

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, March 20, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/03/20

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant that we the members of our province's Legislature fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all our people. Let us be guided by our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you someone who is well known to the majority of the members of this Assembly: Mr. Don Tannas, now seated in the Speaker's gallery. Don was a four-term MLA for Highwood, the constituency I now have the honour of representing. He served his constituents with distinction from 1989 to 2004. In 1993 Don became the first elected Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees of the Legislature, and he served on numerous committees and sat as chairman of various organizations over the years.

Prior to being elected to the Assembly, Don was employed as a teacher and principal for the Foothills school division until 1989, taking a leave of absence from 1969 to 1971 to work with CIDA as a teacher trainer in Uganda. To this day Don has a great empathy for Africa and has visited several times during the intervening years.

Now that he is retired, he serves as executive director of the Western Communities Foundation. Also, Don is well known for his charitable work, particularly with the High River Rotary Club, which he continues to pursue. Mr. Speaker, I'm also very pleased to tell you that Don is a very active member of the Highwood Constituency Association and keeps us right in line. I'm delighted to see Don back in the House, and I now ask that he rise so that all the members may accord him a warm welcome.

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

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly an honoured guest seated in your gallery. Julius Yankowsky is also no stranger to this Assembly. He served as the MLA for the Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview constituency for three terms, from 1993 to 2004. Mr. Yankowsky is presently enjoying his retirement and, of course, is keeping an active volunteering schedule. We're glad to have him join us today, and I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a colleague of mine from the Northwest Territories. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the Hon. Michael McLeod, who is the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. As you may or may not know, ministers in the Northwest Territories are multitalented. Mr. McLeod is also the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, and our relationship goes back

to the days when we were colleagues in municipal affairs as well. Accompanying Mr. McLeod is his executive assistant, Mr. Doug Pon. I would ask both gentlemen to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui j'ai le privilège de présenter en votre nom, à vous et à l'Assemblée, des invités spéciaux venant de la communauté francophone. Ils sont assis dans votre galerie et sont ici pour souligner la Journée internationale de la francophonie ainsi que les Rendez-vous de la francophonie, une célébration nationale annuelle de l'histoire et de la culture française.

Je suis heureux de vous présenter en premier lieu les membres exécutifs de l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta. L'association, connue sous l'acronyme ACFA, a son secrétariat provincial à Edmonton et chapeaute plusieurs autres organisations; donc, 14 bureaux régionaux ou cercles locaux à travers la province.

Présents parmi nous aujourd'hui sont M. Jean Johnson, président de l'ACFA, et M. Joël Lavoie, directeur général. J'aimerais également vous présenter M. Rhéal Poirier, directeur général de Francophonie jeunesse de l'Alberta, et M. Denis Perreux, membre exécutif du comité local organisateur des Jeux de la francophonie canadienne, qui auront lieu à Edmonton en 2008. Les accompagnants pour cette journée spéciale à la Législature est M. Denis Tardif, directeur général du Secrétariat francophone.

Je leur demanderais de se lever et être reconnus par l'Assemblée. Je vous invite à vous joindre à moi pour leur souhaiter une bienvenue chaleureuse.

Merci, M. le Président.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to members of this Assembly a number of guests from the francophone community who are here to commemorate the International Day of the Francophonie as well as Les Rendez-vous de la francophonie, a national two-week celebration of French culture and history. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery.

I am pleased to introduce executive members of the French Canadian Association of Alberta. The association, commonly known as the ACFA, is the provincial umbrella organization representing all francophones, with a provincial secretariat in Edmonton and 14 regional or affiliate chapters across the province.

Here today are the president, Mr. Jean Johnson; the executive director, Mr. Joël Lavoie; Mr. Rhéal Poirier, executive director of the Francophone Youth Association of Alberta; and Mr. Denis Perreux, executive member of the local organizing committee for the National Youth Francophone Games, that will be held in Edmonton in 2008. Joining them on this special day at the Legislature is the executive director of the Francophone Secretariat, Mr. Denis Tardif.

I would ask them to stand to receive the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [As submitted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly five very talented young Alberta students. But before I do, I would just like to provide a bit of background.

Since assuming this portfolio, I've visited a number of schools in the province, and without exception at every school I go to, I've just

been incredibly impressed with the artwork of our students. So beginning today, some of that work is going to be displayed in my office in the Legislature, and it's my hope that soon the walls of my office will be covered with Alberta student artwork and that it then spreads out into the hallway and maybe down even into your offices, Mr. Speaker. I encourage every hon. member to come by our office and enjoy this great artwork.

Today with the Premier we had the pleasure of unveiling the first five pieces of student artwork, including a sketch by one of our grade 6 students of the next hockey superstar, Sidney Crosby, which happens to be hanging in my office over the fireplace. Today I would like to ask the Alberta student artists seated in the gallery to stand as I recognize them. We have Ashley Loughheed from Louis St. Laurent school, Christian Comeau from St. Boniface school, Cassiel Pedro and Joshua Dipnarine from Virginia Park school, and Victoria Barnay from Edmonton Christian school. They are all accompanied by their very, very proud parents, their art teachers, principals, and other family members. I would ask if they would all stand and be recognized and warmly received by this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How do I beat an introduction by the Ed. minister? But I think I can do it.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly guests from grade 6 of the Heritage Heights school in my Highwood constituency. This is a new school, just opened this last fall, and a week from Friday the hon. Minister of Education and myself are going to officially open this school, and a beautiful school it is. Let no one in the world say that we don't have some new schools because we do, and this one's a great one.

Mr. Speaker, the total number of students, I believe, that we have with us today is 39. They did have an enduring trip coming up; I think they got some roads that weren't great. I would like to introduce their teachers Mrs. Alison Rattai, Mrs. Ada McIvor, Mr. Bill Cunningham, and parents Mrs. Roxanne Gibbard, Mrs. Cindy Mooney, Mr. Leonard Johnson, Mrs. Debbie Hagel, Mrs. Kristyn Hall, and Mrs. Toni Bouvier, who just happens to be my niece and whom I'm very proud of. She has her daughter Brooklyn with her in that group today. I would please ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

1:10

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two representatives of the Alberta College of Social Workers. As I mentioned yesterday, March 18 to 24 is National Social Work Week.

The Alberta College of Social Workers does an outstanding job representing the social work profession in Alberta. It advocates for policies, programs, and services that serve the best public interest. Through its membership activities the college establishes and maintains standards that promote skilled and ethical social work practice. I'd like to ask Lori Sigurdson, professional affairs co-ordinator, and Rod Adachi, executive director and registrar of the Alberta College of Social Workers, to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly a couple of guests

that we've got up here from Champion, Alberta. Dick and Izzy Ellis have been lifelong residents of the village. They're very involved with the community, and Dick is heading up the Vulcan waste management authority. He's come up with a wonderful idea on how to dispose of all the waste that we have throughout the counties, and I hope he's had successful meetings with a couple of the ministers in attending the AAMD and C. I also know that they're looking forward to a tour that your staff will have for them to see this magnificent historic building. Dick and Izzy, would you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly three individuals from the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, of which I'm very proud to serve as chair. Seated in the members' gallery today: Mrs. Jean Dreger and Mrs. Diane Caleffi, both of Calgary, both well known to the Calgary caucus members. Both are volunteers who serve tirelessly on this council ensuring that Alberta seniors have an advocate and a place to turn for advice. Seated with them is Dianne Laird, the manager for the Seniors Advisory Council, my right arm and a very dedicated individual with the Seniors Advisory Council, and I'll tell you that she's very, very sharp. I am proud to work with them as their chair, and I'd like to ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Loughheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members assembled the authors of the book *French Canadians in the Political Life of the Province of Alberta, 1891-2005*. Seated in the gallery are Dr. Ernest Mardon, his son Dr. Austin Mardon, and they're accompanied by friend Arthur Lau. I would mention also that Austin is a member of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am so very, very proud this afternoon to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly an absolutely amazing group of young people. I have with me today a grade 5 class from Keheewin elementary school in the south part of Edmonton-Rutherford. These students on their own initiative undertook an exercise to write me with their concerns about global warming and climate change. As a result of those heartfelt letters, our Leader of the Official Opposition included comments from their letters in his alternate throne speech, and they were here today to share some of their ideas in terms of addressing the issues of global warming and climate change.

I'd like to ask all 23 students to rise. They are accompanied today by a number of adults: Ms Lorraine Boggs, the principal of Keheewin school, which incidentally is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year; their grade 5 teacher, Ms Cindy Pang; and teacher helpers Joy Procinsky, Debbie Ainsley, Leslie Clarke, Jeanette McDonald, and Carol Wilson. I would ask them to all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you members of the school of Neil M. Ross, 51 students, two teachers, and five helpers: Mr. Brett Arlinghaus, teacher; Mrs. Cathy Bagdan, teacher; parents Mrs. Cathy Traynor, Mr. Tony Gannon, Mrs. Dianne Hajek, Mr. Ed Karl, and Mr. Daryl Wright. Would they please rise and receive and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Dawn Freeman and Karen Mykietka. Dawn and Karen both reside in my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. They serve as the editor and managing editor of the *Rat Creek Press*, both since 2004. The *Rat Creek Press* is a community newspaper that serves north-central Edmonton, including much of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Their goal is to highlight community news, activities, and recreational opportunities as well as local residents and businesses to support the growth of a strong, vibrant, well-connected community.

I would like to thank Dawn and Karen for the important contribution the *Rat Creek Press* is making in our community, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House members of the Council of Alberta University Students, or CAUS. These guests met with the NDP caucus this morning and briefed us on the state of postsecondary education in Alberta today. They provided us with valuable recommendations, and in our opinion these merit the most serious consideration of the members of this Assembly.

I would now ask each of my guests to rise as I call their names and ask my hon. colleagues to hold their applause until each has been introduced. David Cournoyer, chair of CAUS and VP external of the University of Alberta Students' Union; Samantha Power, president of the University of Alberta Students' Union; Emily Wyatt, president of the University of Calgary Students' Union; Julie Labonté, vice-president external, University of Calgary Students' Union; Joanne Luu, vice-president administration, University of Lethbridge Students' Union; Duncan Wojtaszek, executive director of CAUS. I would now ask that they receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call upon the first of six to participate, 18 years ago today, on March 20, 1989, the citizens of the province of Alberta went to the polls. There are three members in this Assembly who were elected for the first time 18 years ago. So let us congratulate the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, and the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House on their 18th anniversary as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Let us also wish happy birthday today to the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie

Mr. Ducharme: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui, à l'occasion de la Journée internationale de la francophonie, c'est un plaisir pour moi de présenter à la Chambre une explication d'un événement canadien qui s'appelle les Rendez-vous de la francophonie. Neuf millions de francophones se rassemblent à la grandeur du Canada sur une base annuelle pour célébrer les Rendez-vous de la francophonie. Cette année les Rendez-vous ont lieu du 9 au 25 mars. Durant cette période de temps on célèbre les communautés francophones afin de promouvoir la langue et la culture française tant par ses activités sociales et ses célébrations que par sa dimension humaine et communautaire.

Les Rendez-vous contribuent à renforcer les liens entre les anglophones et les francophones du Canada et favorisent un plus grand respect entre ces deux communautés de langues officielles. De plus en plus nos municipalités albertaines se joignent aux Rendez-vous en tenant des cérémonies pour reconnaître leur communauté francophone. Parmi ces municipalités cette année on compte Red Deer, Lethbridge, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Rivière de la Paix, Falher, et Fort McMurray. Félicitations à ces municipalités.

Vibrante comme elle l'est, la communauté francophone célèbre sa langue et sa culture tout au cours de l'année par l'entremise de festivals de la chanson, festivals de film, carnivals d'hiver, et j'en passe. J'aimerais profiter de l'occasion pour inviter tous mes collègues à connaître la communauté francophone en participant aux événements qui ont lieu dans leur circonscription pendant l'année.

Merci, M. le Président.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today on the occasion of the International Day of the Francophonie it is my pleasure to provide the Assembly with information on a wonderful Canadian event called Les Rendez-vous de la francophonie. Nine million francophones get together for the annual Rendez-vous de la francophonie, which runs this year from March 9 to March 25. During that period of time attention is focused on francophone communities, with the idea of promoting French language and culture as much through community and human relations as through social activities and celebrations.

Les Rendez-vous contribute to the reinforcement of links between francophones and anglophones in Canada by fostering greater respect between the two official language communities. More and more of our municipalities are joining in Les Rendez-vous by holding ceremonies to recognize their francophone communities; for example, in Red Deer, Lethbridge, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Peace River, Falher, Fort McMurray. Congratulations to all of them.

Vibrant as they are, francophone communities celebrate their language and culture throughout the year through music and film festivals, winter carnivals, and other celebrations. I would like to take this opportunity to invite all my colleagues to get to know the francophone community and to take in some of these events in their own ridings throughout the year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [As submitted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

1:20

Cremona Cribbage Champions

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize and congratulate the Cremona Legion cribbage team of Diane Davies, Jack Borton, and Bill and Donna Kidd, who have recently won the Alberta-Northwest Territories provincial championship for team cribbage. To achieve this feat, they first had to win tournaments in Cremona, Carstairs, and Cochrane. They will soon be on their way to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where they will compete for the national

championship from April 27 to April 30. I understand that some of them are watching today, and I know this Assembly will join me in cheering them on and wishing them all the very best of luck as they compete for this national championship.

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

Trojans Girls Wrestling Team Gastroparesis

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wrestling for recognition. Today I'd like to speak about two types of wrestling events. While both forms of wrestling matches are fought by individuals, the support they receive in their struggles is dramatically different. The first type of wrestling is the more traditional form of Olympic wrestling, which I had the pleasure of coaching for over 20 years. Therefore, I was extremely pleased to hear of the recent successes of 15 members of the William Aberhart high school Trojans girls wrestling team from the Calgary-Varsity constituency, which I represent. Thirteen of the 15-member team qualified to wrestle at the provincials. The girls' achievements are the result of their personal commitment and the support of their dedicated coaches, team, schoolmates, and families.

In contrast, across this province thousands of Albertans are engaged in a different type of wrestling match. These Albertans are grappling individually with the limited resource support of their second mortgaged families against the debilitating effects of gastroparesis. While gastroparesis, a motility disorder which prevents an individual from properly digesting their food and therefore being constantly on the edge of vomiting, has yet to be cured, it can be managed.

Calgary-Varsity teenage constituents Thomas and Jennifer Keith-Ferris, aged 15 and 17 respectively, along with 23-year-old Krysta Livingstone, a Medicine Hat resident, have had their quality of life returned to them through the implanting of a GES device, a gastric electrical stimulation device, which has been approved federally but not provincially. Because no medical facility exists in Alberta and since the Alberta government does not cover the costs of either the travel or the treatment of this disorder, many families cannot afford the life-restoring implant costs. Once again I'm calling upon this government to restore and increase funding for motility research, to stand in the corner of the thousands of Albertans wrestling unnecessarily with the debilitating effects of gastroparesis. Please support the efforts of Dr. Christopher N. Andrews, a gastroneurologist specializing in gastrointestinal motility disorders, based out of the Foothills hospital and associated with the University of Calgary.

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

Calgary Maple Sugar Festival

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last weekend there was a very sweet event in Calgary, the annual Maple Sugar Festival, le Festival du sucre d'érable, celebrating the unique Canadian tradition. During the era of the aboriginal people in eastern Canada they would make an incision in the trunk of a maple tree with a tomahawk, and a piece of wood was then inserted, serving as a spout to gather the sweetness of nature. When the people from France learned of this tradition, the tap hole was made with a small axe, and a wooden reed was installed, allowing maple syrup to gather in a wooden container. Around 1885 the wood reed was replaced by a metal one, and from then on the tap hole was made with the help of a steel gauge. Around 1890 the wooden pails suspended to the tree by a nail made their appearance to gather every drop of the sweetness. So that's the history part.

This Maple Sugar Festival is now part of Canadian culture. I'm very pleased that the celebration of this original eastern Canadian tradition is now in modern times in Alberta, in the far west of Canada. Indeed, it's now from sea to sea, a *mari usque ad mare*. The sweet event in Calgary was offered in an array of lively festivities in an atmosphere of family *joie de vivre*.

I want to commend the event volunteers, performers, and organizers, mainly from francophone groups.

J'aimerais remercier les volontaires, les artistes, et les organisations qui montent annuellement cet excellent Festival du sucre d'érable, apprécié par les gens de tout âge.

I want to recommend that everybody should attend this festival in Alberta each year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Continuing Care Accommodations

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent controversy surrounding the Holy Cross long-term care centre in Calgary is a deeply troubling example of the government's long-standing refusal to deal with substandard care, that is too often provided to our seniors and Albertans with disabilities in this province. Indeed, it shows the devastating impact of creeping privatization in continuing care. Albertans know that the profit motive in long-term care leads to exactly the same results as it does in any other kind of health care service: higher costs and lower quality. Private operators have a vested interest in keeping down the cost of labour and services in order to maximize profits on their shareholders' behalf.

Perhaps the most pernicious way that the profit motive is being implemented in seniors' care is the conversion of long-term care facilities to assisted-living centres. This is a growing and serious problem for many Alberta families. Not only are the expectations of care lower in assisted-living centres, but residents can receive essential care services only if they can pay for them out of pocket. All too often families are forced to pay thousands of dollars per month to maintain respect and quality of life for their aging parents or disabled loved ones. A system-wide shortage of continuing care spaces means that people who should be in long-term care are forced to wait and pay in assisted-living facilities. Meanwhile, long-term care facilities in Grande Prairie, Jasper, and other communities are expected to be closed and replaced by assisted-living lodges, where the same residents will simply have to pay more.

The minister of health should put an immediate halt to any further conversion of long-term care facilities to private, for-profit assisted-living centres. The NDP opposition will continue to push this government to take real action to ensure that Albertans have access to safe, affordable, high-quality continuing care. Guaranteed delivery of safe and high-quality care for our seniors and others in need requires immediate action to improve standards, properly monitor facilities, and end creeping long-term private care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition, the first of many, with 88 signatures on it. This petition urges the government of Alberta to "prevent the development of the Sherritt Dodds-Roundhill coal gasification project until the expressed consent of the families . . . in the affected and surrounding areas is obtained" and, furthermore, urges the Alberta government

to “develop a comprehensive energy plan that uses our abundant energy resources to develop a green and sustainable future.”

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today again I am rising to table a petition, signed by 80 residents in Edmonton, which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Edmonton, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to complete, as soon as possible, the overpasses and interchanges at the locations where the Anthony Henday Drive (Edmonton Ring Road) intersects Lessard Road, Callingwood Road . . . and Cameron Heights Drive.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Bill 22

Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 22, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, this bill allows for the separation of Alberta Investment Management from the Department of Finance into a stand-alone provincial Crown corporation. The legislation also balances operational independence with the highest standards of accountability and transparency.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

head: 1:30 **Oral Question Period**

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

Municipal Waste-water Infrastructure Assistance

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier challenged me to provide evidence that this government has committed millions of dollars to the water transfer from the Red Deer River to the project at Balzac, so I will. If the Premier checks page 18 of the supplementary supply estimates from just last August, he'll find a line that commits \$4.8 million “to support a project in the Municipal District of Rockyview that includes a horseracing track and an equine centre.” This matter has been extensively debated in this Assembly and approved by a vote of this government over the objections of the opposition. To the Premier: will the Premier now admit that this government has approved millions in spending on this project?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader kept talking about a secret deal. I said: present the evidence of a secret deal. The supplementary estimates were of course debated here in the House, and it's no secret. It's a matter of the record, and he finally found it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [some applause] Prop him up, guys; prop him up.

To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: since this money is under the jurisdiction of his department, how much, if any, of this money does the department plan to spend?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes. As the Premier said, I've been waiting for this question for quite some time. He just hasn't quite got down to me yet. This came out of a program that's designed for municipalities, and we've had this program for close to nine years now. It's designed to assist municipalities with costs for water and waste-water infrastructure. It's for new projects that benefit our economy and grow our agriculture processing industry. Only municipalities are eligible for this funding.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. So let's focus in, then, on the specifics of the deal concerning the Balzac water transfer. Again to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. I will assume that there's more than just a verbal arrangement between the government and Rocky View on this one. Can the minister tell this Assembly and all Albertans: what are the terms of the deal under which this money will be spent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are no specific terms of the deal. This is a program that we've had around for nine years, as I've said. They qualified for the program, so when they get their proper approvals, the money will be forwarded to them. At this particular time the money hasn't been forwarded to them because all the systems are not a go yet.

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

Racing Entertainment Centre Project

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A freedom of information request to the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation has informed us that there are 1,800 pages of documents relating to the Balzac water transfer in this department's files – 1,800 pages in one department. None of those have been made available to us at this point, but they indicate that a lot of work has been undertaken by this government on this water transfer. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: given the intense public interest in this issue, will the minister make the 1,800 pages of the documents public, or does he intend for them to remain secret?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I don't know anything about the 1,800 pages. I do know that there have been some applications for water that my predecessor had actually rejected and said that they didn't meet the criteria.

I don't know exactly why the person that runs FOIP in the department wouldn't – if there is some reason that we cannot give the information out because it implicates a third party that wants to say, “We don't want that information out there,” that's up to whatever the rules are in FOIP on whether or not they give out those.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suggest that the minister does his homework a little more extensively. Thank you.

A simple, straightforward question to the minister: exactly what has been done by the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation on the water transfer to Balzac?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I stated yesterday, as far as I know, there have been no deals done. I know that we had an application from the MD of Rocky View. It didn't meet the criteria, and it was turned down. Other stuff that was done, I will tell you – I shouldn't say that; I do know of another thing that happened. Ivanhoe Cambridge has been working with our department on whether or not they can have access into the property. Our department is doing their due diligence and making sure that all safety is adhered to. They're talking about interchanges and things like that, and the experts in our department have to do their due diligence and see whether or not it can be done.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This time to the Minister of Environment. Please just answer the question. Given the minister's detailed knowledge of and support for the project at Balzac, did this government review the memorandum of agreement between the MD of Rocky View and the developers before it was signed?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated many times before, the responsibility for reviewing the information is borne by officials within my department. I expect my officials to review all relevant information before they come up with a final recommendation, which has not taken place at this point.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Environmental Policy

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure today to ask some questions that were inspired by the grade 5 class of Keheewin school in Edmonton-Rutherford. They're here in the members' gallery. In a series of letters expressing their concern about the environment, the emotions and concern and conviction that was displayed by these letters remind us through these children of the reason why we must work together to put the environment first. To the Minister of Environment on behalf of Lindsay from Keheewin school concerned about waste: when will we see a provincial blue box program to promote recycling?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a good question. The issue comes down to the role that government plays in encouraging people to take issues regarding recycling seriously. At this point in time the government continues to support municipalities in both financial form and from an expertise perspective in encouraging further development of recycling programs. A province-wide program, frankly, I think is not that practical because it needs to be coordinated at the local level by municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Emma and other students expressed great concern about deforestation, especially in our northern forests, saying, I quote: without trees we can't breathe, and without trees all the carbon dioxide will stay in the air; clear-cutting

causes more water pollution and higher costs for water treatment. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: can the minister tell us if he will stop clear-cutting practices in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll take that question on behalf of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. There are very clear plans in place in the province of Alberta with respect to forestry to ensure that we do not compromise in any way the watershed system that is so dependent upon our forests. I can assure the hon. member and the student who asked the question that issues related to water and the watershed are paramount in decisions regarding forest management.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another issue discussed by the students today with our members is that we need to stop burning so much coal and fossil fuels and encourage more solar, wind, and other renewable energies. To the Minister of Energy: can the minister tell us why we do not give the same incentives to renewable energy that we give to the fossil fuel industry?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that there are very good incentives in the province of Alberta for all energy projects, including renewable and, we're hoping, alternate energy. We continue to work. As part of the mandate that I've received from the Premier of the province of Alberta, we will develop an integrated energy strategy, and the integrated energy strategy includes all of the above. Fossil fuels are a base for Alberta. On top of that we will have very aggressive wind power; we will have hydropower; we will have green power with biomass: all forms of energy.

1:40

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

Employment of Children

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier confirmed that the Conservative government was asleep at the wheel with respect to major policy changes that would have seen 12-year-olds working in Alberta's bars. Flash back to 2005, and you will recall that this Conservative government approved major policy changes that allowed for children to work in restaurants without permits, and this change was made without debate in this House and without public consultation. My question is to the Premier. Why did the government turn back the clock to the 19th century with respect to child labour laws and allow children to work in restaurants?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the hon. leader is trying to get to, but yesterday I was very specific, I think, spoke very plainly, that after the minister responsible, the Solicitor General, and myself heard of the planned policy change, we put an end not only to 12-, 13-, 14-year-olds working in bars but all minors. So for the matter of the record, all minors: no working in bars and lounges in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Premier seems to believe that any boneheaded policy decision by this government is okay as long as he reverses himself once he gets caught. The members opposite ought to put down their copies of Adam Smith and try picking up Charles Dickens. The number of children working in restaurants in this

province is now in the hundreds. Will the Premier now admit that his policy of allowing child labour is reckless and cannot be morally justified? Will he end child labour in this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, talking about the government decision: this was not a government decision. It was made by the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. There are a number of steps that this policy would have to work through, especially through the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. So it's not something that would have happened overnight; there were checks and balances in place.

With respect to young people working in restaurants, sooner or later in this province, Mr. Speaker, younger people have to learn the value of hard work, work for their parents or maybe their relatives in a safe environment under good supervision. There is nothing wrong about people learning the ethics of work.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the checks and balances in this province are the Alberta Federation of Labour and the Alberta NDP. [interjections] Well, how else did this get reversed but that we caught the government at it? Will the Premier admit that kids should be working on their homework, going to school, playing hockey, playing sports, and not working in restaurant kitchens? Will he end child labour?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we will do whatever we can to ensure that that party stays as the check and balance in this province forever. Thank you so much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Career Transition for Military Personnel

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our military services are vital to the existence and security of our nation. We enjoy our home life while our armed forces defend our way of life and system of government. Some of my constituents have served in our Canadian armed forces as tradespersons and truck drivers. They voice to me that their qualifications in the military were not recognized and certainly not easily transferred into the same civilian occupation. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What policy or specific program does our government have to help our former military personnel in their career transition?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The men and women who serve our country are strong leaders with remarkable skills. Obviously, we want to incorporate them into the regular working areas of our economy as quickly as we can because of those skills. It's important for Albertans' postsecondary credentials to be recognized globally, and it's equally important for our province to recognize credentials that are earned outside of our postsecondary system. I am pleased to say that Alberta is working with the Department of National Defence, the Canadian federal National Defence department, through the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship to recognize military trade credentials. To date the board has recognized the certificate of military achievement, qualification level 5, and will continue to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents, who were truck drivers in the military, told me that they have a hard time getting civilian truck driver licensing, so my only supplementary question today is to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Through what policies and programs does the government help military truck drivers in their transition to the civilian occupation?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are aware that a constituent in my colleague's riding has raised concerns about retraining. In response my department has committed to conduct a further review to determine whether Alberta should consider equivalency arrangements. Alberta does operate like other provincial and territorial jurisdictions within Canada by not accepting military driving credentials without retesting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Holy Cross Care Centre

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Canada/Alberta affordable housing program in October 2004 and January 2005 the owners of Holy Cross Manor in Calgary were granted over 3 million provincial tax dollars to build a total of 230 units of affordable housing. Enterprise Universal Incorporated hasn't been paid out the full amount yet, and thank goodness for that because not only have they not produced a single unit ready for occupancy; they haven't even made a substantial beginning on the second project. The rules say that the deadline for completing these projects is 24 months from the time the money is granted. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who clearly didn't see this mess coming: why isn't the minister on top of this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to say that the ministry is on top, and we have continuing consultation with developers on their progress. We also have communications with those developers to see if there are any difficulties. At the present time that is what's been done.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, the minister wasn't minding the store, and he wasn't staying on top of things, or else we wouldn't have gone two months beyond the completion deadline without the work even commencing. Or could the minister prove me wrong, perhaps, by sharing with this House, in the interests of transparency, the details of how this tight, ongoing process of dialogue works to produce results? I don't see any.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the Grey Nuns building project: part of it has been and is behind schedule. But I do want to say that the \$3.2 million that was committed, the 1950s building project for 100 seniors' units, is near completion. The second phase, or the second part of the application, which involves \$4.5 million: there has been no indication from the developer of him pulling out of the project, but I will say that we are having continuing dialogue with that developer.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, Albertans don't need excuses. Albertans need affordable homes. Everybody needs a home. Enterprise Universal now says that it does need more time and more money, or else it will pull the plug on the second project, 130 units of afford-

able housing for families and seniors, and give back the million and change the province has already advanced it. Doesn't the minister think it's about time to take them up on their offer, or is he planning to shovel even more tax dollars into this money pit?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the project that was applied for was a good project. There are criteria for those projects, and the criteria were adhered to by this developer.

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

Child Care Funding

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The most important concern for many young families is the care of their children. Many working parents depend on the provincial government to help provide high-quality, affordable, and accessible child care. Alberta families have been struggling to find and pay for daycare spaces and after school care. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Yesterday the federal government announced \$250 million for provinces to create child care spaces. Can you tell us what this means to Alberta?

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am really pleased with yesterday's news. We all know that we do have a shortage of child care spaces in this province. My understanding is that the funding will be distributed on a per capita basis, so presumably we're talking about \$25 million. I can say today that I look forward to getting more details, both in the confirmation of the amount of money that we're getting and also whether there are any requirements or conditions that go along with that funding.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: I'm happy for the province, but what does this mean to the average working family in Alberta who has young children?

Ms Tarchuk: I mean, ultimately, Mr. Speaker, I can say that what this does mean is more choices for parents. It's too early to speculate on how we're going to spend the funding, but I can tell you that we will work with our stakeholders, and while we're planning, we will also build on the strengths of our five-point investment plan. Of course, any plans that we go forward with will have to go through the appropriate government approval process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's all.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's federal budget offered proof that Alberta is basically on its own when it comes to creating new child care spaces. The funding offered to Alberta is only a fraction of what was offered in the previous federal/provincial child care agreement. Provincial leadership is essential to create the new child care spaces that many Albertans need. To the Minister of Children's Services. Many individuals who would like to start child care centres cannot afford the start-up costs. Does the minister have

a plan to address these funding shortfalls, which directly limit the number of new spaces created?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even before this announcement yesterday we have committed to continuing with the five-point plan, and that has been well received across the province. Also, two weeks ago we proceeded to enhance that five-point plan. Like I just said, we welcome the funds from yesterday, and we will continue to plan for additional child care spaces in this province.

Mrs. Mather: Labour shortage remains one of the biggest barriers to the creation of new child care spaces. The shortage of child care workers with level 3 certification, the highest level of training, is causing many centres to cut spaces or close altogether. What is the minister's plan to deal with this specific labour issue?

Ms Tarchuk: I can tell you that in our planning process we're looking at all aspects of areas that will help create child care spaces, and that does include professional development accreditation. As you know, a couple of weeks ago we dealt with wage top-ups. So we are taking a serious look at that issue.

Mrs. Mather: Municipalities across the province need more child care options. From Brooks to Fort McMurray to Cochrane to Grande Prairie the message is the same: the shortage of child care spaces is hurting families, the community, and the local economy. Again to the Minister of Children's Services. Alberta used to be a leader in provincial/municipal partnerships in child care. How will the minister enhance the role of municipalities hoping to get more involved in child care provision?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that I have met with several stakeholders over the last several months. We are just finalizing an FCSS review that is going through the process in the next couple of weeks, which will come forward with some recommendations for the program that the hon. member mentions. I do know that during the review it has been highlighted that funding for out-of-school programs is an issue. Like I said last week, while we've made some changes on the zero to 6, with the 6 to 12 we don't have a policy mandate now, but I have committed to taking a leadership role in working with municipalities on some workable solutions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Regional Taxation Issues

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Based on the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability report it appears that Edmontonians can look forward to some new taxes which likely will not be levied in Strathcona county as this county has ample revenue from their industrial base. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Will the minister assure the residents of the city of Edmonton that if there are any new municipal taxes introduced, this new tax regime will be administered to the entire capital region?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability released its report yesterday, and I need to say that the council's blueprint – and that is the council blueprint – for sustainability for municipalities is that report. I also would like to say that the government is still reviewing the recommendations of that report and will report later this spring.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will taxpayers of Edmonton hence be looking forward to a higher overall tax bill?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, if new taxation powers are granted to municipalities, it will be up to the individual municipality to determine the appropriate level of municipal taxation within their communities, not different than the municipal tax levies that are in place right now.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Fair enough. To the same minister: but if differences persist, will the provincial government force the Edmonton area municipalities to work together?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are certainly looking for opportunities to strengthen intermunicipal co-operation not just in Edmonton but throughout Alberta. The Premier has given me the mandate to address regional planning issues and intermunicipal disputes. As I previously mentioned, I expect to release the government's response to the minister's council very much in the near future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Education Funding

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Parkland strike is over, but there are fears that this strike was the first of many. Within the past week negotiations in two other school divisions have broken down, and over 80 per cent of school boards will be in negotiations this spring and summer. Without decisive action now the Parkland strike could be a pattern we see over and over again in the coming months. To the Minister of Education. School boards will be in labour negotiations this summer, but the province has the final say about the financial position the boards will be in. Will the minister commit to providing adequate funding to school boards to ensure that they can bargain effectively this summer?

Mr. Liepert: Well, clearly, Mr. Speaker, that is a budgetary question, and I would encourage the hon. member to ask that question about the 20th of April. But let me just say this. I'm an optimist when it comes to negotiations going forward. I tend to look at things from a positive viewpoint rather than a negative one.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's preventive that we should be talking about.

The deferred maintenance problem in Alberta schools is bad and getting worse, Mr. Minister. The Calgary board of education alone has a deferred maintenance backlog of \$426 million. Will the Minister of Education commit to addressing the deferred maintenance backlog in this province's schools so that school boards can put money into programming and instruction rather than paying off past government neglect?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, again that's a question where I would encourage the hon. member to wait for the budget. But what the province did last year was put in place a policy whereby we did put money into maintenance and modernization. I can only be optimistic that there'll be as much or more money to spend in Education in this budget than there was in the last one.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A lot of parents are waiting for that, hoping it's going to get better.

Let's try this one. The \$6.4 billion unfunded teachers' pension liability continues to be a huge problem for teachers across the province, and this government has been dragging its feet on the issue for years. Numerous leadership candidates, including the Premier, promised to take action to address this issue. Will the minister commit to finally – finally – eliminating the unfunded liability in the teachers' pension plan? Will you do something about it, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: As the hon. member is aware, that is one of the objectives that the Premier has mandated me to work on. I will be doing that, and I would ask the hon. member to stay tuned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

2:00 Affordable Housing Task Force Report

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have in front of me a release out of the municipal affairs department about the Affordable Housing Task Force, that I was a member of. If it's correct, it says that the 15-member panel spent 45 days gathering input, compiling the report, visiting nine communities with more than 800 presenters and another 600 written reports. I go down a little further, and to my dismay I see that the government will review the report and not respond till May. There's a crisis out there. We heard this. Rents are rising. There are more homeless out there, condo conversions, and we're not even going to allow the public to see this report till May. It's irresponsible. My question to the minister is simply this: why are we waiting for May to see what should be a public report released very quickly?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to concur that I did receive the report from the chair of the committee yesterday, and I do want to compliment the work that was done by the committee, the thorough work and the dedication. I also want to comment that I believe the news release commented that there will be a response from the government to the recommendations by May, not necessarily a release of the recommendations but a response to the recommendations.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, in the same release it says, "The task force's report and the government response will be released publicly at the same time." That's what it says in your own release here, Mr. Minister. My question again is simply this: why is it that all the people that took the time to present to this task force, a lot of hard work, cannot see the results of this? The government can do their analysis after, but this should be made public immediately. Why not?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, I did receive the report yesterday. I am going to take the proper procedures to bring the report to government, and at that time we will release the report.

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not asking the government to respond immediately. What we're asking for is the task force report to be made public so Albertans can see what's in it. Then the government can respond. That's what we want.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how to better answer the question except to say to the hon. member that I have received the report. I am going to take it through the proper channels of this government and will release the recommendations, will release the response to the recommendations as quickly as possible because I very much believe that that report is very thorough and very important to Alberta.

Electricity Line between Edmonton and Calgary

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, about two years ago the Alberta electric systems operator, the Department of Energy, and others met with the EUB in Calgary, and out of that meeting was a determination that there was a necessity for a 500-kV line from Wabamun to Calgary. Now, the other thing that flowed out of that meeting was that there were about 13 proposed locations for this line to be built. AltaLink was charged with coming up with which would be the best location. It quickly was reduced to two, without the input of the landowners along the lines. It then was reduced . . .

The Speaker: Sorry. Forty-five seconds has gone.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll proceed on the basis that I would understand that the hon. member is speaking about a particular 500-kV line that runs between Edmonton and Calgary. It's currently being reviewed by the EUB. The hearings with respect to the issue are set off until the middle of April pending the result of a legal question around the hearings.

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, the landowners are feeling that they've been dealt with in contempt, and they want the hearing to now be postponed till the 1st of June. So to the Minister of Energy: will you ask the EUB to hold off till the 1st of June, and if not, why not?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, as I had mentioned previously, yesterday and again moments ago, this issue is in front of the EUB. They are not part of this government. They operate separately from the government. They are charged with the responsibility to assess this application along with many others, and they will continue this process in due course. It's been set off now till the middle of April. I have no indication whether or not the delays would go beyond that point in time.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, the EUB has a policy that they will not determine before the hearing whether in fact the consultant and/or lawyer would be paid for. This puts the landowners in a very difficult position. Not only that but they will only pay up to \$250, and today you cannot get a lawyer or consultant for \$250 an hour. They charge around \$300 an hour. Will the minister look into that situation?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, the EUB has fairly strict guidelines around the issue of paying for people that intervene with respect to these hearings. Most certainly I will take the comment of the member under advisement with respect to moving from a \$250 an hour legal fee amount to a \$300 amount. If there's something that

the EUB is missing there with respect to the price of lawyers, certainly we could ask the EUB if they wouldn't mind reviewing that particular issue.

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

Provincial Parks and Protected Areas

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just 4 per cent of Alberta is designated as protected areas and provincial parkland. Unsurprisingly, over 10 per cent of Alberta's wildlife is endangered and threatened. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: will the government commit to expanding the parkland in this province so that we at least give these creatures a chance to avoid being wiped out?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very, very much, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is certainly right in asking that particular question. Our policies in the province of Alberta are such that we do want to protect a number of species, including wildlife and including wildflowers and various live materials that are out there. So, certainly, we are doing some of that in the province of Alberta, and we'll look at other endangered species as we move along.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the minister talked about the need to honour existing commitments to oil and gas companies operating in protected parkland. Will the minister honour his commitment to Albertans and ensure that in the future "protected" actually means "protected"?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think I also indicated last week that we had various categories of protection, and I may want to repeat those. One of them is the wilderness areas. Others are the ecological reserves that we have. We've got also Willmore wilderness. We also have wildland parks, provincial parks, heritage rangelands, natural areas, and recreational areas. In each one of those we have different rules and regulations that we adhere to. In some of them we allow absolutely no activity aside from on-foot travel and participation, yet in others we provide a broad range of activity that can happen in those areas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you again. Given that the minister's mandate to defend protected areas conflicts with his commitments to oil and gas projects in protected parks, can the minister tell us if he's taking his marching orders from Premier or the Minister of Energy?

2:10

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think it's neither of those. Certainly, we are working with all the stakeholders. We are working with the energy industry. We are working with Sustainable Resources. We are working with Agriculture in establishing what can happen in all of our areas. We try, as I indicated before in this House, to achieve a balance. In some areas, again, we are protecting them wholly. In others we are saying that certain activities will be allowed to happen.

Capital Cost Allowance Program

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, in yesterday's federal budget the government of Canada announced that it would phase out the accelerated capital cost allowance program for oil sands development. There have already been a number of concerns voiced by the industry about the potential impact that this change will have on the future of the energy industry. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Because this program is being phased out over a number of years, is there a possibility that this could lead to the unintended consequence of even more rapid development, putting additional strain on our labour market and on our infrastructure?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly, initially I have to express my concern and disappointment with the federal government's budget statement indicating that the accelerated capital cost allowance would in fact be removed. More to the question, I would suggest that there is an economic climate in the province of Alberta, including now the situation around accelerated capital cost allowance, our review of royalties, a rather inflated cost of doing business in the province of Alberta: I think that these things added together will very likely temper applications.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, at the same time that the phase-out of the capital cost allowance was announced, new capital cost allowance provisions were announced for manufacturers. Given the minister's mandate from the Premier to increase the amount of value-added in the province, what is the potential impact on projects such as the announced or proposed upgrader projects that are happening in the industrial heartland?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Yes, Mr. Speaker, thank you. Most certainly, the province of Alberta is going to continue to move ahead. We are very, very positive with respect to the resource base that we have in the province of Alberta. We will continue to move ahead. With respect to upgrading, I believe that there is an opportunity for us here on the manufacturing side. The feds have left a bit of room there with respect to that issue and accelerated capital costs. We will be pursuing that.

Mr. Doerksen: My next question is to the Minister of Finance. Given concerns raised by the industry that they are facing uncertainty due to this announcement and its impact on capital and investment, can he advise members of this Assembly whether this change will be taken into account during the review of the royalties?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's an absolutely excellent question. The last thing that we want to have happen to our oil industry is a one-two-three punch, with number one being the income trust, number two being the accelerated capital cost allowance, number three being potential climate change issues. So in our Royalty Review Panel I have asked the panel to take a look at the accelerated capital cost allowance, see what that has to do with the royalties, and see exactly the position that the oil sands companies are going to be in with respect to that. I think it's a very important question, and it's something that we certainly have to take a look at and take into consideration when we take a look at royalties.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Openness and Transparency in Government

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Every secretive government's dream, contrary to international standards on public openness, a huge step backward in the fight for more open and transparent government, unacceptable, noxious: these are the words that were used by experts in informational laws, political scientists, and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation to describe Bill 20, which was forced through by this government in 2006. The blanket exemptions in Bill 20 serve one purpose, and that is to protect this government from any form of public accountability. To the Premier: given that Bill 20 prevents the citizens of this province from accessing internal government audit documents for 15 years – 15 years – is it the Premier's position that such an exemption supports an open and transparent government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government has moved quickly on openness and transparency. It started, first of all, with a posting on the web of all of the manifests of government aircraft. We also are going to be making public all ministerial expenses, EA expenses on the web starting in April. We're moving today, of course, second reading of the Lobbyists Act. We're moving with the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007. We have done more in the last 90 days than any government before.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that Bill 20 prevents the citizens of this province from accessing ministerial briefing notes for five years, is it the Premier's position that such an exemption supports an open and transparent government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the bill was debated and passed in the House, and it's up to me to uphold the law. That law is Bill 20, that was passed. If the opposition has other ideas that they want to bring forward to the House, so be it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier made the following statement regarding Bill 20 in May of last year, and I quote: if it does restrict openness and transparency in some way, then so be it, and I'm sure that no matter who is elected as leader, that person will find the need to change the legislation. End quote. To the Premier: given the scathing reviews from information law experts and academics regarding Bill 20, does the Premier now support the statements that he made during the leadership campaign, and will he enact changes to the legislation?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll stand on my record in terms of the movement we made over the last 90 days to openness and transparency in this government, but there is more to come. In fact, we're opening up this Legislature to all-party committees, and we'll see soon where they stand on that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Highway Maintenance

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the course of this winter travelling back and forth, many of us see the deterioration on our highway network, especially when it comes to cracks and potholes and lane identification. My question today is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. I'd like to know if the maintenance of these potholes and improvements to the lane identification are part and parcel of the contracts we have with our contractors that maintain the provincial highways, Minister.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for that very important question. The hon. member is correct in that this winter has been very hard on pavement and pavement markings. Our maintenance contractors are responsible for filling the cracks and painting lines on our highways. The contractors have to work to the standards set out in their contracts, and government inspectors ensure that the work is done properly and in a timely manner.

Mr. McFarland: Second question. If that's the case, is there any way that the department and the contractors could facilitate some accelerated maintenance, especially when it comes to lane identification?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, our highway maintenance contracts are performance based and encourage the contractors to be out there and doing whatever work is necessary. Our contractors are paid only for the work they do actually perform, so it's in their best interests to be busy. If they don't do the work, then they don't get paid. There's no incentive for them to be sitting around the shop when there's work to be done outside. Of course, it's in the travelling public's interest for the contractors to be out there as well. I can assure the hon. member that our contractors are doing whatever the weather permits them to do.

Mr. McFarland: Given that traffic volumes and the weather conditions have, in fact – and I'm back on the lane visibility – deteriorated substantially, and I know that it's impossible for this stuff to be done during the winter, is there any way to get a more durable or a more timely application of some of these lane identifiers?

Mr. Ouellette: As I mentioned in my first answer, the amount of snow clearing and sanding this year has taken an unusual toll on pavement markings. My department is always experimenting with paints that are more durable and reflective, Mr. Speaker. We need to test the products first before we put them on the approved material list for our contractors to use. We also are trying more permanent inlaid plastic markings on some of our higher volume roads, and these markings are considerably more expensive than traditional paint but do last longer. They have been used successfully in warmer climates such as California, and we're hoping they will work in the Alberta climate. Should they prove cost-effective and work well, we will consider, then, putting them on the roads for . . .

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

2:20

Electrical Power System

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Business owners, farmers, tenants, and homeowners struggle to pay their monthly power bills. We know why. Last fall I asked the now Premier how his government planned to unplug electricity deregulation. To date, unfortunately, I have not received an answer. Hopefully, this afternoon I will. My first question is to the Premier. Given that in six years deregulation has added \$13.8 billion extra to the cost of generating electricity in this province – and this does not include transmission, distribution, and billing costs – when will this government do the right thing and unplug electricity deregulation?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this province has gone a long way in adding additional generation in this province. In fact, even with all of the cogen that's happening in the province, we still require more generation. The other is that through deregulation in terms of generation we have also looked at new generation for wind and solar and, very close to my constituency, even cogenerating electricity from manure.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. Premier: if this generation has added so much capacity to the system, why are prices continuing to skyrocket for homeowners, for commercial users, for farmers, and for businesses in this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the cost of electricity – moving electricity to homes, the cost of infrastructure, the overall cost to each and every Albertan – has risen in some cases because of the fact that we haven't kept up with maintaining our transmission lines and our distribution lines over the last number of years. Then, of course, with respect to generation natural gas prices are up. We will soon have, depending on what happens from the federal government, perhaps even more in terms of electrogeneration from coal, given new rules possibly coming from Ottawa. So there's a lot to come in the area of electrogeneration, I can assure you of that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. Premier. Because there was no long-term planning done with electricity deregulation, we now see first-hand the mess with our distribution and transmission system, which adds many dollars to the bill but specifically to the cost of electricity. Why is the cost of electricity going so high?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think what he's trying to imply is that through a regulated system, then, these changes would have been made a lot faster. Actually, it's the reverse, and history has proven that.

The other is, Mr. Speaker, that in spite of all these issues that the hon. member may be raising, there are still over 500,000 people that move to this province, and more people insist on moving to the province of Alberta because, quite frankly, it is the only – only – jurisdiction in Canada that has any economic growth.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we dealt with 98 questions and answers today.

We'll now revert to where we were in the Routine, and I'm going to call on the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for an introduction of a bill.

head: **Introduction of Bills**
(*reversion*)

Bill 24
Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 24, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill 24 be moved to the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Bill 204
Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007/
Loi modificative de 2007 sur les emblèmes de l'Alberta (reconnaissance du fait franco-albertain)

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to request leave to introduce a bill, being the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007/ Loi modificative de 2007 sur les emblèmes de l'Alberta (reconnaissance du fait franco-albertain).

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to table a copy of a letter that a constituent, Bonita Davidson, has sent to me. She's a personal care attendant, and for some time she's been working as a live-in caregiver in the self-managed care program. I referred to her in my response to the throne speech. She's particularly raising issues about the need for respite care for caregivers and also the fact that many caregivers are not covered by WCB, and if they become injured, there's no assistance for them. So I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of that letter today.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a press release issued by the Ed Stelmach leadership campaign, including a pledge that the teachers' pension fund unfunded liability would be addressed through a final and fair and lasting resolution.
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a letter that I wrote yesterday to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food, and it is, again, suggesting that the Minister of Agriculture and Food post an apology on the website in regard to question period yesterday.

The second tabling I have is a press release and supporting

research documents indicating that electricity costs have increased by 38 per cent since 2000 in Alberta for farmers whenever you compare them to the other western Canadian provinces, which have seen single-digit increases in their electricity costs.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two groups of tablings here today. One is from the Unity Centre in my constituency, which is a tremendous resource centre for the less advantaged in northeast Edmonton. It speaks to homelessness and the need for more affordable housing.

The second group is calling on the Assembly to support that the accused killer of Joshua John Hunt be sentenced and tried as an adult due to the nature of his crime, his past criminal history, and that he is close to the age of 18 years.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the prerequisite number of copies of an article talking about the Keith-Ferris family and their struggle with gastroparesis. The article is entitled Life-changing Device Helps Local Kids Stay Active: Provincial Funding Needed for Gastroparesis Patients.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from my constituent Linda Smith. She is concerned about crime. She's urging this government to punish young offenders who commit crimes and not give them second, third, or 10th chances to keep committing crimes. Five copies, please.

Thank you.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, pursuant to the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research Act the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research 2005-2006 programs and financial highlights; pursuant to the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act the Alberta ingenuity fund 2005-2006 annual report; pursuant to the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board 2005-2006 annual report; the Alberta Prion Research Institute 2005-2006 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Dr. Oberg, Minister of Finance, a report dated January 2006 entitled Organization and Governance Review of Alberta Investment Management, prepared for Alberta Finance by Capelle Associates Inc. on behalf of Capelle Associates Inc. and KPA Advisory Services Ltd.

head: 2:30

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 1
Lobbyists Act

The Speaker: I'm going to call on the hon. Premier. I'd just advise

all hon. members that under our Standing Order 29(1)(a)(i) the Premier is limited to 90 minutes' speaking time.

The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that extra time.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure, of course, to rise today and move second reading of Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act.

I'd like to really begin, Mr. Speaker, by touching briefly on the history of this legislation, of this bill. Last spring an all-party Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee reported back to government, and one of its key recommendations was the creation of a lobbyists registry. In addition, this bill was one of the commitments which I campaigned on last fall. I committed to taking it one step further.

This bill will accomplish three goals. First, it will require lobbyists to register; secondly, it will prohibit lobbyists from simultaneously lobbying and providing paid advice to government on the same issue; and, third, it contains provisions to have the listing of entities who receive payment from the government posted online. This is a dramatic step, a first in Canada, and one which will allow all Albertans to see and compare for themselves who is being paid to lobby government and also who is being paid by government.

Mr. Speaker, lobbying is a legitimate activity. It can be very valuable to government during the very important decision-making process. Albertans have the right to communicate with decision-makers, provide information, and, of course, their views on issues that are important to them. As the preamble to Bill 1 clearly states, "free and open access to government is an important matter of public interest." At the same time, it is important that both members of the public and public office holders know who is being paid for trying to influence government decisions. A lobbyist registry will provide for greater transparency while maintaining open access to government.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to briefly define the role of a lobbyist. A lobbyist is an individual who is paid to communicate with public office holders in an attempt to influence government decisions. Lobbyists may be retained for a fee or may be employees or paid officers or directors. They may work for nonprofit or for-profit based organizations. Lobbyists include sole proprietors and partners in partnerships who lobby on behalf of their business.

However, not all communications with government are considered to be lobbying. For example, a person making a submission to a committee of the Legislative Assembly or in the course of proceedings before a board or tribunal is not lobbying. A constituent does not need to register. Of course, those that come, you know, on a weekly basis to our offices do not need to register before communicating with their MLA unless they are communicating with their MLA about a private bill for their own special benefit. There is no registration required if a person is asked for his or her opinion by a public office holder, nor must a lobbyist register when they want to influence a public office holder about the interpretation or application of legislation, regulations, or a government policy as it applies to the lobbyist's client.

However, a lobbyist must register if he or she wishes to influence government decisions in certain areas. These areas include influencing the content of legislation, regulations, or government policy. A lobbyist must also register if he or she wants to influence the awarding of a government grant or financial benefit or a decision to privatize a government service. The definition of "lobbyist" and the types of communications which require registration are carefully designed to ensure that registration is required in appropriate cases but without impeding access to government.

The registry will be freely accessible to members of the public in a searchable format through the Internet. Information contained in the registry will include the name of the lobbyist, the issues on which he or she will be lobbying, and the communication techniques to be used, including identifying whether they will be communicating with ministers, MLAs, or public servants.

The registry will be overseen by the Ethics Commissioner, who will have the real authority to appoint a registrar. The registrar will have the authority to issue advisory opinions and interpretation bulletins to assist lobbyists and all Albertans in understanding the registration requirements.

A second key feature of the bill is that it prohibits both lobbying and providing paid advice to the government on the same issue at the same time. This prohibition addresses an issue of concern to Albertans and works to ensure that government receives objective advice. As part of their registration lobbyists will have to provide a declaration that they are not in violation of this prohibition. The registrar will have the authority to investigate breaches of the legislation and, when in his or her opinion it's been breached, can impose administrative penalties of up to \$25,000. Breaches of the legislation could also be prosecuted through the court system. This bill provides for fines of up to \$50,000 for a first offence and as high as \$200,000 on a second or subsequent offence. These, Mr. Speaker, are the highest fines of any province in Canada. Additionally, when a person is convicted of breaching the legislation, the registrar can prohibit that person from lobbying for up to two years.

Mr. Speaker, the third element of this bill is that it provides for the publication of an index of government accounts paid. The index will be fully accessible and searchable on the Internet. The index will include individuals and corporations who are paid under government contracts. This information will be readily available to the public. It is information already collected. There will be no extra steps to take for Albertans doing business with government. The index will provide openness and transparency in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 will allow Albertans to see for themselves that lobbying activities are being done openly. This is leading-edge legislation. It demonstrates my government's commitment to governing with openness and transparency. This bill will go a long way to restoring public confidence and respect for this democratic institution. I encourage all members of the Legislature to support Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act.

I would now move that we adjourn debate on Bill 1 and return to it at a later date.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 20

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007.

The supplementary supply estimates provide additional spending authority to five government departments. All of the spending has been reported in the third-quarter fiscal updates. The estimates include capital for postsecondary institutions, agricultural assistance programs, housing initiatives and programs for the homeless, and funds for physician services.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon in second reading of Bill 20, the supplementary supply No. 2 act, which means, of course, that this is the second time this year that this House has considered a supplementary supply. [interjection] The second time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the new Premier and his new cabinet have talked an awful lot about the fact that this sort of spending is not to be seen as often, as regularly, or as much in the future. I can tell you one thing for sure: this shadow minister is going to hold them to their word. I will dog them every day to make sure that they're true to that. You will know, Mr. Speaker, that it has been a bone of contention ever since I was elected to this Chamber, that we saw quarterly updates to the budget, and in most cases we saw as much money being announced in spending at those quarterly updates as there was extra in the surplus. This is no way to run a government. It's no way to run a business. It's no way to run a household. So, as I say, I certainly intend to hold them to their word on that. I've noticed in some of the comments from the President of the Treasury Board more recently a bit of a softening on that stance, so I'm serving fair warning today that I will be watching very carefully.

2:40

You know, really, if the purpose of supplementary supply is to deal with emergent and emergency situations – and we've discussed before whether it should be forest fires or flooding or even, I suppose, you know, a downturn in the value of the Canadian dollar which causes the price of new government airplanes to rise dramatically. I suppose you could argue that that's an emergent situation as well. But when I look through Bill 20 and some of the areas where we're providing supplementary funding, bearing in mind that this bill is coming forward after the new government was sworn in and the new ministers were sworn in, yet there are a number of items in this particular bill that cause me to question whether or not they are in fact emergent or emergency.

I'm just looking, for an example, Mr. Speaker, at Advanced Education and Technology, \$34.5 million for a grant to match private donations to the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. I think my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark was referring to this yesterday. We know that some of that money is to match the Mactaggarts' wonderfully generous donation to the University of Alberta. The government has known about this for a couple of years now, Mr. Speaker. I remember the day that we had the Mactaggarts in your gallery and the announcement was made. So here we are now quite some time later and finally providing the matching grants, and it's a good thing. It's something that we were all in favour of. My question is simply this: why does this have to have been done in supplementary spending? Why could it not have been in either last spring's budget or in this spring's budget, which is really the proper place for that spending to be?

One point five million dollars for enhancing science literacy awareness programs at the Science Alberta Foundation: a wonderful initiative. I'm sure nobody on this side of the House is going to argue against the merits of spending the money in that particular program. The question is really: is it emergent? Was it an emergency? Was there some compelling reason why it had to be done in a second supplementary supply bill, or could it not either have been done in last spring's budget or have waited another month and been in the 2007-2008 budget?

Five hundred thousand dollars for enhancing awards and promoting the annual gala event at the ASTech foundation. Same argument, Mr. Speaker, so I'm not going to belabour the point.

We look at the Department of Agriculture and Food asking for \$50 million to supplement the CAIS program. Again, I'm sure there

are some very valid arguments for that being an emergency. That money is most likely very desperately needed by the folks in our agricultural community. Perhaps a justifiable expense and one that I wouldn't necessarily have a problem with.

We look, however, at the Department of Finance, and there's \$7.07 million to reimburse public sector pension plans, research endowment funds, the scholarship fund, and other minor funds for investment losses. Now, Mr. Speaker, I've reviewed the *Hansard* from last week when we were in committee debating this, and I didn't see any response from either the Finance minister or the President of the Treasury Board or the Premier indicating what happened with those particular funds and why they lost \$7.07 million in an economic environment when virtually every fund I'm aware of made money last year. Certainly, I watch the stock markets as closely as most members in this Assembly do, I'm sure, and I watch with particular interest the heritage savings trust fund, which generated a healthy return last year. I'm quite curious, and I think that before I could lend my support to this bill, I'd want to know what happened with those funds that we lost a total of over \$7 million in them. Were any actions taken against the managers of those funds or some hard questions asked as to investment decisions they were making? In this economy it's hard to imagine that funds would be losing money.

Another one that jumps out at myself – and I know that the Member for St. Albert asked a question in question period this afternoon about the unfunded teachers' pension liability, Mr. Speaker. Here we have in one lump-sum payment \$40 million that the government is putting into their share of the management employees' pension plan unfunded pension liability. Again, I reviewed *Hansard*; I didn't see any reference to this in the *Hansard*. Perhaps I missed it. But \$40 million, as near as I can tell, covers the lion's share of the government's share of that unfunded liability, and it's made in one fell swoop in the middle of a budget year, without any explanation for why it would be an emergency.

At the same time we have nearly \$7 billion in an unfunded liability to the teachers' pension plan, which we press this government constantly on. We are continually told time and again that it's going to be addressed, that there will be movement made on it. In the meantime, we carry on with the difficulty in attracting teachers. We carry on in a situation where taxpayers are funding this to the tune of some \$45 billion over the lifetime of the project as opposed to dealing with the \$7 billion liability today. So clearly for taxpayers it would be a good deal to look after some or all of that unfunded liability today.

I'm hoping that there will be some addressing of that in the budget that we see next month. Again the question is: why was this \$40 million needed in the middle of a budget year? If there's \$40 million for that particular unfunded liability, what about all of the other unfunded liabilities that the government has, certainly the largest of which is the teachers'?

I look at the Health and Wellness department getting \$147 million for higher than budgeted costs of physician services. Again, given the state of health care in this province and the urgent need for that, I'm not going to pick a bone with that in particular. I think there's probably good justification for that, so perhaps that is a good use of supplementary supply.

Likewise, Mr. Speaker, Municipal Affairs and Housing: a total of \$42.846 million is being requested. It looks like the majority of that is going to rent supplement programs: \$15.173 million for an affordable housing program, \$16.142 million for the off-reserve aboriginal housing program, and a further \$9.531 million to address "homeless or near-homeless people through outreach teams administered by seven major community-based organizations." Well, I

don't have to tell you or any member of this Assembly how important the issue of housing affordability has become.

When I give my response to the throne speech either later today or sometime in the near future, I will definitely be addressing that particular issue as it relates to the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford and how it has over the last year and a half become the number one issue in my constituency office. I'm going to guess that that's not dissimilar to other experiences that members of the House are having.

So a total of \$42.846 million going to various issues surrounding housing affordability. Again, this is an emergent issue, and this is the sort of thing that I can certainly live with in terms of supplementary spending.

I guess, to sum up, as I said, the two for Finance, both the \$7 million to address losses from various investment funds and the \$40 million in one fell swoop being dumped into the management employees' pension plan: I really have questions as to what the emergency is there, and, Mr. Speaker, as I outlined, the three different ones from Advanced Education and Technology: 34 and a half million dollars to match the donations, \$1.5 million for science literacy awareness programs, and \$500,000 for the awards and promoting the gala event at the ASTech Foundation. I suppose a question that might be relevant as well, since we're discussing it, is: just exactly how much of that \$500,000 went for enhancing the awards and how much of the \$500,000 went for promoting the annual gala event? I'd be curious to know that. If there's somebody on the government side that might be able to answer that question prior to the vote being taken later this afternoon, that would be helpful information as well.

2:50

With those comments I will close for now. As I said, I would hope that this document is going to become a dinosaur, that we will not be seeing great big supplementary supply estimates anymore, or at least if we do see them, they will be restricted to true emergency situations like affordable housing crises, like forest fires and flood relief, and such instances that all members of this House would recognize as being truly important in terms of addressing midstream, mid budget and that honestly cannot wait until the budget process would take its due course.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and speak to this supplementary supply. There are a number of very important issues, I think, that are covered in this supply, and these are the earlier mentioned homeless and near-homeless funding, the affordable housing programs. These are things that should be funded.

I'm surprised that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford would mention that the China Institute should be delayed in its funding. I was just there last week and they were very, very concerned that their funding would be coming forward. That it is in fact coming forward I think is crucial to them, and it's crucial that this will get going, provide the matching funding that the Mactaggarts so generously gave, and look to push forward the economic development that the China Institute will give.

Another area that I've heard about often is the area of public/private partnerships, which seem to come up in sup supply quite a bit. The nature of public/private partnerships is that sometimes they look like rent-to-own, and we've got to look very carefully at these P3s, as they are often called. There are many types of

contracting with government and contracting actually in the private sector that are used in order to try to get a job done. Often the cost-plus way, which uses contractors, is not really the best way to go in that it just provides almost a guaranteed profit. The public/private partnerships usually use contractors. I think that to use a cost-plus mode would not be a good way to go in that type of situation.

We have had many types of P3s over the years. I mean, in my constituency, for example, the Northgate Lions seniors' centre is a good example, using the Lions Club as one of the contracting agencies, as one of the groups in a public/private partnership in order to bring about a facility that was very, very successful in coming forward over the decades and over a number of expansions in providing a tremendous service to seniors in my constituency.

The Auditor General has said that the government would be remiss if it did not look at whether it utilized public/private partnerships in its endeavours. One of the main things I think, though, in this time of expensive rising costs is to get projects done quickly. In my constituency I don't think the Anthony Henday will be able to get going unless we use P3 financing for that purpose. I think that is the best mode to do so for that, and I support that. It is important to look at that and to move forward on these projects because if we don't move forward quickly, there will be much more cost over time.

That's all I have to say on sup supply. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning is the third speaker, we now have this opportunity under Standing Order 29(2)(a) to have a five-minute question-and-comment period.

Before we get to that, might I draw to the attention of all members in the Assembly the presence in the Speaker's gallery of a former Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and a former minister of the Crown, now Mrs. Shirley Cripps, formerly the hon. Shirley Cripps.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the question-and-comment period.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. In light of his remarks regarding P3s, does the hon. member have any concern over the fact that there was a significant cost overrun at the Anthony Henday Drive ring road project? The last annual report from Infrastructure and Transportation revealed that in a \$108 million budget, I believe it was, there was a \$36 million cost overrun. Does the hon. member still have that much confidence in P3s after that cost overrun?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. The nature of the P3s that we're seeing and what we've seen in Anthony Henday and how we want to see it go forward, especially, I think, in the bridge on the east portion of Anthony Henday, is to see that we will ensure through the cost – and to be truthful, I wonder if the cost overruns would not have been more in the long term on the other portions with the increases in costs that we've seen in construction, which has actually percentage-wise often risen far more than that in other areas.

If we're to move quickly in order to have our infrastructure in place for the bridge across the North Saskatchewan on the east leg, we have to get that going quickly. There will be much greater costs to our city, to the northeast, to the movement of goods and services, to so many things if we do not move quickly, and I think that's the only way that we can actually finance that at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert on the question-and-comment period.

Mr. Flaherty: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would be very interested in hearing the good MLA for Edmonton-Manning talk about the whole question that he's raised about P3s regarding schools. One of the biggest problems that we're having in this province is that the neighbourhood school and the community school concept is disappearing, and people are feeling that they're being left out. What we're leading to is the deterioration of the community and the well-being of people in the community in terms of the school being an integral part of that particular community. I get really concerned when I hear the good MLA for Edmonton-Manning suggest that this is an answer to the construction of schools as well, I imagine you imply. I'd be very interested in hearing your comments on that. I hope that you've done research on it because I'd be very interested in hearing it.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some years ago I spent five months plus, I think it was, working on a report on procurement and travelling across this country, more in the small business area but looking at larger areas like defence, education in the federal sector, many, many areas. We reported directly to cabinet in that particular function. We were full-time. We looked at all of the functions of contracting, and I chaired the small business hearings across Canada.

The function of contracting is not always so simple as that it should all be done by public servants and all the rest of it. The fact of the matter is that when you build a school, it's almost always done by a contractor in any case. It's how you put it together, how you get it going, and how you ensure that it is built in a timely fashion and in a quality fashion that counts. That's what we've got to be looking at.

I know that in many areas of the north end and where I'm at we need schools. We need them built quickly, and we've got to do it somehow. The nature of public financing sometimes calls for different and imaginative ways of doing things. I think that we've got to be looking clearly at different and imaginative ways of doing things, and sometimes, not always, P3 may be the way to go.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on the Q and C section.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's sounding an awful lot like a job application, I think.

Mr. Speaker, when I purchased my house, I signed a 25-year mortgage. I paid payments on it for 25 years, and then I owned the house. Is it not true, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, that this is just another form of debt financing?

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seem to be a popular source that needs to be questioned today, and one should not be . . .

The Speaker: I must sorely regret and intervene now. The time has now escaped us.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, I believe you caught my eye.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and

speak to Bill 20, which is No. 2. In this bill the government is asking for an additional amount of money from the last budget. I think the total money the government is asking for is \$393,516,000. You know, this is the second time since I've been elected where I saw that during the budget time they don't calculate properly, and after the budget they ask for an additional amount. This is the second time again. So I should say that this government again failed to stay within their limit, within their means.

But Albertans are looking. They are expecting from us that we should live within our means. When the government, you know, introduces the budget and makes sure that they include everything, they should anticipate what's going on in the coming time, but I think that once again they failed. They keep on spending more and more money.

The problem is that they are spending money unwisely. That's the main concern of lots of people I talk to, and they are mad about it. They said: you know, this government spent 93 per cent of energy revenue in the last 25 years. This is the Tory government's record. At one time they used to blame some other parties. That includes Alberta Liberals. "Fire the Liberals. They are spenders." But I think this Tory government is the big spender. I think they broke all the records so far.

Now, once again they are asking us to sign a blank cheque, a blank cheque for \$393,516,000, and this is the second time after the budget. This is totally out of control, and we don't have the proper details. I know they are spending on specific ministries, but there's no breakdown of how much goes where, no full details about where they are going to spend money or whether they already have spent money on any particular ministry.

This is not acceptable to most of the Albertans, and they have to change this bad habit. I don't know why, after repeating the same things again and again, this government doesn't listen. I think it's their duty to listen and to do something good for the people who elected them. But they are not listening, and I still wonder because suppose they don't spend money wisely or prudently?

Priority-wise the Premier has the mandate on certain things. Some other priorities were not even included in the throne speech. My constituents are concerned. The main concern in my constituency is hospitals: still nine and a half hours' waiting time. I don't think that they are seriously addressing that issue because this problem is still there for a long, long time. We still have shortages of doctors in our area. It's not only in Edmonton-Ellerslie, but it's all over Alberta, wherever I go. Even some members sitting in this House have mentioned it a few times, and they understand that it's a big problem all over Alberta. If it's a huge problem, why don't they take it seriously and at least guarantee Albertans that they will look after their best interests in the hospitals?

Education is another priority in my constituency, Mr. Speaker. My constituency is growing so fast. Next door to my riding is Edmonton-Whitemud and Edmonton-Mill Woods. Those three ridings are growing so fast. You know, they need schools. They need recreational centres. They need libraries. I wish those priorities would be included and that this government spend money, particularly in building new schools in Edmonton. I saw in a paper just a couple of weeks ago that this government is building eight new schools in Calgary and none in Edmonton. We are growing like Calgary, and I wish that this government would concentrate on the growing area all over Alberta. I'm not saying that they should spend money only in Edmonton but all over Alberta. Education is still the top priority, and they should take it very seriously.

Wherever you go, whether you go to Calgary, you go to Grande

Prairie or Medicine Hat, road conditions are terrible. It's terrible.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, the Messier Trail.

Mr. Agnihotri: Yeah. I mean, ask anybody. Urban or rural area roads are terrible, and I wish they would spend some amount of money in this area as well.

Another serious thing which I think we should address here is the low-income people. The social deficit, Mr. Speaker, is increasing. We should at least think about those people who are earning less than \$20,000. Still there are people who are earning \$20,000 annually, and their rent is going higher every year. Some people, I mean, are hand to mouth. They can't even, you know, afford at least a reasonable amount of money for their groceries. So with those unfortunate people we should consider them very seriously, and we should address their concerns as soon as possible before it's too late.

I remember that we increased the AISH payment after so many years, and after that there was no review. Those people – I mean, everything, all the prices have gone up. How are they going to survive? If we don't take seriously those people who don't earn too much money, that problem becomes socially very serious, and those people will go on the street and will try to earn easy money in a way that society doesn't expect. So before we are too late, we should seriously consider and address this issue.

3:10

The last time I questioned the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, he said that the crime rate in Alberta is reducing. I don't believe that. I'm sure there are lots of other people sitting in this House . . .

Some Hon. Members: I don't believe it.

Mr. Agnihotri: You don't believe it. You see, Mr. Speaker, this issue speaks for itself. It's a big, big problem in Alberta. Not only in Edmonton, not only in Calgary, not only in Grande Prairie but all over. It's even growing in rural areas. So we need some more police officers and staff to make sure that our children, our parents, especially seniors, walk freely during the nighttime. I tell you personally that it's very dangerous to even walk on the streets after 9 o'clock in some areas, and it's getting worse. So before it's too late, I think we should give this sector a little bit more priority.

Environment is a big issue. Yes, I'm glad that government has started taking an interest in environmental issues. But let's see, anyway. I don't want to discuss this issue right now because we are dealing with another bill. I will address that issue when we deal with that.

The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that this government is throwing money at the problems. They keep on throwing money at the problems. Still they don't have long-term, sustainable policies. They started forming some committees. Maybe they want some input from opposition parties, which is a good thing because we are all elected to serve the best interests of Albertans, right? But I don't know why they didn't have those plans for a long, long time. We always get the lip service. If they had proper sustainable policies 25 years ago – for example, I'm sure with the money that this government received from the nonrenewable resources, we could have so much, a huge amount of money.

At least, if you see the Alberta Liberals' plan, even the 15-year plan, if we had that plan, we could have savings of about \$120 billion – \$120 billion – in our heritage fund. That means that out of \$120 billion if we calculate at today's rate of interest, \$7 billion interest would have come out of that money. We could have used

that money in the general revenue. We could have the best universities in the world. We could have the best hospitals. We wouldn't have a long waiting time in the hospitals or have to sit two hours, three hours in the surgery. Whenever I go and see my doctor, I have to wait there for two, three hours, and the doctor always says: "Just tell me one problem. If you want to talk about the second one, come next time." [interjections] This is true. Maybe you get preference that we don't.

One time, Mr. Speaker, one of my good friends, a doctor, said, "You know, I can look after this." I said: "Doctor, I respect that. I don't want preference, okay?" Everybody should be equal. Yes. It's true.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, hon. member, I regret to inform you that the time for this segment has now expired.

We do have five minutes, though, for questions and comments if an hon. member would like to participate under the standing order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on this Q and C section.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to ask the hon. member if he might be able to share with us a little more about his comments regarding his visit to a doctor and having to book a second appointment if he has a second issue he wishes to discuss. This is a very serious issue. I heard members on the other side indicating that he should just get another doctor. Well, I've had constituents come . . .

The Speaker: Please, hon. member. No. I accept that it may be a serious thing, but right now we're debating second reading of a supplementary supply bill. What this has to do with service by individual doctors is beyond my comprehension. There has to be some degree of relevancy with respect to it.

Perhaps, hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you wanted to participate in the Q and C section?

Mr. Martin: No.

The Speaker: Okay.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow on the Q and C section.

Ms DeLong: Yes. Thank you. I was listening to my hon. colleague, and there were some interesting things that you did say during the beginning of your speech which I think are valid questions – okay? – but I would suggest that you should also be providing valid answers. What you were questioning was the amount of money that we were spending and that we were asking for more money for particular, specific items. Now, which of those particular, specific items do you think we should not be spending money on? You also made reference to us generally spending more money, so could you please specify what things you would like to cut, where we should be spending less money?

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you wish, proceed.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you very much. I appreciate your question. You know, I don't mind spending. I already said that spending money on the programs is not a bad idea. I was talking about the priorities. In my constituency we have different priorities, and I want to make sure that I raise my voice for the people who elected me.

In this bill you're asking for \$393,516,000, the total amount, and on health care \$147 million. I want to make sure that if we are sanctioning \$147 million on health care – it's a huge amount – that

at least we will be able to, you know, reduce the waiting time, increase the number of doctors, staff, beds. That's what I mean. Yes, I was talking about, you know, going out of the way because every time the government introduces the budget – make sure they calculate everything. Not second time, third time, fourth time. They keep on repeating the same things again and again, again and again. That's a big problem for me, and this is not acceptable to me. This is not acceptable to all Albertans who are listening here today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional members to participate in the Q and C section?

Then that being the case, we'll now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, then followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the hon. Member for St. Albert, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. But if there are additional members of another side that want to participate, we'll insert them in.

Right now the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

3:20

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to make a few brief comments about the supplementary estimates. It's more to do with the process, but there are a couple of things I do want to go over.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

We've had this debate in the Legislature, and I hope that this particular debate will be fast coming to an end. In the past we've dealt with budgets in March that really didn't mean anything. We'd pass the budget, and then in June we'd have more money, and in the summer we'd have more money, so nobody took the particular budget very seriously. I doubt that the cabinet ministers did because they could come back and say: well, I need more money.

Now, supplementary estimates were never meant to be part of the ongoing budgeting of the government, Mr. Speaker. I've mentioned this before. When I was first in this Legislature, they were set for what we'd call genuine emergencies; you know, forest fires or, I suppose, if there's a pandemic or something like this. Nobody can predict that, so that's why you need supplementary estimates. But under the previous regime, if I could put it that way, they became just part of the ongoing way we did business: bring a budget in in March, pass it in June, and then immediately it would be outdated because we'd have to have more spending.

Now, I think – I hope that I'm correct in this – that as we change and go to fixed election dates, my understanding is that we would be dealing with the budget a week or two after the Speech from the Throne, which is basically the way it used to be. If that's the case, Mr. Speaker, we really should not have a big need in the future for huge amounts of supplementary spending. I hope that's the case. I think that puts onus on the government, then, to be realistic in terms of the budget, to put some work into it because they shouldn't be coming back asking for millions of dollars – hundreds of millions of dollars in the past – for extra spending. They have to be more realistic is what I'm saying.

Mr. Speaker, it just goes to show with the supplementary estimates. Health and Wellness: I know where that is. Probably it was needed because we're in a crisis situation, as we are in so many other areas, for the doctors' settlement just recently. But surely we could have projected that we would need something like this way back when.

Municipal Affairs and Housing. Well, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker,

having listened to Albertans, that this is also another crisis, and this amount of money here is not really going to solve the problem. Now, we'll obviously have to wait until we see what the budget brings forward. We'll be watching it very closely.

But I guess I say to the President of the Treasury Board and the Treasurer that I hope that we've come to an end of this idea that a budget that's passed in June is outdated. That's an unacceptable way to run the people's business. There's absolutely no doubt about that. I understand that for this particular time we do need supplementary estimates, and there might be times down the way where emergencies come up that we may need it. But hopefully the budgeting process changes to the point that people are realistic, knowing that they can't just come back. I think that's the job of the two honourable gentlemen across there, to make sure that budgeting is realistic in the future and we're not passing, as I say, hundreds of millions of dollars after the budget is passed. That's unacceptable. It's not transparent. It's not open. It's inefficient, and it wastes money, Mr. Speaker.

So we will look forward in the future to this next budget. We'll certainly look forward to the next two budgets to see how this process works.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any questions or comments?

The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move to adjourn debate on this bill at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 25

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, again, Mr. Speaker. I now rise to move second reading of Bill 25, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007.

Interim supply estimates provide funding authorization until the new budget is approved. These interim supply estimates will provide the spending authority to government from April 1 to July 1, 2007. Approval of the interim supply estimates pending the approval of budget is not unusual for government. It is required whenever spending authority is required to bridge the gap between the last fiscal year and passage of a new budget. Interim supply estimates are higher this year than previously because the new budget is being introduced and debated later than usual.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak in second reading to Bill 25, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007. Let me just start off by saying that I hope that this is the last time I will ever have to rise and speak to an interim supply act.

As most members of this House know, Mr. Speaker, there are new rules contained in the House leaders' agreement, which, hopefully, will be coming to this Assembly for its approval sometime in the near future, which would establish a set sitting date, every year in February for this Assembly to meet, and a set date by which the budget would have to be brought down. My understanding and

sincere hope is that this House will adopt those rules. If, in fact, we do, in all likelihood the budget would always be passed in advance of the end of the fiscal year; therefore, we would never again find ourselves in a situation where we're being asked to approve nearly \$10 billion without any real solid explanation as to where or how that money is going to be expended other than to say that it's needed for the operation of the government until the budget is passed.

I expressed last week when we discussed this interim supply in committee that this is, perhaps, the most frustrating exercise for an opposition MLA. I think, probably, there are several government MLAs who feel the same way, that it's almost like writing a blank cheque. I used the analogy of your teenager coming and asking for an advance on their allowance and not wanting to tell you what they're going to use it for. I don't think that this is really that much different.

So, as I say, my hope is, certainly, that the House will adopt the House leaders' agreement, that we will find ourselves in a situation where henceforth we will always know when the budget will be introduced, and it will always be passed in advance of a fiscal year end, and we won't have to have interim supply bills in front of us anymore.

I would like to expand on those comments just a little bit by saying that the President of the Treasury Board indicated that it is not uncommon for governments to do this. I think what he meant to say was that it is not uncommon for this government to do this. I've done some research, and there are many examples of governments that do not routinely use interim supply or other terminology that would be similar. So, yes, indeed, it happens with regularity in Alberta. It doesn't have to happen.

Let's just be mindful of the fact, Mr. Speaker, that the members opposite and their political party are in complete control of the agenda. They're in complete control. They're at nobody's mercy when it comes to when this House sits. They had complete jurisdiction over when their leadership race would take place, they had complete jurisdiction over when a new Premier and a new cabinet would be named, they had absolutely complete jurisdiction over when this House would be called back to sit, and they have complete jurisdiction over when a budget will be introduced. So the fact that we're not seeing a budget introduced until 19 days after a fiscal year ends and that that budget may not be passed until well into the month of May or perhaps even June, this is nobody's fault but their own. This is entirely foreseeable. This was entirely avoidable.

The fact that we're here today voting on \$10 billion in interim supply without really knowing what we're granting that money for could have been avoided. It does not have to have been the case whatsoever. The members opposite and their leadership and their political party, that wing of them, have to take full responsibility for the fact that we're even here debating this today.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to cede the floor to other colleagues who may wish to comment as well. Thank you.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You'll have to forgive me, but I must seek direction. We are still on Bill 20?

The Acting Speaker: We are dealing with Bill 25, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007. The other one was adjourned.

Mr. MacDonald: The other one was adjourned.

The Acting Speaker: We'll get back to it.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay.

Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to get an opportunity to speak on Bill 25. I was certainly anxious to speak on Bill 20. I have some concerns in regard to Bill 20 and, of course, the Auditor General's report on, being specific, how the CAIS program is currently administered and managed and how the Auditor General would like to see improvements made on that. Hopefully, I'll get an opportunity to discuss that with Bill 20.

Certainly, concerning Bill 25, interim supply, we see a long list of allotments to various departments. At this time my first question would be in regard to the office of the Chief Electoral Officer and the \$2.1 million that we're allocating here to be spent between now and July. I would like to ask: exactly how much money in total will we be spending in that department this year? Is this money being used to prepare for an early snap election after the April 19 budget? Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was talking about the budget in April, but is that part of the plan of this government?

An Hon. Member: Absolutely.

Mr. MacDonald: Absolutely. Well, I'm glad to see that they've got a plan of something, Mr. Speaker. It's evident that they have an absence of plans with other directives.

An Hon. Member: Order your signs.

Mr. MacDonald: Order my signs? I've got them stored out in the country, and they're ready to go.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor. The chair will be happy to recognize anyone who wishes to participate in the debate, but currently the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor. You may proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward with interest to a response from the hon. members across the way in regard to the budget on April 19 and the fact that they seem to be generously funding between now and July the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. We'll just see what happens here.

Now, certainly, we look through this and the long list of expenditures between now and July, and it's a significant amount of money. We almost seem to be cavalier, we almost seem to be casual about spending money in this Legislative Assembly, and it concerns me. There seems to be an unlimited supply of money. This is a government, I'm sorry, that treats the Treasury like a credit card without a limit, and we have to be very, very careful.

I know that the hon. President of the Treasury Board is fiscally responsible. I know that. He has proven that to me in the past. I think it would be interesting, Mr. Speaker, to be at a Treasury Board meeting to see how all this plays out. I'm sure there are many members who want to see this budget increase significantly, and there are those that want some fiscal restraint. I think that in light of the fact that we've been operating without a plan for so long and we've seen the budget increase so dramatically, caution needs to be exercised. I realize there are all these spending requirements. Certainly, we have the money to deal with them.

There are the little things that concern me with this government. For instance, I'm looking at the government's executive fleet operations, and this was a document that was tabled as Sessional Paper 525/2006. We don't seem to mind spending money on ourselves, and this is a reflection and a comment on this current government. You look at the long list of individuals who enjoy a car from the executive fleet. They're all listed here alphabetically.

Mr. Flaherty: How many are out there?

Mr. MacDonald: I don't know, hon. member, how many there are. I know there's a deal signed with a leasing company that still doesn't make economic sense to me.

I look at this, and I see Murray Smith, Alberta's representative in Washington, DC. The unit description is a 2006 Subaru Tribeca. Now, I've never heard of this model.

Mr. Flaherty: Very expensive.

Mr. MacDonald: Very expensive? It's \$42,000 to the government, and it's still worth 40 grand. Now, why do we need to supply this individual with a car at taxpayers' expense in Washington? I know there's a handsome salary involved with that job. I know there are expenses. Last year at this time I asked in debate: does this individual have an eligibility for a government pension? I was never given a direct answer about that. This former member of the Assembly seems to be doing very well. Oddly enough, he is, like the current Premier, a former member of the Deep Six, who were very concerned at one time about excessive government expenditure and wasted money.

At the same time that members of this side of the Assembly are asking for increases in support payments for clients of AISH, clients of social services, an increase in the Alberta seniors' benefits, these increases don't seem to happen. [interjection] Now, the hon. Minister of Energy says that that's good, I think, but I would have to disagree with him because as the cost of living increases, those individuals that I spoke about are receiving less and less because of, unfortunately, inflation eroding away their disposable income.

Inflation certainly has increased, hon. member, and one of the reasons why inflation has increased and these people have so much less money is because of the high cost of electricity. Electricity costs have reduced their disposable income because many of those individuals pay a power bill. I know that may be a difficult concept for the hon. minister to grasp, but some people have difficulty at the end of the month paying their power bill because of electricity deregulation. They get nervous whenever they open the bill because it's a big bill. This government made a big promise, that deregulation would reduce the cost of electricity, but unfortunately that hasn't happened.

There are groups, there are individuals who certainly need this government to be kind, to be generous because they themselves cannot for one reason or another look after themselves, but I think Murray Smith is quite capable of looking after himself and his own financial interests. It just amazes me that we are so generous with party insiders, former members of this Assembly, yet with other people we're not so generous. In fact, we're mean. Whether this government is going to change or not, I don't know, but I'm disappointed in this government. I think you can do better, and I think we can spend our money more wisely.

Whenever we look at Bill 25 and we see the amount that's going into the Health and Wellness budget, we see Infrastructure and Transportation, we see Finance, we see Energy, and we see Education, certainly these are all important and very vital portfolios, and they need to be funded. They need to be funded so that the managers of those departments can budget. We need to ensure that the civil servants are paid. We need to ensure that we can attract more civil servants because certainly as the civil service gets up there in years, we need to attract younger people into the civil service.

3:40

Now, with that, Mr. Speaker, I think I will conclude my remarks

on Bill 25. Again, I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to exercise caution. Let's be careful, let's spend the money where it is needed, and let's just look at some of the excesses. I consider our political appointee in Washington, the fact that we are looking after his wheels, to be an excess. It's excessive, it's unfortunate, and it's unacceptable.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any comments or questions?

Any other speakers?

The hon. President of the Treasury Board to close debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a second time]

Bill 20

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007

(continued)

[Adjourned debate March 20: Mr. Renner]

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to speak on Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007. I will be very direct in my remarks.

I would like to discuss the \$50 million allotment to the CAIS program. Certainly, in my travels last fall I heard the CAIS program referred to, and this was in southern Alberta, south of where the current Minister of Agriculture and Food operates his farm. South of there the farmers I talked to sort of fondly referred to CAIS as chartered accountants' income support. After I read the article in the *Edmonton Sun* the other day regarding the amount that had been collected by the hon. minister of municipal affairs in CAIS payments, he and his family certainly have a very able accountant. Now, I had thought at one time that the minister would share his detailed knowledge of the CAIS application form with all farmers across the province, but it turns out that the farmers have to contact the hon. minister's accountant.

Now, the CAIS program is certainly going to change. This government's federal cousins seem to be determined to eliminate it. I was quite surprised to be watching CPAC last fall whenever the Canadian Wheat Board debate was on, and during question period the federal minister of agriculture stated that there would be fundamental changes, that the CAIS program was not working as it had been designed, I believe.

Now, we find here a \$50 million expenditure for the CAIS program. There have been, certainly, issues with the CAIS program in the past. This government was very anxious to get support payments out in 2004. In that year, of course, we had the significant overpayments, which put many farmers in a great deal of financial difficulty, and they are being gradually returned. There were some changes made last year to the CAIS program to make those returns easier.

When we consider this \$50 million amount, we should also look again at the annual report of the Auditor General of Alberta. This is volume 2. The Auditor General and his staff have been very busy in the last year. I don't know if this is a reflection on the lack of planning by this government, but there has been, of course, his annual report, which came out last November, I believe. We also

have the supplementary reports on AADAC, aboriginal affairs, Infrastructure and Transportation, Lakeland College's contracting practices, postsecondary institutions like Grant MacEwan and others with computer control problems and contracting practices, and the agriculture, food, and rural development expense accounts and what should go on there.

Specifically, the Auditor General and his staff also spent some time on the CAIS program, and this is not the first time that this has happened, Mr. Speaker. In the 2004-05 annual report, page 120, the Auditor General recommended that

the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation improve controls over the administration of the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization program by:

- documenting its policies and procedures,
- strengthening its claim verification procedures,
- maintaining sufficient documentation on file,
- developing criteria for waiving the application of the structural change,
- developing criteria to identify high-risk participants –

I guess that wouldn't include the hon. minister of municipal affairs – and

- testing spreadsheets before implementing them.

Now, that was two years ago, hon. members, and as far as the Auditor General is concerned, this government is making, as we debate this \$50 million expenditure, satisfactory progress.

The current audit findings indicate that there should be “improvement in CAIS internal controls.” Now, the corporation, as I understand it, made a number of internal control improvements to the administration of CAIS, including

- documenting and implementing CAIS policies and procedures . . .
- creating a Program Cross Compliance and Investigations unit to establish criteria to identify high-risk participants,
- working with the Department to access complete BSE information,

among others. This has been done. CAIS controls have improved, and I'm pleased to note that, but “some deficiencies continue to exist.”

The Auditor General's staff found that

program documentation and data entry improved; however, the following control deficiencies persist:

- reasonability tests – in 6 of the 40 claims [that the Auditor General's staff] examined, the Corporation did not explain variances from the reasonability tests that exceeded thresholds or the reasonability test was not completed at all;
- documentation trails – for 2 of the 40 claims, we were unable to assess how the Corporation determined certain amounts used in the calculation;
- use of spreadsheets – the Corporation has not defined the spreadsheets that must be tested – before use.

Yet as we sit quietly in here this afternoon contemplating an additional \$50 million to this program, I think we should heed the deficiencies that have been outlined here by the Auditor General.

3:50

Now, the Auditor General's report also indicates: “Control weaknesses to be improved in new CAIS computer application.” There are a lot of problems, I understand, in the Department of Agriculture and Food with computers and access to computers and whatnot, and that is reflected in other parts of this report. But this is what the Auditor General had to say.

The Corporation will rectify two control weaknesses by implementing the new CAIS computer application system, which will be used to process claims from 2005 and later. System controls to be implemented and improved include:

- reasonability test reporting on claim verification results,
- sharing common information between the CAIS, insurance and

lending computer application systems to assist with claim verification.

Now what remains. The Auditor General indicates that to finish implementing this recommendation, the Corporation needs to:

- implement and comply with the policies and procedures, including improving the documentation of reasonability test variances and calculation amounts,
- implement the new CAIS computer application system,
- develop criteria for identifying high-risk CAIS participants, [and]
- test spreadsheets used to calculate payments – before using them.

If these spreadsheets had been tested in the past, maybe farmers wouldn't be stung with this \$80 million overpayment that they have to wrestle with in their annual budgets.

That is what the Auditor General has brought up, and I would be interested to hear from the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Mr. Speaker, I can't help but want to say “and rural development” as well. It amazes me that this government would remove rural development from the ag portfolio. I'm not satisfied with that. I know that there was a lot of confusion in December when the government was reorganized, but to find this over in EII, I just don't understand it. The hon. minister made reference to this this morning when he spoke at the AAMD and C, but I wasn't satisfied with his response. The \$100 million rural development fund – I think development belongs in the department, not over in EII. There's still confusion over how all that worked. Some staff were put over in EII and then moved back. Others didn't know which way they should go.

Mr. Speaker, I think that before we go any further with this \$50 million request, we should hear from the minister, and he should explain what is being done to ensure that the Auditor General's recommendations and concerns are being dealt with before any more money from the CAIS program goes through the system and is allocated to farmers. Hopefully, the farmers will not be asked by this government for that money back because of an error in calculating the payment.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions? Hon. minister of agriculture, do you have a question, or were you wanting to speak?

Mr. Groeneveld: I want to make a comment which is probably going to hopefully answer some of the hon. member's questions. However, I've got to scat out of here in a few minutes to take a phone call from the federal minister of agriculture. Maybe he's got a direct pipeline through this inefficient computer system and knows exactly your questions and he's going to answer them that quickly. I'm not sure. At any rate, I don't think I'm probably going to get through this before you want to cut me off.

Some Hon. Members: Try. Try.

Mr. Groeneveld: Okay. Just a couple comments, and I will give you some written answers if I have to leave and I can't get this done.

I'm really quite upset with your opening statements implicating the minister of municipal affairs and this CAIS program. I think that was totally inappropriate, and as you'd like to say to me, I think probably you owe the man an apology. I think you were implying that he made some false claims. I'm not sure, but I don't think . . .

Mr. MacDonald: No. Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, this is comments and questions. This is a brief five minutes back and forth.

Mr. MacDonald: A point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order on comments and questions? Okay. Go ahead.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. minister of agriculture: I did not say anything like that, and I would ask him to withdraw that. I just pointed out the facts, and the facts are in the report of selected payments to Members and former Members of the Legislative Assembly and persons directly associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly, and this is for the year ended March 31, 2006. I would now ask him to withdraw that allegation.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, people have been around in this Assembly for a very, very long time. When you rise on a point of order, the chair requires a citation. There was no citation, so I hope that what the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has done is clarify his statements.

Hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food, if you would like to continue your comments, you may proceed now.

Debate Continued

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to touch on a few quickly. About the \$50,000 . . .

Mr. MacDonald: Fifty million dollars.

Mr. Groeneveld: I'm sorry. Fifty million dollars. Point of order, yeah. Okay. Let's get it straight.

Mr. MacDonald: It's a lot of money.

Mr. Groeneveld: Yes, it is a lot of money. However, probably what the hon. member doesn't realize is that the ag department – and basically this all comes back from CAIS because the program wasn't used – lapsed just about \$290 million in the third quarter this year.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Groeneveld: It was \$290 million, give or take a few dollars and cents.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. minister, this is supposed to be brief comments and questions. I'll ask the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar if he wants to respond.

Mr. MacDonald: Just briefly, and I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. This gets back to my opening remarks in regard to the cavalier attitude that this government has. There's a big difference between \$50,000 and \$50 million, and we've always got to be mindful of that in this House.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other comments or questions? The Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: I will withdraw the \$50,000 – I'm sorry; it was a slip of the tongue – if that will satisfy the member.

An Hon. Member: A typo.

Mr. Groeneveld: A typo. Right.

So the nature of the beast is how we work. The \$50 million sits in here, and as I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I believe, mentioned, it is in what we call a disaster fund area to keep the reference margin pilot project alive for the farmers. So what it does is keep their premiums down. It will make them more eligible to collect out of the CAIS program.

The computers: I'll quickly touch on that. That has absolutely nothing to do in this world with CAIS overpayments. That was estimates to get the money out quickly. That was through the federal system. When the people applied, they were warned that this could happen, and when they received the money, they were also warned that this could happen.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the time allocated for questions and comments has now lapsed. Any other speakers?

The hon. president to close debate?

Mr. Snelgrove: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a second time]

4:00

Bill 3

Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of points that I'd like to make respecting this bill, not the least of which is the pride with which I come forward introducing the first bill of its kind in Canada that establishes legislated greenhouse gas emission reductions targets. I want to at the outset talk just a little bit about this whole issue of intensity versus hard caps because I think that there's been much discussion in the public about how intensity will or will not lead to real reductions. I think that there are some who, maybe, don't understand how the intensity targets are reflective of the whole picture as opposed to the individual facilities that are covered under this act.

On a number of occasions I've indicated that there are approximately 100 facilities – actually there are about 104 or something like that – that are affected directly by this act. Mr. Speaker, what's important to note is that each of those 100 facilities will be affected by this requirement in a very significant way. They will be required to reduce their emissions by 12 per cent, and someone will say: well, aha, see it's intensity; it's not emissions.

The thing that we have to keep in mind when we're talking about one individual plant is that we've already established what their targets are. We already know what their emissions are through the mandatory recording. We know what their production has been over that same period of time. So we have an enumerator, we have a denominator, and we know what their intensity has been over that period of time. They are required to reduce that intensity, so simply reducing, turning down the production, won't do it because, presumably, if the technology hasn't changed, the same degree of CO₂ emissions will still come into play.

What intensity means is that from a global perspective we're not going to restrict them from expanding their facility, nor are we going to restrict someone else from opening a new facility. In fact, many of these facilities are under construction as we speak. What we are going to do is make it abundantly clear to industry that this government is taking climate change very seriously and that we expect them to begin the implementation of the necessary technology so that they can reduce their emissions by 12 per cent.

That's the essence of what this bill is all about. The 12 per cent, by the way, Mr. Speaker, is actually in the regulations that I tabled in conjunction with the bill. The bill itself puts the framework in place for regulations to set that target. So, as a result, as technology advances and as the implementation of that technology advances, it allows us some flexibility to change the targets to a more appropriate level over a period of time as it becomes clear that there may be opportunities for further reductions.

The other important thing to note is that the bill comes into force on July 1. Clearly, there is little likelihood that all of the industrial emitters will be able to change their production and install the necessary equipment or even find the necessary equipment so that they can meet the target by July 1. The government knows full well that in the vast majority of cases the options available to these industrial emitters will be severely limited, and most will be contributing to the technology fund that's provided for in the legislation.

That allows us to do a couple of things though, Mr. Speaker. It allows us to ensure that the dollars that are contributed to that technology fund remain in Alberta, that those dollars are committed to dealing with the necessary research, science, and technology so that we can see the development of some extremely promising science, that is just really on the cusp of reality, that will allow us in a significant way to manage CO₂ production over time. It will also make it clear to the public and to industry again that the government is serious.

Let's role the clock ahead and consider what the ramifications are. We won't have the final reconciliation done until sometime in early 2008, and that'll be for a six-month period. Some have suggested that we should have this effective January 1, 2008. Well, that being the case, then we don't do the reconciliation and have the initial impact until well into 2009. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think the public has made it abundantly clear that they expect this government to take action sooner than that. They expect to see the results of that action sooner than that, and that's the reason why the July 1 date was chosen.

The other point that I would like to make is that these 100 facilities represent about 70 per cent of the total industrial greenhouse emissions in the province. While this is a relatively small number of industrial emitters, they form a very significant portion of the greenhouse gas emissions in Alberta. So if we deal with this in a meaningful way, if we encourage the technology that needs to be in play so that we can indeed deal with the management of CO₂ and greenhouse gases, we have an opportunity to make a significant advancement on the climate change file.

That's not to say that this is the end of the government's commitment. As members well know, we have begun, as a matter of fact, an extensive consultation with Albertans to discuss the future of climate change and how we should be developing a climate change policy that not only deals with these 100 industrial emitters but also deals on a go-forward basis with the rest of us in our places in society that drive cars, heat our homes, drive trucks, and transport material across the province. There are, I think, ample opportunities for us to engage in a discussion with Albertans on how the government can continue to lead the charge and ensure that we are doing

everything that we possibly can to deal with issues related to greenhouse gas emissions.

The other point that I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, is that much of this bill deals with the administrative authority that allows us to have the legislative authority and ability to actually enforce the standards. Rather than reinventing the wheel, the procedure that's used to a very, very large extent, with the exception of one or two words here or there that are appropriately changed, mirrors the legislative compliance mechanisms that we have in the other legislation that is the responsibility of Alberta environmental protection. So what we have done is create new legislation, recognizing that we need to have the same kind of compliance mechanisms to deal with greenhouse gases that we already have in place to deal with both particulate emissions when it comes to air standards and water standards and, in fact, contaminated land.

4:10

Frankly, I'm very excited, very proud to be standing here debating this legislation, the first of its kind in Canada. I encourage all members to support this legislation so we can get on with it, have this legislation passed and the necessary regulations in place so that we can meet that July 1 line in the sand that we've drawn for ourselves.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to speak to Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. The minister has rightly indicated that the government of Alberta wants to lead the charge. Unfortunately, they are way behind the parade and appear to be scrambling to catch up to both the science that has been there for decades calling for action and the public who are increasingly vocal, anxious, and angry that this government has been kowtowing to industry and other interests ahead of the long-term future of Albertans and our ethical responsibility on the planet.

A couple of comments in preamble. The timing of this is interesting when, clearly, this is an issue that affects all provinces and the national government is coming forward in the next weeks with a plan. So it's interesting that this government chooses to rush ahead of the federal government and put out something, anything it seems, that will give the impression of action when the federal position is the one that is going to take the lead and to which we must align ourselves and find some common ground and work together, not only that but, of course, the international community which we have already made a commitment to through the Kyoto protocol.

Other comments would have to do, I think, with just setting the stage for where this particular policy or bill fits into the whole picture of action on climate change. We talk about two general areas, Mr. Speaker. One is mitigation, or reducing the emissions. Clearly, that has to be a priority. But the second whole area of action has to be adaptation. That would address more the issues of how are we going to deal with drought, how are we going to deal with extreme weather events, new emerging infectious diseases, flooding, increased forest fires. We are paying millions of dollars every day now as a result of our inaction on climate change in this province and this country and across the world. So to imply that we are taking leadership is far from the truth when we as public are paying for the results not only of these weather events that are occurring at an increasing rate and the droughts that are increasing, but we are also paying the health costs which industry is imposing

on all of us as a result of the decline in air quality and the impacts on human health.

The second thing, I guess, that I want to emphasize is that this fits into the context of a global commitment to ethical action and leadership. Clearly, we need to fit in with other countries' and, in particular, our federal government's initiatives. The public are looking for leadership. They have been calling for leadership over the past decade, and what they have gotten is misinformation and deliberate avoidance of governance, which is to do the science, to assess the impacts, to make a cost-benefit analysis of the options, and to look seriously at what it's going to take to actually do our job as government and act in the public interest.

I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, gross domestic product and jobs are not the sole measure of public interest. This is a continued problem with the way this government looks at and measures public interest. We're looking at questions of sustainable survival. We're looking at lives lost, livelihoods gone, flooding, and serious consequences on the prairies of drought and food production problems.

Again, I guess that I would have to emphasize, especially in Alberta, the great concern that Albertans have over water and the loss of glaciers. Clearly, rainfall and precipitation are going to change. We're going to have flooding in some areas and drought in others. There were expressions from the Athabasca region last night from constituents who are very worried not only about the quantity of water that's being taken out of the Athabasca but the quality as a result of our inaction on some of these issues.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, just as preamble, the whole question of intensity targets as opposed to absolute reductions. I would like to make an analogy of a family where the father drives a 10-year-old vehicle and gets about five to 10 miles per gallon, and because of his concern about improving the environment, he buys his son a small compact car. The compact car actually gets 20 miles per gallon, and he thinks he's doing something for climate change because he has gotten a little more efficient car for his family to add to his own emissions.

Another analogy might be a doctor who is dealing with a smoker. He tells the smoker that he can increase his smoking as long as he starts jogging. That will improve his health, as if there is no need to reduce and eliminate the smoking. So both analogies are to try to understand what we're doing when we talk about intensity rather than absolute reduction. We're talking about reducing the emissions out of this province. When are we going to see some action on that? That's what people are asking me.

I will say that the minister has indicated that even in July this year they're going to be demanding of industry \$15 a tonne from those large final emitters that emit over a hundred thousand tonnes per year. That's progress. I mean, I have to admit that he's taking leadership in the sense of getting payments and action by July of this year and ensuring that that's going into a fund that is going to invest in some new technology, carbon capture and storage, which should fundamentally, as a priority, go to coal-fired plants. They're the ones that are producing most of the emissions here. We should not be building a new coal-fired plant in this province without the capacity. How is it that we've now just approved a new coal-fired plant without that capacity – it's a mystery to me – if we're serious about climate change?

The other limited feature of this bill is that if some companies come on stream in 2000, they could wait nine years before they actually have to implement any emissions reductions. That hardly seems like strong leadership.

Again, it will be incremental increases in this province. If we adhere to the present plan, we will see a 50 per cent reduction in intensity, which means a 70 per cent increase in absolute emissions

in this province by 2020. This is not leadership. Albertans are very concerned about this issue, not to mention our people in the north of the country and around the world. How is it that countries like the U.K. and many in the European Union have already achieved Kyoto targets at 6 per cent below 1990 levels?

Mr. Bonko: Because they had leadership.

Dr. Swann: Well, that's the question. How is it that we can't have leadership in the richest, most technologically progressive country in the world? Well, again, as I mentioned in the House before, follow the money. We are addicted to the income from these industries just as much as the public is addicted to fossil fuels for all of our activities. We have to all be part of that solution, and fundamentally the people of Alberta want to see strong leadership on this issue. It has exceeded health care in interest and support in this country, and we don't see it being reflected in Bill 3.

4:20

A 2 per cent reduction annually in intensity for these newer emitters is hardly going to result in real progress in this province. It actually speaks to the whole question, I guess, of whether this government is serious about smart growth, about sustainable growth, about putting in place measures of sustainability as opposed to simply using the word sustainable when it's convenient, but where they're actually going to measure what sustainability means in terms of preserving and protecting social, environmental, and economic values.

I've talked about the vital difference between emission intensity and absolute emissions, and I think it would be nice to hear the minister speak to that issue. I indeed would be hopeful that the federal minister will be addressing the question of absolute reductions because that's clearly where we have to go, with progressive leadership on these. We have made commitments to the people of Alberta, to the international community to take this very seriously.

It appears from other discussions that this government in Alberta is not prepared to go further than this in terms of what comes out of the federal government. That would be profoundly disappointing to Albertans, if we're not willing to ramp up these guidelines and be consistent with tougher guidelines if they do appear. I sincerely hope that they do appear from the federal government in the next couple of weeks. In a spirit of co-operation we need to work together to solve this.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In summary, Mr. Speaker, some of the key questions I have and the reasons I can't support this bill are that there are no clear absolute targets and timelines. The cost per tonne of \$15 is way out of line with the rest of the world, where they're paying \$30 to \$35 per tonne and sending a clear message to industry about the importance of making the transition to cleaner technologies, to energy efficiency, and to investment in renewables, that could be doing a heck of a lot more than they are today in providing our energy needs in the province.

We also, I think, are being restricted in this bill to carbon trading within the province, which is a restriction that is not helpful to industry. That's not helpful to promote the interests of the whole country and to create a more competitive environment, which business appreciates.

From many of the industry people that have spoken to me, there's clearly a need for more fixed targets for them to do their business planning and to actually make a clear commitment within their

business planning and new developments, to know where to put their investments and where it's not going to be fruitful. There is a lack of clarity and a lack of consistency, and still many businesses and industrial developments are unsure where to go with this bill.

Clearly this bill needs to be integrated with other aspects of our land-use planning: agriculture, forests, and in particular water use and urban development. I hope that there will be more to come in relation to harmonizing those.

Mr. Speaker, I'll leave it there. Those are the key objections that I have and that I'm hearing from my colleagues and citizens. I'll look forward to further debate. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. If other members would like to participate, a little note would help.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with a great deal of interest to make my initial comments in regard to the proposed Bill 3. At the outset I do want to express my appreciation to the hon. minister for, I guess, bringing forward this bill. This is an important debate that we have to have here in the province of Alberta. Certainly, I'm hoping as well that in the spirit of co-operation it gives us an opportunity to debate this issue specifically and the larger issue of climate change and pollution and development in this province, to seek a productive end for all members of our province.

Indeed, this issue of climate change has come to a focus point, not just in Alberta but around the world, I think probably at the very least because people can now start to see the effects of climate change with their own eyes. You know, this is a very powerful teacher, Mr. Speaker, when you can actually see things happening around you. Certainly, it is unsettling at best and potentially catastrophic at worst to watch the short-term effects of climate change and to anticipate what the long-term effects are as well.

So with this first round here, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to outline some of the, I guess, baseline information that I am drawing from so that we have a clear idea of where I will be going with this debate and with Bill 3 specifically. Hopefully, as I say, in the spirit of the Legislature as it is set up here, we can come to some sort of progressive conclusion with Bill 3 that will serve the purposes and the interests of all Albertans.

First of all, it's important to recognize that Canada produces 2 per cent of global GHG emissions, carbon emissions, but with only representation of .5 per cent of the population of the planet. According to a very recent study Alberta is producing 40 per cent of those emissions that Canada produces. So considering our smaller population, this gives us a very high percentage of actual carbon production. In fact, it means that Alberta, representing .005 per cent of the world population, produces almost 1 per cent of global GHG emissions.

You know, these same GHG emissions rose 40 per cent from 1990 to 2005, to 234 million tonnes from 168 million tonnes. At a 4 per cent growth rate, which we easily meet and probably exceed, Alberta's total carbon dioxide emissions will rise between 66 per cent and 83 per cent above 1990 levels even if intensity was reduced as this Bill 3 might be suggesting. So really these statistics make it clear that we are in fact one of the great centres of carbon dioxide production and pollution on the entire planet Earth.

Why is it important to make some changes? Of course, we know that global warming, which I would like to introduce and keep in the forefront of this debate, is in fact irrevocably changing the environment around us and of the planet as a whole: 19 of the 20 hottest years happened from 1980 onwards; 2005 and 2006 have been some of the hottest years in recorded history on the planet. We've

increased our contribution to this unfolding disaster by 40 per cent since 1990, just to keep the statistics in mind. Good environmental stewardship, Mr. Speaker, entails thinking globally and acting locally, and I'm hoping that we can start to show both of these things, which I think have been sadly lacking in the past 15 years or so.

What good are intensity levels, Mr. Speaker, if our total contribution to the problem actually increases? How does this address in any real way the first phase of the climate change bill when, obviously, total emissions have been instrumental in making the situation what it is? Thus, this issue needs to be addressed.

Allow me the indulgence of an analogy as well. My analogy is akin to an unhealthy person eating a hamburger. Let's make him "he." He states that he will reduce the fatty portion by 50 per cent and then simply just triples his intake. The person's intake may have gone down per serving, but his overall consumption actually increases, thereby negating any of the benefits of reducing the portion as such. [interjection] It's not a bad one. I'm sure we'll have more. Metaphors are something I'm strong at, for sure.

Mr. Speaker, we oppose this bill as it stands on the grounds that it does not address in any serious manner the issue of climate change, nor does it bring anything meaningful overall to the environmental agenda. Bringing in legislation that would start to roll back our GHG output until we are 6 per cent below the 1990 level I think would be a little more realistic. Start a long-term budgetary commitment to develop renewable, sustainable, and alternative energy generation and conservation technology. Three, look at ways of successfully implementing technology best habits and best practices, both vertically and horizontally across the economy, to cut our fossil fuel dependency, not just here in Alberta but in fact across the country and around the world. Even if we ignore the lack of openness and transparency when it comes to some things here in this province, let's look at what we do know in terms of climate change here in the province of Alberta. Okay?

4:30

Mr. Speaker, my main concern, then, is to put out some of these general issues. Certainly, I have a number of amendments that I would like to put forward in regard to Bill 3. I would just like to reiterate as well from the comments I made at the outset: I do commend and know that there is potential not only from the Ministry of Environment but from the opposite side to actually make a meaningful contribution here to climate change and to make a positive step in terms of legislation in regard to carbon dioxide emissions and climate change, from all sides of the House here. We'll certainly endeavour to work with everyone to create something that in fact reduces our carbon dioxide output in absolute terms and not just in terms of intensity.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) kicks in, so if there are questions that you would like to be directed to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, please advise.

There being none, then I'll call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to discuss Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. When I first heard that the government was in fact waking up from its long slumber with regard to climate change as well as the environment, I was a little excited when I did come across the bill. But then as I read a little bit and we were able to get some specifics, I was disappointed because of the fact that it's

time right now for Alberta, for Canada, indeed the entire world, for our governments to take a lead. We're failing here to take the necessary steps to really fight climate change. We're giving lip service again instead of real action.

There's an opportunity here for the government to talk to the industry and to the federal government, to come up with some real plans for real reductions in absolute emissions, what essentially Albertans and Canadians want. What we're receiving in this bill will do nothing to stop the greenhouse gas emissions from increasing while everyone else is prepared to take real changes.

Real governments take and show real leadership. We're stuck with the same old, tired government that hasn't really had a change of position from that of 2003: a 50 per cent reduction in emissions and intensity in 2020. The same goal was in 2003, so nothing has changed there. They will do absolutely nothing to stop the further effects of climate change. This government refuses to listen to science, to the people, and even to industry, who are prepared to take the necessary steps and changes here today for right now. They've said that, but we're still dragging our feet.

The industry, as I said, is prepared to move on climate change, and this government has stubbornly refused to deviate from their stance. This bill represents exactly the same old Tory government, stuck in the past and refusing to do what needs to be done, to take a bold leadership way. Instead, they're waiting for industry to show the way. What the world and what Alberta needs right now is its leadership, and it's vital, especially in Alberta. When our government is leading with this amount of money, we could certainly make impactful, meaningful changes not only for today but for future Albertans. We need leaders, not cheerleaders.

If we go back – and I digress a little bit. When you think about it, a lot of us have been in Alberta for a long time. Go back even 20, 30 years. What were we looking at? What's changed? What's noticeably changed? Well, our weather. If we just talk about our weather, we no longer get the huge amounts of snow that we once did. That's an automatic, definite change that we see. Maybe in the outlying areas they've got a little bit more. But over the past 20 years there's been a significant increase in the amount of changes that have been happening. As well, the summers used to be hot. They used to be long. They've been changing. Last year may be an exception. It was a nice change, but again it's changed over the last 20 years.

As a youngster I remember going up to the Columbia Icefields with my grandparents and walking on those glaciers there, on the icefields, as I've said. I've gone back with my kids just a few years ago, and they've receded a whole 200, 300 metres. That's a couple of blocks, if we want to just put it into context there. They're no longer the same ice that I stepped on as a kid. It's gone back, way, way back, and it's receded. Now, you know, kids today, what are they going to see 20 years from now? They're going to see it receding even further. This is a huge step. This is a visual step. They've been marking this decline of the glaciers, these icefields, for over 100 years. They can see it. They've measured it in sticks and time and actual dates recorded with pictures as to what has gone. That, in a nutshell, should be enough, especially out in the rural areas, out in the outlying areas, that these areas are.

Maybe it doesn't matter to people like the Member for West Yellowhead. His area is up towards that area. I've not heard him say anything. He usually just claps when we talk about coal and everything because he's so excited to have this spewing into the atmosphere, but not about real change and real effective change that's out in his area.

We're talking about, like I said, the rivers, the lakes, the streams. These are the things that matter to the kids, the same things that I

had as a young child, the same things that I want for my children and for my grandchildren, for all children of Alberta. Perhaps that's not what the other side wants, but that's exactly what I want: something that is going to be able to last, a legacy of a lifetime.

Our natural areas are something that we should be able to embrace. It's a natural tourist draw. We get thousands upon hundreds of thousands coming up to our mountains, to the Jasper and Banff areas to see the scenic areas where all of our water is derived from, which is the mountains. But that's slowly, slowly receding due, it's obvious, to climate change.

So I can't support it as it is right now. I know that we are going to be putting through some amendments. I look forward to those, and I look forward to the debate from the other side as we try and, again, achieve something for everybody, which is a meaningful climate change bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) kicks in. If there are questions to be directed to the hon. member.

Shall I call on the hon. Minister of Environment to close the debate? I have no further speakers.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, then.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 3 in its second reading, the climate change act. The issue of climate change is an extremely important issue. It's grown in significance over the last several years, especially since the controversy over the science of climate change died down. I remember the debate on the Kyoto treaty and the decision by the federal government of that time to sign onto this international treaty, control of GHGs into the atmosphere, and acceptance of the challenge set before the signatory countries with respect to the absolute reductions in the GHGs, as articulated in the Kyoto agreement. I remember that the government of Alberta, under the leadership of Premier Klein at the time, was dead set to oppose the implementation of Kyoto targets and promised to bring in what they call made-in-Alberta policies and programs impacting climate change.

Nothing has happened since, but at least one thing that's been settled since that time is the organized attempt on the part of those who did not favour taking any action on the climate change issue to challenge fundamentally the integrity of the science of climate change. Thankfully, that debate is now over, and there's absolutely overwhelming agreement everywhere, globally, on the integrity of the climate science and what it's telling us needs to be done if we are not to be facing extremely serious risks with respect to future economic prosperity.

More than that, the negative impacts of climate change on our quality of life, including the availability of fresh water, the future of our lakes and rivers, and the fact of the rapid disappearance, or recession, if you wish, of our glacier formations in the Rockies suggest a kind of future which looks bleak unless we take determined, effective action to get a handle on the forces that are leading to climate change. Human activity, particularly the pumping of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, is seen as the major cause of global warming and climate change.

4:40

This bill, Mr. Speaker, is a belated attempt on the part of this government to enter the scene and claim that this government is ready to take action on climate change. To do that, the bill suggests that this government is going to focus on controlling emission intensity rather than absolute emissions as such. The problem with this fancy term, emissions intensity, is that it simply focuses on

certain reductions, a percentage reduction, 12 per cent at the moment, in the emissions per unit of energy produced. We know that the tar sands are a huge operation in this province, and the millions of barrels of oil that are extracted from the tar sands continue to grow by leaps and bounds. So the volume of production is going up exponentially, and a 12 per cent reduction in the intensity of production per unit is not going to take us even close to achieving in the short to medium run any absolute reductions.

This government has not put forward a comprehensive plan of which this particular act could be seen as a first, important, and immediate action. It vaguely promises to bring in some other measures later on, but we don't know how this particular act forms a plan of a comprehensive strategy on the part of the government of Alberta to move towards meeting Kyoto targets, which are very, very modest, Mr. Speaker. If we become partners in a national effort and a global effort to at least achieve the minimalist GHG control standards set forth in the Kyoto agreement, we will then be among those who can work actively to convince many other countries, developing countries such as China and India, to come on board later on, following, say, 2012 and the years immediately following that. Unless we take and accept our responsibility, do our part in moving countries and societies around the globe to move towards absolute reductions, I think we are risking not only instability in the climate globally, but we are risking our own prosperity, risking our own quality of life in the years to come.

Mr. Speaker, in a book just published by Nicholas Stern on the economics of global warming – and I would certainly encourage my colleagues in the House to look at what this book has to say. I heard someone talk about this book a couple of weeks ago and then requested our Legislature Library to order this book for our use. The book is around now. Presently I have it. I'm happy to return it quickly to the Legislature so that my colleagues in the House can look at this.

This serious work of scholarship, Mr. Speaker, is an eye-opener. It does two things. On the one hand, it draws attention to the massive risks that are ahead of us if we don't do anything, if we continue to talk in a convoluted way about reducing greenhouse gas emissions per unit of energy produced, the carbon-based energy produced, and deliberately turn attention away from the need to in fact achieve absolute reductions between now and 2050.

If climate change continues apace in the direction in which it has been going for the last several decades now – and particularly the last decade is very, very important in setting the pattern of change in climate – we risk putting the lives of hundreds of millions of people at risk across the globe from violent changes in weather, which lead to flooding in some places, drought in other places, jeopardizing the places where hundreds of millions of people now live across the globe. They will not have that space available to them to live. They'll be made homeless. They'll be rendered jobless and destitute.

If we wait another 30 years, by 2080 things will get worse. They'll begin to affect all of us, regardless of where we live on the globe, in ways which Nicholas Stern says should be an eye-opener for us. We should do everything that we can to stem the trends effectively enough; that is, achieve absolute reductions in a systematic way over the next 30 to 50 years to avoid that catastrophic future that the science of global warming warns us about and that is very carefully elaborated and analyzed by Mr. Stern in that book that I just mentioned.

So this bill before us, Mr. Speaker, Bill 3, climate change act, does not and will not lead us in the direction of joining those governments and those forces and those societies which are finding ways and are willing and determined to take action to move towards

absolute reduction in the greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere in a timely fashion.

We know that the European Union is moving in that direction. They are in fact going to call on all of their members to undertake programs and policies that achieve that direction. I think we, as the beneficiaries and as the trustees of this important resource for our own children and their children, have also to take action. This bill, I think, falls short, Mr. Speaker, of moving us in that direction.

So it's a matter of concern. Albertans are watching us. They want us to take action. They know that we have to, what's called, balance economic considerations with our concern about protecting our environment from future harm because of climate change. But it's the issue of balance. What is the right balance? If you read Nicholas Stern's book, then you begin to look at the whole issue of balance in a very different way.

It would be very short-sighted of us to ignore the consequences of global warming if absolute reductions are not achieved within an acceptable time frame, the next 20 to 30 years. In order to get there, we have to start now. If we don't, then the economic prosperity that is claimed to be at stake if we take serious action now on climate change will become, I think, a story that we don't want visited upon us later on. Unless we take seriously the issue of climate change, the chances of risking our future are so high that we ought to look at the question of balance between our economic future and our ability to control climate change in a different way.

4:50

The very definition of balance must change. There are huge benefits to be had from developing alternative technologies, to begin to develop alternative sources of energy that will be not only not harmful to the climate and will not further accelerate the negative changes that are taking place but, in fact, will help us both become more prosperous and achieve reductions in global warming that will protect us and others around the globe equally. It's time, Mr. Speaker, that we moved away from our attachment to this language of reduction in intensity to making clear and unequivocal commitments to absolute reductions in the longer haul.

This is not a political issue. This is an issue that's global in nature, and this is where the local and the global intersect and meet in a very dramatic way. What happens elsewhere will have consequences for us. Today it may be other places that will be negatively affected, but 20 years from now we may be the ones who become, in fact, the victims of the change that we now are unwilling to see as upon us and take effective action on. Effective action can be taken, and Stern, I think, in a very detailed way tells us what actions we can take without harming necessarily either our quality of life or our current or future prosperity. There are huge opportunities, particularly for advanced societies like Canada, where we, I think, have the opportunity to act on it.

I think, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry. The time has gone.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have this opportunity to participate in the debate at second reading this afternoon of Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. I, certainly, had a good opportunity to look at this legislation first hand at Government House on March 8. I was quite surprised there to go through the press release and then a copy of the specified gas emitters' regulation. It was the first time that I had been involved in a news conference on legislation, on a bill, where the printed regulation was the focus. No one seemed to notice there that we were looking at the

regulation and not the statute itself. I found this ironic and interesting at the same time.

This is the first carbon tax in Canada, and it's historic legislation. Some would say: well, we should call it a CO₂ tax. I could certainly live with a CO₂ tax or a carbon tax, but it is the first attempt at a carbon tax in this province. What we do with the money that is raised from this tax is also an interesting discussion.

I think at first glance that when we look at making changes to CO₂ emissions in this province, we have to give this bill consideration. I don't know how serious consideration, but we certainly have to give it consideration, as these changes in Bill 3 are designed to introduce a full range of compliance options with an appeals process supported by audit and investigative powers.

Perhaps the hon. Minister of Environment can answer these questions, or we can get answers in committee. I'm going to start with the regulation, not the bill, because I have some questions before we get to committee, and hopefully the hon. minister can provide answers. Now, when we're talking in the regulation about industrial process emissions, we need a clarification on this. I'm not trying to confuse anyone here, but total direct emissions minus industrial process emissions equal actual emissions intensity, and there's a definition in the regulations on actual emissions intensity, but it's important that we get a handle on what is an industrial process emission. There's a definition of this here under the letter (n) in the definition portion of the regulation, but I think we need this to be explained further.

Now, when we look at this, Mr. Speaker, it indicates in this regulation that industrial process emissions means direct emissions from an industrial process involving chemical reactions other than combustion and where the primary purpose of the industrial process is not energy production. So does this include cokers and reactors in a process stream? Where do they fit into all this? Does this exclude pulp mills, petrochemical plants, fertilizer plants, industrial feedlots? What exactly is the meaning of this? As I understood it at the press conference, only 70 per cent of Alberta's industrial emissions were represented by this legislation. Does that definition exclude the other 30 per cent? Again, what are we going to do with the other 30 per cent of these industrial emitters?

We all know that there was a significant royalty holiday in the oil sands projects. One of their allowed costs was equipment or capital that was employed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Certainly, there has been with some projects a reduction in their intensity, but I don't know how much money has been spent in this manner by the oil sands project owners. I would be curious if the hon. minister could provide an answer to that.

I'm going to have a lot of questions in committee on this because I have been reviewing it and reviewing it with a significant amount of interest, but with Bill 3, before we get to committee, section 8 is being repealed, and the following is being substituted.

Agreements re: interjurisdictional co-operation

8 The Minister may not enter into any agreement under the Government Organization Act providing for co-operative, complementary or compatible actions with other jurisdictions in respect of specified gas emissions unless the agreement is consistent with this Act and the specified gas emission target for Alberta established by section 3(1).

This is interesting. Why is it necessary?

Now, also we heard – and the press reported on this – that there were significant penalties under section 45 of Bill 3. You know, in the case of a corporation we're looking at a fine of not more than a million dollars. In the case of an individual, a hundred grand or imprisonment for two years or both a fine and imprisonment. Now, if you were guilty of an offence under section 44, there's also a

\$50,000 fine or in the case of a corporation a fine of half a million dollars.

5:00

So how would all those penalties work whenever we have administrative penalties also to be used? I think that if my interpretation of this is correct, the administrative penalties are going to be subject to the regulations, and everything seems to be subject to the regulations. But surely there is an answer available. If the hon. minister could provide it to the House in the course of debate before we get to committee, I would be very grateful.

Now, there is a lot to discuss in this bill, but certainly the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has been consistent in bringing up the need for CO₂ sequestration. The Premier, the current Premier, on March 8 indicated at that press conference that the enhanced oil recovery CO₂ sequestration pilot project that was going on down by Joffre had increased the flow rates on the oil wells east of Joffre by 18 per cent, which is significant. But that's pure CO₂ coming off the industrial process stream at Joffre, and it's not the capture and compression of a CO₂ gas stream from many different sources.

Now, there's talk about the pipeline that is to be built. CERI has already done some research on that. They've crunched some numbers that are a little older than this legislation, two or three years. The Canadian Energy Research Institute indicated that a 20-inch line filled with liquid CO₂ at the pressure of 1,000 psi would cost roughly about \$400 million to construct from Fort McMurray down to some of the mature oil fields surrounding the Edmonton area. There was talk that this had skyrocketed in price to \$1.4 billion. Certainly, there seemed to be excitement, and I was glad to see the federal government get excited about this project because we on this side of the House have been following the research done in other jurisdictions on CO₂ capture and storage, or sequestration, for a number of years now. I was pleased to see that the federal government and this government are at least looking into that.

I can understand why we need to study this issue, but I hope we're not spending money on research projects that are ongoing and some of which have been completed. Certainly, I think we have the same sort of geology in the western sedimentary basin as the Williston basin, and there in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, is the CO₂ monitoring and storage project that has been going on since 1999. The Alberta Research Council has been involved in this. Saskatchewan Industry and Resources is involved. EnCana, of course, is involved. The University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, the Geological Survey of Canada, and the Colorado School of Mines are also involved in it. There are quite a few people. Industry is well represented in this endeavour by EnCana, of course, by SaskPower and Nexen, Chevron, Texaco. TransAlta Utilities is also involved. Of course, the CEO, I believe, of TransAlta Utilities, Mr. Snyder, is involved in this research project that is to go on. But the results from this Weyburn project that are out are significant.

I would like to know why we have to proceed with the current study when so much work, it's apparent to me, has already been done on our behalf, and certainly with the Alberta Research Council involved, surely this government is aware of the study and the results that have come in the last six years. It seems to be a very, very good idea to sequester carbon. If it's good enough in Weyburn, I think we have the same sort of geology here in Alberta.

Now, I'm not going to go through this project in a great deal of detail, but I would urge all hon. members to have a look at this. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I believe I'll table this report for the information of all members here tomorrow. In the province of Saskatchewan, where this project is going on, this is quite interesting.

The Province of Saskatchewan is unusual in that it has long required operators to provide records of operational and well histories and the

Province has archived roughly 600 cores from the field as well as all the geophysical logs and other relevant information. All this data was made available to researchers and it provided a thorough historical dataset in addition to the pre-injection baseline dataset.

This is to allow accurate research to be done in this Weyburn oil field as far as CO₂ injection.

The CO₂ enhanced oil recovery has contributed – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview will be very interested to know this. Since they started injecting CO₂ into the mature oil field in Weyburn, they have increased production by 5,000 barrels per day. That's a significant increase in production, Mr. Speaker.

At this time . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Your speaking time is over, hon. member.

Now we have to deal with the question-and-answer and comment period. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on the question-and-answer portion?

Mr. R. Miller: Yes, Mr. Speaker. My question is whether or not the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would like to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: Well, the speaking time elapsed. We heard the clock, and the words were not uttered, so I'll recognize another member. If another member wants to participate, the other member can stand up and adjourn the debate. Then we'll go on, and everything will work really well.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, would you like to participate in the question portion or in the debate portion?

Mr. R. Miller: In the debate portion.

The Speaker: Sorry. First of all, anybody else want to question or comment?

Then, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, you're recognized to participate.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 1 Lobbyists Act (continued)

[Adjourned debate March 20: Mr. Stelmach]

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. The hon. leader will be restricted to 90 minutes.

Dr. Taft: Aw, shucks. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will restrain myself. I will restrain myself. [interjections] Oh, I'm sorry to disappoint everybody.

It's a privilege to rise and debate what is a very important bill, and the government and the Premier acknowledge the importance of this bill by making it Bill 1, their flagship bill. I imagine it will get farther than the loyal opposition's flagship bill got, Mr. Speaker, which was voted down in second reading at the first opportunity. However, I imagine this bill will move forward, and that's fine. We think it's a step in the right direction. You can be sure that we'll be bringing forward a number of amendments before this debate is over.

5:10

There's a long history to Bill 1. I think it might be worth

beginning by just making everybody aware of where the term "lobbyist" comes from. At least my understanding is that if you go back through the history books and look at the operation of the British Parliament, that fabulous building at Westminster, when people wanted to influence government – in fact, this would even predate the building at Westminster – they would linger about in the lobby of the building trying to capture the Members of Parliament at the time on their way into Parliament. They would corral them and say: well, will you please do this or will you please do that or channel money this way or pass this legislation that way? That was a normal part of business, and because it was all done in the lobby of the buildings, they were called lobbyists, and that's how we end up with the term "lobbyist." So a little bit of interesting background.

The history of this particular bill is also pretty long although it doesn't go back centuries. It goes back over a decade. I think it's worth reviewing this legislation because I do believe that if this legislation were brought forward 10 or 15 years ago, it would be truly pioneering legislation, but having been brought forward now, it's really, as it stands, an effort to catch up to most of the rest of the country. And catch up we should, but I'd like us to do better than that. I'd like, before this bill is finished in this Assembly, for Alberta to be leading the country in handling its lobbyists.

An important year in this Assembly was 1996 because of the tabling of the so-called Tupper report, which was commissioned in response to a conflicts of interest scandal concerning the Multi-Corp affair. The actual title of the report is Integrity in Government in Alberta: Towards the Twenty First Century, Report of the Conflicts of Interest Act Review Panel. It was chaired by Allan Tupper, a well-known political scientist. Two other members were on it, Patricia Newman and Francis Saville. It was submitted in January 1996, and among its key recommendations was a lobbyist registry. That's 11 years ago now almost exactly.

That recommendation was taken very seriously by the Official Opposition, so that very spring a member of a previous Liberal caucus introduced the Lobbyists Registration Act, Bill 223. Of course, it was a private member's bill, Mr. Speaker, and as happens with so many private members' bills no matter how good they are, it got voted down at the first opportunity. Interestingly, though, the following year a government member introduced a private member's act also proposing a lobbyist registry. In 1997 the Lobbyists Registration Act was introduced as Bill 212. Sadly, it met the fate of most private members' bills and was voted down immediately as well.

The years ticked by. I think there were other efforts. The Member for Edmonton-Gold-Bar reintroduced the bill.

An Hon. Member: How come private members' bills are always voted down?

The Speaker: The hon. leader has the floor.

Dr. Taft: Sorry. I'm getting questioned.

The Speaker: Sorry. There are no questions. The hon. member has the floor. Please proceed.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So by 2001, after I think at least one other attempt to introduce a lobbyist registry through a private member's act was voted down, there was a provincial review. One thing led to the next, and ultimately another committee was struck, chaired by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. I must say that all reports are that that member did a very effective job of chairing the committee and

leading a team and producing a good report, so my congratulations to the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill and to all the other members of that committee.

Anyway, that report was quite comprehensive, and among other things it recommended, once again, a lobbyist registry. Every time the idea of a lobbyist registry has been raised in this Assembly, up until this spring it's been mocked. I remember the previous Premier doing his fair share of mocking and accusing the opposition of lobbying for a lobbyist registry and things like that. I'm sure that the Speaker remembers those kinds of debates as well. However, we finally have a breakthrough here, and we have a proposed Lobbyists Act. It is a step in the right direction.

I've sometimes thought that we could call it the Rod Love act or something like that because there are a number of very specific concerns stemming from some actions in the last number of years by certain individuals closely connected to the governing party, among them the former Premier's chief of staff, in fact, two chiefs of staff of the former Premier, and their actions moving back and forth between the Premier's office and the private sector in getting hired. The case, for example, of Peter Elzinga being hired by a major oil company to lobby on their behalf to get a change in the royalty scheme or the case of Rod Love, for example, being hired by a consortium to lobby on behalf of a railroad to Fort McMurray.

People quite rightly raised a lot of concerns about those circumstances and the fact that there was no systematic way of knowing who was being paid how much, by whom, to speak with which cabinet minister. The public has a right to know, Mr. Speaker. The public has a right to understand who is lobbying which member of government on which topic on whose behalf, and that's what a lobbyist registry is about.

The effect of this bill or the intent of this bill I think, as with most lobbyist acts, is to draw a clearer line between the public interest and the private interest, and I'm all in favour of that. To the extent that this bill does that, I think it's a good idea. We want to tighten it up. But clearly there are conflicts of interest when people attempt to influence the decisions of government in such a way that may lead to their private enrichment or their private benefit, and that leads into a murky situation of real problems. As MLAs all of us need to work hard to improve public confidence in the actions of our Assembly, in the actions of our office, and I think a lobbyist registry will do that sort of thing.

I myself have wondered recently about what kind of lobbying activities are going on. I noticed, for example, a sudden surge of interest in nuclear power in Alberta, particularly among a number of government members. I found myself wondering: well, who's lobbying the government on behalf of the nuclear industry? I have no way of finding out. With a lobbyist registry I hope that we'll find out. Likewise with private health care: the surge of interest from time to time in Alberta in private health care, undoubtedly fuelled by lobbying on the part of private health industry interests. But the public has no knowledge, no capacity, no tools to find out who's doing the lobbying and on whose behalf. Similarly with P3s. And, of course, the water transfer that we've been debating so heatedly in this Assembly undoubtedly has lobbyists connected to it. In fact, I know that various members of this cabinet were well briefed on the project last summer, even earlier. Well, let's find out who did the briefing and what the outcome was there.

So that's some of the background. To the extent that the bill will make public things that are wanted to be kept private but should not be private, I think that's a good idea.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, I think it's worth noting that there are already lobbyist registries in many jurisdictions in Canada. In fact, the

federal Lobbyists Registration Act goes back two decades. It goes back to the 1980s, and it has been amended and tightened several times since then. Ontario has had a lobbyist registration act since 1998, Nova Scotia and British Columbia since 2001, Quebec since 2002, and Newfoundland and Labrador since 2005. So you can see here that despite the claims of this government that this is somehow the first in Canada, in fact, we are trailing behind.

Now, as to some of the specifics, Mr. Speaker, I think we might want to move to tighten up some of the provisions around definitions of lobbyists, the nature of their activity, exactly when somebody is considered a lobbyist and when they're considered a contractor, and if there's too much room to manoeuvre around those issues. The fact that a person might be able to switch from being a lobbyist to being a contractor with very little effort at all and sort of get around some of the rules is going to be a concern for us. But, as I say, in principle for our opposition a lobbyist registry is something that we've long called for. We'll work with the government and look forward to perhaps some constructive co-operation around bringing in some amendments to this bill and look forward to strengthening the very foundations of democracy in this province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will move adjournment on Bill 1. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, your guidance: are we still on Bill 1?

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, there was a motion to adjourn. The chair called for the vote on the motion to adjourn. There was a voice call, and it sounded to the chair like the motion was carried. So we've finished with this business, hon. member. Okay. Would the members give unanimous consent for the chair to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to participate in second reading on this bill?

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Sorry. We're back to where we were. The next order of business.

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

Mr. Ducharme moved that a 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 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 15: Mr. Oberle]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, you've not participated yet?

Mr. R. Miller: On the throne speech response, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. R. Miller: No.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. R. Miller: I will. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my

pleasure to have the opportunity to rise this afternoon and respond to the throne speech delivered by the new Premier of Alberta on the 7th of March.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge once again the confidence that the residents of Edmonton-Rutherford have placed in me as their MLA, the continued support that they express through my office for the work that myself and the members of the Official Opposition are doing. I would just like to say that I am incredibly humbled at having the opportunity to serve the nearly 35,000 residents of Edmonton-Rutherford and represent them to the government through this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, in listening to other members of this House give their responses to the throne speech over the last couple of weeks, it's been interesting to me once again – and I say once again because it seems that history does repeat itself – to listen to members of the government when they respond to the throne speech. If you were to take their word, you would think that the world is all rosy and everything is wonderful and Alberta is heaven on earth. Then you listen to members from the NDP opposition, and you would think that the sky is falling and that Alberta is just about the worst place in the world to live and nothing is going well and everybody is suffering.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, you will know that the Official Opposition has a view of the world that I think is a little more in alignment with reality, and that is that Alberta is definitely the best place in the country to live. There is no question about that. But the reality is that with the boom and with all of the successes that we're enjoying and with all of the wealth and prosperity that is evident in this province right now comes an awful lot of responsibility, an awful lot of challenges, and an awful lot of difficulty and hardship for those that for whatever reason don't find themselves being brought along with that success and prosperity.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

So this is a much more realistic view of the world, and I would like to reflect some of that in my comments this afternoon. Yes, things are booming, and, yes, there are a lot of people that are doing very well, but, yes, Mr. Speaker, there are also a lot of people, including a lot of people in Edmonton-Rutherford, that are not enjoying all that this current economic boom can and should bring to them.

Now, I'm going to just sort of flip through the fancy book. I don't know how much it cost to print this Speech from the Throne.

An Hon. Member: What colour is it?

Mr. R. Miller: I have a member asking me what colour it is. Surprisingly, it's orange and blue, Mr. Speaker. I do find that a little ironic for reasons that I'm not going to necessarily go into right now.

My first comment really would be under the heading Acting on Albertans' Priorities. The government talks about wanting to act on Albertans' priorities, and they trot out the five platforms that we've come to know so well. I'm not even going to repeat them because, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I'm starting to get sick and tired of hearing them. This is not rocket science to trot out these five platforms that the government trots out. I understand that they now have banners they have put up at every press conference that talks about these five things. Well, you know what? It's motherhood and apple pie. Of course, we want to improve Albertans' quality of life. Isn't that what we're all here for? Did we need a couple of former newspaper columnists to dream this up, Mr. Speaker, that we wanted to improve Albertans' quality of life? Of course not. That is

absolutely what every member of this House is here for, and if it's not, then it should be.

The next heading in the document talks about Governing with Integrity and Transparency. I think the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition touched on that a minute ago. You know, certainly, as he pointed out, these are lofty goals that the Official Opposition has been pushing for for years in this province. This is not something new. This is not something innovative. In fact, it's really an example of the government finally – finally – recognizing what almost every other jurisdiction in North America has recognized over the last number of years. We're slowly but surely dragging ourselves into the 21st century.

You know, there's a hole in that particular Bill 1 that was being discussed a minute ago that's big enough that you could literally drive a truck through it. That is the section that deals with ministers contacting stakeholders and then not having to register as lobbyists. Now, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't take a lot of brains to figure out that if a minister really wants to circumvent the process and protect a stakeholder, all he has to do is go through his phone book and phone all of these various stakeholders and tell them: I want a meeting with you. Now suddenly they don't have to register as lobbyists. I'll speak more on it when I have the opportunity to speak to that bill, but clearly there was a major problem with that bill right from the start. Here we are, you know, in the early days of a new administration that's talking about integrity and transparency, and we continue to see examples of how that is not taking place.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon in question period I raised questions about Bill 20, that was passed last year in this House, which was extremely regressive in terms of allowing openness and transparency. The Premier played dodge ball with me and wouldn't even answer the questions that we were asking. So we've got a long, long way to go before we're really, truly addressing the issues of integrity and transparency.

Mr. Speaker, Managing Growth Pressures is the next subtitle here, and this is one that I'm going to spend some time talking about because it's probably the most important section in this document that the government produced and probably the one that I'm hearing most about in my constituency office from the residents of Edmonton-Rutherford. Particular in that is the issue around housing affordability.

I've mentioned it before. I come from a background of small business. I have to tell you that I find it very frustrating serving in government now, the pace at which things move even when there is a crisis. I have to say, you know, that when I was first elected two and a half years ago, we heard mostly in the constituency office about issues of WCB claims. We heard a lot about health care, particularly when the third-way debates were coming up – we still do – had a fair amount of correspondence over same-sex marriage, lots of talk about education, but, Mr. Speaker, about a year and a half ago we started getting calls into the office about housing affordability.

You know, when I was in business, if I had a call and it identified a problem and then I had another call and it identified the same problem and soon there was a pattern, Mr. Speaker, I would pick up the phone, and I'd call the plant manager. I'd say: "There's a problem here. We've got to fix this." We would put all of our resources into it, and within a short period of time it would be fixed, but unfortunately that's not the way things work with this government.

A year and a half ago we started hearing about the problems around housing affordability and some absolutely horrendous stories – and I'll touch on a few in a minute – just horrendous stories about

real people, real lives, and I know that this isn't just happening in Edmonton-Rutherford. I know that this is happening across the province, Mr. Speaker.

So a year and a half ago we started hearing about it, and then as we went through the summer, the calls became more frequent, the examples were much more serious, much more heart wrenching, and quite clearly happening all over the place. Then we move into the fall, and the Conservative Party has their leadership race under way. Suddenly they're all talking about it, and it's become an issue. Then they elected a new Premier, and he says that in 45 days he's going to establish this commission and that within 45 days they're going to report. Great.

Now we've got the report. It's in the minister's hands, and he's saying that it's going to be well into May before we see responses from the government on this. That doesn't even mean, Mr. Speaker, that we'll have action. It just means that the government is going to announce what their responses to the recommendations are.

By the time we get to some real, concrete action addressing this very, very serious issue, we're probably looking at two years having passed from the time that it first became evident in the constituency offices that citizens of this province were having real difficulty finding housing that was affordable to them. Two years, Mr. Speaker. That is just absolutely unacceptable when I know that day after day every one of us is having calls into our offices concerning this issue. Why it should take two years to get concrete action on an issue that is so terribly important I don't understand, and I do find it frustrating as somebody who comes from a business background, where you can pick up the phone and make things happen.

I want to give a couple of examples of calls that we've had in our office that deal with this. One was from a lady who's been diagnosed with a progressive illness, and very rapidly she's losing her health. She had wanted to move into some sort of assisted living that would accommodate her as her health deteriorates. Unfortunately, as is the case not just across Edmonton but across the province, there was a long waiting list to get into this particular housing that would support her in that way. Mr. Speaker, not only was there a long waiting list, approximately two years to get her into there, but they wouldn't even allow her to put her name on the waiting list at this point because her health isn't bad enough. They literally told her that unless she walks with a cane or is in a wheelchair, she cannot put her name on the waiting list.

Now, she's got all sorts of evidence from every one of her doctors, including evidence from her employers, just showing how rapidly things are progressing, and she will very soon, within a matter of months probably, be walking either with a cane or a wheelchair. But she can't have her name even put on that waiting list until such time as she is. So there's something wrong with a system that doesn't address that.

As a result of the fact that she can't move into assisted housing that will accommodate her, she's going to have to make a move now and then probably a year or so down the road, as she becomes more and more debilitated, another move. So we've got a situation of a relatively young woman who's struggling with all of the issues that come with facing this illness, and now she's going to be forced to uproot herself not just once but twice. Lord knows where she'll be moving to.

One of the issues that was illustrated – and I'm sure that it's going to affect this lady but was illustrated by another lady that came into the office as well – is the dramatic increases in rent, which most of us, I think, are recognizing as rent gouging because landlords in so many cases are asking for anywhere from 25 to 50 per cent, sometimes even more, in terms of increases over the period of a year. I've had two instances now, this other lady that I was referring

to a minute ago and now another one that was in the office last week, that are being forced to move and not just forced to move into another accommodation but, because of the dramatically increasing rents, being forced to move into another accommodation literally miles away from where they are now. You're doing exactly what my colleague from Edmonton-Decore just mentioned. You're moving them away from family and friends. They're finding that they have to move away from all of the support services that they've built up over the years.

The second lady that I'm referring to now is a senior. She's divorced and has been living on her own in the same apartment complex for over 20 years. She's now faced with the situation of having to move away from the neighbourhood that she's come to know, away from the friends that she's developed, away from the church that supports her, away from the social agencies that have supported her, and, you know, that's a recipe for disaster. This is going to be a big, big problem. As I say, just two examples in my constituency. I've had many others, and as I'm speaking, people around me are saying that they've had similar calls into their offices. So this is an issue that needs to be addressed, and it needs to be addressed before May. It needs to be addressed before April. We need immediate action to help these people.

Mr. Speaker, I see that I'm fast running out of time. I do want to touch on a couple of other things that are really important to the residents of Edmonton-Rutherford, and they do fall under managing growth pressures as well.

Certainly, the 23rd Avenue interchange at Calgary Trail, which I knew in 2004 was going to end up being an election issue – I was told that it wouldn't be. Sure enough, it did because of the way that the funding came down to municipalities from the government and the fact that Edmonton received . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, were you signalling me that you wanted to adjourn debate?

Mr. R. Miller: I was signalling you that I would like to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Bill 1
Lobbyists Act
(continued)

[Adjourned debate March 20: Dr. Taft]

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on Bill 1, the government's flagship bill, which addresses a long-standing concern among Albertans and among my constituents in Edmonton-Strathcona. Over the last 10 years that I've served in this Assembly, this is an issue that has come and gone without any action being taken. They've taken a long time to get here.

5:40

We have a long way to go in putting in place legislation, making changes in policy, amending existing legislation to restore the confidence of Albertans in the integrity of the manner in which we do our business in this House and in this government in the province of Alberta. This bill is certainly one step in that direction. It's a step in the right direction, but we want to make sure, Mr. Speaker.

Albertans expect us to make sure and my constituents would want me to make sure that we take our time and pay attention to the details of this bill so that we get it right. Late but right.

We are followers in this respect as a province. Other jurisdictions, provinces, the federal government have had legislation speaking to this issue in place for years. We need to learn something from a sort of comparative study of those pieces of legislation and the practices that have arisen from that to make sure that our bill becomes, then, stronger as a result of the fact that we can benefit from and should benefit from looking at this experience in other provincial jurisdictions in the country.

Mr. Speaker, I've been following the activities of Public Interest Alberta, an organization which is holding hearings around the province on the issue of democracy in the province. It's seeking broad-based public input into what Albertans would like to see change in in this province to strengthen democratic decision-making, to achieve transparency in the way decisions are made in public forums such as this one, or in the government, and seeking participation by Albertans in sort of determining the future course of action which all of us collectively need to take to roll back the big tide of cynicism that has gripped Albertans over some time. This is reflected in the declining voter participation in our provincial elections over the last 15, 20 years. We all, I'm sure, are concerned about this continuing decline in the number of Albertans who turn up at the polls to vote when they get a chance every three or four years to express their verdict.

So this bill, Lobbyists Act, Bill 1, I think is a bill that is attracting lots of attention of Albertans. I was in Lethbridge the weekend before last weekend, about 10 days ago, Mr. Speaker, at one of these public forums held by Public Interest Alberta. There were about 45 people who took part in this forum. A lobbyists registry and the prospect of a piece of legislation in this province coming into being was greeted with high expectations and some gratification. At last there is action on the horizon, in the process being taken by this House to enact a law that will regulate lobbyist activities in this province, that will make public for the first time who is a lobbyist, whom lobbyists are lobbying and for what purpose.

The bill clearly is a first attempt at this. So there'll be changes that we'll be seeking in the bill both in terms of definition of a lobbyist, the activities that are considered as lobbying activity. We'll be joining the other members of the House in making improvements in the bill by way of amendments when we have that opportunity, when the bill reaches the committee stage for debate.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to, of course, lobbying, people want changes in election funding. They want some legislation to regulate that. People expect there to be some legislation in place, to have a legislation which requires a disclosure of contributions to leadership contests for political parties. So there's a long way to go before Albertans will be satisfied that we as legislators have taken actions on their behalf that they think will lead to restoration of their full confidence in the way business is done around this province by our government, by legislators, and by other public agencies that are responsible for serving the public interest.

I think, Mr. Speaker, it's important to remember and for me to

note that our exclusive obligation is to serve the public interest. Public interest is best served if democratic institutions, democratic traditions are respected, legislation is in place that requires us to act in ways which puts our conduct beyond any question with respect to integrity, openness, and our commitment to public interest: the core function of the office that I hold and the office that all of us hold who have the privilege of sitting in this House. So we are in principle in support of the bill. We see problems with some provisions in it, which have been commented on by other commentators too.

I just want to draw the attention of the House to the first reaction to the bill that came from the co-ordinator of Democracy Watch, Duff Conacher. Democracy Watch is an organization with an office in Ottawa. One of the serious weaknesses, loopholes in the bill that he puts his finger on is the request-initiated activities of what otherwise would be considered lobbying activities. So long as the request is initiated by the government from the minister's office, from a minister to seek advice and approach a consultant, that will not be considered as lobbying.

Mr. Speaker, I want to underline the fact that this is a very serious loophole that's been noted. In fact, when the federal legislation, which was more recently amended in 2005, plugged that particular loophole, the number of lobbyists registered multiplied by eight times. In other words, this loophole allows a very large percentage of people who engage in lobbying activities as defined in this act to not have to register.

So the effectiveness of the bill very much depends on our ability at this stage, while we're debating this bill, and particularly at the amendment stage, where amendments can be introduced, to plug that particular loophole, that request-initiated consultations or lobbying activities must be covered in this bill. That remains a major concern, certainly, of my caucus, and we will try to address this and, hopefully, will have the co-operation of all members of the House, make sure that this bill becomes, in fact, leakage-proof. If you allow this leakage to happen, then surely this important step that's being taken by way of this bill after waiting for years and years and years will again prove to be ineffective.

5:50

So we can't fail. We can't afford to fail in making this bill as strong, as good as we possibly can.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat. I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:51 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1 p.m.]