

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 21, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/03/21

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Pál Vastagh, ambassador of Hungary. Also seated in your gallery is the ambassador's wife, Leeze Vastagh, along with Ferenc Banyai, deputy head of mission, and Béla Balaz, honorary consul general in Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, more than 40,000 Albertans trace their ancestry to Hungary, including many who came as refugees in the 1956 rebellion. Between 2001 and 2005 Alberta's exports to Hungary averaged almost \$3 million per year, consisting mostly of machinery, especially for our oil and gas sector, and also pet food. Over the past five years Alberta's imports from Hungary have averaged approximately \$19 million per year, including computer parts, telecommunications equipment, and aluminum.

On behalf of government and the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations my wife, Jennifer, and I had lunch just a few moments ago and had a great experience. I know he really enjoyed his meeting with you, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to wonderful things between Alberta and Canada and Hungary.

I'd ask our honoured guests now, Mr. Speaker, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also an honour and a privilege for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a guest seated in your gallery. Mayor Judy Gordon of Lacombe is no stranger to this Assembly. She served ably as an MLA for the Lacombe-Stettler constituency for three terms, from 1993 to 2004, and we are glad to have her here to join us today. I'm going to ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Members will know that you are the chair of the very active Alberta branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, or the CPA. This province shares a common bond across the globe with over one-quarter of the world's population. I'm therefore pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members Mr. Thembekile Mzantsi, Serjeant-at-Arms, head

of safety and security, Eastern Cape Provincial Parliament, South Africa, and Mr. Hasani Ngobeni, Serjeant-at-Arms, Limpopo Provincial Parliament, South Africa. Both are here today on a two-day attachment to study the operations of our visitor, ceremonial, and security services branch. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce a number of employees from Alberta Environment who are participating in the public service orientation tour. They are seated in one of the galleries, and if I could, I'd like to quickly read off their names and ask them to stand as I do so: Sheree DeCoteau, Ashton Stewart, Judy Tran, Monique Dietrich, Frauke Meyer, Rachel Dennis, Krista Westover, Laura Partridge, Greg Nelson, Santiago Paz, Jennifer Martin, Carolyn Skoworodko, Keith Denman, Justin Sabourin, Elizabeth Smith, Jason Stianson, Angela McGonigal, Kendall Tupker, and Lorie Wagner. Again, I'd ask all of the members to give them a warm traditional welcome as they experience from the public service side what the elected representatives deal with on a day-to-day basis.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you a group of 23 provincial employees with Infrastructure and Transportation. They work in the ministry's properties division, which is responsible for the operation and maintenance of government-owned properties. These dedicated employees are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise as I read their names: Cheryl Alty, Carlo Amodió, Sandye Glass, Tara Fitzpatrick, Koby Godwin, Colette Haakman, Lauralee Harrison, Karen Herd, Rhonda Holland, David Jesse, Tanya Jerasi, Karen Johnson, Trudy Lewis, Sherry Liptak, Deborah Marriott, Mike MaGathan, Jason Ness, Peter Nietereasta, Elena Nyhus, Judy Tumm, Jerry Wasylkiw, and Siân Wright. Please join me in wishing them a traditional welcome.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure and honour to introduce to you a group of 37 young and enthusiastic people from Edmonton-Castle Downs, which in itself – I know you will agree, Mr. Speaker – makes them superstars. They are students of Bishop Savaryn elementary school, and they're currently studying governance in Canada. They are accompanied by a couple of teachers: Mrs. Evelyn Sopkow and Mr. Mark Harvanka. With them is a volunteer parent who I know spends a great deal of time volunteering in that school and whom I consider to be a friend as well, Mrs. Anita Armet. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour and a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly some very important members of our community in Red Deer. They are from Catholic Social Services, and they are here to watch us represent them and to see how government works. They're accompanied by their group leaders

Mrs. Sherry Albrecht, Mrs. Shirley Butler, and Mrs. Suja Varghese. These people are very special people themselves because of their caring and compassion, that helps to make the lives of the people in their care better and happier. They are in the members' gallery, and I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly 12 very special people from the High Park community in my riding of Edmonton-Glenora. They are here in support of their school, High Park school, which is being considered for closure. I would ask them to please stand as I call their names: Clare Peters, Kristine Peters, Arlen Peters, Jackson Peters, Kim Kotyk, Jorge Kotyk, Gary Kotyk, Kim Patten, Geniene Elder, Reilley Elder-Cherry, Tess Crowthers, and Joan Deverill. I ask the House to please give them a warm welcome.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Council of Alberta University Students has been at the Legislature meeting with elected officials all week to make known their concerns and the concerns of students in Alberta's postsecondary institutions. On Monday they were introduced by the hon. Minister of Education, yesterday they were introduced by the third party, and today it is our turn to introduce this group as a way of showing that they have the ear of all sides of the government. Here with us today – and I introduce them to you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to all members of the House – are David Courmoyer and Duncan Wojtaszek. If they would rise, please, and if you would all give these guests the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

1:10

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two guests who are part of the Save Our Schools group from Newton school. They are Gerry Hofs and Brenda Hovan. These dedicated members of my constituency have been working hard with other parents and community members on a proposal to save Newton elementary school from closure by the Edmonton public school board. They have an innovative plan to convince the board that Newton school is sustainable and should be saved for the good of the students, the parents, and the community. Gerry and Brenda have shown incredible commitment to the idea of community schools, and I would like to commend them for their efforts. I would also ask them to now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Michele Jackson. Michele was raised in Ottawa, Ontario, and moved to Edmonton seven years ago. She has worked on Parliament Hill as well as for the Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corporation, which was a nonprofit social housing organization. She has also served as an archivist in the national archives of Canada. Here in Edmonton Michele has worked for various francophone nonprofit organizations and for Western Economic Diversification Canada in communications. We were delighted to have Michele join our NDP caucus team as my

executive assistant last fall, and we're indeed fortunate to have someone with her skills and experience in our office. I would now ask that Michele rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Ministerial Statements

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

St. Joseph's General Hospital

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Albertans are aware, a situation has arisen in the East Central health region. My ministry took immediate action upon learning about this situation, and that work is continuing. It is unacceptable to me, as I'm sure it is to most Albertans, that this situation could arise in our health care system. I am very concerned, and I'm determined to find out how it could have happened.

Yesterday our focus and priority was on the health of Albertans who may be at risk and ensuring that those Albertans are properly informed and properly taken care of. While this remains a priority, we are moving forward, continuing to investigate, and looking at next steps. I want to be absolutely certain that East Central health has the management capacity it needs to ensure the quality of patient safety and care, so today I will be announcing that I have asked my ministry to contract with appropriate management and other experts to co-manage and support East Central staff as we move forward. The chair of the health region has also requested that pursuant to the Hospitals Act I have the ministry develop a plan and appoint a board of management to oversee the management of St. Joseph's hospital while we address these issues.

As we look deeper into the situation, let me be clear. I am committed to taking whatever further steps may be necessary. Albertans deserve to receive quality health care and expect nothing less. It is this government's and this minister's commitment to deliver just that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of the Official Opposition.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to rise and respond to the minister's statement.

This situation in Vegreville is a very serious problem. Few things can be more serious than the health and well-being of Albertans. Albertans are concerned, and they need and deserve assurances that their health system is working.

There are two equally important issues here. The first is the local level and problems regarding inspection control practices at that hospital. The second is the adequacy of provincial oversight with monitoring and enforcement of standards. Alberta Liberals have long been concerned that one of the risks in this government's approach to health care reform is that its capacity for enforcement and oversight of standards has been steadily diminished throughout the 1990s. It has yet to recover.

This situation scares us. It scares all Albertans. Residents, their families, and members of the communities directly affected have a right to know that they will be okay. More broadly, Albertans want to know that their government has strong prevention practices established so that these things never happen in the first place, but if they do, they want to know that the government has a comprehensive emergency response plan in place. The closure of a hospital so critical to this community or any community is an issue of public confidence and public trust. This situation should not have happened. I look to the government for leadership.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in Ministerial Statements our rules allow a minister of Executive Council to make a statement, and our rules allow a representative of the Official Opposition to make a statement. For additional members to participate requires unanimous consent.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has caught my eye. I know he will want to rise to seek unanimous consent for the leader of the third party to participate.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I and my caucus colleagues in the New Democrat opposition are deeply concerned for the health and wellness of the residents of Vegreville and surrounding areas. I sincerely hope that further cases of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA, are not found.

I note that the East Central health region has halted new admissions to the hospital and closed the central sterilization room due to MRSA and sterilization concerns. However, there are some very serious questions which must be answered with respect to this MRSA outbreak and the hospital sterilization techniques.

During an audit the East Central region found that the sterilization of hospital equipment was not happening according to proper procedures. This audit was provided on February 13, 2007. East Central ordered the cancellation of sterilization and a cessation of surgeries in the hospital; however, St. Joseph's hospital sterilization room continued to operate. Over a month passed between the health region's order and the closure of the sterilization room. If individuals were exposed to or infected by any blood-borne or communicable diseases between the time of the order to close the sterilization room and the government taking action, then a full public inquiry must be struck in order to protect the public from further occurrences of this sort.

Mr. Speaker, it's a matter of great concern that the appropriate safeguards in our health system have eroded during the cuts of the 1990s and have not yet been corrected. The minister has promised immediate action and will put in place a board of management for the hospital, but that does not close the matter as far as the New Democratic Party opposition is concerned. We need to have an inquiry into the events that led up to the causes of this occurrence and make sure that it cannot happen again. Certainly, the delay in implementing the health region's order is unacceptable and must be explained as well as any government knowledge or responsibility thereof.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Members' Statements

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are joining communities around the world today to recognize the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This day represents a rallying point for the world to eliminate racism and intolerance. This year's international theme is Fighting Everyday Racism.

On this day 41 years ago the United Nations declared March 21 the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This special day was created to commemorate the 69 individuals who lost their lives during a peaceful antiapartheid protest on March 21, 1960, in Sharpeville, South Africa.

In Alberta a number of events are taking place all month in recognition of this day: a multicultural book reading and short story

contest in Calgary, a film showcase in Edmonton examining racial stereotypes found in Canada, a discussion in Red Deer on the harmful effects of racism on children, an event with food and cultural displays from various ethnic groups in Brooks. Students and schools throughout the province are also hosting a variety of events to commemorate the day.

Alberta's municipalities have joined an international coalition of cities against racism. This project aims to have municipalities follow key principles in order to help build communities that are respectful, safe, and welcoming. The Human Rights and Citizenship Commission and the Alberta Urban Municipalities are actively involved in supporting this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, on this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination I ask the members of this House to join me and communities throughout the province in taking action against all forms of racial discrimination and encouraging fairness for all citizens.

Mr. Speaker, let's all fight racism every day. Thank you.

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

1:20

Arts Vibrancy in Rural Alberta

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to acknowledge the artistic vibrancy that exists in rural Alberta. I recently enjoyed a performance of *On Golden Pond* at the Rosebud Theatre. The hamlet of Rosebud was once a coal mining, railway, and farming community on the brink of extinction in the 1960s. The population had dwindled to 12 people. To help revive the community, a school of arts was founded, and the Rosebud Theatre followed in 1983.

What was once a struggling community has now become the home to western Canada's largest rural professional theatre. Thirty-five thousand people a year from all across Alberta and beyond visit this theatre in a community still family oriented and still based upon a strong attachment to the land.

The success of the Rosebud Theatre has allowed the community to preserve many original buildings in the area. The local hotel is now the administration office for the theatre. The former United Church is now an art gallery, and even the theatre itself was once used for grain storage years ago. The theatre has not only saved the community, but it brought the spirit back to Rosebud. Building on the success of the theatre, the hamlet has seen even more development with bed and breakfasts, a gift shop, and galleries.

Other rural Alberta communities are revitalizing their hometowns by embracing arts and culture as well. Fifteen years ago the tiny hamlet of Kelsey, near Camrose, launched a dinner theatre event. It started as a fundraiser to help restore the local community hall, but today the Kelsey Drama Club and local volunteers continue to welcome guests from as far away as British Columbia. Stony Plain has embraced the arts in another way, with outdoor murals and sculptures depicting the town's history. This attraction is always open for everyone to enjoy, and guided tours are available.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

High Park Elementary School

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The neighbourhood elementary school is an integral part of every vital and dynamic community. In many communities the local school is the hub of social life. Given the bonds that tie families, children, parents, and grandparents to a school, it is a tremendous shock to the whole

community to learn that their beloved school is being considered for closure. A parent wrote in a letter: when you take away a community school, you take away the heart of the community. But the shock gives way to anxiety and anger, and then one by one individuals and families begin talking and gathering and planning for the future.

This is what happened in the High Park community here in Edmonton, and I want to use this moment to pay tribute to the residents of High Park for their courage, resourcefulness, and their grit. They proved what the community organizers say, that when it comes to community assets, the glass is always half full, not half empty. In the face of many barriers, including cruel, all-too-brief timelines, they never gave up, and they are here today to proclaim that High Park is their school, and it is their community.

Governments and school boards should be in the business of building up and strengthening community, not destroying it. Our legislation should make it possible for all sectors of the community – residents, parents, politicians – to all come together and work together to preserve the viability of the community.

It is obvious that closing a school has tremendous costs. It means a migration of young families out of the neighbourhood. It means the decline of social cohesion in the community. It means the breaking of the bonds of community for many generations identifying with the school. It means a spiral of decline which is very hard to turn around.

I am proud of the efforts of the High Park community, and I hope against hope that the outcome of their efforts is successful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Growth Pressures in Central Alberta

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, much noise is made in this Assembly over the growth pressures in the Wood Buffalo region, the city of Calgary, and the city of Grande Prairie. Specific responses have been made to accommodate the growth in these regions, and rightly so, but I want to remind this Assembly not to lose sight of the fact that there are other growth pressures in this province which face their own considerable challenges.

Stats Canada released the 2006 census results last week, showing the growth from 2001 to 2006. The province of Alberta grew by 10 per cent while the rest of Canada grew only by 5 per cent. Calgary grew by 12 per cent, Edmonton by 10 per cent, the Wood Buffalo region by 24 per cent, and Grande Prairie by 27 per cent. But little heralded is the fact that Red Deer grew by 22 per cent and Sylvan Lake by 36 per cent.

This puts central Alberta into the same stratospheric category as the aforementioned communities. It is no wonder central Alberta communities are anxious to protect their freshwater resources to accommodate their population and economic growth potential for the future. This is an important reminder that government programs must be balanced in their approach to address the needs of all communities, not only the ones that are media favourites and flavour of the month.

The census results also demonstrate the impact of small and mid cities on the growth patterns of Alberta, communities like Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Sylvan Lake, Spruce Grove, Strathmore, and Airdrie. While justified, I am loathe to begin a small cities caucus because I believe we govern for the province as a whole, but let it be understood that these cities have unique challenges which are not the same as large cities or the rural communities. Whether as regional centres for health care delivery or postsecondary education or centres for water and sewage treatment, they have enormous positive impact in Alberta that should not be underestimated.

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

Racial Discrimination

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a day to acknowledge that racism is still present in our society. Racism is an outdated idea and still present and accepted. Discriminatory laws and practices are very much in vigour in some places. In other places people accept silently more subtle forms of discrimination.

Racism and racial discrimination make a mockery out of human dignity. No rhetoric about equality or fairness is credible if we accept racism and racial discrimination. We must look forward and agree on the best strategy to rid mankind of the corruption and pollution that creates racism and discrimination. We must raise awareness and involve all Canadians in the movement against racism and advocate against all forms of discrimination. Through education and information we fight the ignorance and intolerance that breeds racism and discrimination.

As Canadians we should make some effort to support acceptance and diversity. First of all, speak out against racism. In this case silence is not golden. In fact, silence, too, can lead to greater discrimination, so you have the right as well as the duty to speak out. When you have a chance, stand up and protect our society's great diversity and respect our differences. We must work together to break down these barriers brick by brick. Racism can be stopped. Together we can accomplish this goal.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Role of Private Members

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of Alberta have placed their trust in their representatives. We are elected to represent the people of Alberta to uphold their values and their vision. We work very hard in the Legislature, and we need to remember that the work we do does lead to great things. While some criticize, others act. Barack Obama said: do we participate in the politics of cynicism, or do we participate in the politics of hope? I participate in the politics of hope, and I chose to make good things happen.

There are days in this Assembly when the detailed work of line-by-line consideration of legislation makes most of us and the public sleepy, when the noise and chatter of question period embarrasses some of us, when the long afternoons of occupying a seat for the sake of quorum are mind-numbing. On those days some of us wonder how effective our role as a private member is. However, the good-news story is that PCHAD, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, a hard-fought-for private member's bill which I had the honour of sponsoring, now boasts some instantly recognizable good work, which warms the hearts of those who have seen the ravages that drug abuse causes among the young.

This act has had an impact. It has saved lives and saved families. Of the 232 young people who have been temporarily held for drug abuse assessment, 50 per cent have voluntarily gone into treatment. Ask me if the faces of the mothers and fathers of these children don't show real relief and a great big thank you to all in this Legislature who fought to pass this bill against enormous odds and tight deadlines. Voluntarily to treatment, 50 per cent: in that number lives are saved. This is effective work of private members. The governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan have implemented similar legislation, and I thank all members of this Assembly.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

St. Joseph's General Hospital

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's news of shocking oversights at a hospital in Vegreville has Albertans extremely worried. Not only are residents in the area concerned that they may have been affected by improper sterilization practices, but they're worried about this government's failure to alert Albertans in a timely enough fashion to a major health risk. My questions are to the Premier. How long has the Premier been aware that St. Joseph's hospital wasn't meeting standards since they seem to have had a history of problems?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister and I followed the advice of professionals, and that is our public officer of health. They posted, of course, on the doors of the hospital last Friday a public health order, and it's for those people that were going to gain access into the hospital. Over the weekend the minister of health met with officials to follow up, and we're doing whatever we can as quickly as possible to restore confidence not only in St. Joe's hospital but all hospitals in the province of Alberta.

Ms Blakeman: So the Premier knew at the same time as the public.

Again to the Premier. There was a failure on the part of this government to monitor and enforce the situation. There is no doubt that this province is going to face lawsuits from patients that may be infected due to this negligence. Has the Premier begun discussions with cabinet and legal counsel on the scale of this government's liability?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is the kind of behaviour that Albertans find upsetting. First of all, let's assess the situation. The officer of health said: minimum risk. We are going to ask all those that had any service in terms of the hospital, any kind of health care delivery service, that were in contact with the CSR – we're going to make sure that we contact them all, make sure that they're aware of the risk. But to say that we're already anticipating huge court cases, et cetera, is – you know, folks, let's first restore the confidence in the hospital.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I would have called it planning.

Again to the Premier: what deadline has the Premier set for the report by the Health Quality Council of Alberta to be completed, and will the Premier commit to making the report public immediately after receiving it?

Mr. Stelmach: The minister will respond to the actual time limit of the Health Quality Council.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I have requested the Health Quality Council to look into all aspects surrounding this situation and to report back to me. I have not as yet put a deadline on that process. We need them first to look into what it's going to take. We will be in discussions with the Health Quality Council leadership this week to talk about the nature and extent of the inquiry and what needs to be done, and we will set appropriate time frames at that time. I want to make sure that the work is done thoroughly and completely, so I'm not going to put artificial deadlines on it. But on the other hand,

we're going to make sure that they understand that it has to be done as soon as possible.

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

School Closures

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals have long shown that they value community schools, but this government has proven again and again that it does not. In January the Minister of Education himself stated: I don't buy into the concept that the closure of a school is going to collapse a community. Well, we dispute that sentiment, and there are a lot of people in the gallery today that would dispute that sentiment. Will the Premier admit today that school closures have a profoundly negative effect on students, parents, and the entire community?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this province places a tremendous priority on education. In fact, I'm proud to say that in terms of comparisons to other jurisdictions, we lead in so many different areas of achievement. It's a great tribute, of course, to the teachers and our students. That is the really positive message that we want to get out to all Canadians.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Community members who are most affected by school closures feel shut out of the process. The timelines for closure are too short, and the views of the community are not taken seriously. The Alberta Liberals would encourage more community involvement in schools, not less. Will the Premier commit to extending the timeline and level of community involvement in school closures to ensure that important voices are being heard in the community?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we've always taken pride in the fact that our government listens to Albertans. It does get out to every corner of the province, our ministers and caucus members.

On the administrative, in terms of regulations within the School Act, the minister can respond.

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

Mr. Flaherty: I thought he was responding, Mr. Speaker. Sorry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert has the floor.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this government is behind the trend when it comes to community schools. The Alberta Liberals have introduced excellent policy and legislation that would protect valuable community schools from closure and would expand their role in the community. The government has been happy to borrow Liberal policy in the past, so why not now? Will the Premier call for a moratorium on school closures until a clear community schools policy is in place?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, whenever we enter into discussion, of course, with respect to a possible school closure, there are very clear rules that school boards have to follow in terms of working with the community, working with parents, working with the municipality. I partook in a number of situations where the public came together in terms of the discussion of a reduction of a program within an

existing school. I think the process we have is good. If it requires some improvement, we'll certainly listen to any Albertan that would come forward with any advice.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

St. Joseph's General Hospital

(continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. MRSA is one of the superbugs now found in many hospitals. The most successful way to prevent this is handwashing before touching patients. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How much of the MRSA infection has been transmitted from St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville to the community? If someone infected with MRSA has gone into the community and, say, served lunch at the local seniors' centre, then it is cycling through the community and back into the hospital. What plans does the minister have to test the local population for this superbug infection?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, an interesting question. First of all, I would say that of all the admissions to St. Joseph's hospital, to my understanding nobody came into the hospital with MRSA.

The other thing I would indicate is in terms of my discussions with the provincial public health officer. The MRSA infection, although there are some community instances known about it, is primarily a hospital infection. The question about whether it has been transferred or could have been transferred out into the community is a very interesting one, and I guess that what we need to make sure is . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: how do we know that the emergency room patients are safe? They were exposed to the same contaminated equipment and unsanitary practices.

Mr. Hancock: What we need to make sure of, Mr. Speaker, is that people in the community know and understand the symptoms of MRSA, which are rashes and lesions, and, if they have those symptoms, to immediately seek medical attention.

With respect to the sterilization of the equipment: there was an immediate order put in place to stop use of equipment. All of the equipment was removed from the hospital and appropriately sterilized. So on the go-forward basis, appropriate steps have been taken to make sure that no person attending at the emergency at St. Joseph's hospital would have any concern about the sterilized equipment. That has been taken care of on a go-forward basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness. A directive by the health region to close the sterilization room on February 13 was violated by the hospital for a month. Can the minister determine what went wrong here? I don't want to wait months for a Health Quality Council report. Is it a default in monitoring or in enforcement?

1:40

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, that's precisely the reason why we're moving ahead today to put in place a plan and a board of management to take control of the management of that institution under the

Hospitals Act. That's the appropriate methodology in this type of institution. If that board of management is not successful in making sure that we can have total assurance of the quality of management and operation of that facility, then a supervisor can be appointed after the board of management is in place. But that's precisely why we've moved to the board of management: so that we know with certainty that directives of this nature are being followed and that all appropriate protocols are being followed in that particular hospital.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On February 13, 2007, during an audit of St. Joseph's hospital the East Central region found that sterilization of hospital equipment was not occurring according to proper procedures. East Central ordered the cancellation of sterilization and a cessation of surgeries in the hospital. However, over a month passed between the health region's order and the closure of St. Joseph's sterilization room. My question is to the Premier. Why did this hospital continue to operate its sterilization room for over a month despite being ordered to close it?

Mr. Stelmach: The Minister of Health and Wellness is following this file very closely, and he'll respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That indeed is a question that we need to get to the bottom of. But when this minister was made aware of the situation on Thursday last, March 15, I immediately briefed the Premier, and I immediately called in the provincial public health officer, immediately got in touch with the local medical health officer, and immediately an order was put in place to close the sterilization room, remove the equipment, and do proper sterilization procedures. The rest we will find out and we will take care of.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that the health region ordered the sterilization room closed and surgeries to take place elsewhere. That did not happen, and there was a potential for people to be exposed to or to be infected with blood-borne diseases, including HIV and hepatitis B and C. My question is to the minister. Was the February 13 audit provided to the minister or his department of health before Thursday, and if so, when?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, first, no services were performed of a nature that would involve the equipment in question after February 13. I'm satisfied from an inquiry that that is the case. So no Albertans were at risk at that stage. That should be made clear because we don't want to unnecessarily alarm Albertans. To the best of my knowledge the first awareness that the department had and certainly the first awareness that the minister's office and that this minister had of this situation was on March 15, and we took immediate action.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I hope the minister will be able to assure the House that there are procedures in place, that his department is informed of these types of audits in a

timely fashion in the future. The public might well have been at risk. I would ask the minister: if any individuals were exposed or were potentially exposed to any blood-borne pathogens, will the minister commit to a full public inquiry to look into the systemic failures in our health system that this exposes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that we do not want to get people unnecessarily alarmed. First of all, the audit that the member is talking about was a joint operational audit between the East Central health authority and St. Joseph's hospital, which is contracted to the East Central health authority. So it was their internal process to look at their operations. That was not an audit that we had instituted. We should have been advised of the circumstances, and they should have taken it more seriously. We'll get to the bottom of that.

With respect to the go-forward, I think the hon. member should be patient. We will have the Health Quality Council have a look at the issue, and we will determine from there what facts need to be followed up.

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

Tax Deductions

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In our booming Alberta, trades, techs, and engineers work long hours at the highest tax rate with few tax breaks. Alberta needs more trades and techs. Why not help them with their tools? We need venture capital to convert our research into commercial reality. We need qualified coaches and choreographers in volunteer roles to help keep kids off the streets. Why not tax breaks? My question is to the Minister of Finance. With the feds only giving small tax breaks for trades tools, will the minister ensure that Bill 207 from 2001 – that's on tool tax breaks – is finally proclaimed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member may or may not know, Bill 207 was passed in this Assembly. It was sponsored by, I believe, the MLA for Strathcona. It was a very progressive bill. The federal government saw the wisdom in that bill and actually followed suit a couple of years later. They brought in a tool tax deduction, and with that the tax deduction was actually carried on into the province as well. So the province is doing a tax deduction also. I would ask the hon. member, as well, that if he sees fit to have more of a tax reduction, he would be welcome to bring back the bill, and we can certainly have it looked at again in this Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. A supplementary to the same minister: with most provinces and the feds providing tax breaks for contributions to labour-sponsored venture capital funds, when will Alberta put this tax break into effect?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, across Canada the federal government does indeed give a tax credit to the labour-sponsored venture capital funds, and some provinces have paralleled this. Interestingly enough, in Ontario, which is where probably the biggest fund has

been, they've actually started to phase it out, and it will be phased out in the year 2010. Their reasons and rationale for phasing it out are quite simply that it wasn't effective. So I think there are better ways to encourage venture capital. It's certainly something that we want to do, and the hon. member's question is very well received. It is something that we have to do in Alberta, and we're looking at other ways to encourage venture capital, to encourage the higher risk investments within Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the coaching shortage in sports and culture and too many kids on the streets will the minister consider a tax credit for qualified volunteer coaching for kids?

Dr. Oberg: Again I thank the hon. member for this question. I will say honestly that it wasn't an angle that I had actually looked at. What happens typically is that the deductions for health and fitness, especially, have come on the side of the student, have come on the side of the kids participating in the sport. But I think the hon. member has an excellent idea. I think that it would fit very well under the minister of tourism, parks, and recreation and his community spirit committee, and I have asked the minister to take a look at that. I think it would work out very, very well there.

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

Employment of Children

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. There have been a number of comments and questions in the last few days about children as young as 12 working in different places in the province. A simple question: what are the rules about this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across Canada children at the age of 12 have been allowed to work. There are very strict rules about work. For adolescents, for example, on school days they cannot work during the time that school is in session. They can only work two hours per day, and they cannot work between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. So there are some time constraints, and there are also some parameters around it. We always – always – require that parents give written consent before adolescents are allowed to work. Across Canada in many places, in many family businesses, in grocery stores, and delivering newspapers . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: has there been a change to these rules so that restaurants could hire younger workers for the purpose of addressing the labour shortage that we're experiencing?

Ms Evans: No, Mr. Speaker. There has been no change. This has not changed. All we did was stop issuing permits, and then we added a new requirement. Restaurants have to send in safety checklists, very detailed ones, for every adolescent they have working. We've had rules for adolescent employment since 1974, when restrictions were brought in to prevent children under 12

working and restrictions were put on the type of work that adolescents and children age 12 can actually do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister: how do you know if employers are actually complying with these requirements and regulations?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have employment standards officers. We are adding an additional number, a significant number, in the budget that will be presented later this spring. I'll be happy to talk about that at budget time. We do checks to see if they're adhering to those compliance requirements. If an employer is found to have hired an adolescent inappropriately, we will put in place a cease-and-desist order. We will close the business. We also conduct regularly other public health inspections. Public awareness around adolescent employment has increased, and employers and employees alike are aware of the laws that we have in place for 12-year-olds.

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

1:50

School Closures (continued)

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many people in my riding were alarmed at the Minister of Education's comments: I don't buy into the concept that the closure of a school is going to collapse the community. For the past five months I've been working with members of my constituency in Edmonton-Glenora to prevent three school closures, and it is clear to my constituents and to me that there's nothing more important to a community than a school. Can the Minister of Education tell us today whether or not he believes that schools are a crucial part of communities?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, decisions by school boards to close schools, whether they are in urban centres or in rural Alberta, are always trying times for parents. But the reality is that a flat enrolment across the province and the requirement to build schools in new neighbourhoods where kids live mean that school boards are faced with decisions on school facilities that have declining and low enrolments.

Dr. B. Miller: Well, the closure process, Mr. Speaker, is brutal for a community. My constituents feel like their voices have not been heard by the school board or the government in this process. Will the Minister of Education commit to changing the government's school closure policy to allow for at least 18 months of timelines and more community involvement in closures, a step that has already been taken by other provinces, such as Ontario?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think the process that's in place is fair. It's clearly laid out, and school boards need to comply with what's laid out in the School Act. It's a reality, as I said in my first answer, that you're going to have schools that have very low enrolments, and school boards are elected to make those decisions and are making them.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, the government has proved year after year that it's far easier to close a school than it is to open a new one. The importance of community schools to neighbourhoods is profound, and many people in the High Park community are worried

about the long-term sustainability of their own community. So could I ask the minister: will he tell us what plans the government has to ensure that the community is protected and can continue to be a vital community if the school is closed?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that in a lot of mature neighbourhoods – and I certainly know this as an MLA for my constituency – there are a number of schools that 20, 30 years ago were constructed as neighbourhood schools. We are now at the point where, simply, the fact that a particular school is closed does not mean that there isn't a school in the community. So it's a decision that school boards have to face. It's not an easy one, but that's the fact.

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

Support for Music Festivals

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Since its early roots in our province in 1908 the Alberta Music Festival Association has been promoting and developing music and speech arts in Alberta through performance and workshop-style adjudication. The association is made up of 35 local festivals, mostly organized by volunteers. Regardless of the size of the community and whether it's the Kiwanis music festival in Calgary or local festivals in Crowsnest, Athabasca, or Red Deer, children around the province have benefited from being involved in the arts and music. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Can the minister please outline what kind of support is provided for music festivals in Alberta?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the arts are very, very important and integral to the quality of life of all Albertans. You know, the government has recognized this, identifying improving Alberta's quality of life as one of this government's top five priorities. Music festivals are an important component of the arts in Alberta, and the Alberta Music Festival Association through its local festivals does an extremely good job of introducing music to students of all ages, helping them develop not only as artists but also as individuals. Funding is provided to the Alberta Music Festival Association on an annual basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The musical talent of the youth of Alberta exists across the province regardless of the size of community, and all Alberta youth who choose to pursue the performing arts are equally deserving of encouragement and support. My only supplemental is to the same minister. Can we expect funding to increase for these important community-based programs?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, in 2006-07 the budget for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts was nearly \$23 million. That was an increase of 16 per cent over the previous year. Every year funding from the foundation supports the arts in Alberta in a number of other ways, including funding to 55 festivals across the province, including music festivals. We also support arts organizations, from the Calgary Opera to the Okotoks Arts Council. We also support 260 schools in bringing artists into their classrooms. As well, we provide grants to 1,200 musicians, visual artists, and dancers.

The Speaker: Hon. member, did you have a supplementary?

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. My first concern is to get affordable housing built in a timely fashion. My second concern is this: when provincially funded affordable housing isn't built on time, as in the case of the Holy Cross centre, we get all our money back and give it to someone who can get the affordable housing built. We learned today that the government neglected to put into the contract with the Holy Cross a guarantee that if the project fails, we get all the money back that we're entitled to. To the Premier: can he explain why there was no clause in the contract requiring Enterprise Universal Inc. to pay back the money with interest if the project fails?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's a very specific question to a specific agreement. We'll get back to the member with respect to that specific agreement, and we'll consult with the housing minister.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to that answer.

At 5 per cent compounded, in two years the party in possession of \$1.137 million can rack up about \$120,000 in interest. That's a sizable chunk of coin, I would say, in any ordinary Albertan's books. It could pay for another affordable housing unit. Will the Premier direct all government departments to include a repayment with interest clause in all government contracts? It's our money, after all. It doesn't belong to the contractor who fails to deliver.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the priorities, of course, that Albertans talked to me about during the leadership campaign. Of course, as the new government we moved immediately on this critical issue. We now have in possession a report, a report, quite frankly, that was done by an all-party committee, really a first of its kind. The minister now is reviewing the report. He will be presenting his recommendations to the cabinet policy committee, to caucus, and to this government, and we will act on it.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, you don't need a task force to answer that question.

Interestingly, the amount of interest equals the \$120,000 that the company has already spent on demolition and design, which the government says it's not expecting to be returned. You know, I'm not very good at math; that's why I'm not the Finance critic. To the Premier: does one cancel out the other, or is the taxpayer now out \$240,000?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, I guess that's why he was a radio announcer before he got here.

An Hon. Member: Low blow. Low blow.

Mr. Stelmach: You know, I hear from across the way, "Low blow." They can snip and snipe away, make all kinds of obnoxious comments, and then in jest with a smile on my face – and all of a sudden look at how they're all getting upset. [interjections] Look at that. Whoa. Man.

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

Water Management

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the impacts of climate change, including drought, are a very real possibility in today's environment. Water scarcity as a result of climate change is a primary concern for many Albertans, including my constituents. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Water storage could become increasingly important to communities facing the threat of water shortage. What is this government doing to ensure that reliable water supplies are available well into the future for all Alberta communities?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's Water for Life strategy has been in place now since 2003, and it is acknowledged by such authorities as the Rosenberg water institute to be among North America's leading comprehensive plans to deal with water. That plan acknowledges that we have to have a long-term plan on both the conservation side as well as the management side of our water.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, during the government's public consultation process for the Water for Life strategy Albertans asked that the costs and implications of potential reservoir and diversion projects be known. To the same minister: in a government promoting its openness and transparency, what action has the government taken on this initiative under Water for Life?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Environment is in the process of working itself through the Water for Life strategy. Two of the priorities that were identified under the strategy were to first prepare an inventory of potential water storage sites. That phase has been completed to this stage. The current phase of the study is to assess the potential for those sites and put them into some kind of a priority situation. The final report will provide Albertans with ample opportunity for valuable input and comment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: if water storage is determined to be the best option for securing reliable water supplies for Albertans in the future, how will Albertans be involved?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the development of any kind of a water storage project has a process that is very dependent upon public input, community input of all kinds. I can assure the hon. member that should any of these projects that have been evaluated as having potential proceed, there will be ample opportunity for input from the public.

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today Public Interest Alberta released its comprehensive report on postsecondary education. The central message of the report is that our advanced education system has still not fully recovered from the deep and short-sighted cuts of

the '90s. Years of neglect have strained our education system beyond limit and leave the government rhetoric about building a learning Alberta ringing hollow. Alberta needs a concrete and comprehensive plan put in place immediately. Will the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology today commit to ensuring that all qualified Albertans have access to affordable advanced education by aggressively reducing tuition levels until they are the lowest in the country and set timelines for achieving that goal?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's a good question. I'm glad it was asked because we're doing a very similar plan like that right now with postsecondary institutions. I've mentioned several times in this House that we had a round-table discussion with all of the postsecondary institutions in the province, both public and private, on the 26th of February, and that was to develop the road map, to develop the Campus Alberta approach of roles, responsibilities, and mandates.

The issue is capacity, Mr. Speaker. Tuition is one piece of the affordability puzzle, but we need to create the spaces for those students, and that's what we're going to do in collaboration, co-operation, and by communicating with the postsecondary institutions.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I haven't heard the minister talk about timelines that are needed here.

My second question. The government's current commitment to create 60,000 postsecondary spaces by the year 2020 will create new spaces at a rate no different from the rate by which this system has been expanding anyway. When will Albertans get a firm commitment and clear timelines for significantly increasing the number of postsecondary spaces in Alberta, and will the minister commit to fully funding those spaces through operating and capital grants?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the hon. member has recognized the amount of rapid growth that we've had and the fact that we've been maintaining that rapid growth in the spaces. We will continue to do that to make the number of spaces that are necessary for those students that need to have access to our postsecondaries. In addition to that, my goal is to have that roles, responsibilities, mandate framework completed by the end of this year so that all of the postsecondary institutions and government and students and all stakeholders can look to the future and the spaces where we need them, when we need them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Successful learning requires highly skilled, permanent full-time faculty and staff. Alberta does not have a comprehensive plan for attracting and retaining the best. Will the minister commit to tabling a plan, including a firm timeline for implementation, during this session of the Legislature?

Mr. Horner: Well, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona rightly knows from his past experience, each institution does their own faculty planning. Each institution is responsible for hiring those faculty members that are responsible for delivering the courses. Obviously, if we're going to build infrastructure, we are going to propose to the institutions that we're going to fund them to deliver the programs within those institutions. As part of the overall roles, responsibilities, and mandate plan, we intend to do exactly that in collaboration with the postsecondaries.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mountain Pine Beetle Effect on Timber Harvesting

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A slowdown in the U.S. housing market has meant low prices for timber and huge pressure on the logging industry in many rural communities. This morning Alberta Forest Products Association stated that 2006 revenues were down \$569 million, and they expect this trend to continue. Despite this, the government's plan for dealing with the pine beetle requires that firms cut and process even more timber. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Why are we asking timber firms to clear-cut large swaths of trees when the market cannot deal with the excess timber?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to report to the House and the hon. member that I've met several times with the Alberta Forest Products Association and many of the major lumber firms that work in this province. We've discussed our plan on the pine beetle and put it in the context of the softwood lumber process and also the market conditions in the United States. There is a strong consensus on how to move forward. We have something called the forestry competitiveness paper. I received that in January, and we're discussing that with the industry now.

Thank you.

Mr. Bonko: Will the minister direct forest companies to change this practice instead of building up timber which will lay on the ground and be susceptible to the pine beetle, or are they going to change the fact that they're going to allow them to continue to cut, putting the product, with its low commodity, at risk further?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I suggest that we take a collection up for the hon. member to send him over to British Columbia and see what the effects of doing nothing are. In British Columbia they said: stand back and wait. There's hardly any pine forest left over there. I'll put down the first \$20.

Thank you.

Mr. Bonko: The pine beetle is a threat to our forestry industry. It's a natural part of our ecosystem and will remain one in the future. We must adapt our practices accordingly. Our forests are particularly vulnerable because decades of manmade forest suppression and artificial reforestation have made them that way. What is the minister going to do to change the practices in this province to ensure that our forests are never again vulnerable to the pine beetle, as they are now?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, finally the hon. member has hit a good point here. Our forests are susceptible to pine beetle, also to disease and to forest fire. Why? Because of the success of our fire prevention over the last many years. I'm happy to report that the healthy forest initiative, that this government is in the process of developing now, will precisely through harvesting restore a healthy, age-balanced forest that will be more resistant to disease, to pine beetle, and to forest fire.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Surface Rights Compensation

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question as well is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Over the past

year I've had numerous calls from landowners very concerned about the amount of compensation they are being offered by the energy industry to access their land for drilling oil and gas wells, the installation of pipelines and power lines, and the like. I understand that the rates have not had a thorough review since the 1980s, when the Surface Rights Act was passed. Could the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development tell me if there are any plans under way to do a thorough review of surface rights compensation rates in the near future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Stand up for property rights, Ted.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An excellent idea from the NDP as well, in response to standing up for property rights, I mean, one of their few good ideas.

I have heard the same concerns as the hon. member about the Surface Rights Act and the Surface Rights Board. I recognize that no changes have been made for 25 years, since the last review, and the industry has changed tremendously since then. It's time to take a good look at it. I'm happy to report that I am prepared to consider reforms and amendments to that to improve both fair compensation and timely access.

Thank you.

2:10

Mr. Marz: I'd like to thank the minister for that answer.

My second and last question would be: will the minister commit to having a committee of MLAs, landowner groups, and industry representatives be part of such a review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, one of the first principles of this government is to listen to all Albertans when it comes to issues like this. But it would be premature for me to commit to a full task force at this point in time. I did receive just this week the surface rights review task force report of the Alberta association of municipalities and districts. It's an excellent report. I've looked at their recommendations. I'm ready to consider many of them. In fact, yesterday I committed to accepting two, indicated that two of their recommendations I'm prepared to accept already. But I want to have further discussions with Albertans before we decide how to proceed on this.

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

Disabled Inmates at Remand Centres

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our remand centres are holding facilities designed to house people charged with committing certain crimes until they're sentenced. There are many problems surrounding our remand centres, overcrowding being the main one, leading sometimes to triple credit for time served while incarcerated in them. Edmonton is finally getting a new facility. The question is: what do we do in the current centre until we get the new one, and what do we plan for this new one that we're constructing right now? Some inmates are people with disabilities. There are no supports available to assist them with things like personal cleaning and showering, using the toilet, or doing their laundry. To the Solicitor General: can the minister tell us why there are no provisions in the existing remand centres to provide support and services to disabled inmates before they're sentenced?

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

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. All our prisoners that are held and all those that are held in remand centres are treated with dignity and respect, and to the best of my knowledge all those that are there are given the proper care and opportunities to shower, et cetera.

Mr. Elsalhy: Mr. Speaker, in the eye of the law remanded individuals are innocent people until they're proven guilty. Even those who are eventually convicted still have a right to be treated with dignity, and they should be offered assistance with regard to their physical disability, as stipulated in the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. Recently in the Edmonton Remand a disabled person in a wheelchair was forced to endure terrible conditions due to inadequate support. Dragging oneself across the floor and climbing onto the toilet, having to do the same to get in and out of a bathtub surely meet the definition of a loss of dignity, contrary to what the hon. minister has just said, a violation of human rights. To the minister of tourism, parks, and culture: will this minister commit to investigating the conditions at the Edmonton Remand Centre to ensure that disabled inmates are not discriminated against because of their disability and that they get the support they need to live with dignity while they're incarcerated?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond. The Member for Edmonton-McClung has a right to be concerned. However, I would need to look at the details and get some of the information. Then I'd be in a better position to respond.

We also have the Human Rights Commission, where the member could lodge a complaint if he feels he needs to go that route.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Solicitor General. As the minister responsible for the new Edmonton Remand Centre and its design, the fate of any disabled individuals who may be housed there is in his hands. It falls to him to ensure that the new remand centre is designed so that disabled people don't have to crawl on the floor to go to the bathroom or use the shower, that their laundry is looked after, especially those with ostomies or bowel or bladder problems, and, basically, to design a more disability-friendly site. Will the minister assure us that this new site is going to have a percentage of units and washrooms that are wheelchair accessible and that there is going to be some provision to assist those with disabilities with their cleaning and housing needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the hon. member that the new facility will be designed to properly look after all of the folks that we're holding there.

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

Mountain Pine Beetle Effect on Watershed

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I read reports from British Columbia of a study linking the mountain pine beetle with increased flooding threats in affected watersheds. My question

is directed to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Is the minister aware of and concerned about the findings of this report?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed, this report is timely and important to Alberta, but the report highlights, if anything, the importance of taking pre-emptive action to harvest these highly susceptible, older pine stands before the pine beetle takes effect in these. So I can tell you briefly about the B.C. study. It was based on a computer model of an interior B.C. tributary system, and what it found was that in a pine beetle infested area the threat for flooding, the damage to the watershed, and the resulting threat to flooding were greater from trees being killed than from logging.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I concur with the hon. minister. As a professional forester in the province of Alberta I agree with him that that's really the only strategy that works.

I'm concerned about the report though, and I'm wondering whether the minister concurs with the study's finding that hydrological assessments are required in watersheds that are heavily affected by the beetle?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I agree completely with that. Surprise. That's why in Alberta, unlike British Columbia, we've required hydrological assessments as part of forestry management plans for the last 20 years.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the minister could enlighten us on what other actions the department is taking to ensure that watersheds are protected from beetle impacts in the province of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to report that the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development has recently hired an additional full-time hydrologist to focus on this very area. We have strengthened our ability to assess the relationship between watersheds and pine beetle to put us at the forefront of all Canadian provinces in this area.

Thank you.

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

Capital Cost Allowance Program

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Official Opposition has long demanded a public review of the royalty structure to determine whether or not Albertans are receiving a fair share of their resource. Unfortunately, the Minister of Finance, who is overseeing this review, continues to fire shots over the panel's bow before it has even begun its work. He continues to make

leading statements on matters related directly to this review. My question is for the Minister of Finance. Does the minister have reports or studies that project what financial losses, part of what he called the one-two-three punch, will be for the oil sands companies in light of the federal government's decision to phase out the accelerated capital cost allowance? If he does have them, will he table them in this House?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would be more than happy to table them in the House. We are currently tabulating exactly what potential the accelerated capital cost allowance has of affecting our industry. We have to remember that in Canada the oil and gas industry is an incredibly important component of a very vibrant economy. Our Premier always talks about that if it wasn't for Alberta, the growth in Canada would almost be flatlined. This is a very important issue. It's an issue that we have to stand up for on behalf of our industry. My biggest fear is what the hon. member just said, the one-two-three punch: income trust, accelerated capital cost allowance, and potential climate change.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister concede that by telling the panel members to take into account the ACCA phase-out when determining their final recommendations, he has effectively undermined their independence and the mandate of the panel? And this is the panel that, I have mentioned earlier, Albertans have so long been calling for.

Dr. Oberg: Actually, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would have seen the press releases and listened to what I had said when I first announced the panel, I had actually asked them to look at the accelerated capital cost allowance at that time, and that was some two months ago. That was before we even knew what was in the federal budget. So this is something that we have asked them to look at: how taxes and royalties in general are affecting this industry.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I've long suspected that the minister knew what was in the federal budget long before the rest of us did.

My last question is also for the Minister of Finance. Does the minister have studies or reports that project the potential savings for oil sands companies who now invest in green technology, and will he table those reports in this Legislature?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, on response to the hon. member's first part of his question, I wish I did know what was in the federal budget, but unfortunately we didn't.

I'd be more than happy to do that. We're currently tabulating exactly what the accelerated capital cost allowance will do on our green projects. But we do have to remember that when we're talking, for example, about the CO₂ pipeline, that's about a billion and a half dollars versus a hundred and some billion dollars that are currently projected to be invested in the oil sands, so there is a difference in magnitude of scale on that. We thank them on the green side but not necessarily on the accelerated capital cost allowance for oil sands.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move to the next order of the Routine, just to let you know, there were 92 questions and

answers today.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a fine group of students and their teachers and parents from St. Mary's in Taber. We have with that group teachers Mr. Pat Pyne, Ms Alissa Henriette and parents and helpers Mrs. Kathy Collett, Mr. Mike Cudrak, Mr. Ed Derksen, Mr. Tony Fiedler, Ms Connie Green, Mrs. Sheila Heal, Mrs. Kathy Knibb, Mrs. Audra Ness, Mr. Joe Smith, Mrs. Judy Strojwas, and Ms Jody Green. It's a real pleasure to have visitors come this far and see the excitement that they have in wanting to know about the democratic process. Mr Pyne has made many trips to Edmonton from Taber to share this with his students, and I look forward to meeting them after. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 1,044 people asking the government to take immediate steps to halt further closures by the Edmonton public school board by amending the closure of schools regulation to provide parents and other community members with a period of not less than 18 months to formulate a revitalization plan, to strike a task force comprised of trustees and qualified members of the public to review and make recommendations regarding the Edmonton public school board's current school closure process, and encourage ongoing consultation and partnerships between parents, communities, and municipal and provincial agencies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got a petition of a much larger group. These are the citizens from Edmonton-Manning who are supporting the construction of a new Edmonton remand centre but not in northeast Edmonton. There are 218 in this group.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to give notice that at the appropriate time I will move that written questions and motions for return appearing on today's Order Paper will stand and retain their places.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to file with the Assembly five copies of my letter to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in response to Sessional Paper 89/2007.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness, I wish to file the appropriate number of copies of responses to written questions 33 and 34, which were asked by the hon. leader of the third party.

Also, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry I wish to table the required number of copies to written question number 27.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter from Karen Baxter, the fund development coordinator for the Western Guide and Assistance Dog Society, providing information about this organization, which was founded in 1996.

The second is a letter from Erick and Katherine Guevara of Calgary regarding the issue of child care in Alberta. "At a time when the population is growing and the high cost of living demands more childcare programs, it is strange that support for all children 0-12 with appropriate benefits is lacking and is leading to crises in childcare."

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table eight letters and appropriate copies regarding the possible closure of High Park school, heartfelt letters expressing their desire to have the school stay open from Beth George; Gary Kotyk; Ron Hayter, a councillor of the city of Edmonton; Kathy Paradis; Jesse Sorensen; Judy McInroy; Alexandria Woycenko; and Gloria Krischanowski.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings, the first recognizing the fantastic accomplishments of the Calgary-Varsity William Aberhart Trojan girls' senior wrestling team that won the city this past week. They did extremely well.

My second, Mr. Speaker, is a copy of four letters with the appropriate number of copies regarding the possible closure of High Park school. These letters of concern come from Kristine Peters, Jerry and Kassie Kissel, Arnold Hickey, and Karen Johnson.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, the first being four more letters regarding the potential closure of High Park school, and these letters are from Donna Kelly, Jennifer Reeve, Hans-Juergen Kirstein, and Roberta Paradis.

My second tabling this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is the requisite number of copies of a document entitled Edmonton: Going from Good to Great. It includes the 2006 annual report of the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation. I and several of my colleagues from the Legislature were fortunate enough to attend their annual luncheon today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Anything in there about the Oilers?

Mr. R. Miller: I think the document is silent about the Oilers.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is the requisite number of copies of the University of Alberta: Celebration of Teaching & Learning program book, which is a wonderful celebration ceremony which I attended. It took place on Friday, September 8, 2006.

The second one is eight more letters from concerned parents who are writing to us and to the Minister of Education with respect to the possible closure of High Park school. These letters are from Melodie Stewart, Frank and Marion Kapuscinski, Harry and Muriel Grant, Josef Messmer, Alec Kelly, Lisa Henkel, Constable Troy Jacobsen, and Nikki Andrea.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning Public Interest Alberta, a nonpartisan public interest advocacy organization, issued a discussion paper called *Where To from Here: A Vision and Plan for Post-secondary Education in Alberta*. I'm happy to table five copies of that paper.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got a couple of groups of tablings, one here is two letters from the Unity Centre calling for more affordable housing in northeast Edmonton.

Some more tablings requesting this Assembly to support that the accused killer of Joshua John Hunt be sentenced and tried as an adult due to the nature of the crime, his past criminal history, and that he's close to the age of 18.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to do two different tablings. The first tabling is letters and the appropriate number of copies from parents from High Park school regarding the possible closure. The letters today are from Brayden Kelly, Genène Elder, Cheryl Highfield, and Sylvia Yurko.

A second group are from the same school, concerned about the possible closure of High Park school. Those letters are from Evelyn Kelly, Doug Billey, Nickolaus Hee, and Kim Patten.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the interest of all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly the CO₂ Monitoring and Storage Project report, that is going on in Weyburn. I referred to that yesterday during second reading debate on Bill 3. I would urge all members to please have a look at this.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to section 4(2) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act I am pleased to table in the Assembly the annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer for the calendar year 2005. The report includes the office's financial statements for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2005.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

2:30

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In honour of the International Day for the Elimination of Racism I would like to table an inspiring

statement released by the Canadian Labour Congress on this issue. I hope that all members have a chance to look at the statement and reflect on the role each of us plays in fighting prejudice and discrimination.

Thanks.

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. Hancock, Minister of Health and Wellness, the Alberta Cancer Board annual report 2005-2006; the College of Chiropractors of Alberta annual review 2006 and financial statements dated June 30, 2006; the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta 2006 annual report; pursuant to the Health Disciplines Act the Health Disciplines Board annual report January 1, 2005, to December 31, 2005; pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act the Alberta Mental Health Board 2005-2006 annual report; pursuant to the Health Professions Act Aspen regional health annual report 2005-2006, Capital health annual report 2005-2006, Northern Lights health region annual report 2005-2006, Peace Country health annual report 2005-2006; pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act the Alberta College of Social Workers annual report 2005; the Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists 2005 annual report; Alberta Dental Association and College annual report 2006; the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta 2005-2006 annual report and financial statements for the year ended September 30, 2006; the College of Alberta Psychologists 2005-2006 annual report and auditor's report as at March 31, 2006; the College of Dietitians of Alberta annual report 2005-2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Lindsay, Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, victims' programs status report 2005-2006.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 20

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to move Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007, in Committee of the Whole.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Just for Albertans who aren't familiar with the supplementary supply estimates procedure, more detail is provided than is provided in the interim supply estimates, so we have more than just a single line item. In some cases we have as many as six or seven specific amounts listed, and we have a sense in a general manner of where this money is going to.

Under Advanced Education and Technology for expense and equipment/inventory purchases \$107 million has been committed. This is one of the larger commitments to supplementary supply. A question I would have for the hon. representative of the Treasury Board is if he can break this down a little bit further with regard to the amount that is going to, for example, the infrastructure – for

building, for classroom space, for seats – versus the amount that would be passed along to research, and I'll get into that in greater detail.

Agriculture and Food is receiving an additional \$50 million. Finance is receiving almost that same amount, \$46,570,000.

Health and Wellness, which continues to be one of the major expenditures of the province, will receive \$147 million.

Municipal Affairs and Housing, by comparison, is just receiving \$42 million. When I go through the various departments, I'll ask about what portion of that is going to incent affordable housing building.

Infrastructure and Transportation is receiving one of the smaller amounts. That's \$500,000. Considering the delays in projects, that seems like a very small amount of supplementary transfer.

Service Alberta is to receive \$530,000, and in Monday's discussion of the need for a consumer advocate a lot of responsibility was placed at the feet of Service Alberta. I'm not sure that that amount of transfer will provide the due diligence and enforcement that we would hope to receive from Service Alberta with the loss of the concept of a consumer advocate.

In total, the amount of expense and equipment/inventory purchases under the supplementary supply act is \$393,516,000, a number very similar to the relief that is being provided for the municipality of Wood Buffalo. It's a relatively small amount in terms of the interim supply budget, which is actually approximately \$10 billion.

From the capital investment – as I've pointed out previously, the capital fund – which contains approximately \$6 billion, a small amount is being transferred, \$530,000, leaving a considerable amount which could be put towards reducing infrastructure deficits, building schools, and a variety of worthwhile projects.

With regard to the general revenue fund again I'm pleased to note that Advanced Education and Technology score largely. As I indicated at the beginning of my presentation, we get into more details, which I very much appreciate, and we get some of the breakdowns; for example, for postsecondary institutions. The enrolment planning envelope receives approximately \$214 million, almost \$215 million actually. Of that, the supplementary appropriation is \$31,700,000.

Now, we know that postsecondary institutions are in desperate need of increased space. In Calgary alone over the last two years 25 per cent of eligible students who had the appropriate marks and could afford the high tuition increases in this province had no access. So this small amount of transfer is not going to assist tremendously in increasing enrolment, as is suggested by this enrolment planning envelope.

With regard to infrastructure for postsecondary facilities this is an area where I would like to see a much greater transfer both in the interim supply, which I'll be speaking to later, and also in the supplementary supply because the supplementary appropriation here is only \$69,100,000, and this is a concern I have because our future is determined by the quality of students we produce, whether it's from technical colleges or academic universities. It is interesting to note that Mount Royal College has recently been granted certain status as a university in the specific area of nursing. Hopefully, there will be support from the government and also, in terms of governance, further appropriate development at the University of Calgary.

2:40

I commented earlier about research, and I notice that the research innovation capacity is \$2 million. That seems like an extremely small amount given the amount of research that universities are expected and required to carry out.

The information continues with regard to ministry support services, and basically I see, in thousands of dollars, the equivalent of a million dollars. In terms of program delivery and support I gather that the government didn't consider this an area that was in need of support because there's no budget line for that item.

Postsecondary facilities infrastructure. Again, this is an area, considering that the University of Calgary just last year celebrated its 40th anniversary. There are a number of buildings at the University of Calgary which are basically falling apart. A good example of that would be the old arts and admin building. There is a dramatic contrast when you go into the accompanying Haskayne School of Business. It's a considerably more attractive and well-supported facility, largely due to the fact that the Haskayne family donated a large amount, for which the University of Calgary is very appreciative.

In the details of the supplementary estimates for Agriculture and Food I note that Canadian agricultural income stabilization – in other words, thanks to the federal government's CAIS program – \$50 million is being transferred. A number of farmers are very dependent on that CAIS program. One of the areas that I would like to see further transfers for in these supplementary estimates would be supplying farmers with a kind of equivalent of a workmen's compensation program so that farm labourers and farmers themselves and their families could be supported in the tragic event of an accident. So this is an area where I would suggest that more money could be provided in terms of supplementary estimates.

One of the areas that I am concerned about with regard to the agricultural industry is the oversight. For example, a number of farmers for years have been incented by this government to take on alternate forms of agriculture, including such questionable practices as elk and deer ranching. Previously, we know that with the onset of BSE the testing for diseases was extremely limited, and one of the reasons that we didn't find out about our first outbreak of BSE was the fact that there weren't enough testers, and CWD and testing for it was being taken up. So this is one area I would like to see more supplementary supply being extended to, and that's the testing program.

It's still in the very early stages, but my hope is that with possibly some of the money put into agriculture and some of the money put into postsecondary research, we will be able to test animals for CWD and BSE while they're still alive so that we don't end up with what personal members of my family have experienced, losing their entire herd of Angus cattle because the animals couldn't be tested while they were still living. I realize that we have to take drastic measures to ensure that the spread of disease is eliminated. I would support research into live testing, and I know that the countries to which we export the meat would be very appreciative of that as well.

With regard to Finance, treasury management has received an increase, most likely because a new department has been created to oversee Finance in terms of the Treasury Board. I'm not quite sure why that extra oversight is required when we're talking about eliminating a number of ministries. I'm appreciative of the fact that the government did reduce the number of ministries, but this was a new ministry that was added, and possibly the minister can explain to me some of the expenses associated with creating this new ministry.

Investment, treasury and risk management. Today in Public Accounts and for the last two weeks in the House I have talked a tremendous amount about risk management in the form of the risks associated with P3s: private, for-profit at public expense projects. I've also brought out the fact that despite the government's assurances with regard to risk management that there would be no cost overruns in P3 projects, it has already been noted that there was an

almost \$37 million overrun on the southeast leg of the Anthony Henday. I've already spoken about the concerns I have with the ring road in Calgary and the associated expenses.

With regard to Health and Wellness, it comes as no surprise, given the fact that the government reached an agreement with the Alberta Medical Association, that there would be supplementary monies going to this area. This is an area that I very much support in terms of the transfer of funding because in Calgary alone – and I'm sure the story repeats itself throughout the province – we are losing general practitioners. We're losing front-line staff. In Calgary we lost 41. I know that, for example, in the Wood Buffalo region there is a desperate need for doctors, to the point where doctors are being offered \$1,200 a day. They're being incented to help out the Fort McMurray circumstance. Of course, this is just an interim band-aid situation, but supplementary supply is a form of sort of meeting the need now and making the appropriate transfers.

Another area, of course, that is of concern is the management of the health services, and I look forward to the fact that Public Accounts will be calling before it the two large health regions in Calgary and Edmonton, Capital health and the Calgary health region. Also in Public Accounts today I suggested that I would like to provide support for the Wood Buffalo region, which is experiencing tremendous growth, and of course south in Grande Prairie there is a need for hospital and health support and infrastructure housing.

This province is booming, but there are expenses associated with that boom, and one is the social deficit. So when I note that \$147 million was added to the amount, I'm appreciative of the fact. I think it's money well spent, although again the detail is not quite clear. I notice that in line 3 on page 24 it says Assistance to Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Mr. Chase: I agree, but unfortunately there is no line item; there's no supplementary appropriation for this extremely important area.

2:50

Again, I'm very pleased with the discussions that occurred today in Public Accounts about the desire to have a very strong, financially effective, and supportive AADAC operating in the province. It has been noted that the AADAC organization, which deals with addictions, receives only 3 per cent of the money that is raised in terms of gambling and lotteries. It seems like it's an extremely small amount to cure the problem of gambling addiction. Of course, of all the money that we receive from alcohol taxes, I would like to see a tremendous amount transferred to the AADAC program in terms of prevention. Just adding new bells and whistles on VLTs and slots does not dampen the addicted individual's enthusiasm.

In terms of Municipal Affairs and Housing, I indicated at the beginning my concerns that there is very little money being added under supplementary appropriation. I note that the \$42.846 million is a total amount. There's a very small amount under housing services. It says rent supplement, and it shows a 2,000 figure here. Of course, we're talking in the thousands so approximately \$2 million for rent supplements. I keep referring sometimes to thousands when I should actually be noting that the book indicates that this is in thousands of dollars.

The Alberta Liberals have been calling for an emergent support in the form of rent supplements and subsidies. A number of people on AISH and on fixed incomes, who are supposedly not required to expend more than 30 per cent of their total earnings on rent, are being forced to pay up to two-thirds of their meagre \$1,000 AISH amount on rent, and that leaves very little for food or other necessities, such as transportation. So the area of supplementary supply for housing, especially to initiate affordable housing, is an area where I would definitely like to see more money spent.

Thank you. I'll look forward to rejoining.

Mr. Snelgrove: One of the things the hon. member talked about was the \$530,000 in Infrastructure. That's simply a transfer from Infrastructure to Service Alberta for the planes, so it was not supplementary spending in Infrastructure.

Mr. Chairman, it doesn't really matter to me if we want to debate Bill 25 or Bill 20 or rent controls. It's the hon. member's time, but most of what he talked about wasn't really relative to supplementary supply. They may be addressed under Bill 25, interim supply, and the budget, but the elk farming and rent controls and P3s – it doesn't matter to me, but that misinformation about the \$530,000 was directly related to my department. The other ministers may want to comment on this.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak on Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007, in Committee of the Whole. This is an estimates that's including capital for postsecondary institutions, agricultural assistance programs, housing initiatives and programs for the homeless, and funds for physician services. It's money that's viewed as urgently needed, or emergent.

I'm just thinking how nice it would be if a lot of the Children's Services agencies could have the same opportunity to bridge the gap in their budgets with supplementary supply, as our government does. These agencies need predictable and stable funding. I noticed that Children's Services is not asking for supplementary supply. I wonder why some areas are asking for additional funds but Children's Services is not.

As I look at this bill, which is asking for additional money from the last budget to the tune of \$393,516,000, this is the second time in my term here where I have experienced this request for supplementary money. In a sense it's like signing a blank cheque because we don't get much detail about where the money is going. I know that they're spending on specific ministries, but there's no real breakdown of how much goes where and the full details about where they're going to spend money or whether they've already spent some of it, as a matter of fact.

First of all, I'd like to talk from the point of view of my own constituency. Some of these things are being addressed here in supplementary supply, and I'm really happy to see that. We have a grave concern in Edmonton-Mill Woods about the waiting times at hospitals, and this is a shortage of doctors and nursing staff that's a real and ongoing concern.

I hear about the roads in urban and rural areas, I guess. It's not just in Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Another real concern I have, though, is about what I'll call the social deficit, with low-income people and more and more middle-income people feeling that they are now low income. We should think about these people who are earning less than \$20,000 and who are finding that their rent costs are going up astronomically and unreasonably. They're concerned about electricity rates. Of course, there are some that are facing homelessness. These are issues that are of grave concern in my constituency.

Environment is also a big issue, and I'm glad that the government is taking some steps to address environmental issues.

Another thing that is a big concern all over this province is the problem with addictions. There are not enough beds for detox or treatment, yet we're not asking for supplementary money to help with that area and that issue.

The purpose of supplementary supply is to deal with emergent and emergency situations. So I was looking at this and looking 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. My question is: why does this have to be done in supplementary spending? Why could it not have been done earlier, last spring in the budget, or in the upcoming budget? I'm not sure why that is. I also am wondering what capital projects are being funded with the \$66.3 million that's been requested. Another question: is the \$34.5 million grant from the access to the future fund, or is it from general revenues? If it's from general revenues, why hasn't the access to the future fund started paying out yet? I believe that that is what it was set up for.

Looking at the Department of Finance, there's \$7.07 million to reimburse public-sector pension plans, research endowment funds, the scholarship fund, and other minor funds for investment losses. I'm wondering how it happened that we have investment losses when we are in a wonderful, incredibly hot economic market or economic environment right now. What actions were taken against the managers of those funds? What hard questions were asked about the investment decisions that resulted in a loss? It's hard to imagine that in this economy we'd be losing money like that.

Additionally, with Finance 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. We know that we have nearly \$7 billion already in an unfunded liability to the teachers' pension plan, which we press this government about fairly consistently. We're continually told time and time again that it's coming, something is going to be addressed with that, but we don't see the movement on that. So this is a situation where taxpayers are funding this to the tune of some \$45 billion over the lifetime of this project as opposed to dealing with the \$7 billion liability right now. It would be a good deal, I believe, for taxpayers if we could look at this unfunded liability today and get rid of it.

3:00

I'm hoping that this is going to be addressed in the upcoming budget. Again, the question is: why was there \$40 million needed in the middle of a budget year? If there's \$40 million for that particular unfunded liability, what about all the other unfunded liabilities that the government has, certainly the largest of which is the teachers' unfunded liability fund?

I look at the Health and Wellness department getting \$147 million for the higher than budgeted cost of physicians' services, and I believe there's an urgent need for that. There's probably really good justification for that request, but I'd like to ask: how will the money be allocated? Can the minister provide a breakdown of how the money for physicians' services will actually be spent, and I'm wondering why that money wasn't included in the 2006 budget. Could these costs not be predicted? How is it possible to under-budget by \$147 million? Then, I guess, always we have to ask what measures are being taken to be sure that Albertans are getting value for their money.

I look at the total of \$42.846 million going to various issues surround housing affordability. This is an emergent issue, and it makes sense to me that we are asking for this now.

I have concerns that some things are not included, like Children's Services: the need for more child care spaces, so acute in this province; the need for child care staff; the need for adequate funding for our agencies, who are struggling with all kinds of stressors these days. I'm looking at the need for predictable, stable funding for FCSS agencies and the AASCF agencies, where over and over we're hearing that it's hard to function with the tyranny of project-based funding and the uncertainty of knowing what's coming next month in terms of help and the amazing amount of energies that have to go into fundraising so they can provide the programs that we know are needed for the vulnerable in our society.

I would hope that we won't be seeing supplementary estimates anymore. I think that a good job of budgeting would make the need for this extra request for money not necessary. I would like to see that we can actually do some serious thinking and strategic planning, long-term planning so that there is no longer a need to be asking for supplemental money.

Thank you.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour for me to stand and speak on Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) bill. I haven't had a chance so far in second reading, and I've been following the debate in *Hansard*.

I just want to speak for a few minutes about the supplementary supply under Municipal Affairs and Housing. It was, of course, a privilege for me to be on the Affordable Housing Task Force and to go around the province and listen to people and their concerns, so immediately my attention was riveted on this portion of the supplementary supply.

The \$2 million to fund 600 additional units for the rent supplement program, of course, is an excellent move. I think that more is required because that program is such a good program. It enables people with low income to be able to move into apartments where there's a supplement to the 30 per cent of their income that is put into the rent, so the landlord receives a cheque directly from the government to provide that extra money. Given the fact that our low-income people are really struggling in this province, in many, many cases I don't know how else they would be able to find a place to live.

We are facing a housing crisis in this province, and all that we can do to help low-income people, especially on the income side of things, not just the supply side, is something that we should seriously look at. The problem is that low-income people, not just people who are on AISH or receiving money from Alberta Works but low-income people who are actually working but whose salaries don't provide enough income to provide for rents given the rise in rents in this province, need help. I applaud the government for at least making this step, and I hope that there will be more support for the rent supplement program in the future.

Now, I still want to make a comment about the next line, the \$15,173,000 for the affordable housing program to increase the availability of affordable housing units in the province. I believe that this is a part of the affordable housing trust program, but the money referred to here is actually the money that the provincial government has received from the federal government, the one-time federal funding of \$81.1 million which has been provided to Alberta over three years. I think in answer to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, who is our housing critic in the Official Opposition, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing did respond that this, indeed, was federal money, and that's the explanation for the sentence here, "This spending would be offset by a transfer from the federal government."

Well, this is a bit misleading because here's an announcement of money that's going into this affordable housing trust program, but it actually is federal money. Where's the provincial money? Shouldn't this federal money be matched by provincial money? That would be a more interesting announcement so that we would really be clear that the provincial government is committed to this program, not just using federal money but actually adding more money. So instead of \$81 million over three years if the province actually matched that money, we'd have \$162 million over three years, and that would be, indeed, good news in terms of developing

more affordable housing in this province. As I said before, we have just a crisis in housing in this province, as all of our task members heard, and we just have to be vigilant now and make the right kinds of decisions.

Of course, the minister will wait and respond to the task force. The task force report has already been delivered to him. I would like to see that report become public much earlier than sometime in May; nevertheless, we need to have the government moving in the direction of more support for affordable housing.

I could say exactly the same thing on the next item, \$16,142,000 for the off-reserve aboriginal housing program to increase the availability of housing for aboriginal Albertans living off-reserve. So this, again, is a reference to the off-reserve aboriginal housing trust, which was a one-time federal funding of \$48.4 million that will be provided for Alberta over three years. My understanding is that that federal money actually has already come and is sitting in the treasury and awaits distribution, so this is an announcement that \$16 million of that money will be distributed. That's great, but what about the rest, and what about, again, matching? What about an announcement that the province is actually going to match this federal money also?

3:10

I am very impressed by various aboriginal groups in the province, including Métis settlements and the groups that are concerned and the nonprofit organizations that are ready to move to help build this housing for aboriginal people. It's been a program that's worked in the past, and it will work in the future. But I don't see the commitment of the provincial government here reflected in these numbers. I mean, it's fine to transfer the federal money on, but what about matching this money so that we can really indeed deal with the crisis in housing in this province?

Those are my thoughts on the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) bill. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 20, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 20 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Carried.

Bill 25

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007

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

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

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to rise and participate in debate on the interim supply bill in Committee of

the Whole. Some of my remarks are going to be somewhat repetitive from the last two years as this is my third time participating in deliberations on interim supply.

In my opinion, as I have stated before, interim supply should really be minimal. It should be for emergencies or unforeseen circumstances, Mr. Chairman, and certainly not in the billions of dollars and not before each and every budget, each and every year. So the question that I basically keep asking of this House is: what is really the purpose of a budget if the government cannot stick to a budget?

Also, the issue of how late the budget usually arrives: typically one would think that a budget has sort of a fixed date, a fixed expectancy date, when we anticipate that it might be coming down. Then year after year we are faced with a situation where the budget is delayed, and sometimes it's delayed more than one time in the same interval, or in the same year.

Interim supply, by my definition, really means a cash advance. Mr. Chairman, take your credit card debt, for example. We all know that cash advances are the worst kind of transaction. I personally as an individual and in my family, in my household, never do cash advances. We budget, and we stick to our plan, and we never run out of money this way. So why doesn't this government budget as an individual or as a family? Why don't they use the same methodology as I use in my own household?

Also, having interim supply tells me as an individual and as a member of this esteemed Assembly that there is no plan. There is no overall plan where we know that we're going to need this money, and it should be built into the budget, and budgets come on time, and it's really simple and not in the tens of billions of dollars.

Another question which is really puzzling in some way. In 2004, just to use one example, interim supply was \$5.5 billion. It is almost double this amount this year when we're asking for in excess of \$10 billion for this fiscal year, 2007-2008. Why this big jump? I mean, I don't think the cost of running the government or the cost of conducting government business has increased by this amount, and I don't think it's also a factor of the fact that, you know, this year the budget is a little later than in 2004, for example. How much of a delay I don't think explains this big discrepancy.

Now, having said this, I recognize and appreciate the argument that the wheels of government have to turn and that our civil servants need to be paid in the interim until the actual budget is introduced. The question is: why is the budget more than one month late? Customarily we have expected budgets to be announced in this Assembly or in this province sometime in mid-March. Why is this budget coming on the 19th of April instead? Couldn't we have avoided interim supply altogether or greatly minimized the amount by being on time? That's the question.

Another question, Mr. Chairman – again, this is a layman asking – there seems to be an apparent conflict or duplication where now we have a Minister of Finance, or a Provincial Treasurer in the old definition, and then we also have a President of the Treasury Board. So role clarification, I think, is warranted. We need to know what each of them really does.

Mr. Flaherty: Good luck.

Mr. Elsalhy: My hon. colleague from St. Albert is saying, "Good luck," and I think that, yes, we need more than luck to understand this unique situation where we have two people entrusted to dispense and expend taxpayers' money and why we need two ministers with two huge departments, lots of staff, and making two minister's salaries, for example.

Remember, Mr. Chairman, when the former Premier created a ministry for restructuring and government efficiency following the 2004 election, adding to the government bureaucracy and trying to convince us that we needed an extra department to make government more efficient, I questioned this, and many of my colleagues in the Official Opposition questioned this. We called a spade a spade, and we said that it was such a colossal waste of money and that it wasn't making government any more efficient. But the decision stayed, and we had a minister with staff, making a minister's salary, and also in turn a large transition allowance when he is no longer an MLA, all at taxpayers' expense and with no apparent benefit.

After the last Tory leadership we were told the good news, that the size of cabinet had been reduced, but we didn't really tackle the issue of duplication or conflict, redundancy. We have two ministers likely going to share some of the responsibility or going to have overlaps, and they might be at times rowing in opposite directions or at least pulling on those purse strings in opposite directions. Then you add the hon. Premier. The hon. Premier has a lot to do with financial decisions, and from time to time he would offer an edict, or a decree, as to how things should go, and now you have an interesting triangle, Mr. Chairman, unfolding before your eyes. You have a President of the Treasury Board, you have a Finance minister, and then you also have a Premier, who all contribute to that discussion on financial matters.

Anyway, I'm not going to go through each of the 20 entries in this interim supply schedule.

Mr. Chase: You're leaving it for me.

Mr. Elsalhy: I am leaving it for my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity because he's better versed in all things financial, but I need to focus on maybe one or two of them, and I know that other members have raised the same concerns at earlier stages of debate.

First, I wanted to talk about Municipal Affairs and Housing. They're getting, if I remember correctly, about \$235 million. That's a decent chunk of coin. Hopefully, part of this would be to immediately and decisively look at issues surrounding affordable housing. What is more important to me is rent affordability. My argument, Mr. Chairman, is that for every man, woman, or child who is on the street now, who is already homeless, there are probably 10 or 11 waiting or ready to join them. So rent affordability to me is more important. It's more of an issue. The ones who are on the verge of becoming homeless outnumber those who are already on the street by about 10 to 1. So I'm hoping that some of this money is going to immediately go toward programs to offer rent subsidies, to offer relocation allowances, to increase the supply of units that are available.

3:20

Mr. Chairman, I am sure that you agree with me that the current boom is placing a lot of difficulty on Alberta families, people on low income or fixed income. The term "homeless" now is not just people who are on the street living in cardboard boxes or in shelters. We have people who are living with other people, living in basements, renting a couch at somebody's home. We have people living in their cars. I don't think that waiting for the findings of that task force that toured the province – what I'm saying is that we can't wait till the end of June to hear what the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is willing or ready or prepared to do. What we need is action right now and action two months from now and action six months from now and action that keeps going because this problem is only going to escalate with this type of market that we're living in. Municipal Affairs and Housing: I hope that some of this money is going to be put to use immediately.

Second, a combined comment on both the Solicitor General and Public Security and Justice and Attorney General. Justice is getting \$119 million, and the Solicitor General is getting something like \$600 million, if I do the math. Between them I think, again, that some of this money should immediately go to funding and providing resources for front-line police officers. Our mayors of the cities and towns, the Reeves of the smaller communities, police chiefs across the province are asking for better per capita funding, and they're asking for increased training and programs to avert crime at the front end or upstream, if you will, Mr. Chairman. Hopefully, some of this money should go toward these programs.

Today there was an announcement on sort of a crime prevention task force. It's something that has been announced, and it's going to be a nine-member panel chaired by a member of this House. While task forces are useful and while they are beneficial, sometimes we have too many of them. I think the answer to our crime issue is not to have another road show where people submit their complaints or their concerns. We've already heard these, and it's not that we are likely going to hear anything new. I think the message is loud and clear. We need more resources, we need more funding for police services, and we also need to build community assets.

What do I mean by "community assets"? If you use the model in B.C., for example, Mr. Chairman, it's basically engaging young kids and keeping young kids busy and keeping young kids away from the streets and away from bad influence. What you're doing is opening doors for them to engage them in the community, to make them use their time a little more constructively, and to prevent them from falling prey to things like drugs, illicit substances, gang violence, all that stuff. So to build community assets, offer kids scouting programs, offer them sports programs, arts programs, get them busy in their communities helping clean up the community, helping with, for example, Crime Watch. They can help with, you know, a community fair or a community barbecue or raising funds for charity or stuff like this. You add to their feeling of self-worth, but you also get them away from those negative influences that might actually get them in trouble down the road.

If you ask the mayor of Edmonton, if you ask Mayor Bronckner in Calgary, if you ask the mayor of St. Albert, they're all likely going to tell you that asset building in the community is the way to do it plus increased funding for police services. If you ask Chief Boyd here in Edmonton about what he thinks – and he comes from Ontario, and he has spoken to members of the opposition and, notably, the hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora about this – he would tell you that asset building in the community, while it might cost a little bit up front, will save a lot of money and grief at the other end. If you, Mr. Chairman, or the hon. Minister of Justice or the Solicitor General speak to the RCMP in Richmond, B.C., for example, they're going to likely repeat my message and say: "Yes, it works. We've had it for a few years, and it is proving to be very useful."

So I'm hoping that some of this money in this interim supply would be used to really think outside the box and to try to do things that people are asking for. Having the task force is great, fine, but we could probably cut down a lot of money and time commitment by just going to the root of the problem, the cause of the problem, which is that we need more police officers on the streets.

This task force is going to cost \$1.5 million, and if you do the simple math, Mr. Chairman, \$100,000 would get you a good, strong, well-trained police officer on the street. So we could actually get 15 more police officers on our streets policing our communities for this amount of money. Instead, we're doing a repetitive consultative process, which is likely going to take some time and then yield a

report which is likely going to sit on some shelf collecting dust, and in the interim we haven't really done anything to address the issue. So I think that a better use of this \$1.5 million would have been to just go ahead and hire 15 more police officers, maybe another 15 six months from now, another 15 a year from now, and so on. This is what people are asking for, and I think this is the proper way to do it if it were up to me.

Anyway, I'm not going to take more of the committee's time, Mr. Chairman. I understand that some of my colleagues and some people across the way are eager to jump up and speak because they feel so passionately about interim supply, and I thank you for this opportunity.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciated the opportunity last week to begin discussions on interim supply. I must admit that I felt somewhat shortchanged because I knew that there were a number of members who had not had the opportunity to deliver their throne speeches, and I did not want to compromise their time at that point.

One of the circumstances that I always attempt to begin my discussions with is setting the scene. Again, this is from 34 years of being a public school teacher. For those people who are concerned about interim financing and how the government operates, we're back to the document, the very thin document, that has basically one-line items mostly in the multimillion dollar categories.

With regard to Advanced Education and Technology I've already talked about the state of decay in terms of infrastructure at the University of Calgary, but I want to talk about a very proactive group that's connected with the university, and that's the Shaganappi Trail advisory group, that consists of members from the communities that surround the south Shaganappi Trail, which kind of bisects the Calgary-Varsity area. There are representatives from the University of Calgary, representatives of the Calgary Foothills hospital, representatives of the research park, which is across the road from and will hopefully with infrastructure support have a direct linkage to the University of Calgary. It represents groups such as Parkdale, Montgomery, and of course my constituency of Calgary-Varsity.

This is a very wonderful organization, to which there is government representation in the form of Infrastructure. There's also representation from the city of Calgary. What it does is discuss concerns where one particular organization might affect directly that of another area, and of course with the University of Calgary desperately in need of expansion to meet the government's plan of 60,000 new spaces by 2020, there is a lot of desire to build.

One of the areas where I would hope that some of this \$728 million, almost \$729 million, is going toward would be the west campus. There are some very exciting plans being drawn up for the west campus, basically, which now has given a fair amount of space to the Children's hospital, the new and very exciting Calgary Children's hospital. It's also worth noting because of the close proximity that the Ronald McDonald House will be opening up this coming Friday. That's a wonderful facility that sort of sits between the university and the Children's hospital and will provide parents and children, of course, with a tremendous amount of support.

3:30

One of the ongoing concerns that's brought forward from the south Shaganappi is the delineation of responsibilities between the city and the province. The city is very pleased that the province, through its infrastructure department, is widening highway 1, the

Trans-Canada, which in Calgary cuts through a large section of my area. In fact, the southern border of the Calgary-Varsity constituency is 16th Avenue. Now, 16th Avenue has had some rather negative intrusive effects, both on the community of University Heights, that I represent, and the community of Parkdale, that my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View represents.

In the case of University Heights, in Calgary-Varsity, a very small retaining wall was built, which was supposed to be a sound barrier, but unfortunately this wall was built in a ditch, so the height of this wall is basically two feet. It doesn't quite reach the nuts on the wheels of the semis that go by, and of course the stacks on the semis tower over this wall as though it were nonexistent. That's the problem that the people north of 16th Avenue that are members of the south Shaganappi advisory group face.

Those in Parkdale, to the south, are facing a couple of problems, for which they've been looking for results from Infrastructure, that will hopefully be part of the money that we'll be talking about when we get to Infrastructure. They're facing light pollution in that the lights that were supplied that are supposed to focus on 16th Avenue are actually focusing in their backyards. We've had a number of meetings with representatives of Alberta Infrastructure, but no resolution has taken place.

Another concern that representatives of the Parkdale community have is the fact that the landscaping opposite the 16th Avenue overpass under which Shaganappi Trail flows has not had a commitment from the province to be completed. There is a little bit of decorative work in terms of cement trees, as opposed to the real version, that the Parkdale community would like to see occurring. They would like to see basically the same kind of quality landscaping that the Calgary health region has done beside the Calgary Foothills hospital extended for the benefit of the Parkdale residents. The beauty of this advisory group is that we constantly get updates from various members, including the research park across from the university, that works hand in hand with the university on developing exciting projects.

Of course, I've referred before to the Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy. It is my hope that some of these millions of dollars will be going to that area although I'm also very aware of the need for tuition support for university students facing a variety of challenges due to increasing tuition costs and finding themselves having to rely on the food bank. This is a rather sad commentary on the Alberta boom, that not only are students having to go to the food bank, but some of their professors are as well. That's a rather sad circumstance.

I've already talked about my concerns about agricultural funding under supplementary supply, so I will not go into great detail in this area although I would like to see farmers being encouraged to grow alternative crops and not simply a singular suggestion that ethanol crop production is one of the areas we'll subsidize. I would like the government to support farmers as they experiment with different types of crops, different forms of crop rotation, which by so doing enrich the ground so that less fertilizer is required. So under agricultural research initiatives I think this would be a terrific expenditure.

Children's Services I referred to briefly the last time I had an opportunity to speak. I commented on the \$11 million. But now that the federal government's budget has come down, we recognize the fact that not very much money has been provided for children's services, whether it's to support the stay-at-home parents, that Bev Smith, a social advocate, has recommended, nor is there much in the way of funding to help parents with daycare or before school or after school care. It was refreshing to hear the Minister of Children's Services talk about extending the support for children beyond the

school entry level and taking into consideration what the other provinces do throughout this great nation, and that's the idea of recognizing that children need support right through to grade 6 or 12 years of age. This is an area that hasn't been sufficiently supported in the past.

Education, of course, is an area that I noted briefly before received \$1,200,000,000. But as former colleagues have mentioned, the unfunded liability itself approaches \$7 billion, and if the government does not address that, its commitment as well as that of teachers will continue. So under the education area I definitely would like to see movement taking place on the unfunded liability.

Also under Education I'm concerned that there's a trend. Instead of taking kids off buses by building schools in new areas, the reverse is happening. We're actually putting more students on buses, and they're coming from the schools that are being forced to close in inner-city areas. There's been a lot of discussion, of course, of the fact that when you take out the school, the heart of the community, then you do not incent new families to rejoin that area.

Under Employment, Immigration and Industry I note \$221,800,000. Again, an item that has received a tremendous amount of discussion in this House – and we're just getting started – is protection for immigrants; for example, immigrants who become landed immigrants, those like the 200 that are being sworn in today at my former junior high school, F.E. Osborne, in the Calgary-Varsity constituency. I've talked about the lack of support for English as a Second Language families as well as students, and we have also talked about the example of the Mexican immigrant whose contract was not recognized when he spent all the money to get here from Guadalajara.

Immigrants are the key to our future. We know that we have a declining birth rate, even given our provincial boom and spikes in the birth rate. We know that immigrants are the builders of our province and of our nation, and we want to make sure that the support they receive when we entice them to come is there. So I don't believe the \$222 million is sufficient to provide the base and protection that they require.

In terms of Energy expense and equipment again, referring to the federal government, they seem very reluctant to take away the \$1.4 billion of tax holidays. In fact, it seems to me that they've deferred that for another eight years. They're not addressing the holidays that industry has received in this province. I would appreciate explanation as to where this \$96 million is coming from. I would like to think that maybe a large portion of it will be reclamation or a more sensitive form of intrusion into areas so that in the future the degree of reclamation, such as what is currently necessary in Suffield, will be reduced by a more appropriate first-time exploration and extraction.

3:40

I spoke to quite an extent on support for environment. In my throne speech I referred to the Water for Life and the blue gold as being great things to talk about, but the fact is that we still haven't mapped our aquifers. If we put together all the data from extraction and exploration in terms of minerals and combined that information, we would have a pretty good sense of our underlying aquifers. I would hope that some of this money, the \$40 million that's being provided through interim supply, will go to accurately mapping our aquifers because without water we've got nothing left. No amount of oil or gas is going to make up for the fact that we don't have water to live on.

Infrastructure and Transportation has received \$972 million. Of course, when we look at infrastructure and transportation, basically that responsibility has been downloaded onto the municipalities. In

their latest municipal report they noted that between the years 1990 and 2005 there was approximately \$5 billion of money that wasn't transferred to support the municipalities. When we look at our infrastructure and transportation deficit, which is the result of paying down the so-called debt at such a rapid rate, basically we traded that debt, as I've said before in this House, for an infrastructure deficit. That deficit finds its total, I would guess, now approaching \$12 billion. We know that the infrastructure defrayed budget of the Calgary school board alone is \$441 million. We're not talking new infrastructure; we're simply talking repairs of existing infrastructure.

Schools for the future. The number of schools that are being required and have been on school boards' plans for years and years and years without any resolution makes us wonder at what point they'll finally be undertaken. Of course, the promise that was provided with the space utilization formula for school infrastructure was that by closing an inner-community school, that was supposed to free up the funding for a new community. Well, we've seen that that's not the case. In terms of expenditures on infrastructure I can't think of better expenditures than schools.

Of course, I am so relieved that the government has finally agreed to fund the southeast hospital and build it in a publicly transparent fashion.

I will look forward to the debate that the minister of the Treasury suggested I save my comments in terms of infrastructure and transportation for, but I have concerns about what's happening at this point.

The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, my colleague, brought up concerns under the supplementary supply about how aboriginal First Nations groups were being supported. Of course, we see a very small amount being attached to International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations of only \$23,500,000. We know that Alberta, specifically here where we are in the wonderful city of champions, Edmonton, second only in importance and splendour to Calgary, is going to receive the largest off-reserve aboriginal population in Canada. Within the next five years Edmonton is going to surpass Winnipeg, and aboriginal individuals will be looking to Edmonton for gainful employment and education.

Thank you very much. I look forward to finishing off my concerns.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you very much. I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak to this bill, the interim supply. It's difficult to give a critical response to interim supply estimates because there's no detail, but I'm choosing to focus on Children's Service's request for \$311 million.

First of all, now that we know that the new federal plan is inadequate to meet needs, I'm hopeful that the five-point plan will remain intact with PD funding and incentives with accreditation. I'm not familiar with the plans for the coming years. I do know that there are concerns in this province everywhere I go about child care. This situation is hurting Alberta's families, it's hurting Alberta's economy, and it mustn't continue. Alberta can afford to invest in quality child care. In fact, it can't afford not to make that investment. I'm hoping that this interim budget is going to put some money into child care, and that it's, I guess, a first step towards what the budget will be telling us in the next little while.

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

Like our economy our need for quality child care is growing faster than any other province, and yet Alberta only has child care spaces to accommodate about 10 per cent of our children, and child care centres face a relentless, uphill struggle to recruit and retain staff.

It's an unsustainable situation that we have, and it urgently requires solutions.

Every Alberta family should have access to quality child care, and families who care for their children at home should be supported with that choice. The Alberta Liberal caucus is committed to expanding child care in quantity, quality, and in the availability of spaces at a reasonable cost. The current situation is that we have long wait-lists for child care spaces, we have difficulty retaining staff, there are concerns about the quality of care, and parents are struggling to meet the demands of working and raising children.

Right now in Alberta our unsustainable system has regulated child care spaces for about 10 per cent of our children. Only Newfoundland and Saskatchewan have fewer. Quebec and Yukon can accommodate about 30 per cent of their children. Alberta is the only province where the number of daycare spaces dropped significantly between 1992 and 2004, and during that same period the number of spaces country-wide more than doubled. In 2004 Alberta had Canada's lowest percentage of women with preschool children in the workforce. Many Alberta mothers simply can't return to work due to a lack of child care options.

This is affecting our economy. It's affecting our workforce in the medical fields as well as many other sectors. If even half of the people that we know could be working were working, that would be about 17,000 if we compared to Quebec's ratio, that would make a hugely beneficial impact on our labour shortage. In 2004 Alberta had the lowest public spending per child care space of any Canadian province. Alberta is the only province or territory that invested less in child care in 2004 than it did in 1992, and there's no guarantee that the new funding based on discontinued federal transfers will be maintained. Alberta is the only province, I'm ashamed to say, that does not offer parents subsidies for child care up to the age of 12. In addition to all of that, Alberta places harsher restrictions on maternity and paternal leaves than any other province.

3:50

Also, I want to again mention stay-at-home parents, who need to be supported and recognized in that choice. As we look at phase 2 of our Alberta Liberal child care policy, we are consulting with people like Bev Smith, the author of *Who Cares?*, and others to address this sector.

Another area I'd like to look at is the Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta. This is a program that has an 80-20 funding partnership between the province and municipalities and Métis settlements to provide preventative social services. Currently 305 municipalities and Métis settlements participate in FCSS to provide 200 programs across the province, either as single municipalities or sometimes as multimunicipal programs. Of these 200 local programs, 187 are members of the FCSS Association.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

From the early PSS, which was called preventative social services, beginnings FCSS has grown to fill several roles in Alberta's communities. They provide ideas, resources, support facilitation, and leadership, and they're strong community partners. They ask questions, they find the answers, and they advocate for action to improve the lives of Albertans. This is an organization that needs our strong support, and one of the things that I'd like to suggest is that the annual FCSS budget be indexed to accommodate increases for inflation, cost of living, and increases in the provincial population.

The province of Alberta is experiencing an ever-increasing rate of growth, and with that growth comes increased social needs. The

demand for services provided to support families who are separated due to work requirements has increased significantly. Increased prosperity is leading to other problems: family breakdown, addiction problems, and reduced community connectedness. Many FCSS programs, especially those serving sparse rural populations, have not seen a significant funding increase for several years. The cost of other programs' supplies and services, especially rent, insurance, and energy, is also increasing rapidly for both FCSS programs and for nonprofit groups that are funded by FCSS. Then there's the cost of maintaining quality staff to operate quality programs. This is increasing rapidly due to the booming economy.

So as we look at the budget, I am hoping that we're going to see beyond this interim into the next budget some consideration for FCSS and community service programs because they're already experiencing an exodus of staff to other competitive sectors of the economy, resulting in a loss of leadership, knowledge, and relationships within our sector. Clients of the community services sector often rely on long-standing supportive relationships with the staff in order to effect a change in their lives. The staff is changing, and there isn't that consistency and the building of a trust relationship. These vulnerable are not going to have the same benefits as they would have if there were stable relationships.

The number of seniors in Alberta is expected to increase from its present 10 per cent of the population to 20 per cent in 2031. FCSS programs for seniors have proven over and over again to be a huge benefit to our province.

To me it seems that the FCSS budget increases are intermittent, with no discernible relationship between the needs at the local level and the amount of the increases. It's impossible for municipalities to plan ahead and strategically set directions and priorities and sustainability.

In summary, the booming economy and population growth are changing Alberta. The market economy for staffing, housing, and office rents in many communities is changing the landscape as well. There's a looming crisis in sector staffing. Increased needs and demographic growth in certain populations are also placing demands on FCSS programs that are currently outpacing funding. In order to keep the health and vibrancy of our communities, I believe that we need to be looking at increasing FCSS funding, making it realistic so that they can budget with some predictability.

Another concern with FCSS, I think, is their efforts to help with the homelessness initiatives. Alberta municipalities have adopted comprehensive strategies to help end homelessness in their communities. They're experiencing significant pressures due to unprecedented growth, employment, and economic issues related to the lack of social infrastructure to support their citizens, including a lack of affordable housing options. Again, this is another area where I think that the province of Alberta needs to renew and strengthen its support for a long-term plan and sustainable and predictable funding for minimizing homelessness and supporting affordable housing initiatives. I'm glad that we're seeing some of that with the supplementary budget requests.

The other great concern I have is for the provision of funding for the creation and operation of licensed care for elementary school-aged children during out of school time periods: before and after school and, perhaps, at lunch time. If we want to look at the stated goals of Alberta Children's Services – to promote the development and well-being of children, youth, and families; to keep children, youth, and families safe and protected; and to promote healthy communities for children, youth, and families – we need to provide and invest in a range of programs and services to meet the needs of families. At this point Alberta doesn't provide any funding beyond six years although the needs certainly don't end at five years.

Family support networks have changed in our society. Parents don't have extended family that they can rely on or friends or neighbours to provide child care for their elementary school-aged children. The circumstances that create the need for child care in the early years generally continue through the elementary years, and quality care is still essential during these years. I would suggest that we need to look at licensed out of school care programs that provide children with adequate supervision and opportunities to participate in activities which increase resilience and build protective factors and help them learn positive decision-making. This is an area where we are sadly lacking in Alberta.

Another area I'd like to look at is the Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families. To do this I'd like to quote from a letter I received from David Horricks, president of this association.

The Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families (AASCF) is a membership-driven association of agencies providing services to children and families throughout the province. The AASCF was founded in 1967 and has worked for 40 years to strengthen member agencies and to promote attitudes, practices and conditions that contribute to quality services for vulnerable children and families.

The AASCF currently has over 110 members from across Alberta representing agencies that serve some 80,000 children and families each year. Our agencies also employ over 7,400 people and have more than 7,900 volunteers that provide over 526,000 hours of support and assistance.

In late 2006 the issue of recruitment and retention of staff reached dangerous proportions. To verify this anecdotal assessment, a province wide survey of child and family service agencies was completed. 141 member and non-member agencies were contacted.

The results were extremely distressing.

- Annualised staff turn over [for these agencies] was 39%,
- 30% of staff work at two or more jobs.
- 68% of the positions vacated could not be filled.
- 66% of responding agencies were concerned about being unable to meet contract obligations and/or sustain high levels of professional standards.

The primary reason for loss of staff and the inability to attract replacement staff relate to low compensation and inadequate benefits. This is a particularly difficult situation since the principal competitor for staff is the same government institutions that are the main contract funder of agencies.

4:00

While the survey confirmed the serious and growing gap in compensation levels, it also provided troubling indicators of future directions.

- Large numbers of professionals are leaving the social services sector for other professional opportunities.
- The demands placed upon staff are steadily increasing with declining compensation and recognition.
- Young people are making career choices that avoid the helping professions

because they don't see a future. They don't see security and compensation.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the social support [programs] for children and families are facing serious human resource problems. It is also evident that there will be no quick or easy solution. However, if we fail to collectively confront the situation we can surely expect to experience more frequent and distressing failures of the social services [agencies].

I ask all members to seriously consider the valuable work that these agencies do and the support that they need. They can't fill positions. They can't compete in the marketplace. It's difficult to compete in this economy, and it's difficult to compete with government sites. They're losing staff to government positions or other businesses.

They got a 3 per cent increase, and they're grateful for that, but it's only for salaries and benefits. At the same time, heat, food, clothing costs have not been adjusted. No real cost-of-living adjustments have been made to this sector since 1993. Grid movement for staff costs 5 and a half per cent between all levels, so they can't attract people who are at higher levels. They have to pay less, and they're losing people.

I'm not proposing that we eliminate that gap between what government agencies can pay versus these others, but we should be doing something to help with fixed costs. Repairmen don't work at the same rate as they did in 1993. Again, I'm hoping that we'll recognize that some of these agencies can't run at capacity because they can't get the staff; therefore, they can't compete with the rest of the sector. Some agencies are running with 60 per cent of the staff that they could have, and that will result in a reduction in the number of kids that they can have, and they can't function because of the economy of scale.

Many agencies are running right now with open positions that they can't fill. There's not enough relief staff. Overtime is expected. People are burning out. If there are further drops, they're going to have to cut teachers or assistants or secretaries, and they won't be able to keep programs. I think the minimum should be 10 per cent to cover costs and to help them deal in a realistic manner and give them an opportunity to truly compete.

Again, a concern that I have is that if we look at our social workers, many of them are overwhelmed. There are too many demands, and there are not enough resources. This includes the amount of help that they can give to foster parents. Often they can't make the number of visits that they should, so the supervision may not be there, which produces risk. The problem is that we don't have enough people on the front line. I'm hoping the next budget is going to address that.

In regard to foster homes I'm wondering who establishes the criteria. What are the criteria? You know, it's possible that a foster home may not be a good placement because there are a number of young people and children now that have very serious behaviour problems. I think we're leaning on foster parents to take more and more kids, and some of them are more difficult kids. That's related to the reduction in group homes that was made in Alberta. We're getting more difficult kids, that used to go to supervised group homes, being placed in foster homes. Alberta used to have treatment foster homes for kids with extreme high needs. These were eliminated, I gather, because of expenses. Now we only have two types, general and advanced. Even the advanced are often not trained or supported, but they're still getting kids with very severe problems.

I also want to mention the issue of addiction services. There are many kids in care who are addicted and need that help. I'd like to talk about the help that we do offer, but I'm running out of time. I want to mention, though, that we don't have enough beds for detox or treatment. We've taken some small steps, and I'm hoping that we will have the opportunity in this Legislature to look at some stronger, more meaningful steps in regard to addictions.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to, as the song says, rise again. My comments are going to deal primarily with Municipal Affairs and Housing. The amount of money that is being put forward, the \$234,900,000, approximately \$235 million, seems like a large amount of money if it was in the form of a lottery prize. But with the increase in the pricing and the inflation of housing, this really is a fairly small amount. I realize

that it's supposed to be just a tide-over amount, but we know that quite often in the budgets there isn't a sufficient amount of money dedicated to affordable housing and housing developments, such that these interim budgets are necessary.

I want to speak very specifically about the terrific constituency of Calgary-Varsity, which is an older community but can be part of a solution in terms of affordable housing with some government support. I am hoping that some of this money, the approximately \$235 million that is being indicated, will go towards better planning between municipalities, in this case the city of Calgary and the province.

We have a desire to increase density. I know the city of Edmonton has come up with some very creative projects to increase density in communities in connection and in planning with the school boards to use part of the former playground area of schools to create affordable housing. In the city of Calgary, specifically in Calgary-Varsity, there is a plan, at least on the drawing board, to have two 12-storey apartment buildings built in the area of 53rd Avenue and the cross of Varsity Estates Drive. While this increased development would help eliminate the urban sprawl that is, unfortunately, one of the markers of large cities like both Calgary and Edmonton, there is not sufficient infrastructure at this point to provide for the smooth entering and exiting of the area.

Crowchild Trail has been widened, and I am very thankful to the province that they've recognized the necessity of building a series of overpasses to eliminate the former traffic lights. Nose Hill Drive is one of the ones that is rapidly progressing, which I'm pleased to see. But, unfortunately, what has happened in this Calgary-Varsity development that is being suggested is that a high-density area is being shoehorned into an area that does not have the road to support it. For example, when the Dalhousie station was added to the west Dalhousie, the Dalhousie side of Crowchild, north of Crowchild, the traffic problems that were caused by the increased volume as people cut through the area in order to reach other developments farther to the north and west have caused a great deal of difficulty. Now, with the application to build two 12-storey towers without a way of getting into the district on 53rd, what we have is basically the equivalent of a vise.

4:10

On one side we have the development of the Dalhousie station shopping centre, and we have a ground-level-only parking facility, which does not meet the necessity of current Calgary-Varsity constituents in terms of accessing the LRT. On top of that, we add these two 12-storey towers with no extra exit or entrance possibilities save, basically, a two-lane overpass into the area, as I've indicated before, the two lanes that come off Crowchild Trail to enter either to the Dalhousie station or to continue on along Crowchild Trail with the option of turning left across the overpass on 53rd. The province has suggested to the city that simply a traffic circle will get rid of the traffic flow problem.

I've been to three different community association meetings where members from provincial infrastructure have been present as well as members of the city's planning department, and I've asked about the possibility of putting just a short lane, basically, that would parallel the existing LRT and connect with the Crowchild Square development, which would allow people at least to get out of the community without having to use 53rd. They'd still have the problem associated with it. But it's unrealistic to think that people living in these towers are not going to have vehicles, that they're simply going to get onto the LRT and head off into the various areas of Calgary to work.

I'm hoping that within this \$235 million there is money – again, I'm thinking Calgary, but as my responsibility as shadow minister

is for the entire province, I would hope that there is money here for Edmonton as well, for their LRT. What Calgary is finding is that given our population one alderman, McIver, who is a very creative, hard-working individual, has talked about possibly taking seats out of our LRTs so that we could have more standing room available. Well, I would suggest that the solution is longer trains, but in order to accommodate that, we're going to need infrastructure money and municipal affairs money in support to extend the existing LRT platforms, never mind extending the LRT west in Calgary.

So expending money on transit as well as the infrastructure of roads would be greatly appreciated, and of course I know that the Edmonton LRT system has experienced a series of delays. It's not gotten to the point where it is in Calgary, but both cities desperately need to cut down on the amount of car traffic. In order to encourage public transportation, it's got to meet the demand. I don't know Edmonton as well as I know Calgary, but I know that, for example, there aren't interconnecting bus lines that run on a regular basis to a number of the industrial developments. People are basically forced to hop in their car in order to access these areas. So this is where I believe the expertise of the province when combined with municipalities, that shared expertise, as well as the necessary funding transfers would allow for a better use of our transit programs.

I very much hope that an extra lane, as I say, can be added to that short section between Shaganappi Trail and 53rd. There's a berm that exists there right now that could theoretically be taken out without interfering with the Dalhousie LRT station. I believe there is the potential of having a lane which would allow access into this development, which would cure approximately half of the problem. At least, people could get out even though they'd still have trouble getting in.

In terms of regional planning there is a need for the province to not be sort of the judge and executioner, but the province should have a role as a facilitator with regard to regional planning. I know that in both Calgary and Edmonton this is a problem. On the number of upgraders that are being suggested for the Edmonton area, the discussion over the various dumps that are being proposed, again in the Edmonton area, the municipalities need to be brought together in some form of regional planning.

We have the AUMA and the AAMD and C seemingly at odds in terms of regional planning. We have disputes between every single city and their surrounding area, whether it's Calgary and Rocky View over Balzac, whether it's Grande Prairie county or the city of Grande Prairie in terms of acquiring land. This is a common problem, and this is where we need provincial leadership. Again, it's just a one-line item, but this is an area that I would certainly promote greater investment in in terms of helping the province take a lead role in facilitating the regions together coming up with development which will eliminate urban sprawl, which will set aside zones for green space.

I don't know whether it's to the same extent as the problem in Edmonton, but there is great concern because of the fact that the Bow River in Calgary is glacier fed and that the proposed clear-cutting in the forest management agreement between the province and Spray Lakes is threatening our watershed. This is one of the reasons we need this kind of provincial leadership. We need to buy back our watershed or at least manage it.

The beauty of the land surrounding Calgary is that to a large extent it's Crown land, so we should as a province have a greater say in how that Crown land is being developed. I don't want to see lumber companies put out of business. In terms of regional planning I would like to see the government help organizations like Spray Lakes to develop a selective logging practice which doesn't eliminate the entire forest but takes out those trees that have reached

a certain maturity, that their value is considered of importance for timber. We know that the pine beetle prefers trees that are of the 80-year-old variety, so as part of our process we could select and take out those trees that are most susceptible, in areas that have proven to be infested.

Also, in terms of regional planning instead of fire suppression, consider the strategy of fireproofing around municipal areas such as Bragg Creek by encouraging the kinds of controlled burns that have been happening in the areas of Canmore and Banff. This is a much more effective way of getting rid of trees. The fire moves through, and new growth comes up whereas if we clear-cut, we dredge up the area to such a point that it takes years and years and years to recover.

4:20

The last topic that I would like to talk about has been covered to a large extent by my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods, and that's the support area, Seniors and Community Supports. My colleague has gone into great and appreciated detail on the fact that supports for individuals, whether it's supports for children, whether it's supports for seniors, whether it's supports for disabled, are woefully inadequate. There is no respite care for the caregivers, and as a result they are being burnt out to a tremendous degree, and they're not being replaced. I have visited the homes of caregivers who have told me that the amount of money it would take for them to have a week's holiday would be the equivalent of three months' worth of wages that they would have to pass along to someone else to allow them to take their much-needed respite, and of course they can't do that.

With regard to opportunities for seniors for respite care, this is an area that I would hope would receive greater support so that caregivers have the opportunity to have time for themselves. They could temporarily put their loved one into respite care, get a chance to recharge their own batteries, reinvigorate themselves, and continue on being better caregivers themselves.

I will talk just briefly about an area that has always been of high importance to me, and that's Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. The province knows that for every dollar basically invested in tourism, in arts, and in culture, there's a \$12 return. By providing money for parks without the necessity of user fees, which given the wealth of this province are basically an insult, we should be able to gain greater advantage and encourage not only Albertans to get out and have a healthy experience but also be promoting our tourism to a greater extent world-wide. We have certain markets – for example, China, Japan, and Germany – who are frequent visitors to Alberta.

In terms of promoting our culture, one of the ways we can do that is to promote an Alberta film industry. There has been a lot of news in the papers recently about Alberta film producers' crews moving to B.C. because British Columbia provides greater filming incentives, and that's had a drastic effect on the film industry in Alberta.

Currently – and I guess that it relates to seniors as well as to the disabled – there is only one area, Watson lodge in Peter Lougheed provincial park, where seniors and disabled individuals have the infrastructure facilities to have a safe wilderness experience. From a disabled point of view the access to so many of our parks is extremely limited. The facilities, whether it's the washrooms, whether it's the layout of the trails, are not user friendly to anyone who is bound by a wheelchair or whose mobility is restricted. I would like to think that Alberta parks are for everyone's enjoyment and that we would make more parks available to individuals with disabilities.

If Alberta is going to continue to be a tourism destination, we have to realize that trees left standing have greater value than trees cut

down, as has been pointed out by the Member for Edmonton-Decore in terms of how little our timber is valued. A living tree provides a series of benefits, whether it's filtering the water, whether it's holding the soil, whether it's serving as habitat for wildlife, birds and animals, and a tree living has a considerably greater value than a tree that is cut down and put into board feet. This is a concern that I've especially brought up before, but I'll refer again to the Bragg Creek area and to the areas surrounding Calgary through which the Elbow and the Bow rivers run. There is great concern in the Sibbald Flats area, in the Ghost-Waiparous area, and in the Bragg Creek area.

Thank you for the opportunity.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The interim supply bill, Bill 25, gives me an opportunity to raise an issue that I have great concern about. I notice in Employment, Immigration and Industry the \$221 million for interim supply. I have no idea what that might be applied to. This is a department that has many different pieces to it. It used to be called human resources and employment, now Employment, Immigration and Industry, and it involves things like immigration, workplace safety, and economic development. I believe rural development is now a part of EII and also Alberta Works, and that is my concern. If a lot of this money that's being voted on for Employment, Immigration and Industry is directed to Alberta Works, then that might be a good thing, but I have no way of telling without any details.

One of my passions for many, many years has been the issue of poverty in this province. I mean, we have a very wealthy province compared to many other provinces in Canada, and many people are doing very, very well as they get very good incomes, but the gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider all the time. Low-income people, people on Alberta Works are just falling way behind.

Now, the fact is that this whole area used to be called social services. I don't know what happened to the expression "social services." It used to be called the department of social services. I don't see the term "social services" anywhere related to this department. It's almost as if the whole issue of poverty, of concern for those who have very little in our province, is just disappearing. Maybe it's the policy of the government to not have any attention on that, and then we can pretend that it doesn't exist. But, Mr. Chairman, the problem of people who are living in poverty in Alberta is extreme, and it's critical.

There was a recent report by Public Interest Alberta called *The Reality of Low Wages in Alberta*, all about the whole question of a living wage. They point out some interesting facts about Alberta. For example, the current minimum wage is really insufficient to allow individuals or families to escape from poverty. Our minimum wage has not increased for so long, and the value of the minimum wage has declined over the last 30 years. There's no indexing of minimum wage to inflation, so it just gets changed arbitrarily once in a while.

4:30

The rising costs of things like housing: again, as part of the housing task force I heard terrible stories of people that just can't handle the rising cost of homes. I mean, homes in Edmonton went up almost 50 per cent last year. So people on fixed incomes and people with low incomes and people who are getting money through Alberta Works, they can't possibly afford the housing that's available in a city like Edmonton. Rising costs put people behind, further and further behind.

There are lots of Albertans who are not earning what we could call a living wage. The numbers don't add up. They just can't put the

numbers together and be able to pay for everything that they need in terms of food and clothing and rent and so on. One in four employed Albertans earned less than \$12 per hour in 2005 – one in four earned less than \$12 an hour – and a lot of those people are people who, as my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods indicated, work in agencies that deal with people with mental diseases, children who need special care, have special needs. These people work for \$12 an hour, \$13 an hour, and there's tremendous pressure on them because they just can't make ends meet. Sometimes they work overtime; they work in two different jobs. They like to work in those kind of positions where they're caring for people who are needy, but they just can't do it because there's not enough money. So it's a tragedy that one in four employed Albertans earned less than \$12 per hour in 2005, and it's probably the same today.

Many working parents do not earn enough to support their families. In fact, over 86,000 children lived in poverty in the year 2004. I mean, we are used to the statistic that one in five children in the whole of Canada lives in poverty. That's no different in Alberta. So, Mr. Chairman, I hope that some of this money is going to those who need it the most, people who have lived in poverty and experienced poverty daily in their lives.

When I look at the numbers in terms of Alberta Works, sometimes it's really difficult to understand how this all fits together. I feel sorry for people who have to deal with Alberta Works and try to get what they're entitled to because sometimes it's pretty puzzling to try to figure out how it all works. But there are two categories in this social service area called Alberta Works. There's the monthly core benefits for those who are expected to work and monthly core benefits for those not expected to work. I've always had difficulties with that kind of categorization. I mean, I think there are a lot of problems when you characterize people as expected to work and not expected to work. Tying welfare benefits to work, the issue of work, I think does not demonstrate the showing of dignity to people who for various reasons will never be able to contribute much to our economy, but they're human beings and ought to receive the dignity and the respect that we all should show them.

When you look at the numbers, a single adult who is expected to work gets \$234 a month for the so-called essentials, like food and clothing, transportation – I mean, that's not very much money, \$234 a month; how do you even buy a bus pass out of that? – then for shelter, for finding a place to live, \$100 if you're living with relatives – \$100, well okay – social housing, \$120; for private housing, so getting a room or trying to rent a bachelor suite, \$168. That's all. Now, how can a person in this kind of hot economy in Edmonton, where the prices went up so much, possibly find anything for \$168 a month? I mean, it's totally absurd.

So that's a total of \$402 a month if a person is in private housing. Now, I'm not sure why there's a distinction on the housing side between living with relatives, social housing, and private housing anyway. I mean, a person who is living in poverty needs money for housing. It should be just one amount. There should be a tying of these rates to the standard of living so that when the standard of living goes up, these rates go up, instead of their being changed just arbitrarily.

I've been following these rate numbers for years. In the early '90s when the government was so concerned about paying off the debt and so many programs were cut, including social service programs, we were quite upset. Those of us who were working in the community and working with people who were living in poverty were quite upset that the numbers were cut back. That made people even more vulnerable than they already were. Through the years it seems to me that what should have happened if we're going to really get serious about dealing with poverty is to tie these rates to the standard of living.

In fact, I was a part of a group called the social economy sector group at the Alberta economic Growth Summit in, I believe it was, 1998. The social economy sector group was chaired by Bettie Hewes, a former leader of the Liberal Party in Alberta. The paper that we presented was on the importance of taking together social development and economic development.

So it's not enough just to be in favour of economic development and go full speed ahead in terms of developing our economy. Economic development should dovetail with social development so that our quality of life does not suffer, so that people who do live in poverty are able to have their needs met so that they can participate in all that this rich province offers. At that Growth Summit we proposed that welfare rates should be indexed and that the housing portion for people living in poverty, dependent on welfare should go up as the standard of living goes up. But that's not the case.

If you ask why we have so much homelessness in this province, this is one reason. People can't afford to live in the rental accommodations that are available, and to me it's a great tragedy. Even when people finally are able to move from getting welfare through Alberta Works, the expected to work or not expected to work, as soon as they get a job, then what happens? Well, one of the good things that has happened is that the health benefits that have been available to people on Alberta Works do follow people as they move into the work world. I think that that has been a good thing.

Why not also have the housing allowance follow people as they move from Alberta Works into the employment world so that they could manage even if they make minimum wage or just a little bit more than minimum wage? If they have that housing allowance that actually goes with them into the work world, then they might be able to make ends meet for a time. What happens to many families is that when they finally do get some employment, they can't make enough money to make ends meet, so they go back onto welfare. Surely we need to develop programs that can enable people to move.

So I'm really concerned. This is the one reason why I became interested in politics in the first place. For years and years and years as a minister in a church, working with people, I saw lots of people come up to the church door seeking handouts. I worked with people in the inner city. Of course, all the churches are working in the inner city in cities like Edmonton and Calgary. You know, so many churches have actually taken up the work where the government has failed. When all the cuts happened in the early '90s, then of course you saw more food banks, more people without housing, more homeless. Mr. Chairman, the people in the churches who have been doing a lot of work to help people in poverty are really tired. They have been working hard to work as volunteers in food banks, to try to attend to people in need, but they're very, very tired. I mean, for them the government has a social responsibility to enable all Albertans to participate in the great wealth that we have.

4:40

I guess that's what I want to say. I mean, with \$10 billion in interim supply, \$220 million for Employment, Immigration and Industry: what portion of that is going to help people in poverty? What portion is going to Alberta Works? Are we going to see changes in the rates, or are we going to see more homeless people, more people living on the streets, and the gap gets wider and wider? Then people may wake up and say: well, what is this economic development all about? What kind of world are we creating when we have 12-year-olds working in restaurants, not bars but restaurants? What kind of Alberta are we creating? Unless social development is intermeshed together with economic development, then I think there's really something wrong with the policies that the government is pursuing.

So those are all the comments that I have to make. Boy, I'll come back to this issue again and again and again because that's my passion. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 25, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 25 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 4 Child Care Licensing Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to take this opportunity to provide some clarification around some questions that were asked during second reading of Bill 4. First, I'd like to refer to a question that related to the consultation process which led up to the development of the bill. I know that some members are wondering who was involved with the consultation process. What we did is we conducted an extensive public consultation in 2005, which provided valuable input that guided the development of the Child Care Licensing Act. We received over 900 written submissions and input from about 225 focus group participants, including parents, operators, child care association representatives, and other interested Albertans.

In relation to space creation I've been asked if I know how the shortage in child care spaces plays out region by region. The answer is: not yet. Children's Services has traditionally collected stats that tell us how many child care spaces are available in Alberta's daycare sector as well as the number of children enrolled in these programs. We need to have better information on what the supply and demand is by region. I've asked my staff to gather this information. We are currently surveying all child care operators – daycare, family day homes, nursery schools, and out-of-school care – to determine how many spaces we have and how many more spaces we need to meet the needs of families looking for child care now and in the future. I expect to have these results later this spring.

What we do know is that the lack of spaces is largely due to the shortage of qualified staff. I'm pleased to say that we're starting to make headway in this area. This month our government announced a 40 per cent increase to staff wage top-ups for child care professionals working in the daycare centres and family day homes. This move has been welcomed by the child care community, and we feel that it will help increase the number of qualified staff, which will ultimately increase the number of spaces available to parents looking for child care. Bill 4 also supports space creation through the introduction of new licensing categories such as home-based child care and other innovative models of programming.

The legislation also supports communities coming forward to identify innovative child care programs that will meet the needs of

parents. These types of programs could require a unique consideration of regulatory requirements such as extended-hour programs set up to care for children of parents who work shift work. By licensing programs, not facilities, operators will be able to make better use of the spaces they already have. For example, under the current act operators licensed to provide out-of-school care have their spaces sitting empty when the children are in school and cannot move preschool children into spaces licensed for out-of-school care. Under the new legislation operators will have the flexibility to use this space for any child in their program who needs one.

We had some questions regarding the level of monitoring. Currently the child and family services authorities monitor programs a minimum of four times a year. Bill 4 will not change this requirement. This is a policy requirement, not a legislative one. However, programs with noncompliance to regulated standards are and will continue to be monitored more often.

There was also a question about how the province will issue multiyear licences. Programs will have an opportunity to renew their licence for up to three years. However, in saying that, I want to clarify that these licence holders will need to have a good history of complying with the regulations, meeting municipal and health standards, and dealing with parent concerns before they will be eligible for the maximum three-year licence renewal. Monitoring will continue during a three-year term, and if compliance to standards become an issue, the terms of the licence would be shortened.

With respect to questions surrounding enforcement, ensuring that programs comply with the act is a critical part of ensuring that families have access to quality child care programs. However, it is a fine line. While it's important that the act have some teeth when there is a need for enforcement due to a major noncompliance, it is also important that we have the mechanisms in place to work with the good-intentioned operators when trying to rectify minor situations. The act provides a range of enforcement options to enable the licensing officer to act based on the severity of the noncompliance such as the ability to issue a new probationary licence. Providers will be advised of the concern and the timelines for compliance in writing. In addition, enforcement actions will be strengthened by requiring operators to post notices of noncompliance. In a case where a licence has been refused or cancelled, the operator will be required to wait two years before reapplying for a licence.

I've been asked if the necessary resources are in place to ensure that proper monitoring and, when needed, proper enforcement actions can take place. I can competently say that, yes, we have the expertise and the resources to ensure that programs comply with the act.

Our discussion guide Toward a Child Care Act proposed that the act include a provision that would ensure that programs establish parent advisory committees. The guide also proposed that the child care act mandate the establishment of a provincial child care advisory council. I've been asked why these items were not included in Bill 4. During consultations we heard that requiring each program to establish a formal parent advisory committee could be problematic for small, rural, and remote programs. Therefore, we are providing more flexibility through regulation for parental involvement to take different forms based on the size of the program and the needs of the parents who utilize the service. Similarly, legislating a requirement for a provincial child care advisory council in the act limits the ability to have informal and varied forms of consultations with Alberta parents, operators, and stakeholders that ensure that this legislation and the programs and services we provide give the children we're responsible for the best start in life.

Which leads me to the question raised about who will be involved in the development of the new child care regulations. Mr. Chair, I

can assure you that there will be an open and thorough consultation. Everyone, including parents, operators, community leaders, and all elected officials, will have an opportunity to provide feedback that would be used to draft child care regulations to ensure that families have access to quality child care programs. I expect this consultation to begin this spring and be completed sometime early in the summer.

I've heard a lot of positive feedback regarding the Child Care Licensing Act, which reconfirms that we're moving in the right direction. Bill 4 will go a long way in helping government achieve its priority to ensure that quality child care is available to the children and families of Alberta.

Thank you.

4:50

Mrs. Mather: First of all, I want to thank the hon. minister for clarifying a number of questions that we did have and offering us even more information, helping us to understand the intent of this bill. Bill 4, Child Care Licensing Act, is an important first step in developing a comprehensive child care act.

As I speak to the Committee of the Whole, I want to refer to the discussion guide *Toward a Child Care Act for Alberta* from July 2005. In that guide it states that

building a bright future for Alberta's children includes creating an excellent, child-development-focused child care system – a system that is supported by solid legislation and that includes parents and communities in decision making and planning . . .

Children and families in Alberta [should] have access to a broad range of regulated and non-regulated child care options.

Licensed child care includes day care centres, nursery schools, drop-in centres, out of school care programs and early childhood development programs such as Head Start.

Un-licensed child care is provided by agency-approved family day homes (operating standards and requirements for the day homes and the agencies are outlined through ministry policy and specified in service delivery contracts under the province's Child and Family Services Authorities), private babysitters and parents and families . . .

Quality child care depends on a strong, cohesive infrastructure that includes networks of community support, public awareness, integrated programs, state-of-the-art training, ongoing staff development and a continuum of programs and services that meet children's physical, intellectual and emotional needs from the cradle to the schoolroom and beyond . . .

[We know that] research over the past decade has shown that quality care for children is critical for healthy child development – whether child care is provided by parents and families or outside the home by paid caregivers. Quality care plays a key role in helping children grow into healthy, well-adjusted, self-reliant adults equipped to succeed at school, at work and in life.

Licensing defines minimum standards that protect children from harm. However, it must be used in combination with other regulatory and non-regulatory tools – including accreditation – to achieve and maintain quality standards that exceed minimum requirements. These tools must work in tandem with inspections and monitoring in order to establish accountability within the child care system.

The need for a Child Care Act was identified in the course of Alberta Children's Services' review of the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act. [That] review was launched in 2004 . . . [and concluded that] Albertans need a comprehensive, responsive Child Care Act that supports the complex needs of modern-day families and provides children with high-quality, developmentally focused care and programs. Alberta's Child Care Act should provide a foundation for

- regulation that outlines specific rules and requirements.
- policy that sets out standards and guides how rules are applied.
- operating procedures to make things work from day to day.

While we are addressing some of the recommendations from this review and this discussion guide, there are more that we are not, and I'm wondering if there will be more legislation coming to support the ideas in this discussion guide.

This act is going to do a number of things. It's going to move beyond criteria of a facility and, instead, license programs based on content, developmental appropriateness, et cetera, while retaining some facility requirements. It's going to enable the minister to create licensing categories outside of what currently exists, like the child care centres, nursery schools, and so on, to enable greater flexibility and meet local and specialized needs. It's going to ensure that parents are well informed and involved in their child's care by requiring the posting of compliance orders.

As I look at the parental involvement aspect, the discussion guide that I referred to, entitled *Toward a Child Care Act for Alberta*, proposed to include a provision about parental involvement through the creation of a parental advisory committee or a provincial child care advisory council. The minister has just explained the reasons why this parental advisory committee has not been included, and I appreciate that. I wondered though: are we going to look at a child care advisory council at the provincial level?

If we look at parental involvement, I want to ask some questions. The ideas in the discussion guide indicated that the promotion and "involvement of parents in the planning, delivery and evaluation of child care programs for their children" would help "enable the expansion of the range of child care choices available to parents." Also, this act would "set standards for child care programs."

Involving Parents.

Parents need a voice in the decision-making process that determines the type, quality and accessibility of child care and development programs available to their children. They need a voice in determining local and provincial priorities for children. They need a forum that [helps them and] allows them to serve as advocates for their children and for the child care system as a whole.

Now, I know that you have indicated that you thought that parent advisory committees would not be realistic because of the different sizes of communities and so on. What about

a provincial child care advisory council whose members would include parents, early childhood educators, child care service providers, community representatives and experts from service areas who play a role in the "quality" of children's lives?"

I'm wondering if you've given thought to that.

Finally, I'm wondering about the posted information, which would also help the parents be involved. I think it's already mandatory for licensed child care providers to post their licence, which, I would imagine, would now indicate whether it's conditional or a probationary status. The discussion guide says that they would like to see inspection sheets posted as well and "notices specifying requirements for corrective action and documenting the licensee's response."

Another recommendation was that

parents should have online access . . . to selected inspection-related information that is stored and monitored by Alberta Children's Services. This would allow parents to make comparative ratings and their own assessments about the quality of various child care programs.

The discussion guide even suggested that there should be annual report cards on their child care facility's staff qualifications, compliance with legislation and standards, and efforts to support continuous improvement, [that] these report cards would be issued by Children's Services staff from information stored on [their] databases.

The idea was that it would serve two purposes. It "would help parents make informed decisions about their children's care, [and the] report cards would help child care providers monitor and evaluate their own performance and identify areas that need improve-

ment.” Are you considering this suggestion or recommendation of report cards?

I’d like to look at access. We have the idea that we should be increasing access. Your government press release stated that this legislation will increase access to child care spaces by opening up the classification of child care settings. This might be true, but I think that the fundamental problems facing child care operators right now still exist; namely, lack of stable funding and problems with staff recruitment and retention. Licensing will not solve the need for spaces and staff. So I hope this bill is the beginning of addressing that crucial need for child care spaces.

5:00

I wanted to take a look here at another thing that related to access. The discussion guide that I referred to said that the “Child Care Act should support the expansion of the existing child care system to provide more choices for parents – in rural communities as well as in urban centres.” That requires looking at home-based child care. This would be a new licence category and would facilitate the establishment of child care in rural communities where the population may be too small to support specialized daycare facilities. The recommendation was that it “would allow two providers to care for a maximum of 10 children. Care would be provided in a private home rather than a specialized facility, operate according to specific standards, and be monitored [still] by Children’s Services.”

This suggestion of creating more spaces also involves the suggestion that you could license for school-aged children spaces being used for other children. The Minister is quoted as saying that this act would allow operators of before- and after-school facilities to make better uses of the spaces that they already have. I’m wondering if this would create possibly an unmanageable situation after school when most preschool kids are staying and after school kids are arriving, and I’m wondering how daycares could double up on spaces. The other thing to look at is the furniture and the toys and the equipment that would be needed because they’re different for school-aged as compared to preschool.

Access to daycare is a real issue in Alberta, and even with the announcement of a new federal plan this week, it’s apparent that providing adequate daycare is going to be primarily the province’s mandate.

I’d like to also look at compliance and enforcement here. While enforcement is essential to protect the safety of children in child care, many child care providers with good intentions inadvertently break regulations. These providers often feel that they’re not given time to either remedy the problems that they were not initially aware of or to explain the circumstances that caused noncompliance, leading to enforcements that mar an otherwise possibly positive record. So I appreciate the minister’s stating that there’s going to be consideration given for those situations.

Then, on the other hand, I’ve heard concerns that there aren’t real teeth in licensing enforcement. So it’s a difficult question. It’s important. I want to again state that I think the appeals process is very clear. My feedback from stakeholders is that they appreciate that. The one question that I’m getting about noncompliance is that perhaps it’s in the nuts and bolts that we could have a little bit more clarity on what the consequences for noncompliance are.

We look at what’s included and what’s not included in this.

The legislative foundation provided by a Child Care Act is one of many aspects of a quality child care and child development system. Alberta’s Act will apply to specific components of that system – namely, to formal, program-based child care provided through child care centres, home-based child care centres . . . nursery schools, early childhood development programs, and out of school care centres.

So this act will support children who use child care services provided by these above-listed agencies.

What’s not included are the

Parent Link Centres, Family Day Home Agencies, Home Visitation programs or Alberta’s voluntary Child Care Accreditation program. Although such programs are key components of the child care system as a whole, they are monitored through policy, not legislation.

You know, day homes, I feel, are an important choice for parents, and many of them provide quality child care. But what’s in place to ensure monitoring and safety in day homes? Again, going back to the discussion guide, on page 11 it states that the child care act that we need

- supports parents and families.
- gives children access to quality child care and quality child development programs.
- recognizes excellence and innovation.
- provides the foundation for an integrated, comprehensive system that makes the best possible use of family and community resources and addresses the needs of children from cradle to schoolroom.

I believe that this bill’s intention is to do those things.

As I said earlier, we haven’t addressed all of the recommendations, but it is a good first step, and I look forward to more legislation coming to address the concerns about the lack of regulated child care spaces, staff recruitment, staff retention, help from municipalities in starting child care facilities, help for existing centres so that they can flourish, increasing choices for parents, and specifically looking at zero to 12. That means looking at specialized assistance for infants and toddlers and, at the same time, looking at the six- to 12-year-olds, whose needs don’t vanish when they turn six years old.

I’d like to conclude by saying that the Official Opposition supports Bill 4 because it is a very good bill. I ask you to give the same consideration to my bill, Bill 207, which is coming up in the future. I hope that when it’s presented, it will be allowed to at least get past second reading.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to just comment on my colleague’s comments. If I can get these changes made, I’ll support it.

In terms of – is it Bill 4? – increasing access to child care, St. Albert daycare providers are wondering loudly about its practicality. Bill 4 would allow, as I understand it, child care spaces licensed for school-aged children to be used for any child. The main thrust of the act would allow operators to make better use of spaces they already have.

The daycare providers in my constituency are worried, have concerns that increasing access will bring about an unmanageable rush after school. Most preschool kids stay after the kids arrive, and they see it being a very difficult type of transition. They’re suggesting that the timelines would clash, so they’ve got concerns about that.

Another issue in St. Albert constituency is that preschool and school-age kids use different furniture and toys. There’s a different type of need for that, different kids of different ages. So that is another concern.

One of our biggest problems in St. Albert is access to daycare. In St. Albert this is a very big issue: long lists, and some daycare providers are already refusing to take names for next year. So it is a big issue in my constituency.

Now I’ll just get off that tune and talk briefly about two points on the basis of my past experience. I believe that monitoring daycare

is crucial for kids, and I think there should be regular inspections at different times of the day to see if standards are being implemented in the operation of daycares. I think that if it's not done correctly, you're going to find that we're going to have some serious problems with looking after children and some of the problems that they may face.

I also think there's a key fact that the government didn't allow back a few years ago in terms of educating parents. I think there should be a major effort on the part of the government to educate parents on how to select and pick a good daycare program. That could be done through videos or through brochures. Sometimes the government has what they call a hands-off policy because they might interfere with people making money out of it. I'm not so sure that that's a good cause.

Anyway, those are my comments, Mr. Chair. Thank you for allowing me to speak. I will sit down and let you go on. Thank you.

5:10

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

Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to make my first comments on Bill 4 here this afternoon, the Child Care Licensing Act. Certainly, both myself and the Alberta New Democrats in general are happy with what we see in regard to this licensing act. It seems to be quite a substantive rewrite of the terms and conditions under which daycare facilities are monitored, licensed, and run. It's not just an amendment to the existing bill but truly a new act that substantively overhauls the regulatory framework of this part of society by shifting focus from facilities under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act to programming, which will be under this Bill 4. Certainly, this is a step forward, Mr. Chairman. I think that this was, in fact, long overdue.

The intent of this bill, as I see it, is to quite completely revise the regulatory framework by grandfathering the facilities' recommendations and making child care programming the central core of this bill. The goal, I believe, as far as I can read, is to see to the child's developmental needs, not just babysitting, so to speak. This is something to be applauded.

The key components that I would like to highlight in a positive light are, one, the regulation-making authority over all daycare facilities, a unifying concept which is long overdue and welcome to all parents requiring these services across the province; two, the enabling of new categories to child care services to be created, including a family group care and other potentially innovative programs that may arise in terms of what people might come up with; three, administrative streamlining, which allows for multiyear licensing of facilities, which certainly, I believe, is a reasonable bureaucratic amendment; four, expansion and monitoring, with a range of prescribed actions with regard to monitoring, which is certainly a very important part of any child care legislation; finally, a permanent appeals board that would be more substantive than the kind of ad hoc one that was in the last act.

So the bill seems to be focusing on quality of care, but we as New Democrats and, I think, representing the population would like to bring forward the importance of dealing with the quantity of care as well, just with the shortage of spaces that are available across the province, not just in major cities but all across the province. The federal government a couple of days ago, five, six days ago, abandoned its plan to create 125,000 new daycare spaces, and we find this deeply troubling, Mr. Chairman. Instead, the money was just going to be given to the provinces. So we certainly would encourage and, in fact, would like to demand that this money go directly to providing public daycare facilities across the province.

I think it's the prerogative of this Legislature to provide choice for families in regard to daycare, and the choice that we must provide, that we have the capacity to provide here, is for an affordable public daycare option that people can go to and trust with their most important family members, which are the children. Providing that choice of a public daycare system I think is an idea whose time has come in the province of Alberta.

There are 154 accredited child care facilities in the province of Alberta, and there are 545 facilities that are eligible for accreditation. Daycare spaces in real terms have fallen 7 per cent between 1992 and 2004 while nationally daycare spaces, in fact, doubled. You know, that sort of simple math I think highlights the problem that we've had with child care in this province over the last 15 years or more, and really it speaks to a problem that we have in supporting families and working families. Certainly, for most families it's the norm and it's not just a choice: it's a reality of life that both parents must work to support the family. So people are looking to daycare, and if we don't supply that, then the whole economic engine that we've grown accustomed to starts to break down.

The birth rate, as well, in Alberta is much higher than the national average. So, you know, when we throw in that factor, which is a good thing, I believe, then, in fact, this daycare shortage goes from acute to potentially a crisis. The sector of daycare in Alberta faces a two-pronged problem of both retaining staff plus the fertility rate. The demand for new spaces is much higher as well, so you have the resulting acute shortage.

The minister recently announced \$13 million to top up fees for children's and family services. I would again give some applause and kudos to the new minister. I think that she certainly has potential to do very well in her new position. She said that the government is acting to help employers recruit and retain staff at daycare centres as well as contracting agencies and women's shelters. I saw on the television last week where there was a daycare facility bemoaning the loss of workers at her facility to the fast-food service industry. You know, it just stood out as a highly ironic thing, to say that the people who are charged with looking after our most precious resource, our children, in fact have the same price rates as people working at hamburger or fish and chips places.

A March 2007 report found that Alberta ranks quite poorly when it comes to child care. It's recommended in this report that the provision of a revamped labour law with better parental components, combined with the need for public or publicly funded daycare facilities, is absolutely imperative. This is the Paul Kershaw report, *Measuring Up: Family Benefits in British Columbia and Alberta in International Perspective*, from March 2007. You know, I think this puts it, perhaps, in the most stark and obvious terms. We often talk about economic competitiveness with our immediate counterparts, both provincially and throughout the United States. This is a factor that I really think trumps many other traditional areas of competitiveness in terms of taxation and law and the ease of starting businesses. The Quebec model of affordable daycare certainly starts to rise up as perhaps one of the very top means by which, at the very least, we continue to create a competitive economic environment in the province of Alberta.

How will this bill deal with the chronic shortage of daycare spaces in the province? These are the questions that we must ask ourselves. How does the government intend to deal with the shortage of daycare spaces in high-growth areas in the province of Alberta? Can we expect the minister, please, to give us a full report of the shortages that are affecting Alberta families across the province so that we can itemize and perhaps prioritize where we should be focusing our monies and attention? Finally, if the minister is claiming that the government is helping to recruit and retain daycare

staff, what progress has been made and how do we compare nationally, especially when we're trying to make a claim that we have a great child care system? Of course, that always begs the question: compared to what?

So those are my comments that I will stay with here for now, and certainly I will have some specific section analysis in the not-too-distant future. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5:20

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. It's my pleasure to rise to discuss Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act, which I very much appreciate my government colleague bringing forward. I have spent the majority of my life looking after children in one form or another. As people are well aware, I was a teacher for a number of years of my life, and in the summers when I was going to university and when my wife was going to university, I ran a number of child care programs, so to speak, for the city of Calgary, from adventure playgrounds where children as young as five years of age could come and handle a variety of equipment – hammers, saws, nails – and build themselves a fort to a number of arts programs.

I consider it absolutely essential that children receive the best kind of care that is possible. In my new role as a grandfather now of two grandchildren I can't think of any more vulnerable group that needs the support of government than children. It might be a close sort of balance with seniors in long-term care, who in a lot of cases have reverted to their childlike trust. With regard to the children, this licensing act will provide a degree of standardization across the various forms of child care that has not been there before. This is an important first step.

Another step that I see is necessary, that we'll work towards and would support the government in their pursuit, is the accreditation of the individuals who work in the various care centres. I know that there are different levels of accreditation, from the kindly mother who chooses to not only stay home to look after her children but, in order to add a little bit to the family's economy, takes in some of the neighbourhood children as well. These various levels of support, obviously, have different rules. I think that as parents and as grandparents we know how much difficulty there is to keep, especially, toddlers safe and entertained and, I would add to it, educated. I'm sure that a number of Calgary parents and grandparents and caregivers every once in a while hit the TV channel 17 to get a little bit of respite and, hopefully, sit down with their children and sort of go through the program, rather than just simply leaving it on as the single child care monitoring device.

It's absolutely essential that children, especially children in the formative ages, have the motivation, the inspiration, a form of education which challenges them to a great degree to develop their potential because we know that those early child years are the formative years and we want to achieve a very strong foundation in those formative years.

It's extremely important, as part of this bill's success, that monitoring be established. There has been some discussion as to the fact that this bill will establish what are, sort of, the minimum standards acceptable. But I would like to think that we would through our monitoring have a process where we'd recognize the high levels of quality care – call it the copper, silver, gold standards of care – and attempt to move everyone towards what the government would consider to be the gold standard. That's where we would have individuals who themselves had the accreditation and the fluency of language – fluency of languages would be even better – to provide a successful program for children that isn't just caring and nurturing but also has an education component to it.

I look at what's happening in Calgary and I'm sure is repeated throughout the province, the number of children with single parents, and sometimes with both parents, who are forced to move each night from one church basement to another church basement, thanks to the caring provision of the Inn from the Cold program. I know that in Calgary the school board at least tries to provide stability, in that the children, without being labelled, have the opportunity to attend the same school on a regular basis even though their sleeping arrangements in various church basements vary from day to day.

Hopefully, in terms of child care we will also provide the stability for these parents and for these children, especially those who are not of school age and, basically, have no regular programming or support while the parents wait to go back down that basement later in the evening for shelter. There's nothing provided for them during the day. I would hope that as an extension of this program we would be able to provide programming and support for parents who find themselves without a home. To me, this is an important area that we need to pursue.

Specifically to Bill 4: it is a good first step. We will need to work on the accessibility, as other members have brought out, because my understanding is that the demand for child care versus the reality of it – I believe that child care meets about 10 to 12 per cent of the needs of a number of parents who would like to have the opportunity to work outside the home but because of the expense of child care don't have that opportunity to work.

It's a different category, but I would hope that in future bills, in terms of supporting child care, we would come up with an allowance similar to the old family allowance, whereby we would support children within the homes, to the point where parents would have the choice where they could say: just give me a little bit more so that I can buy those groceries and pay the bills at the end of the month so that I could keep my children at home and be their primary caregiver and be their primary educator. That is what a number of families who emphasize traditional values, unfortunately, aren't able to accommodate because of the cost of daycare, which in accredited institutions can be over \$1,200 a month, especially if it's an infant involved. But I do very much appreciate what the Minister of Children's Services has brought forward in this bill.

5:30

I am hoping, as other members have mentioned, that there is a strong monitoring component to the bill. I realize that monitoring is expensive, but there cannot be a more valuable resource than our children, and their safety and their quality of life must be encouraged and supported.

I thank the member. Mr. Chair, I would suggest at this point that we close debate and call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I would move that we rise and report bills 20, 25, and 4.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 20, Bill 25, and Bill 4.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

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

Bill 1
Lobbyists Act

[Adjourned debate March 20: Dr. Pannu]

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure for me to rise and participate in debate on Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. This is, basically, the flagship bill for the government, and the substance that's being discussed is both timely and significant.

Lobbying itself is not necessarily a bad thing, Mr. Speaker. Lobbying is important in some regards because people need to be able to have access to their elected officials. Lobbying is, basically, an integral part of democracy because elected officials were elected to be conveyors of ideas. As an MLA myself I take ideas from my constituents and bring them here to this forum, to this Assembly, and as policy-makers or decision-makers we need to be accessible and be seen to be accessible as well.

So lobbying itself is not necessarily an evil or a bad thing; however, there are two main challenges to democracy with respect to lobbying. The first challenge is, basically, one that deals with openness and transparency. Governments are and should be held accountable to their citizens, and their accountability dictates that we have a certain degree of transparency.

Citizens have to be able to evaluate the performance of their representatives and their government, and they have to know who has the government ear at any one point, who is talking to whom in any particular or given department or agency. They also have to know if taxpayers' money is being spent properly, who is gaining or winning government contracts, how much they're paid, why they are paid this amount of money and for what work, and outcomes of such decisions.

Disclosure and transparency are all about leveling the playing field. As an individual I should have the same degree of access to my elected officials and my government as a person who is a professional lobbyist or a person who is paid on behalf of an agency or a group or a business or an interest to influence government decision-making. So lobbying is legitimate, but it should be and must be public.

In this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, we do a bit of lobbying ourselves on behalf of our constituents. Constituents have direct access to this Assembly as well because they submit petitions and they send us letters and other things that we table on their behalf. So this is an avenue for them to express their point of view and have the Assembly's ear and have the government's ear through the Assembly. This

is one way for them to gain this access, and no other way should be given prominence or given more importance than this particular way.

Take *Hansard*. *Hansard* is a tool that this Assembly has adopted, which we didn't have before. You know, I think that, if my memory serves me right, 35 years ago we didn't have *Hansard* in this House. But now we do, and it serves a great purpose to actually show people what we are saying. They can read the *Hansard* excerpt. They can actually check what a certain member said at any one time in any particular debate. They can review votes and proceedings, you know, who voted for what and who voted against what. Some of it is also available in audio and video, which is great.

I think the audio and video service should be inclusive, gavel to gavel. Basically, these proceedings should be taped and televised and archived in digital format from the beginning till the end. I also think that committees should be recorded in video format as well. But that's another topic.

Now, I mentioned that there were two challenges to democracy. The other one is, basically, equal access and opportunity, which I touched on briefly. In the U.S., for example, they take it a step further. They also place limits on how much lobbying a lobbyist can do or how much money a lobbyist can charge to lobby the government. We're having the same discussion here now about campaign finance reform: how much money candidates in elections can raise and from whom, which sources; how much, you know, party leadership candidates can raise money and from which sources; disclosure: how much information should be disclosed, how much information should be withheld, if at all; and things like this.

As parliamentarians, as legislators, we have an opportunity to not only bring in transparency and openness but also to send a message to the public that we mean what we say. We have to recognize that the appearance of openness and transparency is equally important as actual openness and transparency. Because politicians have such a bad reputation with the public, we are trying to convince them every day that we are hard-working, honest people and we are driven by the public good.

This Bill 1 is a good start. It's certainly a good start, and I'm willing to support it after some of my concerns are addressed and after some amendments are hopefully passed in Committee of the Whole.

Now, I will start just a little bit by talking about the preamble. In the preamble the third one reads: "whereas it is desirable that the public and public office holders be able to know who is engaged in lobbying activities." That's wonderful. We need to know who is a lobbyist, but we equally need to know who they're talking to. I don't want a registry of lobbyists that just tells me that ABC company is lobbying the government, and then it doesn't tell me that ABC company is talking to the Minister of Energy, for example, or to his deputy minister. So, yes, we need to know who is talking to the government, but we also need to know who in government is being approached.

5:40

The fifth preamble talks about where it's "desirable that the public and public office holders be able to know who is contracting with the Government of Alberta and Provincial entities." I'm hoping that we should really include how much they're getting paid as well. I don't want a database that basically tells me that ABC company won a contract for, you know, road maintenance, but then it doesn't tell me that ABC company was awarded the contract for \$2 million, for example. So these are little things that are hopefully going to be addressed in second reading and in committee.

Another question I asked myself is, basically, with respect to the disclosure component, the reporting component. This bill puts the

onus for reporting on the lobbyist, which is a good thing because they have to be held responsible and accountable, and some of them are getting paid, so I have no trouble asking them to do the reporting.

However, an outfit like Democracy Watch in Ottawa, Mr. Speaker, wants the onus put on public officials to disclose because what if the lobbyist fails to disclose, inadvertently or intentionally? I think there should be an equal commitment on behalf of the public office holder – a government minister, a department head, a deputy minister, people like that – to also somehow fill in the blanks, to also somehow report who is being approached and what the subject matter being discussed is. So how do we do this? I don't know yet. This is something I am struggling with, but I think there's an equal responsibility on behalf of the public office holder to also tell us that they are being lobbied with respect to a certain subject or a certain decision.

Another thing that I thought about was, basically, with respect to charities and nonprofit groups, community organizations, and entities like this. They are going to be classified as an organization lobbyist, which is fine. Under this definition it is talking about "an employee, officer or director of an organization who receives a payment for the performance of his or her functions" with respect to lobbying. So what if it is a volunteer member of that organization? Now, they're not receiving payment, so will they be not required to report? I need clarification.

Also, what if they're a paid director? What if it's, you know, the secretary for the organization, for the United Way, or what if it's the treasurer for Salvation Army or some other group that actually fund raises to contribute to charitable work? They don't receive a certain, stand-alone, clearly defined payment for their lobbying effort, but they're paid a salary at the end of the month or they're paid an honorarium for carrying out these duties.

So is there going to be a stipulation on a percentage of your work that has to be dedicated to lobbying, where, basically, that's the definition of a lobbyist, or are we going to say that any officer who just receives any payment on behalf of this organization or in lieu of, you know, services that they do for this organization would now be captured under this definition?

Moving on, I have a concern with respect to keeping things in regulation and allowing the minister or the Ethics Commissioner or whoever is going to be in charge of this piece of legislation to put things in regulation. Take, for example, restrictions on the application of the act. Basically, to which areas does this act not apply? We added members of the House of Commons, we added employees of municipalities, we've added members of Métis settlement councils, diplomatic agents, et cetera, and after this very extensive list we also said, "any other individuals or categories of individuals prescribed in the regulations." I think we should try to change this philosophy and the preference of this government that everything should be in regulation or that the bulk or the meat of any bill or act is kept in regulation because it's flexible. Yes, a certain degree of flexibility is needed but not where it basically limits the strength of any piece of legislation itself.

Another trend which I don't like is basically, you know, the plan by this government now to include little bad things with other good things. They basically lump together questionable sections in an act or in a bill with good things. Now everybody in this House is going to be forced to either adopt it all, accept it all, vote for it all, or decline to support all of it again together. They embed loopholes or they embed sort of bypasses to allow themselves some wiggle room.

In particular, I have this issue with section 2(c), which basically allows a public office holder to bypass the system totally if he or she initiates that discussion with the lobbyist. If the lobbyist approaches that minister, for example, the lobbyist has to register, but if the

minister phones up the lobbyist and solicits information or advice, then nobody has to register. I am hoping that through deliberations in Committee of the Whole this section might be amended. Again, if we're really serious about coming across as honest people, that we have nothing to hide and that everything is going to be open and transparent, then this, in my opinion, is one section that needs to be taken out.

I mentioned that the duty to file should be shared to a certain degree with the public office holder. I'm not saying that they should do it within 10 days like a consultant lobbyist would or, you know, 30 days like an organizational lobbyist but maybe once a year. Maybe once a year there is going to be a summary from the public office holder who lobbied him or her, and maybe we should really compare the two lists, compare what the public office holder submitted once a year with all the submissions that we accrued through the year from the lobbyists themselves and see if someone somewhere is not telling us the truth.

Payment information to contractors. Again, that's very useful, and I commend the government for accepting this recommendation. But again they are leaving the details pertaining to those payments in regulation because they say "prescribed Provincial entities" and "in accordance with the regulations." So who is going to be captured under this definition? Which entities? I think this is something that we should discuss in this House and that should not be left to regulations to be done behind closed doors. Again, it's the appearance of openness and transparency versus actual openness and transparency. While I agree with the government that anything is better than nothing, we need to strengthen this further.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) five minutes for questions and comments, if any.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. This bill reminds me of a game that we all played as children, and that game was Mother, may I? We had various steps that we could take, you know. Mother, may I take a giant step? Mother, may I take a baby step? How many baby steps? I view this legislation as, rather than something that I would shout from the rooftops, more something that I might sort of pass off in casual conversation as: "Guess what? Alberta has finally done or is starting to do what the rest of the provinces and the federal government have done for some time. They're going to actually have a lobbyist registry." [some applause] That's about the volume of the clapping that I would provide for this particular bill.

When I gave my response to the Speech from the Throne, one of the areas that I pointed out and the weakness of this particular bill is that if the government comes courting, there's no reporting. In other words, if the government approaches a particular organization and requests their services, then there is no obligation on the government's part to report it because, in fact, they were doing the lobbying.

5:50

When we look at past practice with this government, which would still continue given this form of lobbyists registry, there are circumstances like Kelley Charlebois, who received a series of contracts totalling in excess of \$400,000, but there wasn't even the equivalent of a bubble gum wrapper's amount of written information on the services that he provided. This was all verbal, and of course there were no tapes and no record. So this kind of behind-the-scenes, closed-door justification of service can still take place.

I also remember Rod Love. His employment was somewhat sketchy. He was flying on government planes at the same time as he

was lobbying on behalf of a private railroad organization that wanted to extend some track up to the Wood Buffalo area. Because of his cozy on-again, off-again relationship he was allowed to have access to that government plane to do his lobbying. Well, as far as I can see from this lobbyists registry, that kind of close coziness would continue.

Another area that the government is touting as being extremely transparent is the idea that they'll post the flight manifests. Well, we've always asked for the flight logs to be posted. Again, this doesn't get into the kind of transparency that we're looking for. Simply having the name of a person who approached the government, without knowing the details of what was being discussed, doesn't provide the kinds of transparency or accountability that Albertans are looking for from this government.

I support the idea of taking the baby step, but I look forward to the government going beyond that step. A lobbyist comes in, talks to the department of infrastructure, and says: "Look, we've got a new process for the hardening of cement. With this particular technique we can speed up the drying time. This new technique will involve being able to construct without restriction, any time, whether it's summer, winter, whatever." I would like to think, John Silverman of Cements Are Us, that the information that was discussed with the minister or deputy minister or some bureaucrat within the Infrastructure and Transportation department, the actual discussion and the notes of that discussion, would be made available.

Granted, there are a whole lot of people who wouldn't go surfing the Net to see that information posted, but for those who are concerned about public accountability, such as the Canadian Taxpayers Federation's Scott Hennig and so on, they would like to know what actually took place behind those closed doors other than the fact that somebody from such-and-such a company on such-and-such a day spoke to the government.

So while I commend the government for taking the smallest of initial steps, I would remind the government that for 2004 and 2005 running, they received the most secretive government award. By simply having a lobbyist registry that indicates who approached, I don't think that's going to prevent them from receiving that most unpublic, most opaque as opposed to transparent, most secretive government award.

I do look forward to discussing in greater detail during Committee of the Whole the amendments, the strengthening of this legislation,

which is absolutely necessary and which my colleague referred to as taking things out of regulation and putting them into the bright daylight of legislation. The assumption that the benevolence of a minister is sufficient to make decisions behind closed doors without even consulting his own cabinet members, never mind the opposition members, is insufficient. It's not transparent.

So I would task my hon. colleagues from the government with the homework assignment of creating real transparency. In future projects surprise us by bringing in whistle-blower legislation. Surprise us in terms of your transparency by setting election dates. You know, wow us by overturning Bill 20. Add to my Christmas wish list by putting Bill 40 back into legislation rather than regulation.

I look forward to working with the government on the standing policy committees. The reason I look so forward to this is because the minutes of those standing policy committees will be available for public viewing. It's that kind of transparency that I wish to see from this government on the lobbyists registry. To be truly transparent, provide the details of the meeting. You've really got nothing to lose if transparency and accountability are as important as it has been stated, and you have a whole lot to gain. You might even stay in as government for one more term.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone wishing to participate.

Mr. Chase: According to the operation of the House, am I allowed to adjourn debate at this point? With members' approval I would suggest that we adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1 o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 5:58 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1 p.m.]