?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if it's part of the responsibility of the Premier to talk about the political alliances of others that are not in the House. Let's put it this way: this is an area of disagreement, obviously. I know that there's a fully developed public/private partnership process actually part of government, and that's a part of the B.C. government. They do carry the Liberal label. They have built a considerable amount of infrastructure under public/private partnership, and it has been successful.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Yesterday the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation stated that we're not going back into debt. Mr. Speaker, the Premier is signing Albertans up for 30 years of payments to private companies. By any definition this is a debt. To the Premier: how much alternative financing, Enron juggling, P3 debt is the Premier willing to load onto the backs of Alberta taxpayers, who will be on the hook for the next 30 years?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has put a whole bunch of different words in there, but just to get down to the very specific, of course a good project is the southeast leg of the Anthony Henday. It'll be completed this July, fully open to traffic. Here's the thing. We will know what the payout is on it on an annual basis, including maintenance. It's a fixed cost. I can assure you that it's infrastructure that's going to be enjoyed by the next generation and the generation after, and it will show up in our financial statements.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I'm sure the next 30 years of Alberta's generations will enjoy paying for an untold interest amount over that time period.

To the Premier: how deep does the Premier believe Alberta taxpayers' pockets are when it comes to paying the price for his government's alternative financing schemes? Is this the transparency and accountability the Premier has promised? Are you becoming so transparent that we can see through you?

Mr. Stelmach: Maybe he's got something else behind the eyes; I'm not quite sure. But, Mr. Speaker, talking about transparency, any liability incurred by the government on behalf of taxpayers is and will be duly recorded in our financial statements. This is one area of very large infrastructure getting built, getting built on time, and I will say at great savings when you bring it back to the net present value. If there's a further need to explain the process to any of the hon. members across the floor, we'll gladly have them sit down with our people and explain it.

Rent Regulations

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of Albertans rent their homes or apartments. In today's rental market renters face a growing number of challenges; for example, rising rents and low vacancies. Some of my constituents who are moving out of their rental properties tell me that they are receiving their damage deposit back from their landlord without any interest included. My questions are for the Minister of Service Alberta. What is the policy on landlords paying interest on damage deposits?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the policy on interest is that if a damage deposit is asked for from a landlord to a tenant, it must be put in a bank account, and it must pay interest based on a formula. Unfortunately for the renter, the formula has allowed virtually zero interest to accumulate since 2002. This year it's about .9 or .8. So they would normally get interest if interest had accrued, and it's the responsibility of the landlord to return that interest to the tenant.

Mr. Shariff: To the same minister: where can renters turn for help if they suspect that their landlord isn't following the requirements of the Residential Tenancies Act?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you. Tenants – and we are contacted by many, as everyone in the House is aware of the issues right now – can contact Service Alberta consumer information at 1-877-427-4088 for information and assistance. As well, they can deal with the tenant advisory boards that are in Red Deer, Fort McMurray, and Edmonton. In any case, if they are in violation of the Residential Tenancies Act, they can take their landlord to small debts court.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ambulance Operators' Labour Dispute

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite a negotiation in progress between Flagstaff county and local ambulance workers in Flagstaff county the government has been heavy handed and preemptive in forcing the negotiation into a disputes inquiry board. The chaos created by the government's abandonment of the regional ambulance agreement two years ago continues. My first question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain why the government uses a different set of rules for intervening with the Parkland teachers than for the ambulance labour negotiation in Flagstaff?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is one matter that the minister responsible has all the information on.

Ms Evans: It is a good question, Mr. Speaker. The health care service of providing ambulance was identified in a previously done government report as something that may be an essential service. Although we haven't yet enacted legislation to make ambulance per se an essential service at the municipal level, it is, in fact, something that we have to consider when we're looking at the safety of providing service in a situation of dispute. I've spoken with the reeve on more than one occasion about this. In the first instance we hoped not to intervene, but we did because of concerns for safety.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: why does the minister's personal belief that emergency workers should not be allowed to strike trump the workers' right to do so?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, under no circumstance would a minister of the Crown say that their own personal belief trumps the right of anybody else. What I have pointed out quite clearly is the concern that we have had about the safety of providing service. In the view of our mediator who has been working with both parties to make sure that dates and process were properly in place, the concern that has been represented to me is that safety may be compromised. I have never seen the contingency plan for providing ambulance service if the strike were allowed to take place, and even in the absence of legislation, one in prudent management would have to be concerned if anything happened.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: why is the Premier allowing the government to run roughshod over the local decision-makers' established process? Given that contingency plans were in place, why didn't the government give Flagstaff county and the union a chance to work through their own process?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I know the reeve, Bill Reister, quite well. I will give him a call and talk to him personally if there is an issue with respect to this matter, but I have full confidence in my minister that she is dealing with the issue the proper way.

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

Seniors' Property Taxes

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1993 the Alberta government had an enormous debt, a fact of which we're all acutely aware, and every Albertan was expected to play a role to help eliminate that debt, and that included seniors. Suddenly in 1994 seniors were compelled to pay an education property tax, but at that time they understood its purpose. Well, that purpose has been served. I have some questions for the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Now that Alberta is debt free, will he eliminate the education property tax from the shoulders of seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek does appropriately mention things about programs of the past, where seniors did not pay the education property tax previous to 1993. It was felt at that stage, as all programs change in design, that we would focus more effort to ensure that we could provide the maximum benefit to the seniors in greatest need. So the programs have been designed to ensure that for those who have the greatest financial burden, we would help and assist in program design rather than saying that all seniors would be exempted from the education property tax.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I wonder if the minister would at least reduce that tax for those seniors who can't afford to pay it.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, with respect to reductions in this or any other program, part of that would also be part of municipal affairs, where that program element does specifically align. Our department at this stage does not have any specific designs for reducing the education property tax. Where I would say that we have specifically improved are the monthly cash benefits to low-income seniors. We could go through the assistance on one-time costs, like home repairs, furnace, major appliances. We could even go through how income taxes have helped reduce the burden on all seniors, for example, in keeping more money in their pockets. About \$2 billion are going to various seniors' programs, very substantial amounts.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I wonder if the minister is prepared to cap or extend the cap or fix the cap so that those needy seniors who are really in trouble paying this tax aren't faced with the added burden of ever-increasing property values, which serves to increase property tax.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, in 2004 that's precisely what this government did: cap any increases in education property tax to all seniors. They do not pay any increase that we've seen, inflationary or otherwise, in their property taxes. They have been capped at that amount since 2004.

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

Climate Change

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in his press conference the Environment minister declared to a shocked audience that climate change is real. Climate change is the number one issue for Albertans and Canadians, even above health care. In fact, man-made climate warming has been identified by the scientific community for decades, but this government has distinguished itself in ignoring science whenever inconvenient. In 2001-02 the then Environment minister spent several million public dollars convincing Albertans that cutting emissions would destroy our economy and

jobs. Evidence now shows that governments such as this are passing on a disastrous environmental and economic burden to future generations. To the Premier: since you were part . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier. Sorry.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, environment, of course, is of utmost importance to this government. That's why we're the first jurisdiction in Canada to pass legislation, tabled here in the House, for regulations. In fact, quite frankly, given the kind of responses we've had from other provinces, industry, and Albertans, I know that we're on the right track.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: since you were part of the cabinet at that time, did you support the approach to climate change? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: What approach? The fact that we tabled the bill? Of course we did. The bill has been just tabled here in the House. We're in the process of ensuring that we have a very good system of measuring emissions. Those 100 or so emitters that will not be able to meet those emission standards will be paying a credit, and we'll ensure that that credit stays in Alberta to be put into technology and further infrastructure for the benefit of the next generation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think this Premier is willing to answer a question straight.

In 2001-02 your government took an approach to climate change. Did you support it, or did you not?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we were the only jurisdiction, in order to put legislation in place, with a process where we have an ability now to measure the emissions between 2003 and '05 so that we can set a baseline to see who is emitting more than in those years. I mean, what's wrong with that? We're the only province that can do it.

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

Child Care Funding

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two recent reports from Statistics Canada illustrate the dilemma faced by Alberta families struggling to find and pay for daycare spaces. Alberta is experiencing the country's only baby boom, yet Alberta had fewer daycare spaces in 2004 than in 1992. Families are feeling the squeeze because they do not receive enough support, and daycare costs to families are rising. The government hopes to attract even more workers to the province, but there are no plans to help young parents return to work or ensure family-friendly policies for new Albertans.

My questions are for the Minister of Children's Services. We read in today's paper that the government will get another chance at federal funding for daycare. Will the minister commit to using these funds and provincial allocations to provide operating grants directly to nonprofit centres to enable badly needed . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Second question.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit to using these increased funds coming from the federal government,

hopefully, and adequate funding from the province to provide operating grants directly to nonprofit centres to enable badly needed expansion of high-quality care in the province to happen?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. Thank you very much. He actually raises probably my number one issue and a priority mandated by the Premier, which is to ensure that parents in this province receive accessible and affordable quality health care. There were a number of questions that were involved in your preamble there. I can tell you that we are taking this seriously. We have made a significant announcement last week that would help with the zero to six accessibility for parents of children of those ages. I've also committed on the six to 12 to work with our stakeholders, which would be municipalities and corporations and our operators, on some workable solutions to the issues that are facing them.

The Speaker: Sorry, Minister.

Hon. member, last question.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the increased availability of affordable child care encourages women with young families to work and is an important objective in light of Alberta's labour market situation, will the minister commit to extending funding for child care to children up to the age of 12 to help parents cover the cost of after school care for their children?

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. Thank you. I got cut off last time, so I'll just continue. Currently in the province we license both zero to six and six to 12 child care programs. We have the policy mandate to provide services on the zero to six. Programs through ages six to 12 are delivered if municipalities through our FCSS funding determine that it is a local priority.

I'm well aware of the issues that have been facing both zero to six and six to 12. Last week I made some announcements that immediately will improve the situation for zero to six. On the other side, that you're talking about, I have committed to taking a leadership role in working with all of our stakeholders in finding some workable solutions there.

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

Health Care Workforce Supply

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the year 2010-2011 a new hospital will open in south Calgary. This is great news for our growing city, but as you know, a building is just a building if you can't staff the same hospital. We know that there's a critical need for more health care workers/professionals to staff this facility as well as others in the province. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What are you doing to address, say, the shortage of nurses?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I was very, very pleased to announce that Mount Royal College in Calgary has officially become a degree-granting institution and, as part of that, has been approved to offer a new bachelor of nursing degree program, its very first degree program. We've also announced that we'll be adding more spaces to another new nursing degree program, that begins this fall at MacEwan College in Edmonton. As well, this

will allow us to free up some spots at the University of Alberta. So since 1999 we have more than doubled the number of nursing spots in Alberta, and we recognize that there is a need for more.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. This is great news. However, previously nursing students from Mount Royal completed their degrees at Athabasca University. With this announcement made today, are we announcing the same seats under a new banner, or are these new seats?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, just for clarity. There was, I guess, a little confusion in some of the media today, and perhaps some of the members opposite might be a little confused as well about this issue. This morning's announcement effectively means that we will be more than doubling the number of graduates coming from Mount Royal in the next three to four years.

Mrs. Ady: My final supplemental is to the same minister. As well as nurses, of course, we need doctors and medical technicians to staff this hospital, so what is this minister doing to help us meet these health care professional needs?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to tell my colleagues that we've added a significant number of new spaces across the board in postsecondary and other health programs as well. Last fall we increased the number of first-year physician spaces to 257. That's a 13 per cent increase over '05-06, and that means that the total number of doctors to be trained will be 900 in the next four years. The total number of spaces in other health training programs – that's dentists, pharmacists, lab technicians – has increased by over 1,500. That's more than a 50 per cent increase in just eight years. We are working on our plan for managing all of the growth pressures to build a stronger Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Federal Equalization Formula (continued)

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It would seem that the Tory leadership race did not end on December 2. The Premier and the Finance minister are openly bickering about whether resource revenues should be included in the formula that's used to calculate federal equalization payments. Ordinary Albertans are confused by the mixed messages that the Premier and his ministers continue to send. My first question is for the Minister of Finance. Does this minister support Stephen Harper's election promise not to include resource revenues in the formula? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I find it very difficult to comment on something that the Prime Minister has a full mandate to do or not to do. I understand that that question will be elucidated on Monday at 2 o'clock, so we certainly on this side wait with bated breath to see what the Prime Minister has to say, to see what the budget has to hold for Albertans. Both the Premier and myself are looking for fairness for Albertans in this upcoming budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the Finance minister has said that he expects the federal budget to ramp up the Canada social transfer to Alberta and he doesn't seem to mind including resource revenues in the equalization formula, my question is this. Can he please tell all Albertans what kind of a secret deal he has made with his cousin the federal Tory Finance minister?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I'm actually very complimented that the hon. member would think that I would go out and do some sort of deal to benefit Albertans. I would love to be able to stand here and say that we're getting a higher per capita increase. I'm hoping. Quite frankly, I think all Albertans are hoping that the per capita formula and the CST and the CHT would go to a realistic level where we, being Albertans, receive exactly the same amount as people in the rest of the country and other provinces. I'm hoping that that will be there. Do I have knowledge of a secret deal? The answer is no.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the cost of the federal equalization program increases, the federal government will either have to raise taxes, cut other programs, or run a deficit to pay for it. Even the Premier's director of media relations has said that the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development should be Alberta's lead on the equalization discussion, so my third question is for that minister. On Monday I asked the minister whether or not his ministry had any concerns about the \$5.2 million in federal transfers that they receive and whether or not that money might be in jeopardy if the equalization formula includes resource revenues. He's had a couple of days to think about it. Now my question is: are you worried about that money or not?

Mr. Mason: Just say firewall.

Dr. Morton: If you read *Maclean's* magazine, you realize that that word is very popular in Quebec, and it's why Stephen Harper is going to form a majority government by winning 30 or 40 seats in Quebec.

The member opposite should study the equalization formula. No money leaves the coffers of this government to go directly to Ottawa.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Postsecondary Opportunities

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Studies show that in the years ahead 70 per cent of all Albertans will require some form of postsecondary education. That means it's absolutely critical for all Albertans – every single one – to consider further learning. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What is the government doing to help encourage all Albertans to consider, plan, and save for postsecondary education that they will so critically need?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. We are working with our postsecondary institutions in a collaborative, co-operative approach to communicate not only to the K to 12 system but to parents and to Albertans alike that the future is going to require that higher educated workforce, and the future is here in many respects. Currently we are expanding all of our apprenticeship spots, we're expanding all of our postsecondary spots, trying to meet the demand, but more importantly we're working in co-operation

with not only the postsecondaries but all stakeholders within the system to lower costs so that it's affordable and to work on the affordability framework.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question goes to the same minister. Working with institutions to help create more spaces and make things more affordable is one thing, but there is a group out there that typically doesn't consider advanced education critical. What is the minister doing to raise the level of awareness of the critical need for further education among groups that typically don't pursue postsecondary education and are at risk of falling further behind the economic curve in this booming economy?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're working in tandem with the Minister of Education in the K to 12 system because the reality is that we need to have mentors involved in our K to 12 system telling students and telling parents about the opportunities that a booming economy like Alberta has but also the pathways that they need to achieve those opportunities. Certainly, we'll be looking for new and innovative ways to show students about science, about how they can achieve their potential in a postsecondary system in our global economy.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Child and Youth Advocate

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's most vulnerable citizens, disadvantaged children and youth, need to know that they have somewhere to turn when it seems there are no options left. A strong children's advocate can serve the interests of these individuals, but changes to the position are needed. To the Minister of Children's Services: will the minister demonstrate her government's often stated commitment to openness and transparency by having the Child and Youth Advocate an independent office that reports directly to the Legislature, not the ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can say that when I'm looking at anything within this department, I'm looking through the eyes of children and families, and my focus will always be on that. It seems to me that the advocate is absolutely doing a fabulous job when he's representing the interests of our children and our youth in care. To my knowledge the way it works now is working exceptionally well. I know that on a regular basis he gets to provide us with continuous feedback on our policies. On a regular basis he can continually influence our policy, and if the concern is accountability, he is accountable to both myself and to Albertans through his annual report.

Mrs. Mather: Well, a report commissioned by this government in 2000 recommended that the children's advocate be made an independent office of the Legislature, similar to the Ombudsman or Auditor General. The report stated that this change would allow the advocate to speak freely and without government interference to better serve children, who are often suspicious of the system, and to have more credibility than it does while housed in the ministry. Can the minister please explain why seven years later Children's Services has not moved forward on this recommendation?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge the advocate does speak freely, but having said that, I don't know which report you're talking about. If you would like to forward that to me, I would be willing to take a look at it.

Mrs. Mather: If the minister has no plans to make the Child and Youth Advocate independent, will she consider creating an all-party committee, including the children's advocate, to review provincial child protection services and provide and make public recommendations about how they can be improved to better serve Alberta's vulnerable children and youth?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'd reiterate that I think the advocate is doing a fabulous job. I think that the way it's set up now works very well for our families, our youth, and for this province. I would also remind the House again that he is very accountable to us through his annual report, and he's only one of many checks and balances. We also have appeal panels, we have mediation services that are offered, and as well we have the Ombudsman.

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

Contaminated Sites Cleanup

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the government has introduced a new environmentally friendly program to help clean up gas station sites that have contamination from underground petroleum tanks. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. What is the current status of this program, and how much money is involved?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that the province is providing an additional \$50 million to help eligible municipalities and owners of small retail gas stations to take necessary action to address contamination of underground fuel tanks. I need to say that this is in addition to the program that was brought forward in the year 2000 of \$60 million, and the program addressed 900 contaminated sites. The new program has already affected 200 applicants that were already in place and 100 . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary to the same minister: well, then, who is eligible for the new program? In other words, will this program help the average retailer out there?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the program is available to municipalities and small retail gas stations that meet the eligible criteria.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: what is being done to ensure that sites that are not addressed through this program are also being cleaned up in Alberta?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act requires all owners to clean up their sites whether they're eligible for the program or not. This program assists individuals or municipalities that are eligible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, and would the third party be ready. The potential for the 18th question is here.

Edmonton Remand Centre

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After years of neglect and stalling by this government, finally the decision to construct the new remand centre in Edmonton was made last summer. However, guards are now extremely worried about their safety with respect to the proposed open concept design of the new facility, the open pod style. If things go bad, as can typically happen in a remand centre situation, our corrections officers will likely find themselves facing imminent danger, with their backs exposed. Did the Solicitor General consult with representatives of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees in general, or the local in particular, to hear their concerns with respect to the proposed design?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an excellent question. Yes, indeed we have consulted with our union to ensure that they are onside with this new state-of-the-art design, and we will be meeting with them again to ensure that any concerns they have will be addressed. This new facility is certainly state of the art and follows a model of approximately 100 other correctional facilities across North America. It's a facility that is going to ensure the safety of not only the staff but also the inmates, and we look forward to addressing those concerns.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the primary concern when we're designing a new remand centre must be the safety of those who either work or live inside. Our corrections officers work in an extremely stressful and challenging environment, and they're expected to maintain order in an environment that is inherently dangerous and disorderly. We owe it to them to take their concerns seriously. If the guards overwhelmingly favour a closed pod system similar to the one at the current remand centre, what are the chances that the hon. Solicitor General will order the design amended or changed to accommodate those concerns?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, right now we're working on a proposed design, and if anything should come forward to indicate that we need to change our direction in this design, we will certainly do that. Our top priority is to ensure, again, the safety of the inmates and the safety of our staff, and I'm quite confident this new design will address those issues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister: will the minister make sure that the new remand centre is equipped with immediate lockdown protocols and equipment so that in response to a riot or a similar emergency the entire facility can be swiftly controlled, keeping both guards and inmates safe?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, we have not had an incident of an escape from the present remand centre. The new centre is going to be that much more secure than the existing facility, and all those precautions will be taken. I can assure the hon. member again that the safety of inmates and the safety of staff will be a top priority in the design and construction of this new facility.

The Speaker: We arrive today, hon. members, at 98 questions and answers. That's very good.

head: 2:20 **Request for Emergency Debate**

The Speaker: We have one order of business. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on a Standing Order 30 application.

Parkland Teachers' Labour Dispute

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Standing Order 30(7)(a) stipulates that a motion under this order "must relate to a genuine emergency," and I will explain that urgency very shortly. I would also note that no other motion under Standing Order 30 has been dealt with today and that this motion only deals with a single matter which has not been dealt with in this session. It's not based on a question of privilege, and it's not a question that can only be debated on a motion on notice. *Beauchesne* 387 says that a debate under this standing order must deal with a specific question which requires urgent consideration, it must be within the administrative competence of the government, and there's no other reasonable opportunity for debate.

We are calling here today for a very specific action in this motion; namely, the immediate appointment of a special mediator to resolve the labour dispute in the Parkland county school division. Such an appointment is clearly within the administrative competence of the government. In fact, such a mediator was appointed in the past and proved to be very helpful in resolving disputes. I note that the Alberta Teachers' Association has also asked for a special mediator to be appointed at this time. Clearly, this is an action that the government is able to take, and I think a rigorous debate on this issue in the Assembly would give the Premier and the Minister of Education some clear direction to do so.

There are a number of other measures that fall within the government's administrative competence, but they are not likely to be as successful in resolving this problem as this motion I'm putting forward today.

If a debate is agreed to, I would be happy to elaborate and carefully consider the options we have before us. I would also refer to *Beauchesne* 391 and note that the dispute is not currently under the adjudication of a court of law. Certainly, the Labour Relations Board is playing a role in applying the labour codes to this dispute, but the board's involvement in no way precludes the action we are calling for here to be taken by either the Premier or the Minister of Education. *Marleau and Montpetit* also list the same criteria I have just outlined, on pages 587 and 588. So having established that the procedural criteria and the conditions laid out by the authorities have been met, I would like to very briefly speak to the urgency of this motion.

Mr. Speaker, before I was elected to this House, I myself was a teacher. I am also a parent. So I appreciate how difficult the situation is for all sides. Members of my caucus have received many heartfelt letters from residents of Parkland county pleading for some resolution to this matter in a most urgent way. I believe that all members are aware of how important education is and the foundation it lays for the future participation of our children in the economy as democratic citizens. The longer this dispute continues, the farther the delays are in setting the foundation for these children's education. There are 9,500 students in 22 schools between Entwistle and Spruce Grove, and they're all being negatively affected by this dispute.

We also need to be realistic about what is at stake. Teachers in the Wild Rose school division voted 90 per cent in favour of a strike last night. We know that negotiations for schools boards will be coming up across the province over these next few months. A proper stage needs to be set for these negotiations to be undertaken

in a positive and a constructive way. There's always a lot of finger pointing in this situation, but the point is the urgent need for the government to finally take a positive and constructive role in bringing these sides back to the table.

Just before I conclude, I want to emphasize the urgency and the importance of having this debate here this afternoon. We can recall in 2002 the province-wide teachers' strike, and I know first-hand the damage that a protracted dispute can cause. Every day that the government delays only worsens the damage, especially for students writing diploma exams. The NDP opposition opposes a harsh and arbitrary measure such as back to work legislation and believes that the government has a responsibility to immediately foster conciliation between all parties in this dispute. The children and students of Parkland are counting on this Assembly to do the right thing and move on this motion here today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The chair will recognize anybody else to participate.

Please remember, now, that we're dealing with a procedural question in the House. It has nothing to do with the strike. That's not the urgency argument that has to be heard. That's not the issue. It's urgency of this Assembly to deal with the matter: that's the subject at hand here.

The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder has put forward a motion that suggests that it is urgent and vital for this House to engage in debate on the issues surrounding the situation we have in Parkland, the Parkland school dispute. I fail to recognize what this House debating this motion at this time could do to reconcile the circumstances that we find ourselves in in Parkland.

While it is regrettable that there have been 18 days where students have not been in class, the debate about the urgency of it in this House may not do anything to resolve the situation we find in Parkland. In Parkland a mediator has been available, has been offered, has been available to both sides that are party to this dispute. Both sides have been told that if they could agree on a process for reconciliation, the DIB process with certain conditions, there would be an opportunity for them to come to some reconciliation.

Mr. Speaker, we can talk in this Legislature until the cows come home, but at the end of the day we have no teeth to compel both sides to come together. The best people to have the teeth in this situation are the parents and people in that community to really compel both sides to work together either to commonly resolve it or to in effect go further and ask the government collectively for a process that can in fact initiate resolution.

The Speaker: Okay. Methinks what the hon. minister was doing was participating in the debate, not dealing with the subject as to why we need to adjourn the remainder of the House today to deal with this matter. That's what the urgency question is all about. If it's upheld, then we will have the debate.

The hon. Member for St. Albert on the question of urgency with respect to the need to adjourn the House from the regular Routine.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in support of the request for an emergency debate on the situation in the Parkland school division. As an Official Opposition shadow minister for Education I've been in close contact with board members, a representative of the teachers, as well as parents and students affected by the labour dispute. I've previously risen in the House to ask the government how they're planning to bring a fair and timely resolution to the situation. So I and my colleagues are certainly aware of the urgency of the situation.

The heading for SO 30 is Urgent Public Importance. In other words, the case for urgency logically requires an underlying issue of great importance to the public. The current labour dispute between the teachers and the board of Parkland school division certainly meets the standard of being urgent because kids' education – I want to say up front that in the long run the education system is well served by fair bargaining processes, and that leads generally to good relationships between teachers and our school boards. But in this instance that relationship appears to have broken down, and it is very important to have both sides back at the bargaining table to negotiate a settlement acceptable to both parties.

It's worth noting that the situation is aggravated by the financial constraints faced by some of the school boards across Alberta. Mr. Speaker, this issue deserves our attention today because without the two sides actually talking, a fair, mutually agreed upon resolution won't happen in time for those kids that need to get an education. The result could be that students who are preparing for their diploma exams or applying for postsecondary programs may be disadvantaged. For example, the registrar of NAIT today suggested that once students are out of school for a month, the likelihood of success and even admission is very reduced, a crisis on the part of many families and kids. As of today kids have been out of school 19 days, and the holidays are coming up very quickly. This is urgent. This is essentially a full month of school which is probably going to be missed.

Another point that makes this situation so critical is that many working parents are struggling to find adequate child care. This is placing a huge burden on parents, their families, and the community.

Now to urgency. The authors of the authority set up a number of other conditions for SO 30. *Beauchesne* 390 indicates that the public interest can be served through discussion and debate. Therefore, the public interest will be served by setting aside the ordinary business of today to discuss this extraordinary issue that is affecting the people of Parkland. I hope the government will agree that this deserves the full attention of the Assembly.

I also note that *Beauchesne* 387 indicates that the Speaker may "take into account the general wish of the House to have a debate," and I hope the government side will help us express this wish. We think it's very essential.

2:30

In terms of today's scheduled business and whether there's adequate opportunity to discuss this issue, I would argue that there is not. There is no government bill scheduled for debate today that would provide an opportunity to discuss this issue. As this is not private members' day, there is no private member's motion scheduled for debate, and the next one up for debate would also not provide an opportunity to debate this issue. The next private member's bill, to be debated on Monday, will also not provide an opportunity to discuss this issue.

Written questions and motions for returns are scheduled to stand and retain their places. The debate on supplementary supply will not provide an opportunity since this Assembly is not being asked for additional funds for education. Interim supply debate is not a suitable or sufficient opportunity since this issue requires the full attention of the entire Assembly. Replies and responses to the Speech from the Throne also do not provide the kind of opportunity for a focused debate on this single issue. I still believe it's an urgent issue to be debated immediately.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The chair has heard three speakers with respect to this matter. If there's a requirement to have more, so be it, but the chair is quite prepared to rule on this matter. Any hon. member insist that they want to participate?

Standing Order 30 is rather clear. We've had discussion with respect to Standing Order 30 before, and the Standing Order 30 application is one where the chair may allow such debate as he considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate, not the subject but the urgency of the debate, and then rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order.

First of all, I'd like to confirm that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder has given proper notice of his intention to bring a motion under Standing Order 30. The hon. member fulfilled the requirement of section 30(1) by providing at least two hours' written notice to the Speaker's office. This arrived at 10:42 this morning. The chair also confirms that the subject matter was provided at that time, so there was opportunity between 10:42 and the hearing of these arguments now to do a little bit of research with respect to this and to consult precedent as well.

Secondly, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed is to be put to the Assembly, the chair must determine whether the motion fulfills the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that "the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration."

The member's proposed motion states: be it resolved that the Assembly adjourn its ordinary business to discuss a matter of urgent public importance;

namely, the urgent need for the Premier or the Minister of Education on his behalf to protect the educational needs of students in Parkland county and to foster goodwill between teachers, parents, students, and the school board by appointing a special mediator to help resolve the current Parkland school division labour dispute.

The chair has noted on several occasions in the past – and hon. members alluded to them too – that the relevant parliamentary authorities on the topic of emergency debates are *Beauchesne's* paragraphs 387 to 398 and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 587 to 589.

On an important technical note the chair notes that the wording of the hon. member's application appears to propose a decision of the Assembly; that is, to appoint a special mediator. That would run afoul of Standing Order 30(6). Standing Order 30(6) says, "An emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly."

As well, the chair would note that although this is a serious matter, the chair's understanding by checking the calendar is that this event has now been transpiring since February 16, 2007. The chair is not aware as to why this is a genuine emergency today but not yesterday or the day before or last Thursday.

The chair has reviewed these references closely in considering this request for leave and must emphasize once again to all members that to meet the requirements of urgency, there must not – not – be another opportunity for members of the Assembly to discuss this matter. Question period is one of those areas that's available to members.

To conclude, the chair does not want to detract from the importance of the issue, but the chair is of the view that there will be other opportunities afforded to the members to discuss this matter, and therefore the request for leave is not in order.

head: **Orders of the Day**

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

**Bill 4
Child Care Licensing Act**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act.

This new act is based on what we heard during two years of consultation with parents, child care operators, and other interested Albertans. Child care facilities are currently licensed under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act. This act covers all facilities, including those for adults and children, and being more than 20 years old, it needs to be updated. Rather than amending outdated legislation, we are proposing legislation that is designed specifically for Alberta children. The Social Care Facilities Licensing Act licenses programs based on the state of a facility, not on the quality of the program, but we know that it's the programs and the people providing the care that ensure the best outcomes for children, not the facilities.

Mr. Speaker, this new legislation gives us a new way of looking at child care. It's an innovative piece of legislation that builds on our government's commitment to continue to support and create quality child care programs and will help respond to the child care needs of today's families. If passed, the Child Care Licensing Act would focus on licensing based more on the program than the facility, encourage innovative approaches to create new child care programs while placing a priority on the safety of children. It would enable the creation of new licensing categories, one being new group family day care, where two adults can care for seven to 10 children in approved private homes. This act would allow operators to make better use of the spaces they already have. For example, under the current act operators licensed to provide out of school care have their spaces sitting empty when the children are in school and do not have the ability to move preschool children into those spaces. Under the new legislation operators will have the flexibility to use this space for any child.

This act will reward excellence. Operators who consistently demonstrate quality programming will receive multiyear licences, which would mean less time doing paperwork and more time caring for the children. As well, this act provides for more effective monitoring to ensure that operators comply with the act.

It's time for Alberta's parents and child care providers to have legislation that ensures that the children we're responsible for have the best start in life. This legislation provides the framework that we need. I'd ask all members to support this very important piece of legislation. Your support will demonstrate our government's commitment to building a quality child care system that will most definitely lead to better outcomes for children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act, and I would like to thank the minister for sharing information with me beforehand through a staff member.

Countless Alberta families can't find or can't afford the child care they need. This situation is hurting Alberta's families, and it's hurting Alberta's economy. As I travel across the province, I hear the same concerns: not enough spaces, not enough staff. So I'm glad that this bill is an effort to look at licensing along with the quality of programs.

The years 2000 to 2005 saw the federal, provincial, and territorial governments reach consensus that the early years of life are critical to children's development and future well-being. These same governments also recognized that quality early learning and child care programs play an important role in promoting the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development of young children and agreed to work together to improve access to such programs. They set forth objectives to promote early childhood development so that children would to their fullest potential be physically and emotionally healthy, safe, and secure, socially engaged and responsible, and ready to learn upon school entry.

In 2005 bilateral agreements, agreements in principle between provinces and the government of Canada, further outlined principles for the development of early learning and child care, including quality: regulated to keep children safe and ensure that they are cared for by professionally qualified child development staff. Universally inclusive: open to the whole range of children regardless of their family's income, children's ability, or culture. Accessible: early learning and child care programs are broadly available to children, and the cost is affordable for parents. Developmental: programs that include both care and developmental learning components.

2:40

In recognizing that quality early learning and child care experiences contribute to healthy child development, these governments have taken on a variety of roles that extend beyond ensuring that children in licensed early learning and child care programs are kept safe from harm. Placing the licensing process within this broader policy framework of healthy outcomes for children has expanded the role of licensing beyond keeping children safe to a shared responsibility to enrich programs for children. Licensing is a very complex process, and it includes the roles of investigation, regulation, and enhancement.

This Child Care Licensing Act has been developed to work independent of the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, which is outdated, refers primarily to conditions, and addresses many different ages, services, et cetera. So I am delighted to see the clarity and the concentration on the individuals that are involved in child care only.

This act will do the following. It'll remove criteria of a facility and instead license programs based on content, developmental appropriateness, et cetera, while still retaining some facility requirements. It will enable the minister to create licensing categories outside of what currently exists – centre, nursery school, et cetera – to enable greater flexibility and meet local and specialized needs. It will ensure that parents are well informed and involved in their child's care by requiring the posting of compliance orders.

I see this act as an empowering one. I look at the potential outcomes. I think this child care specific legislation will provide a stand-alone document relating to child care outside of the previous legislation. This provides greater clarity and focus, given that child care was previously licensed under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, which covered a wide range of services like long-term care, emergency housing, and child care centres. It will also open up the definition of child care, which was previously restrictive.

I like the fact that there's going to be reduced bureaucracy here because this bill will extend the length of licences for centres who have earned a good record of services, and that will result in a reduction of the level of administrative work needed by the centre and also, of course, reduce work at the provincial level.

The clear monitoring and enforcement powers clarify the process that the director can engage in to ensure the quality and safety of programming while also setting out the steps by which the director can encourage compliance and, finally, cancel a licence.

I like the fact that we have a stable appeals process now. It's going to move away from the appointment of ad hoc committees and instead create the standing committee to hear all appeals. This will cut down on the delay time, which I've heard a lot about in the past, between filing an appeal and appointing a panel and would also allow members to develop some expertise within the field in the appeals process.

So this bill is essentially a good step. The previous act was outdated and not child care specific. This legislation is clearly designed to remedy some of those failings. The bill also clarifies the

role of the director and provides more stability to the appeals process. Stakeholder feedback has been generally positive, with some requests for greater clarity.

I'd like to look at the elements of the bill; first of all, the licensing. In order to be licensed, centres must conform to existing acts and regulations: the Safety Codes Act, the Public Health Act, child care regulations, the building standards act, and municipal zoning.

The extended timelines for centres in good standing is a good step. This will eliminate the administrative burden to centres with a good record of practice and also the department. It is important that with this increased time scale there will be monitoring to ensure that standards remain high. In regard to monitoring, the act is quite clear on what rights the director has to monitor child care programs, and it seems as though there are solid provisions to ensure access even if it's originally denied by the owner or staff member. One thing that I am concerned about is the fact that the level of monitoring is not mentioned here.

Enforcement is another concern that we have. Something that I've heard at various places in the province is that they feel that the licensing act doesn't have enough bite in it. This enforcement will provide a variety of steps to achieve compliance, and I understand that this includes probation, temporary suspension, and ultimately cancellation of a licence if needed.

The appeals process that's included here is clear. I like that it's going to have a permanent appeal committee where there will be the opportunity to develop some expertise and to reduce some of the delays.

My areas of concern are that although the bill clearly lays out how monitoring will take place, it doesn't make clear how often or how extensive this monitoring will be. In order to be effective and ensure compliance, it is essential that child care centres in all regions of Canada are monitored regularly. This is particularly important given that the bill also increases the length of licensing for providers with a good record.

As I look at the discussion guide entitled *Toward a Child Care Act for Alberta*, it proposed to include a provision about parental involvement through the creation of a parental advisory committee or a provincial child care advisory council. I'm wondering if the minister can explain why these are not included in this act. I can't see this in Bill 4.

Enforcement. There are two parts here. While enforcement is essential to protect the safety of children in child care, many child care providers with good intentions inadvertently break regulations. Many providers feel that they are not given time to either remedy problems that they were not initially aware of or to explain the circumstances that caused noncompliance, leading to enforcements that mar an otherwise positive record. It's not clear that this bill accommodates these concerns, yet on the other hand I've had people express a concern for the need for real teeth in licensing enforcement.

Consultation. This bill will directly affect child care providers, and it is unclear how many individuals in the field were consulted in the writing of this act. Providers often have the best understanding of how legislation affects their programs, and they also know the limitations caused by staff shortages and lack of funding. Consultations would provide the government with valuable insights in the crafting of this bill. We should know what the process of creating it was.

The other thing is access. The government press release states that this legislation will increase access to child care spaces by opening up the classification of child care settings. While this might be true, the fundamental problems facing child care operators still exist; namely, lack of stable funding and problems with staff recruitment and retention. It is really important to realize that licensing alone will not solve the need for spaces and staff. I hope

this bill is the beginning of addressing the crucial needs for child care spaces in this province.

Looking at the appeals process, I want to commend you on the fact that it is very clear. The stakeholders are telling me that they can understand it, and they're not expressing any concerns in regard to appeals.

I do want to take a look, though, at investigation respecting unlicensed child care programs. It says that if the director has probable grounds to believe that child care is being provided without a licence, he or she can inspect the facility under the same terms as a licensed facility, including the ability to get a court order in the case of a refusal by the provider. The director can issue an order, including a stop order, requiring the provider to stop offering the child care program. This order can be appealed. I really want to commend you on including this because I have had concerns expressed to me about facilities in my own constituency that aren't licensed and have far more than seven children.

So when I look at the whole thing, I want to say that this is essentially a good step. It was a long time coming. I congratulate you on getting it here today. There are few fields where high quality and enforced safety standards are as important as they are in child care. When parents bring their children to a child care centre, they expect that they will be safe, happy, and well cared for. This legislation will provide some positive measures to ensure that that happens.

It's one thing to set standards and quite another to provide the support to ensure that they are feasible. Child care providers are struggling with critical staff shortages, high turnover, and lack of predictable government infrastructure funding. We need to address those concerns too.

2:50

I am pleased that this government is taking some action on child care, and I sincerely hope they will keep up the momentum by increasing funding in the upcoming budget. We are facing a critical shortage of child care spaces in this province, and this shortage is negatively affecting Alberta's children, families, and economy.

Mr. Speaker, if there are no more speakers, I ask you to call the question for second reading.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has advised the chair that he'd like to participate.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to rise and speak to Bill 4, Child Care Licensing Act. This bill would provide a stand-alone document relating to child care outside of the previous legislation. This provides greater clarity and a clear focus given that child care was previously licensed under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, which covered a wide range of services like long-term care, emergencies, housing, child care centres. It will also open up the definition of child care, which was previously restricted.

Reduced bureaucracy. Mr. Speaker, this bill would extend the length of licences for centres with a good record of services, reducing the level of administrative work needed by the centre and also reducing work at the provincial level.

Clear monitoring and enforcement powers. This legislation clarifies the monitoring and enforcement process that the director can engage in to ensure the quality and safety of programming while also setting out the steps by which the director can encourage compliance and, finally, cancel a licence. This bill also would move away from the appointment and ad hoc committees and instead create a standing committee to hear all appeals. I'm sure that this would cut down on the delay time between filing an appeal and appointing a panel and would also allow members to develop some expertise within the field and appeal process.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, has, I think, five areas of concern: monitoring, parental involvement, enforcement, consultation, and access. Monitoring. Although the bill clearly lays out how monitoring will take place, it does not make clear how often and how extensive this monitoring will be. In order to be effective and ensure compliance, it is essential that child care centres in all regions of Canada are monitored regularly. This is particularly important given that the bill also increases the length of licensing for providers with a good record.

The second one, parental involvement. The discussion guide entitled *Toward a Child Care Act for Alberta* proposed to include a provision about parental involvement through the creation of a parental advisory committee or a provincial child care advisory council. Can the minister explain why these are not included in this act?

Enforcement. While enforcement is essential to protect the safety and protection of the children in child care particularly, many child care providers with good intentions inadvertently break regulations. Many providers feel that they are not given time to either remedy problems that they were not initially aware of or explain the circumstances that caused noncompliance, leading to enforcements that mar an otherwise positive record. It's not clear that this bill accommodates these concerns.

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I'm pleased that the government is taking some action on child care, and I sincerely hope they will keep up the momentum by increasing funding in the coming budget. We are facing critical shortages of child care spaces in this province, and these shortages are negatively affecting Alberta's children, families, and economy.

I definitely will support this bill, sir. Thank you.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on this important piece of legislation, Bill 4, Child Care Licensing Act. The care of children when they're very young is extremely critical to their growth in later years. It's critical in terms of their personal growth, their development as persons, and also in terms of their ability to do well in school and community and in society in general as they move toward adulthood through their years of schooling and growth.

So this bill, Mr. Speaker, is very timely. I want to note at the beginning that I was very pleased that the minister made sure that the opposition parties were fully briefed on the bill. On our behalf I want to thank the minister for the briefing that we received from one of her staff. The briefing was thorough. It was quite a good exchange of information and ideas. When I look at it, the preamble

gives me some hope. The very first statement of the preamble says, "Whereas the Government of Alberta recognizes the importance of ensuring the safety, well-being and development of children receiving child care."

3:00

Mr. Speaker, refocusing child care services to children's early development is a positive step forward, a step in the right direction, and I want to express our support for this change in direction and emphasis. It's a bill which is a fairly substantive rewrite of the terms and conditions under which daycare facilities are monitored, licensed, and run. This is obviously not an amendment to an existing bill but a new act that substantially overhauls the regulatory framework by shifting focus from the facilities, which was the focus under the social care facilities act, under which the child care facilities operated, to the programming under this current bill. This refocusing on the quality of the program and laying out clearly the requirements and expectations with respect to the quality of the program would form, I hope, a critical part of this act and the regulations that follow from it.

Talking about regulations, certainly during the briefing I asked a question about whether or not we the Legislature will have some role in the drafting and the development of the regulations. It certainly is my expectation that we'll be involved in the regulations of many of these bills, including this one. Although there's a fair bit of detail, it still is sort of framework legislation, and the regulations matter a great deal about how, in fact, this bill translates into actual policy changes and the substance of those policies. So I would hope that the minister will comment on the role that this House and certainly members on this side of the House will have in the development and approval of the regulations related to this bill. We're given the understanding that there may be a role for us to work with the minister and her office during the development of the regulations, so I'm looking forward to seeing that happen.

The previous emphasis, as I said, Mr. Speaker, was on facilities rather than programming. The intent of Bill 4, to completely revise the regulatory framework but grandfather the facilities recommendations and make child care programming the essential core of the bill, is an important change. The developmental needs of children will become, I think, the integral part of assessing the integrity of programs and programming. The key importance of the bill, therefore, includes regulation-making authority over all daycare facilities, enabling new categories of childcare services to be created, including some innovative programs that may be created, administrative streamlining that allows for multiyear licensing of facilities. I have some questions on this. The first licensing will be for one year, but the renewal, I think, would be for a three-year period. As we move into the next stages of the debate on the bill, we'll have perhaps some further questions on that part of the bill and if necessary will bring forward amendments that reflect our concerns with respect to the extension of the licensing to a three-year period following the first year of licensing.

Inspection and monitoring with a range of prescribed actions is good.

A permanent appeal board rather than an ad hoc one under the previous act. I think that's also a positive feature of this bill, that we have a well-established panel, appeal board, which will be able to address appeals coming to the department from either the operators or from others concerned with the quality of daycare in the province.

Mr. Speaker, while this bill is a step forward, we are concerned about both the quality of daycare services presently available in our province and the shortage of spaces. In question period I tried to draw the attention of the House to serious shortages in the availability of spaces for quality daycare in the province. As we move to tighten the regulations with respect to licensing, monitoring, and

making sure that the bill and the legislation and the regulations are enforced, enforcement and monitoring, I think I want to make sure that we don't ignore the issue of the quality of daycare that's presently available and the shortage of spaces. Both of these, the shortage of spaces and the licensing, are inextricably related issues, so the debate on this bill should provide us with an opportunity to address the question of availability of spaces as well as the question with regard to the quality of services available to families with young children.

It certainly begs the question of resources with respect to both enforcement and monitoring. While the intentions stated in the legislation with respect to monitoring and enforcement are very clear, certainly the question of availability of resources to do so on a regular basis and in a thorough manner remains an open question. Unless the resources are available, the mere commitment to monitoring and enforcement will not deliver the goods that parents in this province and members of the Assembly hope will be delivered with respect to the improvement of the quality of care and the availability of spaces in the child care area.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the licensing requirements and the focus on programming will encourage more daycare facilities to seek licensing. There are 545 child care facilities that are eligible for accreditation. There are only about 154 that have the accreditation at present. Clearly, I think there's a long way to go between the number of children who go to accredited facilities and the total number of facilities available and children going there. I wonder if the minister would have some information on the numbers of children. Of the total number who go to daycare, what percentage go to the nonaccredited daycare facilities, either in terms of percentages or in terms of gross numbers? That will help us have some idea about the amount of work that's before us that needs to be done. It's my hope that in the not very long future we will have all children who use daycare services go to fully accredited daycare centres because it is that accreditation that will underwrite or guarantee, if you wish, the quality of the daycare services that the children receive and deserve to receive.

I've indicated, Mr. Speaker, that we will be in principle supporting this bill. On the details of the bill we'll have an opportunity when the bill moves to the committee stage to seek any amendments or changes that we deem are necessary and believe will improve the bill even more than the improvements that it promises now.

Mr. Speaker, with these brief remarks I want to conclude my observations in second reading on Bill 4 and look forward to further debate on it as we move through the next stages. Thank you.

3:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, shall I call on the hon. minister to close the debate, or are there additional members?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, do you choose to close the debate, or should I call the question?

Ms Tarchuk: You can call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

head: **Interim Supply Estimates 2007-08**
Offices of the Legislative Assembly and Government

The Deputy Chair: We continue from where we left off yesterday. I have no lists in front of me.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to participate very briefly in the discussion on the interim supply amounts for 2007-2008. I'd call it a discussion because it really isn't a debate in what I see as the traditional sense of the word. In order to debate anything, I think both sides need to come armed with all the information that is available, and the end result of the debate might actually be in doubt. We don't have either of those situations here right now. We're dealing here with only three pages of single line item numbers totalling a somewhat mind-boggling \$10 million.

An Hon. Member: Billion.

Mr. Tougas: Ten billion. Oh, it's even more mind-boggling, then. Sorry.

How these numbers are arrived at and where all this money is going to be spent, specifically, remains pretty much of a mystery. Now, this is my second day of being in the Chamber for interim supply, which leads me to believe that I'm being punished by my caucus whip for some perceived slight. Among the more interesting comments to come from yesterday's discussion was a contribution from the Member for Calgary-Bow, and I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for making a contribution to the discourse of this House. We don't hear enough from backbench government MLAs, and any contribution is appreciated, so thank you very much.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Bow asked a very interesting question and one that came to my mind too. In essence, if I may paraphrase, she asked if the numbers contained in the interim supply document represented more than we should spend, or is it not enough? That's a very good question and obviously one that is impossible to answer based on the information contained in this document. The Government House Leader also made some interesting comments in response to the question from the Member for Calgary-Bow that lead me to believe that there is hope for improvement in the budgeting process, particularly in the new spirit of co-operation in the House.

Now, I'm not an accountant or a mathematician, but surely there has to be a better way to budget than the process we are participating in today. I believe that the Government House Leader was suggesting that there may be changes in the way budgets are produced and debated coming up in the near future, and as I look at these columns of numbers with unfathomable price tags, I certainly hope that in the future there will be a more realistic and reasonable way to participate in the budget debate.

The current process seems to be: don't worry; be happy; trust us. Well, I'm a trusting guy, but surely there's a better way to produce budgets and debate them than the system we're in right now. For instance, we can't realistically debate an amount of \$728 million for Advanced Education and Technology. Now, that's a staggering amount of money, but it's not even the highest total we have to vote on. We have \$3.6 billion – got it right this time – for health care, \$1.2 billion for education, and \$972 million for infrastructure. What we have here are a little more than numbers on a page with nothing to support the rationale for the numbers.

I would hope, for instance, that the advanced education money will be used to support some of the outstanding plans and projects I've heard about in my travels across the province. The University of Calgary, for instance, has great plans for the future, and the University of Alberta has a continuing goal of becoming a world-

class university. That's clearly going to take a lot of government involvement. When I was at SAIT a few weeks ago, I heard a lot about their trades and technology centre, which is a major project for SAIT that they really want to get moving on, and they actually have \$30 million in commitments from industry just waiting for the government go-ahead.

So these are the kind of things that are perhaps hidden in this document, perhaps not. Who knows, really, what any of these numbers mean? I could go on, but I won't. I promised I'd be short, and I am. I would leave that up to some of my other colleagues to expand on some of this. I would just like to repeat, though, that I believe there must be a better way to debate budget matters that serves the greater interest of all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any minister wish to respond?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to have an opportunity to participate in interim supply debate this afternoon. Certainly, one can look at this as just an advance, but in reality there's a lot more to it than that. You look at the departments, and you realize that this money is necessary to carry on the day-to-day business of government.

As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark stated, it's a substantial sum of money. Hopefully, it is a great deal more than one-third of the government's annual budget. Certainly, the hon. President of the Treasury Board, the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, is going to keep spending under control. I was sitting here watching him and the Minister of Finance and wondering what goes on at Treasury Board over there when they discuss what's going to be spent, where it's going to be spent, and in what time frame. I hope it doesn't come down to an arm wrestle to see who is going to get what money, where. I certainly hope that's not how it's done, and other hon. members are assuring me that's not how it's done, so that's comforting.

When we look at this government and its past expenditures, I am pleased to see that the size of the government shrank. The Premier is trying to give the perception that this is a new government. It's a stretch because the Premier, as we know, had senior portfolios in the previous government for the last number of years, going back 10 years, and before that he was, of course, a member of the Deep Six. The hon. President of the Treasury Board certainly wasn't a member of the Deep Six. He would still have been in high school.

Now, the Premier is trying to distance himself from past practices of this government, and I can see from a political perspective why that would want to be done. The past government has been spending a lot of money in questionable ways, and one way was to expand the size of government. The Premier did the right thing by putting the cabinet on a diet, and it shrank in size. Now, how much money the RAGE portfolio cost us, and how much money other portfolios cost us I can only imagine, but the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster knows full well that there's only one taxpayer.

3:20

When we look at the expenditure here, we look at support for the Legislative Assembly, for the Auditor General's office, for the Ombudsman, for the Chief Electoral Officer – there's \$2,100,000 for the Chief Electoral Officer – the Ethics Commissioner, and I want to get to that in a minute hopefully, and the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, Advanced Education, Agriculture and Food, Children's Services, and Education.

We're going to allocate \$1.2 billion for education. Now, I'm going to use this as an example, Mr. Chairman. I certainly hope those days are over. Last fall in the middle of this land of plenty

there were neighborhoods in central Edmonton, five schools in the Edmonton public school district, that did not have \$200,000 to fund a program that allowed support for children at risk the ages of three and four before they entered the kindergarten system so that they could have help to adjust when they went into kindergarten and through the elementary school system. These are children who for one reason or another aren't getting that support in the family home.

So we look at programs like this, and we don't have money to fund them. This was in September of 2006. I was alerted to this situation, and I didn't know what to do. I made some requests, and they were ignored. I thought: surely with the amount of money that we're spending in this province, we can find a little bit of money to support this much-needed program in the central neighborhoods of the city.

I looked through the public accounts, and I was seeing where we were giving grants, Mr. Chairman, to various golf courses across the province. Grants. I looked on the Internet at some of these golf courses. They may be perceived as public courses, but a guy has got to buy a membership in some of those. The memberships are various prices, and sometimes you can sell the membership. Some of these golf courses were getting grants on an annual basis for \$125,000. Some of them were using this money for irrigation systems. Some of them were using it for new golf carts, for improvements to the greens. Some of them were even using this money to reduce their debt. I did a little bit more research and added this up, and you know these grants were well in excess of a million dollars. I couldn't understand why young schoolchildren in central Edmonton could have so little, yet this government had so much for golf courses.

I'm a guy that's trying to learn how to play golf.

An Hon. Member: You think this is frustrating?

Mr. MacDonald: If you think politics is frustrating, you should try golf. I would certainly agree with you. Some of the hon. members may think I'm to the right in here, some of them may think I'm to the left, and some of them may think I'm straight down the middle, but with my golf I'm all over the place.

I thought it was quite ironic that this was a priority of the government, that we would fund these golf courses through the grant system yet ignore these schoolchildren.

Now, at the same time that I was doing my research and writing the former Finance minister – and I must say publicly that I wish her well in her retirement. I hope she has a long and healthy retirement many years into the future with her husband and her family because she certainly served this province well, and in my opinion she worked hard in the time that she was a member of the Executive Council.

I decided I would write the government a letter in regard to these grants, and the issue sort of resolved itself. There was a bit of money provided. I don't think a person should have to embarrass the government into providing for children. I don't think that is normal. But at the same time that I was doing my calculations on the golf course, the Alberta investment management branch of the Department of Finance was entertaining themselves at the Fairmont Hotel Macdonald, the same period of time, September. Now, this is a branch of Alberta Finance that we're looking at in a bill that was introduced yesterday, I believe, to turn it into a Crown corporation.

This is, as I understand it, the branch of the Department of Finance which looks after investing all our money, whether it's in the heritage savings trust fund or whether it is in various pension funds. I'm told that in total they look after close to \$60 billion worth of assets if I'm correct. They're busy people. I know that the individuals on the management team that I have met as a representative from our side of the House on the Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Committee seem to work hard, and they've got the best interests of the province at heart. They seem to be doing a good job with the heritage savings trust fund. Could they do better? Well, we could all do better. But they seem to do a fairly good job.

They manage a lot of assets. I'm curious as to the practices of this. In particular, we're going to be shining the flashlight on this Alberta investment management company as we discuss whether it should be a Crown corporation or not, a separate Crown corporation, as I understand it from the discussions we had at the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee meeting. There's a bill. Mr. Chairman, I just can't find the Order Paper at this time.

They met at the same time, again, that these children and their parents still don't know whether or not the program is going to be funded in these inner-city schools for early childhood intervention. They met, and they spent a thousand dollars on a fine meal at the Hotel Macdonald. Now, there were 12 people there, I assume, because they all had a lemon chicken dinner. Each one of these lemon chicken dinners cost \$42, for a total of \$504. They had to rent the room to eat all this stuff in because they couldn't be I guess seen in public. They had to have a private room. They had two bottles of red wine, three bottles of white wine. These bottles cost 33 bucks each. They had a couple of juices, soft drinks. I think there's a house wine – I'm not sure – on this bill. They had one Chivas Regal. They had two one-ounce martinis. Interestingly enough, they didn't have any dessert.

An Hon. Member: Because they were full.

Mr. MacDonald: They must have been full.

The total cost of this was a thousand dollars. Now, that's fine. People are entitled to, you know, a good meal. I enjoy one as well as the next person. But while we're telling one group that we can't help them out, this seems to be a land of plenty for others.

My question in regard to the interim supply is: when are we making our financial decisions? Hopefully, it's before we gather at the Hotel Macdonald because I don't think that I would be satisfied with investment decisions that were made in that room at that time. People's judgment may or may not have been impaired. I don't know. But I don't think it is appropriate to be spending the tax dollars that way. It's going to be claimed as a business expense, so I can only assume that it was business. This is how business as usual used to be done with this government, and I'm really hoping that there's an improvement and that these days are behind us. Time will tell, but I hope these days are behind us.

3:30

Now, this is an example, it's an illustration of two stories, one of plenty and one of need, probably within 20 blocks of one another in the city, and it is an illustration of just how far we've gone in forgetting what our purpose is here. These good folks in the Alberta investment management team certainly have to look after our assets, and they certainly have to make sure that our pension funds are invested in a timely and prudent fashion. I'm not saying that. But what gives with this sort of behaviour? It's the taxpayers that are footing the bill here. All I can say is that hopefully they were not there to make any business decisions in regard to the investments that are under their watchful eye.

I would urge the government at this time to please compare the lifestyle of those who are in the Hotel Macdonald, in the private chamber, having their dinner – their lemon chicken and their white wine and red wine and all the trimmings – and the fact that just 20 blocks away, 25 blocks away maximum, there are families that wouldn't have a thousand dollars in a quarter to spend on groceries let alone in one 40-minute period in a fancy hotel. Please don't forget that we have to look after those people.

We have to make sure that the children are given every opportunity to go through the public education system with confidence from the day they enter the door until the day, hopefully, that they graduate and go on to junior high and then go on and graduate from high school, that the day that they go in the doors of those public schools they're not afraid, that they're not afraid to learn, that they're not afraid to speak up because they will be ashamed that they know less than the next guy or the person sitting on the other side. Please – please – don't forget about those people.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I would like to say that as this entire budget process unfolds and as this money that we're talking about in interim supply gets to the programs and services that it funds, it will be spent wisely, it will be spent prudently, and we will never forget in this Chamber exactly who we're here to serve and who we're here to try to help out.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: I just want to go back to the start of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's speech where he talked about our new leader trying to distance himself from government. I can tell you that this new Premier has no reason to distance himself from government. As a matter of fact, no one in this Assembly on this side of the House or over there has any reason to distance himself from a government who has created a provincial economy that has allowed us to build and to develop and to grow a province that over a hundred thousand people a year want to move to. You know, yes, we can have discussions; there are growing pains.

But let's just back up and see why this new Premier doesn't have to distance himself. He worked all of his life in his community and started as reeve of Lamont county, worked on the health unit board in Vegreville and started to develop a reputation then for the nickname he has now: Honest Ed. He committed in times when raising a young family and trying to farm – and I'm sure the hon. members across and behind know how difficult it was through the years to farm – and was always compassionate, considerate of his neighbours, building a fine family.

I'm very proud to be one of the guys that eventually talked this man into running for office as an MLA. He challenged an incumbent gentleman and won. He beat Mr. Fox out in Vegreville. He grew up under the shadow of Don Mazankowski, who taught all of us in that area that he served that our reputations are what we've got, and that delivering to the people the honest goods is the most important thing you can do, and representing the people in that way is what makes you a true statesman. To this day we all know that the Hon. Don Mazankowski is still accepted in any office in Ottawa he goes to. I can assure you that long after our leader today decides that he no longer wants to spend time in this facility, he will still be regarded amongst the other provincial leaders and in the offices of this building as a truly decent man.

When they came to government and formed the group that they called the Deep Six, they brought an ideal to the back that said: "We need to watch ourselves. We need to be ever vigilant about money."

This has been one of the most compassionate Conservative governments that we've got. Why? It's because we've been able to afford that luxury. It's hard to believe some of the circumstances that some hon. members in this Chamber come from, of what a place of misery and woe we have here in this province. Yet you will recall back to the early '90s that we sat on par with British Columbia: 20-some billion dollars in debt, deficits of \$3 billion or \$4 billion a year. This Premier now along with members of his government said: we have to make some tough choices so that our children's future is in their hands. Through all of the demonstrations and all of the stuff that went on, they were part of a group that stuck to their guns. Many of those members are still here. They stuck to their guns, and they paid off the debt that we owed. They balanced our

books, and they reinvested in Alberta. The hon. member will even know how much money we've used from our heritage fund to reinvest into Albertans, and still it's at 16-some billion dollars, among other funds. It's an enormously successful government that's been here over 35 years now.

I think it's a terrible situation that the hon. opposition finds themselves in. In fact, if they have to stick to the real stories out there instead of newspaper clips that are mostly irrelevant, I'm not sure what they're going to ask here except: "How did you guys do it? How did you take a province and turn it into the leading place of the 21st century?" As I travel, I continually find people asking: "How did you do it? How did you change the mindset of people that we don't have to be in debt to be happy, that we can encourage business to invest and develop economies, where we can develop innovative and elaborate technological advances in a little province, around 2 million people at the time when they had to start and 3.4 million now?"

The Premier was part of that. His position in there was always one of including new members into the caucus, teaching them the ways the House worked, teaching them the committee structure, where to go, how to get things done for their constituency, and always in cabinet a careful and thoughtful person who chose to think things through, find out the information around the discussion, and make good decisions. He is still around Alberta regarded as one of the best ag ministers this province ever had. Many of the programs that came in under his leadership are looked at by other provinces as some of the finest tools there are today to deliver services to our farmers.

In transportation and infrastructure: while all of the government's spending was under stress, who did we take from? The Premier said: "Look, I'll do what I can. We need to continue to fund health and education as much as we can, for sure. So we'll cut back. We'll get innovative. We'll do better things." And he created some abilities in his department to deliver things when most people would have just thrown up their hands and said: well, if I can't have all the money, I can't do it. Not our Premier.

He was representing us in international and intergovernmental affairs until he did the very honourable thing and stepped out of cabinet. One of the most heart-wrenching days that he had was worrying about his staff, people that had been incredibly loyal to him for many, many years. I know that what troubled him more than any other thing was: what about them and their families?

This guy has lived a life of commitment, of compassion, of leadership within our caucus and now at the head of our caucus. For the hon. member to suggest in any way that somehow this Premier would either want or need to distance himself from what he's done in this government or what he's done in his lifetime before is just nonsensical. With that attitude I can assure you he will be very surprised when he goes to the polls and the people of Alberta say: not only do we respect that, it's 150 years since any politician earned the moniker "honest" anything. You have to go back to Abe Lincoln to get to the point that Albertans consider our new Premier now, and the polls show it.

So, yes, it's a different style of leadership. Yes, he's restructured government to become more efficient, but he never said to us: well, do it with less people. He said: "Look at what will be the best delivery model to serve Albertans." You know what? If it takes more people, then we'll get them. If it takes getting out of each other's way to deliver programs, we'll do it. If it takes more money, thanks to his leadership, we've got it. If it takes co-operation and innovation, he's the guy that invented the words.

Does he need to apologize in any way or to distance himself? Not a chance. I think the fact that he's there now, met a heck of a lot of people in this province – many of us recognize and support completely what he's done and look forward to what he's going to do.

3:40

Mr. Boutilier: Last night I had the pleasure of attending with the Premier and the Lieutenant Governor the University of Alberta, of course, a fine institution, where it was the business leader of the year. The leader actually was an immigrant that during his time had been discriminated against. In fact, he was awarded last night the business leader of the year with other names like the late Mr. Stollery, like Winspear. It was really interesting when the gentleman who received the award, Dominic D'Alessandro, who was the president of Manulife, started off with what made him successful over the last 50 years. Sitting beside the Premier, it was really quite interesting that this leader selected by the University of Alberta, in fact, talked about integrity, about transparency, and ultimately this leader was listening.

The Deputy Chair: Somebody's rising on a point of order?

Dr. Swann: Is this related to interim supply?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, this chair has allowed people a wide latitude for participating in the debate, and if you want to raise some issues or want to participate in the debate, the chair will definitely recognize you. Right now the minister has the floor.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I could specifically address the issue that when Mr. D'Alessandro spoke last night to the thousand to a standing ovation, he talked about integrity. When he spoke about it, he sounded exactly like our Premier in terms of the message and his vision of where he wants to see Alberta continue to go. I found it very reassuring last night that a business leader selected by the University of Alberta, a wonderful example, was in fact using the platform that our Premier stood for in this House since, by the way, back in the early '90s, and here he was last night. I said to the Premier: Premier, it sounds like the CEO actually has stolen your vision of what, in fact, is taking place here in this province today. I think it's reassuring to Albertans and to the faculty at the University of Alberta that we are without question on the right track, specifically when it comes to interim supply.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to speak on interim supply. I think the government has requested about \$10 billion more, which is, I think, more than one-third of the total budget, I hope, and it's a huge amount of money. Everybody who's elected sitting in this House knows, you know, when they go door-knocking and ask the people, they always advise them to spend money very wisely. I'm sure everybody sitting in this House understands that, and they will make sure that this huge amount of money, which is taxpayers' hard-earned money, is spent very wisely and prudently. This fund, the \$10 billion, they are using, I think, for their operations from April to July, which is April, May June, July, only four months, and this is more than one-third of the budget.

I personally want to see this interim supply funding being spent wisely because I want to make sure that all the money the government spends this time is spent where the money is needed. I mean, my constituents keep complaining about the health care system in my area because there's a long waiting time, and there are shortages of doctors, and some people are worried that this government will sometime introduce privatization. There are lots of rumours. My point is, you know, that I'm not sure in this extra money whether this government is spending anything on health care, which is the top priority.

There are some other priorities in my constituency, like education.

Last week I talked to a group of students from the U of A, and they are still complaining about the high tuition fees. I mean, those are the priorities for the students. That's the real investment. I know that one of the speakers pointed out that the population already increased, so we need more money. Yes. I'm not against spending money on the programs. I just want to request again and again and again that we spend the money wisely on the top priorities. Health care and education are always their top priority.

Personally, in my riding there's lots of construction going on, thousands of new houses. They need a couple of new schools, recreational facilities, and libraries, and every time the government keeps on postponing the capital funds: not this year or the year after or the year after. The people are still complaining. I don't know whether this time they will use that money to build new schools in new areas like Edmonton-Ellerslie. This is a very big concern for us. Some schools that I visited need lots of renovations and are, you know, in bad shape. I have noticed that sometimes the teachers do some handyman's job and fix those problems because it's hard to find labour to do a small job. So we should not ignore those priorities.

The seniors, especially vulnerable people, are struggling. They don't get attention, especially when it's one-third of the total budget we are allocating today. I don't think it's fair if they don't get a fair share because they sacrificed their life, and it's about time we should look after our seniors as well.

In my area the road conditions are really, really bad.

I already mentioned that the hospital waiting time is nine and a half hours, and I've questioned it many times. I remember in 1990 in Mill Woods there was a big demonstration there; 50,000 people gathered there. They demonstrated against deep cuts in the health care system, and at that time the waiting time was only four hours in emergency. Nowadays it's nine and a half hours.

3:50

I don't think we are serious. I mean, every time I pick up any papers, the government is saying that they are honest, open, transparent, accountable, this or that. I think this is just talk, lip service. People are not interested in slogans. They want to see action, and that's missing.

Another important issue in my area is crime. Crime is a big issue. I mean, people are stealing cars. There are break-ins. The drug problem is there. Poverty is there. I want the government to at least consider those people because that's the top priority. The gap between rich and poor is increasing, and we should look at that. Before we spend \$10 billion, we should at least – at least – give them fair consideration.

Can this ministry be accountable and responsible with this money? This is a big question mark. I think that the two ministers – they are talking to each other – are elected to come here and listen to the views. I'm talking especially about my constituents, and if somebody is not listening, I don't think it's right. Mr. Chairman, I request once again that everybody use this huge amount of money wisely and prudently.

Another question is: how would this government spend money to improve the lives of working Albertans? A slogan is good, but what are the details? Where's the plan? It looks very nice when we see the five top priorities in the throne speech. Yes, it looks very nice in the papers, but in reality people want to see the actions, which are missing. Some groups are left behind.

I mentioned poverty. How many people sitting here went to the Bissell Centre in Edmonton? There are other low-income people who are suffering badly, and they are looking at us. They elect us. They elect us to make sure their voice is heard here. If I'm talking, and most of the people are not listening, I mean, how would they get the message? I know that everything is in the record. I request again and again: spend the money wisely and prudently.

Another question is that lots of people are complaining about their utility bills, utility bills every time. Nobody bothers. Twenty, \$30, \$50, or \$100 more, and they get the bill, and sometimes they see the hidden amount in the bills. I don't think anybody bothers why consumers paid so much hidden amounts of money every month. I think they sacrificed a lot since we had those deep cuts.

Previously there was a bill in regard to daycare centres. Daycare centres are a big issue. Lots of parents can't find daycare places. I want to make sure that at least some amount of money out of this over \$10 billion – billion, not million – reaches the area, the sector where the money is needed, especially the long-term care centres. They have shortages of staff. They have less doctors, and you know, some people are even complaining about the services there.

Another thing I want to mention, Mr. Chairman, is that some people argue here that this government is really good and that the new Premier is honest. I have no doubt he must be honest; he must be hard working. But I'll just remind this House that this government spent maybe more than 93 per cent of the energy revenue in the last 27 years. Those ministers who are talking about the new Premier were part of this government sometime. Where were they?

I mean, I'm not talking about this year. This routine, this overbudgeting and asking for more and more money, keeps on going again and again and again and again, and this government doesn't change its habit. I remember that I talked about the same issue last year, again, \$10 billion, where they are spending it, proper breakdown. Nobody knows.

Another issue on this interim supply that I want to mention is my own portfolio: Tourism, Parks, Recreation, and Culture. I mean, this sector has been ignored for decades, even during the Tory leadership contest. All the leadership contenders agreed that this sector, you know, the funding should be increased. Some said at least double, and one of the candidates said: if I become the Premier, I will increase this funding three times.

After the Tory election nobody talks, and I don't think we will find any increase in this very, very important sector. The minister is sitting there. I just want to remind him that when he sits in his caucus, at least he discuss how important art and culture and sports are for Edmonton. You know, tourism is an economic engine, and we should consider that sector as well.

As I said before, maybe we are lucky that every year we receive billions of dollars of surplus from oil and gas royalties. We should be thankful to God. But what are we doing? I mean, if we had less money, we would be in the red at this time. I think this is a very serious thing. If we have the money, we should utilize this money very wisely and spend money where the money is needed.

Finally, I want to mention the WCB. Some people are in hardship and they can't work. I remember that the PDD department in the last budget got only a 2 per cent raise, which was less than the inflation rate. I don't think it's fair for those people: less than the inflation rate. I mean, if some small family's, two kids and a single mother, earnings are, say, \$900 and the rent is \$700 to \$800, how will they survive? Then we expect them to be good citizens.

4:00

Everybody is complaining about society changing. Okay. Society is, you know, taking a bad shape or whatever. We can't blame society if we don't look after every sector. There should be a balance. We should look after those people who are unfortunate as well, not only the tiny portion of the people who are earning a hundred thousand dollars, even a million dollars, every year. They are a very small percentage of the people. If we ignore them, I'm afraid that that will be really bad for all Albertans. If we want to see Alberta flourish, we have to have a balance between all sectors, all average people in Alberta.

Another thing that I want to mention is about this amount of

money that this government will spend on increasing transparency, as they mention in their throne speech, or they are going to improve the democratic renewal. I know that they took some good initiatives in the beginning, but still it's a long way to go. Long way to go.

I would suggest that the government consider a fixed election date and maybe a citizens' assembly and give more money to all the opposition parties so that they can reach out to all Albertans. I mean, I can tell you that the resources of the opposition parties are very small. They can't even drop flyers all over Alberta because it costs over \$300,000. If their budget is, say, \$900,000 or \$800,000, how can they afford to at least convey their message to Albertans? This is not a democracy.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to enter debate on interim supply estimates 2007-2008. The House is dealing with a very important item of business: \$10 billion of expenditures for the next fiscal year that we'll be making a commitment to. Based on the document before us, it seems that there is no real, substantive basis on which to judge whether the money that's being requested here will be spent in a way that will benefit Albertans, all Albertans. There's no way to be sure that by voting for this, I as an MLA will be reflecting the interests and concerns of my own constituents properly because there's not enough information here.

This is a common problem. Every year we come to this point, and the government has to request interim supply in order to keep the big machine running while the Assembly waits for the opportunity to receive the official budget, which reveals every year whether or not the government is changing course, whether or not it's making changes in policies and, therefore, reflects budgetary commitments relative to those changes which will benefit Albertans in general and, particularly, Albertans in need.

We have seen over the last many years, for example, that the budgets that this government has been presenting have increasingly shifted the burdens of taxation over to the shoulders of the middle class. Families in the middle income bear the primary brunt of the changes in the taxation policies of this government. Secondly, we have also known over the years that it has been the consistent policy of this government to shift the burden of taxation away from high-income earners and from the corporate sector over to the shoulders of the vast majority of Albertans which fall in the middle-income category, as they say. So the so-called working Albertans increasingly shoulder the burdens of taxation.

When discussing revenue expenditures in the form of this interim supply estimates, I certainly ask myself how best to comment on this document, how best to and appropriately comment on each request made by each department. In the absence of any idea of where the government is going to go in terms of the policy – and this year in particular, Mr. Chairman, the context is somewhat more special. This is the first time that I'm facing a government which is trying to rebrand itself.

We have a new Premier, and the new Premier and his cabinet seem to have made a decision, obviously, to present themselves as a new government, an entirely new government, a government that's making some important departures from the 36 years of the government that this party in power has offered. It is a difficult task. Unless there are fundamental changes in philosophy, unless there are fundamental changes in this party's historical loyalties to particular special interests in this province, the interests of those special interests having been reflected in the policies and the budgetary decisions this government has made year after year after year, it's

very difficult for Albertans to believe that there'll be a real change in direction.

That's the context: the attempt of this government in spite of its history, in spite of its legacy of policies and plans and budgetary commitments to rebrand itself. So we'll have to wait until next month sometime before we can see if there is, in fact, any evidence, any substantive evidence, indicating that the government is willing and is poised to make decisions on budget, make changes in policy that reflect the real interests of hard-working Alberta families.

In the meantime the government must run and the money must be there to pay for all kinds of commitments that a government like ours has. So when everything is said and done, I'm sure the House will be willing to risk one more time approving this interim supply in the hope that certainly the NDP opposition and this side of the House, in general, will find that the budget reflects changes which reflect the interests of the vast majority of working Albertans, people who are hard-working, people with families, that there'll be policies that make our communities both stronger, healthier, safer, and that there'll be family-friendly items in the budget.

4:10

The one case in terms of family friendliness of the policies of the government that comes to mind is the case of provision of child daycare services in this province. Mr. Chairman, there is a great deal of concern among parents of young children that they'll find it difficult to get good quality daycare for their children. There's a severe shortage and a growing shortage of licensed, good-quality, child daycare spaces across the province. Men and women as family members, as parents of young children, decide to pursue careers, and many of them do so voluntarily because we live in a very different world today where women as well as men seek to have occupations or professional aspirations. They want to take part in the labour market.

Women, in particular, have fought over the years to have barriers in their way removed, one by one, whether they're educational barriers, whether they're barriers related to wage discrimination and wage inequity for jobs that are comparable across occupations employing men and women. They, of course, have been fighting and facing barriers in terms of traditional definitions of roles of males and females.

So while they have been fighting a valiant battle and taking steps forward in seeking equal opportunity and equity in the workplace, they find that they continue to face barriers, such as those related to availability of quality daycare for their children, which prevent them from taking advantage of the opportunities that otherwise may be before them, particularly given the favourable conditions of the labour market. A lot more women in this province probably would be working if it were the case that they could be assured that their children will receive good quality daycare while they're at work.

Many other parents, of course, face the problem of working at times when their children come back from school, and there's no adequate set of services available to look after children in the after school hours when either one or both parents may be at work. We know that it's not possible for most employees in this province to determine when they work. It depends on the needs of the employer as to when they go to work. But schools open and close at certain times of the day. There is a growing need and established evidence of that need for after school daycare for children at least until they reach the age of roughly 12 years so that they can be expected to look after themselves even if their parents are at work.

There's a need to see changes in policy, in daycare, in family supports for families to make life easier, to make things happen for men and women who want to take advantage of their professional qualifications, occupational aspirations, their educational skills, and the talents that they have that they are willing to offer and invest in

the economy in making the lives of all of us living in our communities better.

Mr. Chairman, there is a report here, before we move, with respect to the present state of family benefits as they relate to British Columbia and Alberta compared with some other international jurisdictions. A study just released earlier this month by the Institute for Research on Public Policy called *Measuring Up: Family Benefits in British Columbia and Alberta in International Perspective*, authored by Paul Kershaw, is a telling indictment of the daycare policies of the two provinces mentioned here, Alberta and B.C.

The comparisons are with some other OECD countries although these are provincial jurisdictions. Alberta and B.C. come at the bottom of the list in terms of the family support and the child care services that are provided in these provinces. This says a lot, Mr. Chairman, about where we need to go, what kind of changes we would hope the budget will reflect.

The priorities have to change in this province. The priorities have to change in many ways but certainly in terms of the provision of child daycare services. We need to improve the standards. We need to guarantee a good quality of child care. We need to make that service universally available to families and parents who ask for it, and we certainly want to make sure that young children at a very early age receive the kind of developmental experiences that will enrich their experience of growing up so that when they enter school and go through the educational system to the point where they are ready to enter the adult world and become citizens as well as earners and producers of goods that we all need, they will have become the best that they can be. The critical importance of the provision of child care with focuses on early childhood development cannot be overstated, Mr. Chairman. There are tons of studies that provide solid evidence that investment made in early years in the development of our children pays off manyfold in their lives and in the future of our communities and societies.

Similarly, Mr. Chairman, other policy changes that I hope will be reflected in the upcoming budget – reading these numbers here, I can't tell whether or not we can expect that those changes have taken place. The budget certainly would show those. In the case of seniors, for example, you know, there have been representations made to this government and to all parties represented in this House that we have in this province a seniors' advocate. We know that the seniors face growing difficulties in long-term care centres, in nursing homes, those who live in their own homes finding it difficult to pay all of the bills that they have to pay living on fixed incomes, the waiting times and the quality of care that they have to accept when they go to our hospitals and medical centres.

So there has been a proposal made by seniors' organizations that this province establish a seniors' advocate independent of the government, independent of the ministry that is responsible for seniors' services, and that that seniors' advocate be directly accountable to this Assembly. The report that I received a couple of years ago was also, I think, distributed to other parties represented in the House. It's a proposal rather than a report. The proposal spells out in detail exactly how this can be accomplished and what the mandate of such an office should be and what will be the cost and what will be the benefits. It seems to me that the benefits that will accrue to the senior citizens of this province from the establishment of such an office and the funding of this office, the seniors' advocate office, far outweigh the costs that will be incurred. It's a very persuasive and compelling document. I'm not sure if we will see in the upcoming budget that this document has received the attention that it deserves to receive and, in fact, is adopted by government as part of its desire to change policies and rebrand itself.

4:20

Similarly, Mr. Chairman, looking at the health care budget request

here from the department of health. Again, the time has come in this province to abolish health care premiums altogether. It's a regressive tax. It's called a premium, but it's a tax. It's a tax that's paid by most Albertans. It's a tax that's paid at the same rate, the same absolute amount regardless of the capacity to pay. Those families who earn high incomes – \$250,000, \$300,000 – pay the same amount as those who earn \$30,000, \$35,000, \$40,000 a year. So it's inequitable in the extreme.

It's a tax in the form of health care premiums that, therefore, should be abolished, must be abolished as early as possible to, again, reduce the inequity in the tax burden that middle-income families in particular face and experience from day to day thanks to the changes in the personal tax regime that has been introduced and has been in place in the province for years. We don't know from these estimates, from this request whether or not those changes are forthcoming.

Similarly, Mr. Chairman, I can go on to talk about infrastructure and the crisis that this province is experiencing in terms of infrastructure deficit. It's a hidden debt in the tens of billions of dollars that, Albertans are beginning to realize, has been created by a government that has spared no effort to convince Albertans that it has in fact paid that debt.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll take another chance later.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's difficult to give a critical response to the interim supply estimates as there is no detail. I am choosing to consider the Children's Services request for \$311,000,000 for interim supply. The Children's Services ministry is responsible for essential services, and it saddens me that many of the agencies under the Children's Services umbrella are burdened by the need to fund raise for funds that are necessary for the staff and programs which support our vulnerable individuals.

Recruitment and retention of staff is at a crisis level across the province. Staff are often working overtime because there aren't replacement workers. Staff are overburdened, foster parents are overloaded, and often the work that is required is not done, leaving children, families, and youth at risk.

Social services don't have a choice about the services they offer, like Tim Hortons, who can decide to close overnight. They can't close a group home. There's no place for those individuals or those children to go. Social services impact human lives. Individuals at risk and the disadvantaged deserve the same supports as others in our society.

I don't see anything, of course, and I don't know whether this interim supply will actually address the fact that there's more staff needed to help social workers do the work that the latest case model tells them that they need to do. They have a mandate, but they're not getting the resources in terms of staff to help them. Therefore, the turnover is devastating. This means that the thorough investigations to support good decisions are sacrificed because of a lack of time due to the caseloads of workers. Social workers do not have the crucial resources to meet the expectations.

The recent wage enhancements are welcome news from Children's Services for child care, but this does not include before and after school care nor child care centres who are not accredited. How can these centres attract or retain staff so that they can meet accreditation standards if they can't offer the same salaries? At a time when the lack of child care spaces is acute, this exclusion of some centres for wage enhancements may result in closures of centres.

The interim budget, of course, doesn't tell us anything about plans for agencies that are contracted for children's services, agencies who can't fill positions, agencies who can't compete in the marketplace,

agencies who can't compete with government positions, agencies who are losing staff to government positions or other businesses where they can get paid something more reasonable. Of course these agencies can't attract people who are at higher levels of income.

I particularly hope that the interim budget will address family and community support services needs. The annual FCSS budget should be indexed to accommodate increases for inflation and the cost of living and increases in the provincial population.

Our province is experiencing an ever-increasing rate of growth. However, with growth come increased social needs. The demand for services provided to support families who are separated due to work requirements has increased significantly. Increased prosperity is leading to increased family breakdown, addiction problems, and reduced community connectedness.

Most of the FCSS programs, especially those serving the sparse rural populations, have not seen a significant funding increase for several years. The cost of other programs' supplies and services, especially rent, insurance, energy, is also increasing rapidly for both FCSS programs and for nonprofit groups that are funded by FCSS. The cost of maintaining qualified staff to operate quality programs is increasing rapidly due to Alberta's booming economy.

FCSS and community services programs are already experiencing an exodus of staff to other, more competitive sectors of the economy, resulting in a loss of leadership, knowledge, and relationships within this sector. Clients of the community services sector often rely on long-standing, supportive relationships with these staff in order to effect a change in their lives. When that lack of consistency happens, often these people go back to square one.

Additionally, these populations that are most at risk are increasing at a faster rate than the general population increase. The aboriginal population is expected to increase by 44 per cent between 2001 and 2017. The number of seniors in Alberta is expected to increase from its present 10 per cent of the population to 20 per cent by 2031.

It seems that increases to the FCSS budget occur intermittently with no discernible relationship between the needs at the local level and the amount of the increases. As a result, it is impossible for municipalities to plan ahead and strategically set direction around funding priorities and sustainability. An indexed approach would therefore provide a predictable increase that would allow for longer term budget planning.

The booming economy and population growth are changing Alberta. The market economy for staffing, housing, and office rents in many communities is changing the landscape as well. A looming crisis in sector staffing, increased needs in demographic growth in certain populations are all placing demands on FCSS programs that are currently outpacing funding.

4:30

In order to keep the health and vibrancy in our communities, I believe there needs to be an increase in FCSS funding, an inclusion of a cost-of-living factor, and budget predictability. We want to keep our communities safe, strong, and healthy so Alberta can be the best of both the current economic boom and whatever is to follow it. We need to look at the need for predictable funding for this social need.

Another provision for funding that I would hope the interim budget might consider is the funding for the operation of licensed care of elementary school-aged children before and after school time. I appreciate that the Alberta government invests in a range of programs and services to meet the needs of families and that many municipalities are undergoing accelerated growth from the economic development, but this leads to growing demands for child care services. Family support networks have changed in our society. Most parents can no longer rely on extended family, friends, or

neighbours to provide child care for their elementary school-aged children. You know, the circumstances that create the need for child care in the early years continue through the elementary school years, and quality care is still essential during those years. There's no child care subsidy for the care of elementary school-aged children, and this needs to change.

I recognize that licensed out-of-school care programs provide children with adequate supervision and opportunities to participate in activities which increase resilience and build protective factors, which are important in a child's development. One of the things these programs can do is to help children learn positive decision-making, help them learn how to determine critically what is a healthy thing for them to be involved in.

Finally, the nonprofit sector needs inclusion in this interim budget. Alberta's nonprofit sector is large, vibrant, and diverse. It makes a significant contribution to the quality of life in our province, serving and involving citizens in all neighbourhoods. There are over 8,000 nonprofits in Edmonton alone. The nonprofit sector touches the lives of almost every Edmontonian and member of our population in this province by finding support for aging parents and participation in sport activities, accessing employment services, serving on community league boards, attending places of worship, using the food bank, or sending kids to an after school program.

The nonprofit sector is facing a number of serious challenges which are making it tough to find the necessary human resources to do business. This is due to uncertain and unpredictable funding, inability to raise fees, rising utility costs, competition for staff, high turnover, and declining volunteerism. The factors that are affecting this sector are, first of all, project-based funding, which makes good planning and staff retention nearly impossible. Government contracts that do not cover core costs result in staff burnout and time spent on fundraising rather than on the programming. Rising operating costs mean less money for client services. Low wages and lack of benefit packages means staff are going elsewhere. In the current economic boom there's an increasing demand for service and no corresponding increase in revenue.

This interim budget, I hope, will look at the nonprofit sector. The need for staff has reached a critical level, with many groups now unable to deliver their services safely or effectively. High turnover, vacant positions, and lack of qualified candidates are leading to program closures. Liability is even becoming an issue as safety is compromised in some situations.

On the front lines, here are some examples. The Boys and Girls Clubs of Edmonton are operating at 65 per cent of capacity because they have 35 employee vacancies they can't fill. Highlands community league had to hold a second AGM to get enough people to fill their board. Catalyst Theatre can't find a general manager to work for the salary that they're offering. Group homes can't find people to work the overnight shifts and are lowering the level of qualifications required to fill positions. Support agencies for people with disabilities have experienced a record high employee turnover rate of over 40 per cent in the last year. Staff at an employment training agency are actually making less money than the starting wage their clients are making at the fast-food restaurant across the parking lot. Staff at another social services agency are at the point of needing services such as the food bank for themselves.

Organizations are going into a deficit situation as they spend so much time and energy on recruiting, screening, interviewing, and training while key positions remain vacant, creating a vacuum. These organizations feel that they are rusting out as those that remain behind struggle to carry on. Investment in the social infrastructure is just as critical as investment in the physical infrastructure. Nonprofit groups require both short-term and long-term help in order to stay healthy and hire and retain the staff needed to maintain the province's quality of life. Many agencies and groups

are in a very precarious position, unable to fill critical front-line staff positions.

Our increase in population means an increase in demand for services. There are more people arriving and more people using food banks and clothing banks. Soccer teams, ESL classes, Brownie and Scout groups, societies to preserve cultural traditions, support groups for medical conditions: it's not just about roads and bridges; it's about healthy communities supported by nonprofit organizations with sufficient paid and unpaid labour in place to deliver the service.

We need increased funding to existing grant programs such as the community investment operation grant. We need more realistic funding for government contracted work. Government departments across the board need to fund these programs sufficiently.

Finally, I'm hoping, although I have no way of knowing, that this interim budget is going to look at once again affirming the principles of the five-point investment plan in child care, which was so good. I'm hoping that that major step that was taken will be supported and that in the future we will see expansion into the other points that this plan was intended for.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

Agreed to:

Support to the Legislative Assembly	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$19,800,000
Office of the Auditor General	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$6,200,000
Office of the Ombudsman	
Expense	\$800,000
Office of the Chief Electoral Officer	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$2,100,000
Office of the Ethics Commissioner	
Expense	\$200,000
Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$1,600,000
Advanced Education and Technology	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$728,800,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$27,900,000

4:40

Agriculture and Food	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$205,000,000
Children's Services	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$311,000,000
Education	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$1,200,000,000
Employment, Immigration and Industry	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$221,800,000
Energy	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$96,000,000
Environment	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$40,600,000
Executive Council	
Expense	\$6,900,000
Finance	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$33,000,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$15,000,000
Health and Wellness	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$3,681,000,000
Capital Investment	\$6,600,000
Infrastructure and Transportation	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$972,000,000
Capital Investment	\$362,000,000

International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$23,500,000
Justice	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$119,000,000
Municipal Affairs and Housing	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$234,900,000
Seniors and Community Supports	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$567,200,000
Service Alberta	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$98,000,000
Solicitor General and Public Security	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$119,200,000
Capital Investment	\$6,000,000
Lottery Fund Payments	\$463,300,000
Sustainable Resource Development	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$172,600,000
Capital Investment	\$20,000,000
Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$239,700,000
Capital Investment	\$6,500,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$2,500,000
Treasury Board	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$6,400,000

The Deputy Chair: Shall the votes on all of the above 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 move that the Committee of Supply rise and report the estimates of the interim supply for the year 2007-08 as voted.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports as follows. All resolutions relating to the 2007-2008 interim supply estimates for the general revenue fund have been approved.

Support to the Legislative Assembly: expense and equipment/-inventory purchases, \$19,800,000.

Office of the Auditor General: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$6,200,000.

Office of the Ombudsman: expense, \$800,000.

Office of the Chief Electoral Officer: expense and equipment/-inventory purchases, \$2,100,000.

Office of the Ethics Commissioner: expense, \$200,000.

Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,600,000.

Advanced Education and Technology: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$728,800,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$27,900,000.

Agriculture and Food: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$205,000,000.

Children's Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$311,000,000.

Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,200,000,000.

Employment, Immigration and Industry: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$221,800,000.

Energy: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$96,000,000.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$40,600,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$6,900,000.

Finance: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$33,000,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$15,000,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$3,681,000,000; capital investment, \$6,600,000.

Infrastructure and Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$972,000,000; capital investment, \$362,000,000.

International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$23,500,000.

Justice: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$119,000,000.

Municipal Affairs and Housing: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$234,900,000.

Seniors and Community Supports: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$567,200,000.

Service Alberta: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$98,000,000.

Solicitor General and Public Security: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$119,200,000; capital investment, \$6,000,000; lottery fund payments, \$463,300,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$172,600,000; capital investment, \$20,000,000.

Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$239,700,000; capital investment, \$6,500,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$2,500,000.

Treasury Board: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$6,400,000.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

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 14: Mr. Snelgrove]

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to stand and respond to the throne speech. It's an important time for Alberta, an important time to step back and see where the province is going, appreciate what we have accomplished as a government, as a province, and the tremendous resources that we are blessed with stewarding over the coming years. I was very impressed with many aspects of the throne speech and appreciate the sentiments and the commitment that this new Premier is trying to bring to the government, recognizing that it's not, in fact, a new government. It's continuing on with most of the people that have been around for a

number of years with the Conservative government, with much the same agenda. Some are getting a bit older.

4:50

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are looking for bold leadership, especially with the hypergrowth that's going on in this province, the tremendous inflation, the stresses and strains on people, on the environment, on some of the critical airsheds, watersheds in this province. There's real concern about the lack of planning over the last decade and where, in fact, this government is going.

We've got an inefficient transportation system that's very much focused on the automobile and the individual vehicle. We've got unaffordable housing in the province. We have a serious breakdown in some aspects of the health care system, that needs to be addressed with real reform and real leadership, and real stresses in the educational system. What is the vision, I guess, is what Albertans are asking and what I'm asking today. Where is the plan to deal with a tremendous opportunity and a tremendous danger in this time of hypergrowth and inflation? How will we guide Albertans and the various institutions and the business community, and where is the ethic of community and quality of life that we have heard so much about in the speech?

Mr. Speaker, particularly what jumped out at me as the Environment critic were some of the comments about the environment which weren't given their due place in the speech but considered as a sideline under managing growth. Clearly, the environment is primary in the minds of Albertans and Canadians, and separate attention and real focus and real investment are needed on the environment. Alberta Environment has been crippled over the last 10 years with cuts and by the failure to keep up with the resources that they need and the expertise and the staffing to do appropriate monitoring, to investigate problems, to enforce legislation, and to ensure that this hypergrowth is not leaving a terrible legacy for our future generations.

With less than .5 per cent of the provincial budget Alberta Environment has become the laughingstock of industry with its soft educational approach, and I quote from one of the senior Alberta Environment staff: we facilitate and broker the interests of industry with communities. They're not in this department planning to take leadership and to set limits. They are merely brokering the interests of industry with communities and letting them negotiate and hash out what's going to happen with our environment. This is not good enough, and I think that we're very anxious on this side of the House, as many of my constituents are, that we see some real leadership, some real backbone in this Alberta Environment and this government to address the critical challenges of limits in this province.

The question, I guess, is: who is in charge of this development? I used to believe it was the oil companies, Mr. Speaker, but over time I've come to realize that in fact no one is in charge of development in the province. It's a free-for-all.

Mr. MacDonald: Are you saying that there's no plan?

Dr. Swann: There's no plan, and I would like to see evidence that this government is changing its ways and not allowing unfettered growth and a weak Department of Environment and Energy and Utilities Board to allow this to go on without appropriate assessments, independent assessments, instead of depending on the assessments of the industry to decide whether something is acceptable or unacceptable.

So when I hear in the throne speech that we're going to manage growth pressures and protect the environment, it's difficult to take it seriously. This administration has been denying climate change for the last decade and, in fact, spent 3 million public dollars

convincing Albertans that climate science was phony and that actions on fossil fuel reduction would harm our economy and eliminate jobs.

There's a huge inventory of contaminated sites, over \$8 billion by some estimates, that await reclamation. How are we going to address this, or are we continuing to leave it to future generations?

Under Bill 29 we also learned last year that this government wants to let polluters off the hook. Instead of really remediating and cleaning up contaminated sites, we will allow them to manage risk.

There's no downstream oil and gas orphan fund. It's high time we had this. It's been discussed by the previous minister. I hope this minister will take it up and address it in a serious way.

We've overallocated and poorly managed our southern Alberta river systems, and now we're up against the limits of growth there as a result of this, with climate change going to aggravate the situation. We lack the staff and the expertise to at this time inspect and enforce the legislation in relation to these developments.

Another quote directly out of the Speech from the Throne is that we will be "a leader in practical, innovative, and sustainable environmental policies." Well, I would like to ask: when is the government going to begin to measure sustainability? When are we going to see indicators to help us decide what our airsheds can manage, what our watersheds can manage, and what sustainability means to this government? Does it not include social indicators? Does it not include health indicators? Does it not include a serious commitment to environmental stewardship that will allow the economy to continue into future generations? What's the evidence that we are acting sustainably in this province?

The province is gobbling up good agricultural land for resource development, acreage owners. It's allowing all manner of activity everywhere all the time. Look at the eastern slopes, where we're going to allow continued oil and gas activity, forestry, tourism, and somehow protect our watersheds. Clearly, this is not leadership. We've set no limits on carbon emissions and no significant incentives for renewable energy options.

There is still no cumulative impact assessment before major developments. I'm thinking of the upgrader alley. I'm thinking of a number of developments, including the one now proposed for the Bow River west of Calgary. That's the old Seebe site, the old TransAlta site, a plan for 5,600 people there without any cumulative impact assessment.

We're looking for a new way of doing business in Alberta, and we're not seeing signs of that. We see a government that's scrambling to catch up to an unsustainable path and no willingness to set limits and to slow down the development in this province. The most glaring example of the lack of oversight and planning, of course, is the oil sands in Fort McMurray, where there are critical health care risks presently being overlooked as we allow expansion after expansion in the Fort McMurray area. The First Nations are increasingly outraged at the level and scope and pace of development up there. In what way is this sustainable? We have increased social unrest, and we have clear environmental risks that our children are going to have to deal with. Does sustainability really mean allowing the market to do what it does best, compete, and the lowest possible cost rules the day? The examples from the field are legion.

The speech also alludes to properly managing our water supplies. Clearly, Water for Life has been an important document that's helped to shape thinking and planning for this province, but where are the resources? Where's the expertise to help these watershed councils do appropriate planning and implement sustainable watershed management? Where in 2007 are the fundamental instruments of government to do the job? Where is the land-use framework? This is the third attempt this government has made in the last 15 years to help us decide where our priorities are: where we

will protect water, where we will protect agriculture, where we will allow industrial development, and where we won't allow these things to happen, where tourism is a priority. How long will this province have to wait for leadership on land use?

5:00

When are we going to see proper and expert cumulative impact assessments in this province? We cannot make good decisions on the basis of ad hoc or consultant reports paid for by industry, which is the way we're going today. When are we going to see genuine public consultation on how regions wish their development to proceed? When will we see a regional planning framework that supports win-win decisions for rural and urban municipalities, that respects the balance between economic, social, and environmental protection?

It's early in the mandate of this new leader, a decent man to be sure, and I'm sure that many people want to see, as we do, success in this administration. But this man has been part of the administration for the past 10 years, an administration that continues to refuse to do its job.

What does that job include? It includes establishing transparent goals out of a vision for human and environmental and economic well-being all together. The job of governance includes bringing together the best of science to assess planning and including people from various perspectives that balance the interests of all, placing environment primary, not secondary, to jobs and income. Governance includes a careful analysis of costs and benefits, short- and long-term, of the various development options. Governance includes a full debate and review of where we're going and how we're going to get there. Finally, governance includes careful monitoring and a willingness to make adjustments as the results come in.

If we're going to improve Albertans' quality of life, which is also emphasized in the throne speech, there must be an emphasis on bringing under control the hypergrowth and, in fact, the decreasing quality of life in this province: the increased levels of stress, increased violence especially in families, increasing levels of depression and other mental illness, suicide, workplace injury and death. I want to refer here especially to farm workers, who are still, in the 21st century, unprotected by occupational health and safety and unprotected by workers' compensation.

If, as this throne speech discusses, we're going to improve people's quality of life, what about those at the low end of the spectrum, Mr. Speaker? AISH continues to be, embarrassingly, among the lowest in the country. Social supports, employment insurance are not indexed to the cost of living. Again, we are giving ourselves increases each year while those at the bottom of the rung languish under very difficult conditions financially and increasingly turn to the health care system for support when, fundamentally, they need the support of this government to provide them with a decent living wage.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to look hopefully at the future. This is a time of great opportunity and of great danger if we don't deal as leaders with vision and include those in our community, particularly the most disadvantaged, in setting a course that is truly building stronger communities and demonstrating the compassion that this government talks about. Compassion is not a luxury. If we don't as governments demonstrate that leadership, we are going to see increasing turmoil, increasing breakdown, and increasing failure of a health care system that simply cannot keep up to the growing demands on it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak to the Speech from the Throne 2007.

The Speech from the Throne is an important document. It draws attention to what the government is planning to do, what changes it's planning to make to improve quality of life and to create a society in Alberta that's more just, that's more fair, where prosperity is spread across the population in a more even way than has been the case. The Speech from the Throne is about future plans with respect to strengthening and improving our educational system, both at the K to 12 level and the postsecondary level.

It is about changing direction in terms of the kind of economy that we want to create, especially in year 2007 when we're gathering momentum with respect to the determination of many countries in the world, many governments in the world to bring into being a plan, a program, and a set of policies that will effectively help us control the rate at which global warming is taking place. There is not just mounting evidence but incontrovertible and massive evidence on climate change and global warming. No one can deny anymore that the threat of global warming is a real one and that we need to act on it decisively and now. We have a very, very narrow window of putting in place policies, changing the protocols for greenhouse gas emissions, and ensuring that we have a government and a policy that makes it absolutely clear that the major emitters of greenhouse gases will not be allowed to flout the public will which says that absolute reductions in greenhouse gas emissions is a necessity and that no compromise is possible on it.

It also provides a window of opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to act on greening our economy, to bring in policies that will result in a green economy for the future, the next 50 to 80 years. There's a great opportunity awaiting us to engage in the development of technologies, scientific invention, and breakthroughs that'll put us at the forefront in this competitive world in terms of our ability to sell new knowledge, new technologies, and new programs to reduce the negative impact of global warming, to slow it down by controlling the emissions of greenhouse gases. So the opportunity is there. We are at the crossroads. We are at the centre of an industry which for Canada produces the largest greenhouse gases in terms of absolute amounts.

When I see the throne speech, it recognizes that climate change and the question of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere is something that needs to be addressed, but what it proposes to do is essentially give in to the plans and the practices of the major greenhouse gas emitters, the oil and gas industry. There's no indication in the throne speech that the tar sands development should be slowed down. It not only is leading to Alberta becoming notorious for being the largest emitter of carbon dioxide into the air in Canada – Environment Canada issued a report yesterday that we have the dubious distinction along with Ontario of being the largest greenhouse gas and other air pollutant emitters – Alberta in fact is a leader in putting into the atmosphere the largest tonnage of greenhouse gases in Canada.

5:10

I think that when we have an industry such as we have, from which our economy benefits and Canada's economy benefits, we must take leadership at the same time and recognize the responsibility of being the leaders in introducing policies, legislation, and enforcement mechanisms for the legislation so that we can demonstrate that we not only have the will but also the legislative capacity to reduce those emissions in absolute terms. They talk about reducing greenhouse intensity levels, and we have a bill before us that talks about reducing the intensity of emissions, but it does absolutely nothing, Mr. Speaker. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that it will do absolutely nothing to reduce the absolute emissions. In fact, it will lead to massive increases year

after year in greenhouse gas emissions emanating from Alberta from these industries.

So the Speech from the Throne is really disappointing. It's a betrayal of the hopes of Albertans, a betrayal of the obligations and responsibilities that we have as a province that is the site of this massive industry, from which we all benefit, to do what we need to do, to do the right thing, which is to bring in legislation which will give this government the tools to ensure that absolute reductions progressively year after year after year are obtained in this province, and that we serve as an example to other jurisdictions to do the same. But that's not there, Mr. Speaker.

Much has been said about other weaknesses and problems that this speech has. I'd like to draw the attention of the House to one major flaw that I saw in the speech. Over the last almost dozen years this is the first time that I've seen a Speech from the Throne which devotes so little space to postsecondary education. It has a mere two and a half paragraphs dealing with postsecondary education, an area of investment in human capital, in our own future in ensuring our prosperity and a green and prosperous economy for the future. It deserves and merits a stronger commitment than is expressed in the very brief mention that it receives in the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, I'll quote from the speech. It says:

Your government will also increase access and quality in postsecondary education while strengthening its support for community education and literacy programs. It will work to improve high school completion rates and increase access to postsecondary education with an emphasis on the Campus Alberta approach.

It then concludes by saying:

Investments in advanced education will be targeted towards a comprehensive framework that will make postsecondary education, trade and occupational training more accessible to adult learners.

Nowhere in this very short space, two and a half paragraphs, is a reference and a recognition that the affordability of postsecondary education is a concern that this government has. It produced a document, *A Learning Alberta*, the final report of the steering committee, and then it produced the affordability framework following that last November. I'm curious why there is, it seems, a deliberate attempt to not mention the unfinished work on affordability. That causes concern to lots of people, including over 200,000 students who are part of our postsecondary education system.

The brief comments that I've referred to are a far cry from the emphasis that was given to advanced education in previous years. The government has two recent significant reports, *A Learning Alberta* and the affordability framework, that I've just mentioned, but much of the content of the affordability framework remains to be implemented, from reducing the interest rates on student loans to moving student financing from loans towards grants and bursaries and making it more affordable for the young people of Alberta currently excluded from postsecondary education to be able to take advantage of it.

There is a great deal of concern being expressed by students. I just met with some of them the other day, and they are expressing concern that the government may in fact be dragging its feet even on its own affordability framework, its own document that it put out just a few months ago. There's a great deal of room for improvement on the affordability framework. The student representatives that talked to me do not see the government wanting to honour its commitments to the affordability issues, commitments that it made just a few months ago.

The major challenge in the area of advanced education in Alberta is attracting students to postsecondary institutions. In *A Learning Alberta* the government committed to improving participation rates. Alberta has the lowest rate of high school students moving on to postsecondary institutions in Canada. We are dead last in university participation rates in the country. We need to address the sticker

price of postsecondary education in order to change that situation, Mr. Speaker. This requires the recognition of education as a long-term social investment, a long-term guarantor of enhancing and enriching the availability of human resource and human capital in the province and in its economy.

The government must come to terms with the opportunity cost, the forgone income of postsecondary students. The reason that many Albertans who want to take a postsecondary education don't do so is the forgone income. Giving up the opportunity of earning income by entering the labour force is so much higher now than it was before, and the cost of going to school is also moving up very quickly. So add the two: the forgone income as a cost plus the actual costs of going to school, including tuition fees, residential costs, travel costs, books, and other fees. We haven't put in place conditions which will encourage students to want to go to postsecondary institutions first and then enter the labour market.

Tuition fees are the main factor in determining the affordability of postsecondary education because of their sticker price effect. This is one area where the costs are immediately and quickly amenable to public policy initiatives. Students are asking, of course, that the tuition fees must be rolled back to the 1999-2000 level. It will bring them down to about \$3,000. That will make their tuition fees the lowest in the country. But the government's tuition fee policy does nothing like that. Students have accepted grudgingly what they have been given. It's better than what was there before, but because there's no legislated cap on where these tuition fees could go and the fact that they were not rolled back to what students expected this government to do – that is, roll them back to the level of where they were in '99-2000 – they continue to be very concerned about tuition fees and their impact on the affordability of postsecondary education in general in this province. Student leaders tell us – I met with them on January 15, Mr. Speaker – that they are pushing for a maximum tuition of \$3,000 as a baseline.

Time runs quickly, Mr. Speaker. I take my seat.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and have this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne this afternoon on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar. Certainly, I listened with interest on March 7 as His Honour Norman Kwong delivered this throne speech. At that point I thought to myself that this was a blueprint of where the government wants to go. You open it, and the first thing you read is *The Future Is Now: A Plan for Alberta*.

This throne speech is an admission that there was no plan. In recent years there was no plan. The former Premier, Mr. Klein, admitted that there was no plan. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View certainly outlined some of the issues that are still outstanding, and they need attention.

5:20

Now, I don't know many people that try to build anything without a blueprint. I congratulate this government for coming forward with a blueprint. It's very vague. The details are still being drawn up at the draftsman's table, but the blueprint is at least here. How much is it going to cost us economically, environmentally, and socially as a result of operating without a blueprint in the last number of years? I don't know, but the bills certainly are mounting.

There are a number of issues that are of concern to the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I would like to talk about them at this time. I see here that we're talking about improving the quality of life of Albertans, managing growth pressures, governing with

integrity and transparency, building a stronger Alberta, whatever that means, but there is no plan in here. That's why I say that it's a different quarterback, same game plan with this government. There's no plan in here to unplug electricity deregulation. There is no concrete plan in here to deal with the outstanding issue of royalties. I know that we're having this committee, and I know that it's doing its work as we speak, but I'm not confident in the outcome of that one.

We still have the issue in Edmonton and Calgary and some other communities around public school closures. What is the plan by this government on that issue? Is it still going to dictate to school boards which schools are to be closed without any rational reason? I'll never forget going to Calgary and talking to some of the Calgary city councillors there, and they reminded us not to close inner-city schools because as those inner-city neighbourhoods are developed, you're going to need the schools again. They're absolutely right, and it's a reminder that people on this side of the floor certainly will take seriously. There is nothing to address the whole issue of school closures in this speech.

Homeless people. Earlier this afternoon we heard members from across the way say that this is now a compassionate Conservative government. Well, I guess that's an admittance, Mr. Speaker, that in the past they were not compassionate. One only has to go down to Sir Winston Churchill Square and meet people down there who have no home, who are in need of care. They're not getting it. Straight and simple, they are not getting the care that they need. Many of these citizens, through no fault of their own, through unfortunate circumstances cannot look after themselves, and it's about time that this government starts to do that. It has been negligent in the past, and I don't see any improvement in that in this document.

Now, yesterday we talked in question period about issues surrounding temporary foreign workers and the whole issue of labour rights, who has them, and who does not. What does this government do? Eliminates the department of labour. I'm not saying that there shouldn't have been government departments eliminated and others reorganized. I'm not saying that, but the labour department should be a stand-alone department. It's hidden now in Employment, Immigration and Industry: EII.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Department of EII wants to increase significantly the number of temporary foreign workers in this province. In fact, we're looking at our own immigration strategy. After what I've encountered in the last couple of weeks, this government is not capable of running its own immigration policy. It's simply out of its league. It can't be done, and there are no recommendations, there are no words in this speech that will make me change my mind. We've got temporary foreign workers here that are being exploited. They've been short-changed. They've been cheated on their pay stubs. It doesn't matter if they're working as general farm labourers in Provost. We also have the same thing happening in urban areas.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is talking about bad employers. These bad employers are using recruiting agencies internationally and charging these people thousands upon thousands of dollars to enter this country, and then when they get them here, because of the restrictions on those visas they've got them here to exploit for the length of time of the visa. It is unfortunate, and this has to be changed before this province is capable of administering its own immigration policy. I'm sorry; this is not working out.

We have hourly employees that are coming here, thinking that they're going to get an economic foundation for their families and themselves, and they've been forced to turn into subcontractors, and then they have no rights. No rights. They're just paid a lump sum for an amount of work that's done. That's not what that program was intended to do, and it is totally out of hand. It is totally out of

hand. Until that's fixed, the program has to be studied, and we have to do better. A lot of these people aren't even interested in the provincial nominee program. They just want to leave this country because of how they've been treated. We need better labour laws, and we need a government that's interested in enforcing them.

Farm workers. Well, that's another issue. But there shouldn't be a corporate farm in this province that is allowed to hire people as general farm labour and not pay them overtime, not pay them vacation pay, not give them time off where appropriate, not cover them for WCB, and not give them occupational health and safety training so that they can work safely. This is the 21st century, not the 18th.

Electricity. Individuals and groups have always been coming to the constituency in Edmonton-Gold Bar complaining about deregulation. Now, the largest power bill in Alberta's history has been calculated by a group of retired professional engineers. I'm disappointed to say that this is probably the largest power bill in Canadian history. It now stands, as a result of electricity deregulation, at \$13.8 billion. This is since 2001. This, Mr. Speaker, does not include transmission costs, distribution costs, or the costs of all the middlemen, the middlemen with their hands out. They're getting all those added costs on the monthly power bills. Those costs are not included in this \$13.8 billion.

Now, business owners, farmers, tenants of apartments, and homeowners struggle monthly to pay their power bills, and we know why: electricity deregulation. This government over the 36-year period has made a lot of mistakes, but electricity deregulation is the biggest.

5:30

Now, last fall I sent the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud a letter in regard to this, and the letter stated: what will you do, if you are elected Premier, to unplug deregulation or fix this mess? I didn't get a reply. [interjection] I'm getting a reply now, Mr. Speaker. The only candidates that replied, interestingly enough, were not members of this House: a former member, Mr. Norris, and Mr. McPherson. Mr. McPherson was the first one to reply. None of the others did, including the gentleman from Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, who eventually won the race. Electricity bills were going up. There were brownouts. There were emergency energy alerts all last year, and it was a priority issue for the citizens. Now, I asked all these individuals who wanted to be Premier how they planned to unplug electricity deregulation.

Since October power bills have continued to go up. The government in the past has adopted very many good ideas, but they have yet to adopt our idea for returning to an affordable and reliable electricity system for all Albertans. I see none of that in this throne speech, and that really disappoints me. I know you took our ideas on public accounts. You're welcome to them. But you're also welcome to this idea because we are going to ruin this province economically if we continue down the road of electricity deregulation. Manufacturers, some of whom have already left, unfortunately, are going to go to other jurisdictions where electricity costs are significantly lower and where the governments were smart enough not to buy into this electricity deregulation boondoggle.

Now, in six years, Mr. Speaker, deregulation again has added \$13.8 billion extra to the cost of generating electricity in this province. Again, I have to remind everyone that this does not include transmission, distribution, and billing costs. Since 2001 the extra cost of power for residential, commercial, and industrial consumers has been \$13.8 billion. Each year there have been many pennies per kilowatt hour added to your rate as a result of deregulation. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West is concerned about the cost of a kilowatt hour of electricity, and so he should be.

The true cost of generation, unless you use 2006 for an example,

should be 4.4 cents per kilowatt hour. What is it under the Tory, the Conservative plan? Eight point five cents. More than double, and it's going higher and higher because there was no long-term planning done, and we don't have the baseload generation capacity that we need. There is a shortage of electricity. The transmission system is congested, constrained, and it's to the point now that we've got to ram everything through the EUB because we have to build a 500 kV line between Wabamun and Langdon in the north-west corner of Calgary, and we're overriding the interests of the landowners.

The Acting Speaker: Any comments or questions?

Any other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to respond to the Speech from the Throne. First of all, I would like to thank all my constituents of Edmonton-Ellerslie from the bottom of my heart for the opportunity to represent them and also showing confidence in me in this Assembly. I will definitely continue to do my level best to represent the best interests of the hard-working people of Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Speaker, the throne speech is, obviously, an expression of this government's desire to pursue a certain level of action over the years. What I find in this throne speech is clearly a mixed reaction from my constituents. I talked to many people recently after the throne speech. Some people saw the throne speech on the Internet, and they have a mixed reaction. Some people are saying, you know, that they appreciate that at least the government took some initiative, that at least this new government is saying that they will make some plans in different sectors.

So far I haven't seen those plans, but I really appreciate that they are taking an interest. They are planning to form some committees, to form different committees for making plans. If you see this Speech from the Throne, you know, the slogans look really, really impressive, and you see that the government has a plan, that they will respect the environment, and they will be definitely fiscally responsible and inclusive. They will have a clear plan, and in reality they will deliver it. Well, I'm anxious. I'm waiting for that moment when we will have plans on health care, education, infrastructure, child care, real plans, not just the goals outlined in this Speech from the Throne.

It looks really nice when the government says that they will go on with integrity and transparency. Transparency, yes. When the opposition members ask the questions, sometimes some ministers answer the question very nicely, but sometimes they just ignore it. We have question period in this House, but we don't get the proper answers. I don't know what they are trying to hide. If they really want to serve the best interests of Albertans, they should answer all the questions properly because during question period time we have the cameras, and Albertans are watching them. At least, they should be honest because their constituents are watching. They elected them to be responsible and accountable to them.

But definitely I am impressed to see at least the goals, the direction they have in this throne speech. Like all Albertans, my constituents also have great expectations of all of us here at this Legislature. The people are looking for their government to be guided by professionalism. I mean, when we sit here and we debate or we question during the question period time, they expect us to be guided by professionalism and be gentlemen while we are asking the question or the minister answers the questions.

To be true to the government's promise of open, responsible government, government that is frugal when dealing with Albertans' purse strings, again – I've said it before many times – they should spend money very wisely.

5:40

In this Speech from the Throne, other than goals, I have seen at least dozens of times sustainability, transparency, but I still wonder when they talk about sustainability. Why suddenly have they started thinking about sustainability? Where were they in the last 15, 20 years? Why couldn't they think about sustainability? They've already spent 93 per cent of the energy revenue in the last so many years, 25, 27 years, and if we had a proper plan, this province would have been a paradise in the world.

We are fortunate. This government collects billions and billions of dollars from royalties, and this boom will not come again and again. We had the opportunity. I think most of the money they spent not wisely, I should say, because they didn't spend money where the money was needed. For example, the social deficit is increasing, and that sector was badly ignored for decades. Now we have sufficient money, and we ignore them, and this is not fair to those people. The government has always been saying that they are good listeners, that they will listen to all classes in Alberta, but I don't think this present government has given the Alberta advantage to everybody, which is wrong. They should admit that and start thinking about those people right now.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar just now mentioned electricity deregulation. I think the majority of even the government MLAs know and understand that electricity deregulation is totally a failure, and nobody admits that. Then they talk about honesty, and it doesn't seem nice. If we are wrong, we should dare to say, "Yes, we are wrong," and then we'll think about alternatives. Unfortunately, nobody so far admits that electricity deregulation is a failure. In this Speech from the Throne are just a few slogans, a few goals, a few directions. It looks nice but is not solving the problems that Albertans want to hear about from them.

I see that here it says: improving Albertans' quality of life. I asked the question to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture the other day, and he answered my question differently, I should say. He said that he has to make a balance between the Energy ministry and the ministry of arts and culture. Even Health and Wellness has been saying this for a long time. You know, they are focusing on the quality of life, on health and wellness, and what initiatives we have done so far. This is my third session, and every time I hear the same stories. The progress is zero.

Slogans. Yes. Whenever we ask questions about education, we are top of the world. Yeah. Universities. One of the best universities in the world, you can answer. If we have the best university in the world, why are the students crying out there? Why don't you sometimes visit them and ask them: what's the problem there? They are paying too much for tuition fees, parking facilities. We live in the richest province, and the students – that's the right investment, I think – don't get their fair share. That's the biggest problem. Nobody is trying to reduce the burden of student fees.

So far, I haven't seen any announcement in this throne speech about new colleges, universities. Some new spaces for apprentices, I know that they mention that they will do that. How will they do that? If they have a plan, what type of plan do they have?

Last year the top priority was the prevention of cancer. I know that government spent tons of money on that, but I don't know after that. There was no report on whether that money we spent was worthwhile or not, whether we need some more money into that because cancer, of course, is a big problem, and we all should try to overcome those problems in the hospitals.

In this speech there's no mention of increasing the medical seats. I was born in India. I was about 20 when I moved to England. In England or Europe, even in India, underdeveloped countries, they produce the maximum doctors throughout the world – throughout the world. In Canada, especially Alberta, for example, we can't produce doctors here. Can't we afford that? Can't we afford new

colleges, new universities? Can't we increase the number of spaces? I mean, it's not mentioned, Mr. Speaker. There's nothing mentioned in this throne speech. This is a shame if we have a surplus of \$7 billion and we are not spending money in the right place.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar already mentioned the shortage of workers. I met with a few people and talked about the temporary foreign workers. It's going to be one of the biggest headaches.

The Acting Speaker: Any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, please. The hon. member has in the past expressed concern about the high rate of violent crime. In this throne speech under the category Providing Safe and Secure Communities the government is stating that they will endeavour to establish a crime reduction and safe communities task force. My question for the hon. member is: what efforts have you made to talk to community leaders, to consult with community leaders to reduce crime in the city?

Thank you.

5:50

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, in my riding there's a president, a council all over the area that consists of, I think, 11 or 12 leagues. They discuss this issue again and again. I mean, they have a meeting every three or four months because it's a big issue in that area. Crime is not a big issue just on the south side; it's all over. It's even growing in rural areas as well.

The problem is that we are not trying to find the root problems of crime. The root problem definitely, in my personal view, is social because if somebody is earning less than a thousand dollars nowadays and, as I said, the rent is so much and they have only a few hundred left for groceries, I mean, what do you expect from them? They will go outside and do something, you know, where they could earn easy money. So we should try to find out the root causes of crime. Especially, domestic violence is increasing.

The Acting Speaker: They're supposed to be brief comments and questions.

Mr. Agnihotri: Okay. Sorry. I'll finish in just 40 seconds. Okay? [interjections] Of course, yes, 40 seconds. Okay.

Anyway, thanks for asking me the question. It's a big problem.

The Acting Speaker: Any others with comments or questions? The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, a comment. I want to thank the hon. member for his concern and his efforts to reduce crime in his community. I would ask the hon. member if he's aware that crime is being reduced in the province of Alberta. The initiatives that we have in force are becoming very effective.

Mr. Agnihotri: Well, maybe crime is reduced in the papers, but in the newspapers, on the radio you see and hear every day that people are stealing cars, stabbings, murders. I mean, I don't know where you guys get the reports, but that problem is still there. I think the minister concerned should look at this problem seriously.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other comments or questions? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise at this time and move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. on Monday, the 19th.

[Motion carried; at 5:54 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 26th Legislature - 3rd Session (2007)

Activity to March 15, 2007

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

- 1 Lobbyists Act (Stelmach)**
First Reading -- 5 (Mar. 7 aft.)
- 3 Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007 (Renner)**
First Reading -- 23 (Mar. 8 aft.)
- 4 Child Care Licensing Act (Tarchuk)**
First Reading -- 24 (Mar. 8 aft.)
Second Reading -- 166-69 (Mar. 15 aft., passed)
- 5 Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (Rodney)**
First Reading -- 24 (Mar. 8 aft.)
- 6 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2007 (Dunford)**
First Reading -- 24 (Mar. 8 aft.)
- 7 Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007 (Webber)**
First Reading -- 24 (Mar. 8 aft.)
- 8 Vital Statistics Act (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 24 (Mar. 8 aft.)
- 9 Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007 (\$) (Oberg)**
First Reading -- 50 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- 10 Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 50 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- 12 Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 50 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- 13 Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007 (Rodney)**
First Reading -- 50 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- 14 Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (Jablonski)**
First Reading -- 50 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- 15 Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2007 (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 50 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- 16 Police Amendment Act, 2007 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 122 (Mar. 14 aft.)
- 17 Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (Brown)**
First Reading -- 122 (Mar. 14 aft.)

- 18 Judicature Amendment Act, 2007 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 122 (Mar. 14 aft.)
- 19 Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007 (Brown)**
First Reading -- 131 (Mar. 14 aft.)
- 20 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 131 (Mar. 14 aft.)
- 201 Funding Alberta's Future Act (Taft)**
First Reading -- 25 (Mar. 8 aft.)
Second Reading -- 55-66 (Mar. 12 aft., defeated on division)
- 202 Consumer Advocate Act (Elsalhy)**
First Reading -- 25 (Mar. 8 aft.)
- 203 Service Dogs Act (Lougheed)**
First Reading -- 156 (Mar. 15 aft.)