

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title:** Tuesday, May 15, 2007

**1:00 p.m.**

Date: 07/05/15

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a few of Alberta's greatest assets. Joining us today from St. Marguerite Catholic school in Innisfail we have 25 grade 6 students, and accompanying them are their teachers, Andrea Woods, Sister Marie Clarkin, as well as parent volunteers Sue Haddow and Mrs. Tammy Orom. I am pleased that they could make their way up to Edmonton today on such a beautiful day for travelling. They're joining us in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to all stand, and we'll give them their warm welcome.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

**Mr. Melchin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce seven of the best employees that this government has in this Department of Seniors and Community Supports. We're delighted that through the public service orientation they have time to come and visit and see the proceedings of the Legislature and acquaint themselves with this part of the public policy. I'd have them stand as I read their names: Heather King, Lee Ann Kucheraway, Cathy Wood, Kara Boucher, Christine Jimenez, Sharon Presisnuk, and Janette Spilak. If we could all give them a warm welcome.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure today that I introduce to you and through you nine students from l'école Desrochers school in Jasper. These nine students came by train yesterday. They're with their teacher, Roxane Thomas, and parent helper Diane Hayes. At this time I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

**Ms Evans:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In May it's wonderful to see women that are braving the elements with beautiful hats. Today we are graced in the public gallery with the presence of the Rose Buds Red Hat chapter of Sherwood Park. Queen Lorraine is here with several other guests, Lorraine MacDonald and the Rose Buds of Sherwood Park. If they would rise, please, we'd give them all a warm welcome.

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

**Mr. Stevens:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly this afternoon Mr. Sean Schaffer. Sean will be working in my constituency office this summer. He has a passion for politics and government, and that's reflected in the fact that he is enrolled in the bachelor of applied policy studies program at Mount Royal College in Calgary. In his free time he is a youth vice-president of the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta for Foothills-Rocky View. Sean is here in the members' gallery. I would ask Sean to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ms Audrey Luft, chair of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts; Mr. Robert Sirman, director of the Canada Council for the Arts; and Mr. Amir Alibhai, Canada Council for the Arts board member. This morning Ms Luft, Mr. Sirman, and Mr. Alibhai announced the new partnership that will result in tremendous benefits for Alberta's arts community. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the Canada Council for the Arts are joining forces to form the Alberta creative development initiative, which will provide \$6 million in grants to Alberta artists and arts organizations over the next three years.

**The Speaker:** That sounds like a ministerial statement. How about we go with the introduction.

**Mr. Goudreau:** I'd like to thank Ms Luft, Mr. Sirman, and Mr. Alibhai for their continued efforts in support of the arts and will now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 67 great kids from my constituency of Edmonton-Decore. They hail from the school of St. John Bosco elementary, a brand new school in the area, and it's already full. In fact, they're already needing more spaces. I'd like the kids to rise with their teachers as well: Denise Adolf, Mr. Paul McNeely, and Miss Donna Rankin. They're also accompanied by a parent helper, Mrs. Linda Doan. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two new members of the executive of the University of Alberta Students' Union. Michael Janz, a history major, is the new president of the University of Alberta Students' Union, and Steve Dollansky, a science student, is the new vice-president external. Mr. Dollansky is also the vice-chair of the Council of Alberta University Students. They are accompanied by Don Iveson, advocacy director for the students' union. I ask that they all now please rise and accept the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two very special people who are joining us today, two individuals who are truly representative of this House. One is my nephew Steve Mather, and the other is the Premier's niece Bonnie Stelmach. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I had the pleasure on behalf of the Premier to host a couple of very special individuals, who are in your gallery, and that is Governor Jan Zahradnik and Governor Jiri Sulc, who are visiting Alberta from the Czech Republic. They are also accompanied by Jerry Jelinek, the honorary consul of the Czech Republic; Lenka Vostra, a director; Karel Hofman, chairman of the Czech Business Association; and Marian Ivan Liska, vice-president of the Czech and Slovak Association.

Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure to host these governors at a luncheon earlier today. They will be visiting our province to sign a co-operation agreement with two Alberta cities. Governor Sulc will be signing an agreement between his region and the city of Calgary for co-operation in the area of petrochemicals, and Governor Zahradnik will sign an agricultural co-operation agreement between his region and the city of Lethbridge.

I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional welcome of our Assembly.

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

**Mr. Mar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure, sir, to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Burn Johnston. Burn is a young man who's travelled here from Calgary to watch today's proceedings. I had the opportunity to host him at lunch today to talk about public service, and it wouldn't surprise me if some day Burn were on this floor sitting as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. I'd ask that he please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Trina French and Tina Moore. Trina and Tina are Palace Casino workers on their 249th day of strike due to the failure of the government to protect Alberta workers through fair labour legislation. Trina French was born and raised in Edmonton and has worked at the Palace Casino for six years as a dealer. Tina started at the casino on her birthday in 2000 and has been a dealer during her time there. In addition to being a full-time mom and a full-time dealer at the casino, she helps organize community sporting events that her children are involved in. She has two children who are 23 and 17 years old. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

#### **Medicine Hat Tigers**

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today and recognize and congratulate a team from my constituency who has shown great heart, spirit, and perseverance.

In a pulse-pounding game 7 of the WHL championship the Medicine Hat Tigers scored in double overtime to emerge victorious. They defeated the Vancouver Giants 3-2 on Monday night in their hometown of Medicine Hat. The overtime hero was Brennan Bosch, who scored the final goal just seven minutes and 16 seconds into the second overtime period of the game.

**1:10**

Mr. Speaker, I'm a great fan of the Tigers, and I would argue that there's no other team in the province with stronger supporters. The people of Medicine Hat have a devout passion for Tigers hockey, and many wouldn't dream of missing a single game. The team has a proud history that includes two Memorial Cup championships and alumni such as Lanny McDonald, Trevor Linden, and Kelly Hrudey. I have no doubt that they will continue to build on this history as they head for Vancouver this Friday to play in the Memorial Cup. At this tournament they will once again meet up with the Vancouver Giants as well as the Ontario Plymouth Whalers and the Quebec Lewiston Maineiacs.

I'd like to wish the Medicine Hat Tigers best of luck in the 2007 Memorial Cup tournament. This team has great owners, coaches, and players, and I'm proud that they call Medicine Hat home. When it comes to hockey, southeast Alberta is most certainly not the forgotten corner. This group has made Medicine Hat and the region proud as well as the entire province of Alberta. Congratulations again to the Tigers on their big win, and good luck to them in their battle for the Memorial Cup.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### **Hobbema Cadet Corps**

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had the opportunity to speak to the Assembly on a number of occasions about the Hobbema Cadet Corps. This innovative program involves nearly a thousand children in the Hobbema community. Supported by the Hobbema RCMP detachment, the cadet program helps kids to engage in positive activities. It builds the self-esteem of these young people and gives them opportunities to be with their friends in a safe and welcoming environment.

Recently the Hobbema community gathered to view a documentary about the cadet program called *Shades of Blue*. Filmed by Toronto filmmaker Susan Poizner, the documentary is intended to be a tool against gang violence in First Nations communities. The film takes a look at the outstanding success of the program. Tracing its growth from a few members to the well over 900 that it has today, the documentary captures how this community is actively working to provide a constructive activity for youth. To spread the message of success of the Hobbema Cadet Corps, 1,000 copies of the documentary film will be sent to schools across Canada. Hopefully, other communities struggling with drug abuse and gang activity could use Hobbema's example and develop similar programs to give their own youth an opportunity at a successful future.

Mr. Speaker, I speak for all members of my constituency in saying that we feel great pride about this very successful program. This is good news that should be shared to counter the negative impressions that are left because of drug abuse and gang activity. The Hobbema Cadet Corps has been very effective in filling the vacuum created by illicit activities.

In closing, I want to recognize cadet instructor RCMP Constable Richard Huculiak and to thank him for the great work that he and other leaders are doing with the Hobbema cadets.

Thank you.

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

**Excellence in Teaching Awards  
for Edmonton-Rutherford Teachers**

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday evening 23 Alberta teachers were honoured with the 2007 excellence in teaching awards. I am proud to inform you that there were seven finalists this year from schools in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. Nominated were Ms Denise Pridmore from Richard Secord school, Mr. Theron Lund from Harry Ainlay high school, Ms Iris Frankiw from Greenfield school, Mr. Timothy Cusack from Louis St. Laurent, and Mrs. Simone Desilets, Ms Melissa Spenrath, and Ms Sarah Fedoration, all from l'école St. Stanislaus.

The cream of this crop, Ms Sarah Fedoration, was chosen from among 33,000 colleagues to receive this prestigious award. Sarah's contributions include the development of a new and innovative approach to teaching literacy skills to English-speaking students enrolled in a French immersion program. The nomination package presented on her behalf tells a story of a professional who is adored by her students, parents, and colleagues alike.

An excerpt from the nomination reads:

Albert Einstein once said that "it is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge." In all that we have seen, heard, and experienced from the beginning of this school year, we as parents of students in Ms Sarah's class echo these bold words and use the essence of this quote to highlight our own experiences and those of our children in support of an educator who has invested herself in the art of her teaching.

Sarah's principal, Carmen Stuart, says, "Sarah has a profound understanding of children, socially, academically, emotionally, spiritually. She loves children, and that shows."

Mr. Speaker, the kids at l'école St. Stanislaus are blessed to have Sarah Fedoration for a teacher, and the residents of Edmonton-Rutherford are proud to have her serving in our community.

Thank you.

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

**Sheriff Highway Patrol**

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2005 466 Albertans lost their lives on our province's highways. This is a tragic and unacceptable number. Last fall the government of Alberta strengthened its commitment to traffic enforcement in the province with the creation of a sheriff highway patrol. This program complements enforcement efforts by the RCMP and allows them to focus on more serious crime issues in the communities they serve. Budget 2007 provides \$7.5 million for 42 additional sheriffs, and today the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security announced that 20 of those sheriffs will be on the road in time for this May long weekend.

We now have 60 sheriffs patrolling our highways, targeting aggressive drivers and speeders to help reduce collisions and fatalities. They have handed out almost 25,000 tickets and have helped take more than 50 impaired drivers off our roads since September. Sheriffs have also worked closely with law enforcement agencies in their regions on joint enforcement programs. For example, a four-day joint-forces operation with the RCMP in April netted more than 1,000 speeders on the Queen Elizabeth II highway. Just this past weekend sheriffs pulled over a vehicle near Grande Prairie for speeding. They noticed open liquor, and a search of the vehicle resulted in the RCMP laying drug charges against the driver.

I want to commend the sheriffs for the work they're doing to provide safe and secure communities. I'd also like to remind

Albertans to take the time to drive safely this long weekend and to make sure everyone arrives alive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Telus Cup Midget Hockey Championship**

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year the best midget triple A minor hockey teams in Canada come together to play in the national championship, the Telus Cup. Every year hundreds of volunteers offer their time and expertise to plan and execute the best championship ever. This year for the first time the tournament was held in Red Deer, Alberta. Tournament organizers, including more than 200 volunteers, worked hard for two years to make the Telus Cup a great success. Players, coaches, parents, volunteers, referees, hockey fans, and sponsors gathered for one whole week to watch the best midget hockey in Canada and broke attendance records with standing-room-only crowds.

The fast, tough, and aggressive Red Deer Optimist midget triple A hockey team had a near perfect record. The only loss they suffered during the tournament was to the Prince Albert Mintos, who set a record by winning back-to-back national championships. The Red Deer Optimist lost to the Prince Albert Mintos in the gold medal game in double overtime with a score of 3 to 2.

Thank you to all the sponsors, Red Deer Minor Hockey, Hockey Canada, the 2007 Telus Cup steering committee, the coaches, the parents, and the many volunteers who helped to make this year's Telus Cup a huge success. Congratulations to the outstanding Red Deer Optimist midget triple A players – goaltenders Adam Gingras and the tournament MVP, Marc Boulanger, Darren Windle, Jeff Einhorn, Casey Mitchell, Kaare Odegard, Trevor Bauer, Colin Archer, Kyle Maas, Elliot Marion, Corey Campbell, Jordan Hale, Matt Fraser, Landon Hiebert, Erik Slempe, Cass Mappin, John Digness, Chase Schaber, Kyle Reynolds, Dallas Goodrunning, Bowen Fraser – to head coach Brent Fudge, assistant coaches Jason Nevins, Tanner Murray, and Wynne Dempster, to their trainers, Peter and Crystal Swales, and to their team manager, Gord Yake. Thank you all for making Red Deer and Alberta proud.

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

**All-night Debate on Bill 34**

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rent reliability. From 8 p.m. on Wednesday, May 9, until almost 11 a.m., Thursday, May 10, representatives of all parties wrestled with Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. While deeply divided on the issue of rent controls, we all recognized the urgent need for affordable rental accommodations. It was frequently noted throughout debate by members of all parties that Bill 34 was only a part of the answer, a first step rather than a final solution.

Members of the Liberal and New Democratic parties called upon the government to intervene by introducing amendments proposing temporary rent caps to halt a wave of unjustifiable rent increases. Our Conservative counterparts were asked to define what they perceived as gouging but instead held fast to their sincere belief that the market would eventually sort itself out. Regardless of our party stripe we believe that the vast majority of landlords and tenants are honourable individuals. Where our views diverge is on how we would address the crisis of rent spikes anywhere from 45 per cent to 400 per cent.

The first amendment, that was proposed by the Liberal MLA for Edmonton-Glenora, was to restrict rent increases to the CPI plus 2

per cent over a two-year period, thus providing a breath of calm in which affordable rental accommodation could be brought online. While unanimously accepted by both the Liberal and NDP representatives, it was resoundingly rejected by Conservatives, the member of the Alliance, and the independent.

Two important amendments proposed by our Liberal MLAs for Edmonton-Centre and Edmonton-McClung which required the one-year single increase to be put into legislation rather than regulation and a doubling of the fine from \$5,000 to \$10,000 for landlords who contravene the condo conversion section of the act were accepted late Thursday morning. Unfortunately, renters continue to be left hanging in the wind by this government, which courts the unscrupulous few at the expense of the vulnerable many.

head: 1:20

### Presenting Petitions

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

**Mr. Martin:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition sponsored by the Alberta Social Credit Party. It has 2,498 signatures. The petition calls for the Assembly to urge the government to "introduce legislation to eliminate health care premiums for all Albertans."

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition with 66 signatures on it. The petition calls for province-wide inspections and enforcement at health facilities and reads: "urge the government to immediately establish a public inquiry into the failure of the health care system to protect the safety of patients."

head:

### Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today arising out of questions raised in Committee of Supply. I'd like to table responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a list of documents and studies requested by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore concerning my department's mountain pine beetle action plan.

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

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings this afternoon. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of a news release: Alberta artists set to benefit from the new \$6 million partnership. It provides further details regarding the new Alberta creative development initiative.

The other tabling, Mr. Speaker, is five copies of the guidelines for the community initiatives program, which were approved in 2004,

and five copies of information regarding unmatched grants in excess of \$10,000 which were used to help nonprofit community groups provide valuable services to Albertans across the province.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies from a woman constituent of Bragg Creek, Lucy Curtis, who expresses concerns about the logging plans for the Kananaskis.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table today. The first is from Neil and Maureen Bleakney, who live in Fort McMurray. They are worried about the cost of housing, particularly because high rents are hurting seniors.

The second is from Jacques Francois Boulet. Mr. Boulet and his family recently moved to Alberta but are now planning to move away after being given notice that their apartment is going to be converted to a condominium, and they see no possibility of securing affordable housing.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of a document describing the organization GOPAC. That's the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption. It is now into its third year. It is chaired by John Williams, a Member of Parliament from Alberta, and it has membership now in over 90 countries.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five letter tablings today outlining the infrastructure priorities of five school districts. The first is from the Wolf Creek school division No. 72 indicating the need for school facilities in the town of Ponoka over the next 25 years as well as the modernization of Iron Ridge elementary campus in the town of Blackfalds and modernization of Rimbey junior/senior . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member. Three ministers provided tablings today where they could have gone on for a long period of time. Let's just table and move on, please.

**Mr. Chase:** Okay. My second tabling is from the Calgary Girls' school, looking for support for a 600-student middle school.

My third is from the Calgary board of education, and it represents the needs for Coventry middle school, Northwest senior high, and Piitoayis family school.

The fourth letter comes from the Edmonton Catholic schools looking for major modernization of Archbishop MacDonald, Archbishop O'Leary, and the construction of an elementary/junior high school in Windermere.

The final letter is from the Edmonton public school district, which requires 16 new construction projects. The three highest priorities: Palisades elementary, Burnewood/Meadows junior high, and Terwillegar Heights elementary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Hancock, Government House Leader, final copy dated May 15, 2007, spring calendar, Committee of Supply.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

**Affordable Housing**

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's response to the affordable housing crisis raises serious questions about its competence. At a time when Albertans desperately need clear direction and a solid plan, we get confusion and disarray. The Premier has lost control of this file. Questions posed to one minister get answered by another. At least three different ministers have programs, funds, websites, or committees at various stages of development. My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier tell Albertans why the government's response to the affordable housing crisis is so confused?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, our response to the housing issue in the province of Alberta is very clear. It starts with a huge capital investment: \$285 million for affordable housing. It's followed up with legislation that was passed in the House. There are also rent supplement programs in place and also a safety net in place for those families that cannot find accommodation. That safety net, quite frankly, accommodates families of different sizes to ensure that we can find appropriate accommodation for them in the location of their choice.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, despite the Premier's assurances the confusion continues to grow. First, the Minister of Service Alberta announces a rent review panel, chaired by the Member for Calgary-Foothills, to establish a code of conduct and a public website to shame landlords who gouge tenants. Now it appears that he's backtracking and just looking to sit down with an existing committee to discuss solutions. To the Premier: is his government proceeding or is it backtracking on these flawed plans?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the government is moving forward on any initiatives with respect to housing. This issue came up during the leadership campaign in the province of Alberta, and it's multifold. It's not only homelessness but also low-income rental units and families wanting to buy single dwellings. There are, of course, issues in all those categories. We're meeting with various authorities to make sure that we continue in our plan and build the number of units that we require to house all Albertans.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, this government's actions show that it's completely out of touch with the will of Albertans. A poll released just this morning indicates that a huge majority of Edmontonians and Calgaryans, including 78 per cent of homeowners, not renters but homeowners, support government limits on rent increases, something this government has opposed. To the Premier: how does this government so blatantly ignore the wishes of an overwhelming majority of Albertans on so fundamental an issue?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, clearly, affordable housing is an issue for all Albertans. As I said earlier, we have a four-point plan. We're

proceeding on that plan, and of course most important is to provide as many housing units as possible in the province of Alberta. We've discussed this a number of times in this House. We are proceeding with a plan, and we will see more construction, more starts in the province of Alberta to help accommodate Alberta families.

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

**1:30 Capital Region Municipal Planning**

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, of course, this government is out of touch with the public on all kinds of issues. A public opinion poll on managing growth in the Edmonton region revealed that 89 per cent of people across the whole region believe there should be more regional co-operation in the capital region. However, this government once again is not providing leadership on this issue. To the Premier: why is the Premier so out of touch on another important issue affecting so many Albertans?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Actually, Mr. Speaker, we are working with all municipalities in the province of Alberta towards better co-ordination of planning. There is a focus, of course, in the capital region because of the huge growth. Many of the plans that are announced or will be announced shortly are in Sturgeon and the county of Strathcona, but they will impact all the municipalities in the area. That's why we're meeting to find out exactly the kind of infrastructure that's required, also the kind of follow-up on various social issues that may result from more people moving into the area and the various impacts on individual municipalities. That's the path we're taking, and we're going to keep those discussions going and build a plan for the capital region.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Keeping the discussions going is not working.

Yesterday in this Assembly the Premier said he was, quote, confident that municipalities in the capital region are working effectively together, but I know from going to ACRA meetings and from talking to Edmonton city council that they're barely talking to each other. Clearly the municipalities are in chronic conflict. To the Premier: how does the Premier justify his confidence that mandatory regional planning is not needed for the Edmonton region?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I mentioned in the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce speech I delivered a few weeks ago that we are going to work with municipalities to build a consensus on a plan that will roll out well into the future a lot of the major questions with respect to infrastructure, with respect to some of the social needs of the various municipalities. I did indicate at that time that it's not my wish to use a big stick because I have tremendous confidence in the elected municipal officials, but if after a period of time we cannot reach agreement, then we will have to step in. There is a huge risk here of a significant loss of investment if we don't have a very predictable, stable regulatory planning regime in place.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is right, at least, in saying that there is a huge risk here if there isn't strong regional planning. The Member for Sherwood Park is known, in fact, to oppose the interests of Edmonton in having strong regional planning.

My question is to the Premier. Given that so much of the proposed development in the capital region is in his own backyard, is he also opposed to mandatory regional planning?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, obviously the hon. leader doesn't know where I live. I live south of Andrew and not in the northeast industrial heartland. Anyway, with respect to this whole issue of further development, we are privileged in the province of Alberta because through very good planning on behalf of the province in previous years most of the synergy of all of the plants that will be built, especially petrochemical plants, will be built in one industrial area, which will reduce the amount of footprint across the province of Alberta environmentally. Here's a conveyance of pipeline. We'll have additional transportation lines, rail lines built in that area. Now we have to take the next step and see how having so many workers in one area affects neighbouring municipalities, and we are doing that.

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

### Rural School Closures

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Schools are crucial to the health of communities everywhere, and this is especially true in rural areas. Last week we heard from the Minister of Education that this government is committed to keeping schools in places where people live and learn. Recent news of four potential school closures in the rural area of east Wheatland demonstrates that this government is not practicing what it preaches. People in Rockyford are very worried that their K to 9 school will close. To the Minister of Education: the village of Rockyford was promised last year by the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks that under no circumstances would they lose their K to 9 school. Will you confirm that this promise is still valid, Mr. Minister?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I've not been informed by the Golden Hills school division of any plans to close that particular school.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Understandably, town officials were caught completely off guard by the announcement of this possible school closure. With the assumption that their K to 9 school would not be in jeopardy, the village of Rockyford has begun work on a 40-house subdivision to help grow their community. Town officials fear that no one will move to Rockyford now if they have to put their children on a bus for over two hours each day. To the Minister of Education: can you explain the rationale this department has for looking at closing these schools, especially in the cases where school closures threaten the survival of these rural communities in Alberta?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member continues to spread untruths, how does he expect that people are going to move to those communities? There is no plan that I'm aware of to close the particular school.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I was just cleared by confessional.

Really, what this comes down to is the survival of Rockyford and other villages in the area that are threatened by school closures.

Alberta's rural development strategy, A Place to Grow, identifies schools as the heart of rural communities. Allowing four schools to close will deprive communities of any hope for long-term vitality. This is not acceptable, Mr. Minister.

**The Speaker:** If there was a question there, proceed.

**Mr. Flaherty:** To the Minister of Education. [interjections] Excuse me; I was getting nervous.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, I've already recognized the minister.

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I will anxiously await the 2007-2008 capital plan of the Golden Hills school division.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, you wish to raise a point of order at the conclusion of the Routine with respect to comments made earlier by the Leader of the Official Opposition, is that correct?

**Ms Evans:** At the end of the Routine I will.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

### Temporary Rent Regulation

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A new Ipsos-Reid poll provides more proof, if any was needed, that this Tory government is out of touch with Albertans. More than 90 per cent of renters and 70 per cent of homeowners polled say that rent guidelines are needed to protect renters. But not this PC government. Rent increases of \$1,000 a month or more are just fine with Alberta's government for the gougers. My question is to the Premier. Is it the Premier's position that the vast majority of Albertans are wrong and only the government knows what's best for them, or is he setting up a nanny state for landlords?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, as a response to previous questions in the House with respect to housing, housing is, of course, a major concern for all Albertans. It's reflected in our government priorities. We made this a priority very early in terms of the five priorities of government. As I said before, we're progressing with a huge investment, more than a quarter of a billion dollars for affordable housing followed up with legislation, and we have two safety net programs in place, both rent supplement and also a safety net for families to make sure that we can find accommodation for them.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, this government's answers fall very short of meeting the needs of renters who are being gouged on a regular basis. It's all talk, no action. The Minister of Service Alberta cooked up a new plan for a rent review board at 4 a.m., and I don't know if he was just having, you know, a bit of an hallucination. Maybe the Premier can tell us the status of the rent review panel that the minister cooked up and put a member of the backbench, who didn't know anything about it, on. Who's making policy, Mr. Premier? Certainly not the government.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, regardless of the kind of rhetoric before the questions, this is a major concern for us, and we are working. I mean, when we talk about comments made with respect to I think he said small talk or whatever it was, \$285 million is not small. It's a huge investment. That's going to put a lot of affordable units on the marketplace. We're working with municipalities to deal

with the issue of homelessness. I've met with a number of the executive directors. They're very pleased with the plan in terms of funds going to deal with the critical issue. Again, we're working with the municipalities to free up more land for development. They are clearly moving in the right direction.

1:40

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. We certainly hear otherwise from renters in this province. There are hundreds of thousands of families that are not being served by the government's constant talk.

Yesterday the Minister of Service Alberta tabled an excerpt from the *Concise Encyclopedia of Economics* entitled Rent Control, written by Walter Block. We checked his website, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting. He describes himself as a libertarian/anarchocapitalist philosopher. You know, I just want to indicate that while the Alberta NDP opposition listens to the people, this government is listening to libertarian/anarchocapitalists, something that might just well describe this government's policy so far. My question is to the Premier. Is the policy being set by the people of this province in the interests of the people of this province . . .

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, I don't know what those anarcho things are, but I know that ignorance is bliss.

Let's put some of the quotes in here from the document tabled yesterday.

. . . Swedish Labour Party's welfare state, on the "left." Myrdal [a socialist] stated, "Rent control has in certain Western countries constituted, maybe, the worst example of poor planning by governments lacking courage and vision."

This is another socialist economist from Sweden, Assar Lindbeck: In [most] cases rent control appears to be the most efficient technique presently known to destroy a city – except for bombing.

Mr. Speaker, that is not the author. Those are quotes from other economists who have actually studied what they're doing and have an idea of what they're talking about, completely contradictory to the question.

### Rail Transport of Grain

**Mr. Graydon:** Some of these performances are hard to follow, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents are voicing concerns over rail service levels to smaller grain companies in Alberta. They are finding that reduced levels of service provided by CN Rail are adding extra burdens and costs to these small grain operators. My questions are to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food. Can the minister tell us what impact lower rail service levels are having on Alberta farmers, particularly in the north?

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

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important issue for farmers and grain shippers across western Canada and especially those dependent on CN services in northern Alberta. Low service levels and a lack of rail capacity from CN are preventing Alberta's smaller shippers from moving their grain to market in a timely and orderly fashion. This is creating added costs and making challenges to many grain farmers in northern Alberta and across western Canada.

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

**Mr. Graydon:** Thank you. To the same minister: can the minister tell us what specifically the Alberta government is doing to improve service levels to these farmers?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Mr. Speaker, my department has been working very hard on the issue for several months now, and we commissioned a study of rail service problems and sent it to the federal government. I've also written a joint letter to other prairie ag ministers and to federal agriculture minister Chuck Strahl asking for a full review of this issue.

Just last month, Mr. Speaker, I wrote to the Canadian Transportation Agency making it clear that the current railcar shipment is not acceptable for smaller shippers. I asked the agency to use its powers to re-establish a competitive balance for shippers and a reliable and effective car allocation system.

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

**Mr. Graydon:** Thank you. A second supplemental to the same minister: can the minister tell us when small shippers may see an increase to rail service in those areas?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Mr. Speaker, the situation has gotten so bad that the farmer groups across western Canada have put their support behind Great Northern Grain, also known as GNG. Last month GNG launched a major complaint to the Canadian Transportation Agency against CN Rail. While CN continues to oppose the Alberta government's participation in this matter, for the protection of our farmers we have put forward a plea of supporting GNG in this case. The Canadian Transportation Agency must rule on this complaint by July. If the response from this complaint is inadequate, I most certainly will be having further discussions with the federal government and the Canadian Transportation Agency.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

### Heavy Oil Upgrading Capacity

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2002 the Department of Energy received a report on heavy oil production in Alberta. This report recommends that the EUB and the Alberta government revisit this issue. The lost profits and the lost opportunities are simply too large to ignore. This report gathered dust in the Legislature Library while this government hibernated for an additional five years. My first question is to the Premier. Is it the policy of this government to create a shortage of upgrading capacity in Alberta to force down the price of heavy crude paid to local producers and make the upgrading facilities located in the U.S.A. even more profitable?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, well, 65 per cent of bitumen that's mined in the province today is upgraded. We want to move further, to add to that, and that's part, of course, of the discussions that are going on and looking at the royalty review as well. There are ways of encouraging more value-added because the products coming out of the value-added can be used in synergy with other petrochemical industries. So this is one way of further diversifying Alberta's economy rather than just concentrating on the sale of raw bitumen or natural gas. We look forward to adding to this industry with further value-added.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: why, then, does the report made for the Department of Energy estimate that the total value lost to Alberta is well over a billion dollars per year because of a shortage of upgrading capacity?

**An Hon. Member:** How much?

**Mr. MacDonald:** A billion dollars a year.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, with respect to this particular issue on upgrading, as I said, about 65 per cent – we want to move those numbers further. There's also the issue, of course, of how we do this in a way that the synergy of the industry will come together, also of course moving finished product out of this province to markets in North America. I'm looking forward to the final report coming from the royalty review because it will have in detail a lot of this information.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. Let's talk about the other 35 per cent of that bitumen, which is exported. Given that at least 380,000 barrels of bitumen are upgraded outside the province each day, how many jobs and how much revenue is being exported down the pipeline daily because of this government's five-year hibernation and their continued inaction?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, you know, just in this session you can see the contradiction from both sides of that bench there. On one hand, they want us to stop immediately. They said: put the brakes on all development; no more development in the province of Alberta. On the other hand, in the very same session the other side is saying: oh, but you have to keep upgrading more. So where are these concerns from the opposition with respect to responsible environmental planning in the province of Alberta?

**The Speaker:** Hon. leader of the third party, I gather you rose on a point of order?

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

**The Speaker:** We'll deal with it later.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

#### Logging in Kananaskis Country

**Mr. Rodney:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe all Albertans may agree on the following statement, that Kananaskis Country has always been a jewel in Alberta's crown. For decades now K Country has been a multi-use zone that allows for a wide variety of recreational and industrial activity, but recently opponents of forest management in K Country have accused the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development of not caring about their concerns about the area, particularly when it comes to watershed impacts that they say occur from logging. My question is to that minister. Can he please clarify his position on logging and water quality in K Country?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the Assembly that protecting water quality and water quantity is a priority requirement for all forestry operations in this province. The

hydrological assessments that have been done in the Bragg Creek watershed indicate that timber harvesting has had no appreciable effect on the water quality in that area. I'm happy to report that during constituency week, on April 27, I had the opportunity to spend half a day in Kananaskis inspecting some of the reforested cut blocks, and I can confirm that the integrity of the watershed was well protected by that reforestation effort.

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

**Mr. Rodney:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Logging opponents also say that he doesn't care that natural habitat for wildlife will be, quote, wiped out by harvesting. What is the hon. minister's answer to that?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I assure the Assembly that I do care. In fact, I'm sometimes criticized for caring too much about wildlife habitat.

1:50

**An Hon. Member:** No way.

**Dr. Morton:** Yes.

I want you to know that the Department of Sustainable Resource Development is pursuing initiatives under the land-use framework that are intended to protect habitat on both public and private lands. We're looking forward to doing more of that in the coming year.

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

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: what's his position on the website statement that he's, quote, not impressed by the public's concern about the impact of harvesting on recreation in the region?

**The Speaker:** Look, I hope that you'll deal with government policy questions, not personal innuendo. Go ahead.

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's well known that I do value recreation. In fact, I've hiked and camped and skied and fished in Kananaskis Country for the last 25 years with my family, and that's why I'm personally committed to protecting K Country against pine beetles and the attendant risk of forest fire.

We require the replanting of four new trees for every one that is cut. This is a responsible approach, a balanced approach in protecting the integrity of the forest and also the long-term use for all Albertans of Kananaskis Country.

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

#### Community Initiatives Program

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. CIP guidelines state very clearly that up to \$10,000 will be considered on a nonmatching basis. Not over \$10,000. Up to \$10,000. Documents tabled in this Assembly show that rule 7 was broken 43 times, totalling over \$2 million. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. How dare you say that rules were not broken 43 times?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, certainly there were no rules broken, as I indicated. The rules indicate as well that the minister has a fair



amount of discretion to deal with the applications. We need to recognize that we probably approved during the time frame in question over 6,000 applications through the CIP process, and 43 were where we showed a lot of sympathy to groups and organizations that really needed a lot of help.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. A month ago the minister admitted that he broke the rules. Why does the minister have rules if he doesn't follow them?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, again I need to maybe quote a few of them. One of them was support to the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association. Another was the Centennial High Parents' Society. There was the Alano Club. Those are all groups that are doing a tremendous amount of work and needed some support. They could not provide matching funds, and we decided that they were sufficient and doing good enough work to be able to get those additional funds.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Well, you were paying five times more than they deserved anyway.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans support the CIP program, but all groups should have the same opportunity to apply for the funds. Why should Alberta taxpayers trust this government with their money if the minister picks favourites?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, again I must re-emphasize that we use a lot of flexibility in this. I want to talk about the Grand Cache Transition House. This one was a group of ladies that needed a garage to conceal the location of abused women's vehicles so these individuals would not be followed. They needed this money very, very rapidly. They did not have any matching funds. We showed some sympathy to them and provided them. I can go on and identify a lot more in there, but I don't think I need to.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

### Groundwater Quality

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Groundwater is the only source of potable water for many people in rural Alberta. Some of these people have concerns about the availability of water for themselves. Because of the various types of geological subsurface formations throughout the province, the water that is found in their aquifers may have vastly differing quantities and qualities. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Do we have a good understanding of the current state of groundwater in this province?

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say that the answer to the question is yes. Generally speaking, we do have a good understanding. That being said, there's still much more that we can learn. That's why over the past five years we've spent \$8 million on ground mapping and research. In the estimates that I had under discussion before the House last night, we committed to an additional \$12 million for further research in groundwater mapping over the next three years.

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

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From time to time when people drilled wells in rural Alberta they would encounter methane gas. To the same minister: could you explain why methane gas is so commonly found in water wells in rural Alberta?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right. It is quite a common occurrence to find methane gas in water. Some of that is because the gas itself is sharing space with the water, and as you reduce the pressure in the water source, you release the gas. Depending upon how rapidly you draw down the water in any particular aquifer, you can actually create a small gas well, and that's what happens in some cases. It's not uncommon at all.

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

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question: what can rural water well users do to maintain their water wells to ensure good water quality?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of things that people need to do. One is to ensure that they do not draw down the water too rapidly if they find themselves into an aquifer that contains gas. More importantly, much of the gas issue comes as a result of bacteria that can develop in a well, and it's absolutely imperative that an ongoing maintenance of bleaching, chlorination, happens on a regular basis, at least once a year. I would encourage anyone who has a privately operated well to contact experts in the field and find out how they can properly maintain that well.

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

### Confined Feeding Operations

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are on confined feeding operations, the first to the minister of agriculture. In September the government changed the regulations governing confined feeding operations in this province. The distance those operations must be from their neighbours is governed by the minimum distance separation. The government dramatically weakened that restriction. The only neighbours considered now are residences. That means that schools, community centres, and churches would be exempt from that minimum distance separation, and confined feeding operations can move in. To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: what possible benefit does this change have for Albertans?

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

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NRCB is totally in control of this. The right to farm is under my purview, and of course the other one is under SRD. The setbacks have been established, and they're certainly adhered to. They're checked out by the NRCB, and they absolutely make the recommendations on the approvals.

**Dr. Swann:** That was no answer at all, Mr. Speaker.

Also in the regulatory changes, slipped in without debate, is a weakening of groundwater protection. Formerly all groundwater needed to be protected from animal waste with liners. Now this condition only applies to usable groundwater. The Rosenberg report

on water commissioned by this government states very clearly that the province does not know enough about nor does it adequately protect groundwater in this province. This government doesn't know what groundwater is usable and what isn't. To the Environment minister: why are we weakening protection for groundwater under confined feeding operations?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with the specific regulations that the member is referring to. With respect to usable groundwater I think there's a logical explanation, and it's not confined feeding operations. It's, in fact, the deep well disposal of materials that is done on a standard basis. That is something that I think makes perfectly good sense. In that case, the groundwater in question is saline and is not usable water, and that's an explanation as to why such a regulation would exist.

2:00

**The Speaker:** There was a third point of order being recognized. We'll deal with that at the end of the session.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Cuff report in 2005 describes the poor functioning of the Natural Resources Conservation Board, that it doesn't offer a fair or effective forum for resolving conflicts between industry and concerned residents. There is a widespread perception that when big business wants it, the government provides it, and regular Albertans pay the price. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: what is the minister doing to increase Albertans' confidence in the NRCB and its processes around CFOs?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very familiar with the Cuff report, and I'm happy to report that my ministry has undertaken a review and a reform of the Natural Resources Conservation Board. We've separated its adjudicatory and administrative functions. I'm very confident that the decisions that come out of this reformed board will meet the mandate, which is to make balanced decisions in the public interest about the economic, social, and environmental good of Albertans.

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

#### Disclosure of Leadership Campaign Contributions

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ethics Commissioner Hamilton's investigation into the Premier's leadership campaign fundraising says, "Political campaign contributions are often viewed . . . as potential conflicts of interest and even [political] corruption." He adds that questions about the political donations invariably reflect "a desire to know who is contributing and what the contributors may expect in return." Why won't the Premier admit that disclosing campaign contributions is crucial – absolutely crucial – to governing with transparency and accountability and put in place new rules to address this very real concern that the public has about transparency and integrity?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, there's absolutely no question that this Premier is committed to governing with integrity and transparency and has shown that. He has also moved to bring forward conflict-of-interest guidelines around campaign contributions for leadership

campaigns. I think he's made it perfectly clear that, quite likely, you'll be going through one before us, so we look forward to your input on just how those campaign contributions could be used.

**Dr. Pannu:** Mr. Speaker, we are not getting clear answers from this government. The federal Ethics Commissioner was quoted in this report, saying that "without disclosure of all contributions . . . there may be concerns that the Minister had undeclared future obligations to those who contributed to his or her campaign." That's exactly the concern we have raised in this House before. Again to the Premier. The federal government, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan all have disclosure rules for leadership campaign contributions. Why don't we? Don't Albertans deserve the same respect?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, we are bringing forward legislation that will address campaign contributions to the leaderships. The issue is certainly not as urgent for this party as it would be for yours, so we look forward to pressure from you to speed up this legislation in order that your leadership campaigns can be addressed.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Mr. Speaker, thank you. My last question to the Premier. The Premier says that for he and his government the top priority is to govern with integrity and transparency, but the legislation to guarantee it is missing. The Ethics Commissioner's investigation into the Premier's fundraising notes that our province lacks basic laws to ensure integrity and transparency in leadership campaign fundraising. Again to the Premier: given the public desire for the disclosure of contributions to political leadership campaigns, why doesn't the Premier strike an all-party committee to deliberate and report to this House in the fall?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, the Ethics Commissioner also said that all of the leadership people dealt with themselves in ethical manners, and none of them breached the things. Then he suggested that maybe we should develop guidelines around leadership campaign contributions. We agree, and we will work through the legislative process to ensure that you have full input so that your near-future leadership aspirations can be addressed under a legislative framework.

#### Speaker's Ruling Decision of the Ethics Commissioner

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the chair tabled the report yesterday. The chair wants to make it very, very clear that the reputation of no member has been challenged, I understand, in the questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. The Ethics Commissioner's report made it very clear that no member violated any principle that's in existence in the province of Alberta and recommended no sanction whatsoever, so there's no innuendo here at all possible on any hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

#### Northeast Calgary Ring Road

**Mr. Pham:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Wednesday at McDougall Centre in Calgary the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation and MLAs from northeast Calgary met with about 30 representatives of community groups and business owners who were concerned about the plans for the northeast Calgary ring road. It was a very good meeting, and I would like to thank the minister for

listening to people's concerns. My question today is to the minister. Many of the people are worried about approaches to the intersection at 16th Avenue and 68th Street, which could significantly limit access in and out of northeast Calgary. What are you going to do to address this problem, Mr. Minister?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the first thing I'd like to do is thank the hon. member for the question and all of the MLAs from the northeast quadrant of Calgary that's being affected by the ring road for getting all of the community leaders together at that meeting. They do have a real concern, and I heard some excellent information that night. We are working on the engineering of the off-ramps, but remember one thing: this government's biggest priority is to make sure that all the people driving those roads in Calgary are safe. We are working with the city of Calgary on trying to address what we can do at that intersection.

**Mr. Pham:** Before directing my supplemental question to the same minister, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross for setting up this important meeting.

Mr. Minister, people who live along this new ring road are very concerned about the traffic noise from the freeway because it is very close to their homes. What can you do to ensure that a proper berm is constructed and that it does not destroy the natural beauty of the area?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I understand their concerns very clearly. The residents of that area have spent many years looking after having a beautiful backyard, a beautiful area that backs onto the ring road, and we are planning the best that we can to put berms where they're needed. They mentioned that they didn't really like the concrete attenuation walls. We do have a policy on vegetation, and we're going to put in those berms and work the vegetation and keep the existing beauty of their backyards to the best that we can. [interjections]

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

**Mr. Pham:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I keep hearing a funny noise from the opposition side, and I can assure you that it is one of the most important issues facing residents in northeast Calgary. I have never seen a meeting with more than 30 community leaders having the same concern about this topic.

I would like to ask the minister. They have a concern about access to the ring road, especially the business owners along 84th Street and the residents of Chateau Estates. What is your ministry going to do to address these concerns, Mr. Minister?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I have to reiterate how important safety is. This is going to be a freeway. We have to be very, very cautious about adding extra interchanges. We can already see, with the main freeway through Calgary, that the amount of interchanges there have created great congestion every day at rush hour. I understand that these people want to make sure they have access for their customers. We want to make sure that we address safety and that we don't back cars up into the freeway. Again, we are working with the city of Calgary on addressing some of these issues, and we're going to do what we can. The ring road is proceeding, as you know. The contract has been let. The work is being done. We're working on what we can to address these issues.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

2:10

### Spring Grizzly Bear Hunt

**Mr. Bonko:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In 2006 the government finally suspended the spring grizzly bear hunt. The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development stated that further study was needed. Well, there has been a year that has gone by, and we're wondering about the DNA census study with regard to the population and the recovery team. One of the members from the recovery team was quoted that the figures are actually being kept secret from Albertans. They do not show the healthy population of the grizzly bears. So my questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. How many grizzly bears are there between highways 1 and 3, where the census was taken?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member might have seen yesterday that our grizzly bear research program is going forward. There was a good story about the model forest with the bear that had the GPS and the camera around his collar so we can see not only where the bear goes but what he's doing. The grizzly bear study project goes ahead. We declared a three-year moratorium. We're at the beginning of year 2, and we'll make our decisions about the grizzly hunt when all the results are in, based on good science.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's wilderness is our province's greatest attribute. All too often the government puts exploration of our natural resources before preservation. Will the minister continue to put a moratorium on the spring grizzly bear hunt until we're certain that we have a viable, sustainable population? More than one with a camera.

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had listened carefully, he would have heard me say that at the end of the three years, when we have all the scientific data in and we know what the grizzly bear population is across the province, we'll make our decision.

Thank you.

**An Hon. Member:** Stick to the script.

**Mr. Bonko:** That's right. I will stick to the script.

The inaction of the government is unacceptable. Without the protection of endangered status, grizzly bears and grizzly bear habitat will get choked by development, and their existence gets more and more serious each and every day. What more information from his own ministry would it take for the minister to actively and decisively declare the grizzly bear as an endangered species?

**Dr. Morton:** Like almost every other subject, Mr. Speaker, the hon. members on the other side always hit the panic button and want to make a decision before all the facts and figures are in. We'll wait until the end of the three-year study and make a decision then.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

### Good Samaritan Pembina Village

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The unsubstantiated claims made by the Official Opposition that work and safety conditions at the Good Samaritan Pembina Village continuing care

facility in Evansburg are not adequate for the patients or staff have gravely upset and concerned my constituents in Whitecourt-St. Anne. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister explain what the opposition's allegations are and provide a more accurate account of the situation at the Pembina Village?

**The Speaker:** Well, it's not the minister who is responsible to explain something on behalf of another one, but there was a second part of the question, so perhaps the minister would want to deal with that.

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is important, not to explain the opposition's claims but to explain how wrong they were in those claims and how it has seriously affected the citizens who are resident at the Pembina Village. There were serious accusations about the health status and the quality of care, and that created a great deal of concern among residents. They had a residents' meeting May 3 this year and were very concerned about the allegations that were raised. It's important to say that the issues that were the substance of the concerns that were raised were construction issues which have long since been dealt with. Long since been dealt with. The quality of care is not in any way affected by them, and the safety of the residents is secure.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Again to the same minister. The minister said that these issues have been dealt with. I want to know how and when these issues were dealt with if they were issues at all.

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the Health Facilities Review Committee went through that facility fairly early on. They made a report. They met with the Good Samaritan Society and the Capital health authority, who own and operate the facilities, and the report was done in February of 2004. Any of the issues arising out of the construction of that building, which was constructed in 2003, were dealt with, as I understand it, on a very immediate basis. There have been facility reviews since then, and any issues that arose from the initial construction have been dealt with. So I've taken the opportunity to write a letter to the Member for Edmonton-Centre, who raised those concerns in the House, giving her a chronology of the issues, which she would have known if she'd asked about it earlier and not scared people, and I've asked her to apologize to the residents of that facility.

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

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. [interjections] The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has the floor. Okay. For the third time, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has the floor.

#### Federal Child Care Funding

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Governing with openness and transparency means absolutely nothing if governments refuse to be held accountable. This week the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada published a list of five errant provinces that have failed to report on how they spent federal child care money. The list includes Alberta. To the Minister of Children's Services: can you tell us how Alberta spent its federal child care funding last year and the year before?

**Ms Tarchuk:** The first thing I would say is that we were never required by the federal government to actually report back to them

on the child care dollars. Having said that, I'd like to make the point that we are accountable to our public, and our dollars are annually reported in both our business plan and our annual report.

**Mrs. Mather:** First we hear that last year this department failed to spend over \$30 million of its budget even while facing a shortage of badly needed spaces, and now we learn about this issue. It seem that there are major financial management issues that need to be addressed in the Department of Children's Services. To the Minister of Children's Services: can you explain why Alberta failed to file not only its report from last year but also its report from 2004-2005?

**Ms Tarchuk:** Mr. Speaker, I think I already answered that. We do not have a responsibility to report back to the federal government. We certainly are accountable and have a responsibility to be accountable to Albertans, and we do do that on an annual basis.

**Mrs. Mather:** This year the federal government has promised to give \$25 million new dollars to Alberta in order to help create new child care spaces, yet the main estimates for the Department of Children's Services indicate that the budget increase for child care this year will only be \$16 million. To the Minister of Children's Services: what accounts for this discrepancy, and how can the minister assure us that all federal dollars targeted to child care will indeed be spent there?

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

**Ms Tarchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That answer is very simple. We have not heard back from the federal government as to confirmation on the amount of money as well as any conditions attached to it.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, that was 88 questions and answers, and today is day 31.

There has been a trend recently, though, hon. members. There are a lot of questions having to do with personal opinions, which is really not the main purview of the question period. And it's hardly likely a minister would really know exactly how many grizzly bear are located within this quadrant and that quadrant and that quadrant. That's why we have this mechanism called Written Questions and Motions for Returns.

But today we're going to have a very interesting afternoon now because we have three points of order to deal with. I haven't had one or two of those for the last couple of days, so this should prove entertaining as well as informative and very, very serious. So the first one, the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry on a point of order.

#### Point of Order Allegations against a Member

**Ms Evans:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. Today in a preamble to a question to our hon. Premier the Leader of the Opposition, in my view, breached Standing Orders, section 23(h), makes an allegation against another member, and (i), imputing false or unavowed motives to another member.

The reference to me representing Sherwood Park, describing me as opposed to regional co-operation is not only false, but I think it's typical of the kind of innuendo, Mr. Speaker, that you deplore. My record as minister of municipal affairs is one in which I brought in a co-operative model as well as introduced all-member votes for the Anthony Henday and introduced the Hyndman report to this Legislature. Through my tenure as an MLA as well as my recent

funding of Edmonton Economic Development, this false allegation, which has been ascribed from a couple of periodicals, is one which I intend to challenge. So I would submit that the hon. member opposite should withdraw that reference.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is how the exact wording will turn up in the Blues: the Member for Sherwood Park is known to oppose the interests of Edmonton in having a stronger regional planning mechanism.

2:20

**The Speaker:** Well, before the hon. member goes on, I'll give the hon. member the actual quote.

**Dr. Taft:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** I quote: "The Member for Sherwood Park is known in fact to oppose the interests of Edmonton in having strong regional planning."

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Sherwood Park has cited for the point of order – I'll take them apart one at a time – 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives." There is no mention of any motive whatsoever in the sentence in question, so I cannot imagine that there's any basis for a point of order on imputing motives. I never imputed any motive at all.

As to 23(h), making allegations against another member, Mr. Speaker, I made that statement on the basis of not only printed media reports, which I'm sure the member is aware of, but also on the basis of conversations among a number of members of various councils in surrounding areas around Edmonton with our team. So that was why I made that basis. I think the member's position or attitude towards strong regional planning mechanisms for Edmonton is fairly clear.

However, Mr. Speaker, in the interests of moving along the business of the Assembly, I will withdraw those comments.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Normally that would suffice. Hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, are you satisfied?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, in fact, I will accept that, but I would still say that in the statements that have been iterated in the withdrawal, it would appear that the hon. member gets his facts about me from other unidentified sources. It leaves a shadow, but I will accept.

**The Speaker:** The chair will thank the hon. minister for raising the point, will thank the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition for withdrawing the comment, and will just provide a caution once again that hon. members in this Assembly are members of integrity. Hon. members should talk to an hon. member to find out exactly what the hon. member has said, stands for, or what their position is, and we should not govern ourselves or be led by what's reported in the media or in personal statements in third-party sources that can never be tracked down. This is a place of honour. Let's deal with it on that basis. So thank you for that one.

Point 2, the leader of the third party on a point of order.

#### Point of Order Imputing Motives

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am raising a point of order under Standing Orders 23(h) and (i), making an

allegation against another member and imputing false or unavowed motives to another member. The Premier in question period was responding to a question, and he indicated that the parties on the opposition side had different positions and clearly indicated that our party, the Alberta NDP opposition, claimed that we would stop all development. I wrote that down. I'm sure you have a more accurate accounting.

Our position has been very clear, and it is on the record in *Hansard*. The Premier knows that the position of the Alberta New Democrats is not to stop all development but to call instead for a temporary moratorium on new approvals for tar sands production until such time as a rational strategy for the development of those assets of our province can be developed. We've indicated on several occasions that that would be of a fairly short duration of one or two years and would only apply to new approvals. It would have no significant impact on Alberta's economy, as existing approved projects will continue apace, and it will take many years before those are concluded. So the Premier is imputing false motives to our caucus, which I believe he knows not to be correct.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, in order to have, I guess, a hearing, one has to have a basis for having a hearing. So let me quote from the Blues exactly what was said by the leader of the government.

Mr. Speaker, you know, just in this session you can see the contradiction on both sides of that bench there. On one side they want us to stop immediately. They said: put the brakes on all development; no more development in the province of Alberta. On the other hand, in the very same session the other side is saying: oh, but you have to keep upgrading more. So where are these concerns from the opposition coming from with respect to responsible environmental planning in the province of Alberta?

No member is mentioned, no caucus is mentioned, and the rules very clearly state under 23 that you'd have to have allegations or motives against another member. Parties are fair game, but that wasn't even mentioned in here. So that's not a point of order.

We're moving forward now to the purported third one.

#### Point of Order Factual Accuracy

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the exchange this afternoon in question period the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View made a comment relative to the Rosenberg forum, which I had the honour of attending in Banff, Alberta. The province of Alberta was the first province in Canada to ever host an international forum, with 14 countries from all over the world, because Alberta specializes in water.

**An Hon. Member:** Citation.

**Mr. Boutilier:** The citation is exactly the citation that the hon. member meant, hopefully with greater success, 23(i), but I might also add 484(3).

In that, I believe that it's critically important that Alberta was selected to host this international forum. I attended the forum, the panel discussion, and at no time in my recollection did I ever, ever hear anyone from the Rosenberg forum say that Alberta was terrible when it came to water management.

**The Speaker:** Well, hon. member, once again we have to start off with a basis if we're going to continue it. The chair, unfortunately, does not see a basis, hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. In looking at the quote in here, I'll just quote part of it.

The Rosenberg report on water commissioned by this government states very clearly that the province does not know enough about, nor does it adequately protect groundwater in this province. This government doesn't know what groundwater is usable and what isn't. To the Environment minister: why are we weakening protections for groundwater under confined feeding operations?

An hon. member may disagree with part of the statement, but that would afford the hon. Minister of Environment to respond if the hon. Minister of Environment chose to respond, and the hon. Minister of Environment did.

Secondly, hon. members may all go and attend and hear the same speech and walk away with different interpretations of what was said. If there are disagreements, misunderstandings between members with respect to policy, that does not constitute the basis for a point of order. So we're going to say: eliminate that one.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

### **Continuation of Statutory Enactments**

20. Mr. Groeneveld moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly approve the continuation of the following enactments:

- (a) section 33 of the Agricultural Societies Act,
- (b) section 2 of the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act,
- (c) sections 3 and 36 of the Rural Electrification Loan Act,
- (d) section 2 of the Rural Electrification Long-term Financing Act, and
- (e) sections 32 and 33 of the Rural Utilities Act.

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

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to move Government Motion 20. I'm going to speed through this pretty speedily in the interest of time because I know that we have a tight schedule. The purpose of this motion is to continue the following five statutes: the Agricultural Societies Act, the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act, the Rural Electrification Loan Act, the Rural Electrification Long-term Financing Act, and the Rural Utilities Act. The intent of this statutory agreement is to allow the debate in the Legislature whether the statutes should be continued or repealed. I'm seeking the support of all hon. members to continue these statutes.

I will briefly overview these associated government investments in loans and loan guarantees and why the statutes should continue. The Agricultural Societies Act provides for the issuance of government guarantees to local societies offering activities such as an agriculture exhibition. The principal amounts guaranteed under the act are capped at \$50 million in total. Mr. Speaker, guarantees have not been used to agriculture societies under this act for more than 15 years. Alberta's financial investment is a small fraction of the maximum amount allowed. Currently there is only one loan guarantee issued under the act that is still in effect. That loan guarantee is reported to Alberta Finance annually. Continuance of the legislation is needed to maintain this loan guarantee.

2:30

Loans and loan guarantees issued under the Rural Utilities Act, the Rural Electrification Loan Act, and the Rural Electrification Long-term Financing Act support the installation of rural gas and farm electric utility services. Loan and loan guarantees have not been issued to rural utility associations in more than eight years. However, continuance of the legislation is needed to maintain outstanding loans and loan guarantees.

Specifically, the Rural Utilities Act provides for the issuance of government guarantees for loans issued by financial institutes in support of the construction of natural gas services by rural gas co-ops. Loan guarantees were last issued in 1998. Outstanding loans have approximately two years remaining on the repayment schedules. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's investment is secure. These loans are backed by a lien on the property.

Regarding the Rural Electrification Loan Act and the Rural Electrification Long-term Financing Act, these statutes provide for lending to rural electrification associations or to the individuals for the construction of farm electric utility services. Loans were last issued in 1997. At that time a decision was made by the government to discontinue loans and loan guarantees under this legislation. Outstanding loans have 15 years or more remaining on their loan repayment schedules.

The fifth and final statute, and probably the most important one, listed in motion 20 is the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act. Mr. Speaker, this statute is particularly important and, like the other four, wholly worthy of our full support. This government, along with Albertans, values the contribution of the livestock industry to our economy and our way of life in this province. The Feeder Associations Guarantee Act is important to the strength of the livestock industry through the issuance of government guarantees.

The livestock industry has seen both good and trying times since this program came to be in 1936. For more than 70 years this program has supported livestock producers and the growth of the feeding sector in Alberta. I am seeking the full support of all hon. members to continue this valuable program for our livestock industry. The government loan guarantee is provided to financial institutions that lend money to local feeder associations. Title to the livestock remains securely with the local feeder association, not the individual, Mr. Speaker, but animals are fed, managed, and marketed by the individual feeder association's members, who receive the net profits at the time of sale.

The loan guarantee program has provided many farmers the opportunity to diversify their farm operation and add value to farm-grown feeds. Features of the program have made commercial lenders willing to finance cattle at less than prime interest rates. Approximately 20 to 25 per cent of the annual calf crop is currently fed under this program. The program is community based. There are presently 59 feeder associations in Alberta, representing approximately 6,500 members who benefit from its continuance.

The total amount of loan guarantees issued under the program is approaching the cap of \$55 million. The government guarantee is a fraction of the total amount of credit issued by the commercial lenders to the local feeder associations. The government guarantee has been called on only a handful of times over the program's 70 years of operation. This has been a sound program, Mr. Speaker, as the members of the feeder associations have received total benefits of \$6.29 billion in livestock finance over the 70-year history. This program makes a significant contribution to achieving the government's goal of supporting industry competitiveness and growth by enabling farmers' better access to capital.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to highlight the benefits of these five continuing statutes. I look forward to the debate.

**The Speaker:** This is a debatable motion. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to bring forward some questions that I was asked by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to bring forward as part of this

debate. I have been able to look over some notes that I think were provided by the minister's department, and I thank him for that, and my colleague for Edmonton-Gold Bar thanks him for those notes. Just a few questions that did come up.

My concerns are alleviated with the continuations of section 33 of the Agricultural Societies Act and section 2 of the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act, but there are some sections in the Rural Electrification Loan Act, the Rural Electrification Long-term Financing Act, and the Rural Utilities Act that I have some questions about.

The Rural Electrification Loan Act: what is the total amount of the payments that were made out of the general revenue fund under section 3, and who still holds these loans? I did hear the minister say that the loans were amortized over a considerable period of time, and really the point of allowing the continuation of these enactments is to allow those loans to in fact run themselves out. I understand that, but I am interested in having that particular question answered on Government Motion 20(c).

Also under section (c): under section 36 how many loans are outstanding under this section, and were all of those loans interest free? "Notwithstanding Part 1, loans not bearing interest may be made to associations or persons in accordance with requirements of this Part." So were these loans, in fact, interest free?

With 20(d), the Rural Electrification Long-term Financing Act, section 2: who has applied for and received loans under this section?

Finally, under section (e), sections 32 and 33 of the Rural Utilities Act. Under section 33: how much has been guaranteed and to whom? Could you provide a list of any guaranteed sums that have not been repaid? Under section 34: a question about why section 34 was not included in the continuation agreement that is contemplated by Government Motion 20. It's not included in this, but I'm wondering on behalf of my colleague why that was.

Essentially, we have clauses in all of these statutes that require that every fifth calendar year, if during that period the subsection has not been repealed and a government bill hasn't been introduced that has the effect of repealing it, we must have a motion before us on the floor that continues it. It makes sense that it's being continued for the purposes of allowing these organizations and/or individuals to pay out the loans, but I know that my colleague had those questions. Perhaps if you could supply some additional information in writing, that might satisfy my colleague.

I appreciate the opportunity to have been able to raise those concerns on his behalf. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. If I recognize the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food, that closes the debate. Is any other hon. member wishing to participate?

Shall I recognize the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Speaker:** Minister, close the debate.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for asking those questions on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Of course, I don't have a lot of those minute answers. I know that they're all available. I certainly will respond to those written questions to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. So I'd like to close the debate and see if we can move on with the motion.

[Government Motion 20 carried]

**head: 2:40**

## Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order. The committee has before it estimates for the departments of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Seniors and Community Supports. As per the agreements the first two hours will be allocated to Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the last one hour will be allocated to Seniors and Community Supports. Today is also the Official Opposition day.

Hon. members, before I recognize the minister, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head:

## Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thanks, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce a former member of this House. Dr. Lorne Taylor was the MLA for Cypress-Medicine Hat from 1993 to 2004. Besides the numerous committees he sat on, he was also the minister of innovation and science and later the Minister of Environment. He's also the father of Alberta's Water for Life strategy. He's accompanied today by Ms Laurie Beverley, the vice-president of the Alberta Mental Health Board, and they are attending meetings with various ministers today at this Legislature. I'd ask them both to rise and ask my colleagues to join with me to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, Dr. Taylor was a colourful character in this Assembly. I recall that whenever I was chairing these committees, it was tough keeping him under control, but it's nice to see you here today. Welcome.

head:

## Main Estimates 2007-08

### Municipal Affairs and Housing

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, we'll call the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to begin.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I want to acknowledge that this House has gotten much quieter since the individual – and I will just leave it as individual – from the south is no longer here. Anyway, it's good to see him back.

Mr. Chairman, I am very pleased to be here to present an overview of the Municipal Affairs and Housing 2007-08 spending estimates as well as the '07-10 ministry business plan.

Before we begin, Mr. Chairman, I'd very much like to introduce my departmental staff: first of all, the deputy minister, Shelley Ewart-Johnson, who is beside me; Brian Quickfall, the assistant deputy minister of local government services. We have Robin Wigston, the assistant deputy minister of the housing division; in the members' gallery we have Ivan Moore, the assistant deputy minister of the public safety division; and we have also Peter Crerar, who is the assistant deputy minister of corporate strategic services.

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to thank all of my staff, that have worked very hard in the last few months not only in the preparation of this budget but for all of the work that they have done because it has been very busy around our ministry.

I'll start off my presentation, Mr. Chairman, by providing an overview of the '07-10 business plan. This will illustrate the basis

for our spending estimates. This year's business plan has changed dramatically to include the introduction of housing and libraries and volunteerism. We have identified six opportunities and challenges that have affected our business plan.

Mr. Chairman, the first is our relationship with our municipal partners to promote well-managed local governments. To achieve this, we are helping to ensure the long-term stability, predictability of municipalities through appropriate legislation, capacity-building initiatives, and financial support. We are working with the municipalities to provide advisory services, dispute resolution, and financial support. The key to this is enhancing the relationship between the provincial government, municipalities, and municipal organizations. The ministry will continue its work with municipal partners to identify ways to enhance these relationships through various mechanisms such as the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability.

One of the challenges we face, Mr. Chairman, is to do with unprecedented growth. With the growth intensifying, in many areas of the province municipalities are in some cases struggling to address this issue. We've heard from our stakeholders that they want us to work with – with – them to address broad-based planning and co-ordination issues. This will help us in both maximizing opportunities and minimizing disputes.

Tied into this is the challenge of municipal sustainability. While some municipalities are growing, others are facing economic and dramatic decline. Municipal Affairs and Housing needs to work with other ministries to help these primarily small urban and rural municipalities to deliver their needed services within the constraints of their revenue resources.

Mr. Chairman, affordable housing is a challenge. Maybe I should say it in this way: affordable housing is a challenge that all Albertans feel. To deal with the housing task force recommendation, we're implementing the approved recommendations from the housing task force to increase the availability of affordable housing. To do this, we are providing housing support to Albertans who have difficulty meeting their housing needs. We're also encouraging the municipalities, private and nonprofit housing sectors to develop sustainable housing initiatives that meet identified community needs through the approval of capital funding.

The provincial emergency management system continues to be challenged by evoked risks. These could include health emergencies like the influenza pandemic or potentially hazardous activities by high-risk industries.

Mr. Chairman, communities across Alberta are facing a challenge in sustaining volunteer fire services. There is an increasing need to support these communities by providing increased technological assistance and educational programs that help prevent fires and emergency incidences. It is also a challenge for municipalities to manage the risks associated with the escalated rate of building and development required to support this high level of growth in the province.

In addition to everything else that we are doing, I have three areas I would like to quickly mention. Our community services community development facilitators work with all communities in your constituencies to deal with community issues such as family violence, drug strategies, Water for Life initiatives, and crime prevention. They support many of our provincial public input processes that result in community activities.

The Alberta not-for-profit voluntary sector initiative will create a policy framework for us as government to work with community organizations and volunteers in a province that is supporting so many vital initiatives that impact Alberta's quality of life. This is essential as these organizations face many issues that are placing them at risk.

Alberta's public libraries are truly something to brag about as they are an example of a public service that serves all Albertans and contributes to our success as a province.

2:50

Mr. Chairman, in terms of core businesses we are setting our sights on the following goals: a responsive, co-operative, and well-managed local government sector, financially sustainable and accountable municipalities, a well-managed and efficient assessment and property tax system in which stakeholders have confidence, a municipal government board that administers appeals and issues timely and impartial decisions of high quality, an accessible public library service and effectively supported communities and voluntary sectors, lower income Albertans to have access to a range of housing options and effectively managed housing programs that are focused on those most in need, a comprehensive system of safety codes and standards that provides an appropriate level of public safety, an effective emergency management system, and implementing the approved recommendations of the Alberta housing task force report.

We will achieve this with unprecedented financial commitments that will lead to the development of new affordable housing that will strengthen communities, a comprehensive safety system that will provide an appropriate level of public safety, an effective emergency management system, and effective fire and emergency services that will reduce fire deaths and injuries.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak to the Municipal Affairs and Housing budget debate. I want to begin also by acknowledging that my colleague the Member for Calgary-Currie is not able to be with us because of illness in his family; otherwise, he would be the lead person to begin this budget discussion.

It was a great privilege for me personally to be on the task force on affordable housing. I think it's one of the most rewarding things that I have been involved in throughout my career, and it was quite astounding. I want to acknowledge and thank the minister for taking the initiative to set up the task force, and I also want to acknowledge the help from members of the Municipal Affairs and Housing staff: the deputy minister, Shelley Ewart-Johnson, and the assistant deputy minister, Robin Wigston. I'd also like to acknowledge Don Squire from housing services. I think that Don is a walking computer. Every question that I could think of in terms of wanting more statistics, he was able to provide. Also, I want to acknowledge the help of Phil Goodman, the special adviser, who was just tremendous.

I'm really proud of this report. I think it's a fantastic report. It was a bit of a shame that the report was released on the same day that the government released its response, so in a way the task force couldn't have its day in the sun, so to speak, where we could just focus on the tremendous contribution that this report makes, apart from the government's response. I wish that it had happened like a press conference, where the members of the task force could have talked about their experience and about the report. It was excellent work. But as I went to the press conference where the government's response was given, I was handed the task force report. That's the first time I had seen it, the day when the government gave its response, so that wasn't very good.

It was a tremendous opportunity because what we heard in terms of stories from people throughout the province and also the statistics all added up to the fact that there is a huge crisis in affordable housing in this province.

I wanted to say first of all that I acknowledge that the government's response is meaningful because, obviously, you're commit-



ting a great deal of money to affordable housing: \$285 million in new funding, all of which in general is expected to lead to the development of 11,000 affordable units of housing over five years. At the same time, our task force actually recommended that in order to produce 12,000 affordable housing units over five years, it would cost \$480 million. So your commitment is about half of what we came up with, and we were just going by the statistics that the department provided. We were thinking that at about \$200,000 a unit, 12,000 units, over five years we're going to need about \$2.4 billion. I mean, it's a huge, huge challenge that we face in Alberta. By committing just half the amount of money that the task force recommended, I think we're going to see a crisis year after year until we catch up. The housing inventory is way behind, and we have a lot of catching up to do.

There are a lot of positives in the government's response, and I wanted to just mention a few. The new \$7 million homeless and eviction prevention fund was one of our recommendations. The task force wanted this for damage deposits, first month's rents, emerging rent shortfalls, and so on to keep people from losing their homes. I noticed that this has been recommended to go to Employment, Immigration and Industry, but I don't like what I'm hearing from that department, that maybe this fund is going to be used for skilled workers coming to Alberta to get some money before they find a place to live. That's not what we intended, but, anyway, that's another department.

I appreciate the fact that there's increased funding of \$35 million per year for transitional housing and homeless shelter spaces, the doubling of funding for the provincial homeless initiative to \$6 million per year, and the increase of rent supplement programs to \$33 million. That is fantastic, all of those things.

You also accepted the recommendation of the task force on the establishment of the Alberta transitional housing initiative of \$2.5 million in funding to go to support services for residents in transitional housing. Well, the task force asked for \$12 million annually. Now, this raises a question because the task force philosophy in writing the report was: housing first. The idea was that when we look at the continuum of housing, first we need to have people in homes all along the continuum whether we're talking about shelters or transitional housing or social housing or subsidized housing or affordable housing. But if people are going to be unable to move along that continuum, they have to be wrapped around with appropriate services.

Now, what I'm receiving in terms of feedback from people who are working with agencies in the inner city and so on – and there was one person on our task force who represented that kind of element – is that they're saying that they feel let down because there doesn't appear to be enough of a commitment for those wraparound services. I was just wondering, Mr. Minister, if the department agrees with our housing first philosophy that we communicated in our task force report.

Well, just moving on in terms of looking at the budget for housing services, \$810 million, from the government estimates on page 261. That's point 7. It's very hard. You almost need a map somehow to figure out where all the money is coming from and where it's going. I mean, I understand from discussions with staff when we were working on the task force that the Canada/Alberta affordable housing agreement is finished, the \$44 million. Now we have something called the affordable housing trust, which I understand is about \$81 million. This is from the federal government over three years, which I understand is split between Municipal Affairs and Housing and Seniors and Community Supports. But it's hard to figure out whether that money is actually being matched by the province. I mean, I assume that it is because when you look at the amount of money – for example, the press release names the \$100

million that's going to municipalities, the municipal sustainability housing grant, also the \$96 million for enhanced capital support, and the \$45 million for Fort McMurray. It seems to me that that's a lot more than just matching that \$81 million over three years that the federal government provided.

3:00

I really appreciated Mr. Wigston's PowerPoint presentation at the task force. I think I need another PowerPoint presentation to figure out just what the programs are and how much money is in each of the programs and how that reflects in the budget. For example, I didn't appreciate the fact that in the press release the headline was, "Government responds to task force report with \$285 million in new funding," but listed on there is the off-reserve aboriginal housing program's budget of \$16 million, and I know from discussions that that \$16 million is from the federal government, \$16 million over three years, so that's not new money. I know that one member of our task force, because he's part of the Métis community in Alberta, really pleaded for that \$16 million to be matched. I raised that in the House and during question period. It doesn't appear that that's going to be the case. It is a bit misleading to list it there as if it's new funding. It's not.

There are lots of other issues. The rent stabilization thing: I mean, we have 110 pages in *Hansard* from the all-night session of debate about rent stabilization. The task force presented a package of suggestions about rent stabilization, both rent guidelines, on the one hand, and incentives, on the other, what the task force called sticks and carrots. The government's response was to take one item – namely, that landlords are not allowed to raise rents for a whole year – but didn't accept all of the other elements in that package. Well, I'm not going to get into that debate because there's plenty of material to look at. [Dr. Miller's speaking time expired]

Maybe I can come back in a few minutes and raise a couple more questions.

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I need to start out, first of all, by thanking our hon. colleague opposite for sitting on the task force. I know that it was a job, basically a task, that we asked the task force to accomplish in 45 days. You went to nine communities. You had different individuals from all different walks of the housing world, and you came up with a report, recommendations. For that I want to thank you so much. You made mention of Phil Goodman and Don Squire, who also basically spent a month and a half on the road, and I want to thank them as well because they did work very hard in trying to assist the task force in the best way that they could.

Mr. Chairman, the task force did take 45 days. The hon. member opposite talked about, you know, the responses to the recommendations and, I would gather, having some public input or having some public viewing or some public debate. This government did recognize some of the urgencies of the housing issue, of affordable housing, of homelessness, recognized the urgencies of some of the recommendations that were brought forward by the task force, and we did respond in 35 days. We did acknowledge, as you have as well, that there were needs and there were challenges, and we responded with \$285 million.

You made mention at the end of your presentation of the \$285 million. You talked about the \$15 million matching for aboriginal, and you also made mention of the \$16 million for the homeless. Mr. Chairman, that was talked about in the news release, but that was not part of the \$285 million. The \$285 million was new money. Also, I do need to clarify the aboriginal component and the matching of

the aboriginal component. I felt that it was not the right focus to match aboriginal funding. I felt that we should match that \$15 million with all of the funding that we did because I don't see a differentiation between Albertans for this, for housing. Albertans should be equal, so if you want to look at it, we matched approximately \$196 million with the \$15 million. So that's where the matching took place.

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to talk about the \$480 million out of the task force report that asked for 12,000 units. We felt that the amounts used, \$200,000 a unit, was high and that we could effectively and efficiently achieve very close to the same levels, probably, as you mentioned, with half of the money. We have predicted that we can reach 11,500 units with approximately \$200 million. How is that being achieved? I mean, we need to look at different avenues. We need to look at some short-term goals. We need to look at secondary suites. We need to look at units that can be immediately put on the availability list quicker than building units. I'm not saying that that is not important, but I think our focus was trying to address immediate needs as well. As the hon. member has said many times in this House, we need to look at some immediate challenges as well as looking at some of the long-range views.

The hon. member also talked about the money that has been transferred to EII, the \$7 million for the eviction and homelessness prevention. There is no doubt that that funding is on an emergency basis. We need to make sure that those individuals who need support get that support. The \$7 million for the homeless and eviction fund is a fund that's going to help Albertans who are renting and have the potential of losing their homes because of a rent increase. We worked very hard with Employment, Immigration and Industry to get this program in place so people can apply by the end of the month. We currently have, you know, housing staff in an office in Edmonton and Calgary for those individuals who feel that they have some challenges in being able to pay rent or in having access to a place to live.

Mr. Chairman, \$2.5 million in transitional – and a comment was made that the housing task force had asked for \$12 million. The housing task force, as I understand it, had asked for \$12 million over five years, not for each year. We had proposed \$2.5 million, and we are looking at ramping that up by \$2.5 million for the next two years. I mean, next year would be at \$5 million, the year after that would be at 7 and a half million dollars. I think we're very close. In fact, we're trying to address the needs just a little quicker.

3:10

I'm trying to deal with your questions. You started to have discussions about rent controls. I know that's the Department of Service Alberta. Mr. Chairman, I very much recognize and Albertans have shown that they believe that housing is a concern. We've talked about the poll during question period that happened by your hon. leader. This government recognizes that housing is a concern. It's not a black-and-white issue. We need to deal with some of the challenges in the short term, and we need to look at the long-term solution as well. This government has chosen and tried to make sure that we have some longevity in the focus of trying to make units available for people who need them.

What have we done? We have I believe tried to protect, tried to provide some sustainability to renters. Is it perfect? Of course not. Is it going to work for everybody? It may not. But for those who are really having a challenge, we will go on.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. With regard to providing predictability and stability for renters, the government's actions have provided none of the stability that renters are requiring. Suggesting

that rents will only increase once a year but that increases can have no limit, reasonable or unreasonable, provides no predictability, and it provides no stability. I'm not going to go into the specifics of the stress felt in my community because I've dealt with that. That's on the record.

What seems to be missing in this Conservative caucus's understanding is the reality faced by individuals who primarily, when they're seeking jobs and seeking the Alberta opportunity, end up in the cities. I'm not at all suggesting that because an individual comes from a rural community, they're not intelligent, that they don't have a big heart, that they don't care. I know that a number of members from the government have previously served as trustees. They've served as councillors. I'm sure that they've got a very good handle on their rural circumstance, but they don't seem to have any understanding of the magnitude of the homelessness that is occurring in the cities of Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, and Fort McMurray, or they would take some sort of intermediate action. This \$11 million eviction fund, I believe, is going to be eaten up so rapidly that the government will then be going back to the taxpayers and out-of-budget requesting that more money be put into this fund.

Of course, this fund, while it has a degree of hope and intermediate intervention on behalf of people who are finding their chesterfields out on the front sidewalk, doesn't address the problem over a four-month, a six-month period. It doesn't begin to address the problem of a series of homes, whether they're approaching the 12,000 number of new homes that are supposedly going to be affordable.

There is a gap between the people that will be helped by the immediate eviction fund and the people who are at that lower end of the economic scale but are working. Quite often it's both the husband and the wife that are working and maybe some of the children to contribute to the family's well-being, but they won't qualify for that \$11 million.

I also realize that we have to live within our means, and the government does provide subsidized housing for the people who are in the worst financial circumstance, providing they qualify. But those individuals who are going to be out of their suites or out of their houses that they're renting but earn over the poverty amount are not going to have anything to compensate them because they're above the poverty category.

The government, by putting on temporary financial band-aids which for a moment stop the flow of blood and stress, is only acting for that particular moment, and the long-term approach is not happening. So my prediction is that approximately 70 per cent of the individuals who are experiencing these rent increases will not get the support that is necessary because their financial circumstance will not be subject to them receiving the support.

I started earlier to talk about living within our means. There are a number of people who are willing to spend all kinds of money and, you know, have lawn chairs in their living room so that they can have a piece of property. It's not financially responsible for them to undertake that kind of mortgage expense while not being able to provide food and clothing for their children. I'm not suggesting that the government intervene on their behalf, but there are a number of people who are renters who are just at the coping end of things, who are spending well over 30 per cent of their budget on a legitimate attempt to have a roof over their heads, and this will not help them because they won't qualify.

There seems to be a long-term vision, \$285 million, that will hopefully bring a series of homes on within a two-year period, but the short-term vision is lacking. We're heading into the summer, and it won't be as severely felt as what happened this past winter in a variety of the larger cities, where the government was slow to react in terms of providing shelter for homeless individuals.

3:20

We're reversing the trend that we're trying for. We want to have people supplying the Alberta boom and having worthwhile jobs and a secure circumstance in Alberta, but it's not just members from Calgary-Varsity that I've heard are packing up and heading back to where they came from. This past Friday, for example, I was door-knocking in a part of Calgary-Varsity that has a number of low-rental areas, but their rents are escalating dramatically. I spoke with people from Manitoba. I spoke to people who had recently moved from B.C. Basically, their suitcases are still by the doors because of the instability that this government has provided. They have come in search of a better wage, but what they're finding is that their wage is rapidly being eaten up by rent increases.

In part of the area where I door-knock, there's subsidized housing where the government, true to its word, covers anything above the 30 per cent of the rent for these individuals. I've never been to a Third World refugee camp, with tents and barbed wire and the flies and so on, but what I have seen in portions of Calgary-Varsity is a housing unit that is becoming decrepit, that has not been painted, that has not been maintained. Yes, these people are grateful that the government provides a roof over their heads. But we're talking Alberta. We're talking an area that has the highest per capita income, if you divided it among the individuals, within North America, yet these people are not living in that kind of a circumstance.

Yesterday Mayor Bronconnier on behalf of a million Calgarians came up to Edmonton at the request – and I appreciate the request – of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and he laid out his case. There has been literal and rhetorical head-butting going on, but the mayor came forward. He was looking for a commitment as are the citizens of Calgary and other cities throughout the province.

Now, when the Premier first talked about the matching of the educational portion of the property tax, that gave Mayor Bronconnier and mayors of municipalities throughout Alberta a degree of hope. Mayor Bronconnier, previous to his visits up here, did a series of forums around the districts in Calgary where he got first-hand input from a number of individuals concerned about the lack of infrastructure, the state of roads, how Calgarians were going to pay the bills, and the increases. So on behalf of those Calgarians, who the mayor . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

I'll come again.

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to say that I take a little bit of offence to a couple of comments that the hon. member opposite made. First is the abilities of individuals in rural Alberta to be able to make decisions on housing for urban Alberta. I want to stress to you that housing is something that has commonality to everybody in Alberta. We in rural Alberta also live in a house. We also communicate. We also have most of the technologies that you may have in urban Alberta. I also would suggest to you that when your comment came forward about not having the experience or knowledge, well, myself in particular, I would suggest, born in Calgary: the only rental experience I had was in an urban setting. When we talk about issues, we can talk about philosophies, we can talk about ideologies, we can talk about focus, but I have never stood in front of this House to say: you don't have the knowledge. I would never stoop to that level, hon. member.

Mr. Chairman, rural circumstances of housing are very similar to urban. When the hon. member talked about stability for renters, that is exactly what this government has looked at. We need to look at stability. We need to look at predictability so that there is the

availability of rental units. If there were – and I want to say again that we don't get up in the morning and say, "Well, okay, let's just have rent controls" without thinking about the impact that it has on Albertans.

Let's talk about what impact this government believes could happen. If you have rent controls and you lose the confidence of builders, then there are two things that take place. Those individuals will not invest to increase the units. Secondly, what happens is that the individuals that may have units may find more stability in converting their units to condos. Yes, we gave some stability. But, in essence, that instability could incite individuals to the conversion of condos. So what does it do? It really provides fewer rental units. What have we done? We have taken the individuals in need and have provided them with a rental supplement.

Now, you have made the comment in your comments about the ability of rural members to make the right decision. Mr. Chairman, that is precisely why we have transferred support to municipalities, and in the situation of Calgary \$63 million: to look at and address the needs of their municipality. You know what? You are right. There is no way, sitting in this House, sitting in my community that I understand the situations of Calgary better than Calgary does. That's why we gave the money to municipalities: for them to make that choice, for them to isolate what they feel are the most pressing needs and how they can deal with affordable housing and also homeless even though there is the homeless funding on the side.

Mr. Chairman, those municipalities have the availability, the accessibility to be able to decide whether they should allocate funding towards rent supplement or whether they feel that they could use secondary suites, which would be an answer. I would suggest to you that secondary suites is a big solution, especially for university students or for seniors. The other is that if they believe that there are units that need to be built, that need to be erected because of a declining need, they have that ability, and they have our support.

3:30

Mr. Chairman, the \$7 million fund, as stated by the hon. member, would be a short-term approach. We need to have a balanced approach. For lack of a better term – and I know that this isn't the right term – let me say that we need to have a flow-through approach. There should be a seamless transition for an individual going from an emergency situation to a rent supplement situation. I would hope that that transition could continue on to an individual having rent that he could pay and then maybe moving on to a condo.

You also made mention about the effects – and I'm trying to understand – on Albertans as a whole. The programs that we have brought forward of affordable housing are for people in need. This program is not for people that make \$70,000, \$80,000, even if they are paying 40 per cent. This program is for individuals in need. Two hundred and eighty-five millions dollars, as stated by the hon. member that was on the task force: it's good, but is it enough? We're trying to address the issues as best we can and have a very balanced approach.

But we do have a basket of options. Two hundred and eighty-five million dollars: \$100 million for the new municipal sustainability housing program, \$95 million dollars in enhanced capital to increase affordable housing units, \$45 million for affordable housing in Fort McMurray, a \$13 million increase for the provincial homeless support, a \$3 million increase for the provincial homeless initiative, \$14.3 million for the increase in the rent supplement program – and that's only the ones that the province administers; that does not include the funds that were given to municipalities for them to decide – \$4.3 million in support for housing providers and special purposes housing, \$7 million for the homeless and eviction fund,

which you had mentioned, \$2.5 million this year for the transitional housing, and I would say: only increases in rent once per year, and one year's notice for condo conversions.

Mr. Chairman, we are trying to provide some stability. Is it enough? I don't know if it will ever be enough.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. There are two issues I would like to address with the minister today as part of the supply budget discussion on the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The first is around regional planning and growth management, and the second, if I have time to get to it, is disaster planning.

We are certainly experiencing an issue in the Edmonton area right now around regional planning and growth management. This has been a'coming for a long, long time, I think you could argue decades, because I remember some discussions about this from when I was a girl. I'll make no apologies for being an Edmonton booster. It's the city where I was born, where I grew up. All my schooling is from here. I went to the university here. I'm proud of this city, and I'm going to stick up for it.

At the same time, I'm a legislator, and I recognize that we have to make choices that build, wherever possible, a stronger Alberta. Sometimes that's by concentrating in a particular area, and sometimes that's by taking a step back and going: we have to build and take a much broader brush; we have to work on strengthening and building capacity across the province. But this strikes me as an issue that needs government attention, and it just has not been there. We've seen a little bit of fiddling, a little bit of tinkering; meanwhile, Rome burns or is getting close to it.

The Alberta Capital Regional Alliance was what essentially was permitted under the MGA because the MGA is not prescriptive; it's permissive. What we got from that permissiveness under the MGA is the Alberta Capital Regional Alliance, which is essentially a voluntary coming together of the region – I think it's 23 municipalities – to try and work out some kind of arrangements. It hasn't worked. Voluntary often doesn't work. As much as I love the voluntary sector, I find that their lessons often don't translate well into other sectors, and here's a good example of it because this unlegislated set-up with the alliance just didn't work. It seems to have just spun apart now.

We need something else that's in place. I think that there's a funding model that is an issue as well, particularly to this region. I think many in Edmonton feel that Edmonton is paying for the infrastructure that is used by a million people in the region. We're in a situation where we're where people live, and we have the costs. We carry the costs for what those people who live here need, and those people service an area that has a different access to funding.

If I look at what the reports that have been done recently are telling us, I can't find one that's telling us to do something else, actually. They're all telling us that we must get a regional planning group that works. The government has to take leadership on this and put it into place, or we run the risk of losing development dollars that we should be getting in the Edmonton region.

Some people call it Upgrader Alley. Fine. Not a very attractive term, but we are looking at having significant industrial growth in the area around Edmonton. There is money that comes with that but also money that has to be spent for that, and if we have those industrial developers looking at us, going, "These guys can't provide us roads to get the workers to us. They can't provide the workers. They can't provide the people that help the workers or deliver the services for the workers," it's a problem, and we lose that business. I think Edmonton is the greatest, and I think it should continue to be

the greatest. I don't want to see it caught up in a lack of leadership from the government, and that's where I bring this back to you.

We definitely need a growth management plan. Now, there were a couple of different reports that were done. There was the Hemson report and the Percy report, and then there was another one. If you like history, there was the McNally royal commission from 50 years ago, that said that regional co-operation was necessary to deal with future growth issues. Boy, did they have it right on. Even the Radke report, which again is a recent one, indicated that lack of regional planning in the capital region was going to cause problems in terms of infrastructure, transportation, environmental considerations, particularly around water use by the upgraders and lack of knowledge around our groundwater quantity, and the government's lack of involvement in regional planning could have serious implications here for the future of the capital region. That's a report that was commissioned by the government, so it's about leadership.

Questions that are going to flow from that, then, are: why is the funding under the municipal sustainability initiative being offered with so many strings attached? Does the minister believe that municipalities are incapable of knowing what their communities need and acting responsibly with that money? What I'm trying to get at here is: according to the Constitution the municipalities have to respond back to or are created by or are put in place in many cases by the provincial government, and from the provincial government come the legislative structures and the funding bodies.

So we've got the provincial government funding with strings attached, and then when we look at the structural requirements that are put in place, they're missing. Why has the government not put any meaningful mechanisms in place to mandate regional planning? Are there any considerations in place to amend the MGA to incorporate a regional planning structure? Is there anything coming within the next six months, within the next year, within the next 18 months or two years?

3:40

Part of the municipal sustainability initiative is the conditional operating grants, and these funds are supposed to be contingent upon land-use planning projects, that would facilitate intermunicipal co-operation, so delivering services jointly, et cetera.

Now, it seems to me that the government is trying to use this as a fiscal incentive to get some municipalities to work together. Can you tell me what's going to happen to this funding if the Alberta Capital Region Alliance cannot reach any mutual agreements? Will this funding be forfeit? Will the funding be offered to a majority of the municipalities if they come to agreement? What are the criteria? At what point do they get the money, and who gets it? If 20 agree but three don't, will the 20 get a piece of this money, but the three won't, or they'll all get a reduction? How will that money be worked out? Will anybody be able to access the \$40 million because a few municipalities won't come in on it? Is it an all-or-nothing deal or partial, and if it's partial, what are the criteria around that partial?

Those are the specific questions and concerns that I wanted to raise around the regional planning. I really think there is leadership that is needed, whether it's a change in the MGA, whether it's specific kinds of funding incentives. But so far we have a big nothing, and I think that's not good enough for this region. It's not good enough for Edmonton. It's not good enough for the capital region. I think the capital region itself is largely a creation of this government, and it's not serving us well at this point. Either the government has to step in and do something, which is what I think should happen, or step away.

I want to talk about disaster planning now. The government's core business 4 says, "Leading and managing the provincial emergency management system and making communities safer."

This appears on page 244 of the business plan. Under this, specifically, goal 8 states, "Continually enhance an emergency management system that enables prevention and mitigation of, preparation for, response to, and recovery from major emergencies." But when I look at page 261 of the estimates under this same line item, Emergency Management Alberta, this year's budget is actually down. It's a decrease from what we saw in the previous budget. If you actually look at last year's budget forecast, it was at \$14.8 million. We're now getting \$9.9 million.

Thanks for the opportunity to raise some of those issues.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Chairman, I need to start my comments by answering and suggesting that \$400 million this year, \$500 million next year, \$600 million the third year of our three-year plan is not a big nothing. That is the statement that you had made.

Mr. Chairman, I also want to say that the hon. member talked about wanting to see planning and that the government should get involved and in the same breath suggesting that the government should not get involved in planning or incentives, and she called it strings to municipalities.

We heard over and over again from municipalities that there needed to be planning. When you are dealing with – I don't want to say municipalities. When you're dealing with people, when you're dealing with kids, you don't take out the bat or the axe and beat them into submission. Mr. Chairman, you give them an opportunity to communicate, to collaborate, to co-operate, initiatives to have discussions on how they can work together. We have built silos in this province since the regional planning commissions, and I think they have gone too far the other way. I think we have municipalities that have looked at autonomy without communication or planning.

We have duplication, number one, that this province, even though it is a very wealthy province, cannot afford. We have areas where municipalities have an opportunity to work together but don't. If you look at the municipal sustainability incentive, it does exactly that. If you look at core capital and you look at community capital, they says two things: consult or jointly plan. Consulted or jointly planned. What does that mean? It means talk. It means get together. It means have a plan on what you may be doing. I don't think those are big strings to ask for when you're supporting municipalities with new money, \$400 million.

I agree very much that we need to plan, that we need to look. In fact, my mandate letters talk about regional planning. They also talk about the minister's council on sustainability, and my mandate letter discusses regional planning or dispute resolutions. You know, dispute resolutions would not be necessary if we did the planning. Mr. Chairman, the hon. member specifically isolated Edmonton and her support and her community. In the surrounding areas and Edmonton there are 23 municipalities. We need to work together; they need to work together.

What are we doing? We are providing them some opportunity, first of all, to work together. We are having meetings with those municipalities. We are looking and asking where they want to go. If you heard the answer of the Premier as late as today and if you could check *Hansard*, the Premier said that we need to provide some sort of support or initiative, and if it doesn't work, then I guess we need to have the hammer, and that's exactly what we will do.

Mr. Chairman, you cannot look at these municipal sustainability initiatives as strings. There are some conditions for the focus and direction of support. The major focus is planning. The major focus is working together.

3:50

On the comment about getting involved, I think we are involved. On the further comment of saying that legislation could be necessary, we have a minister's council on sustainability. That minister's

council gave us 12 recommendations. Some of those recommendations will need legislation. Mr. Chairman, we are going through, at this time, the government processes, looking at those recommendations and looking at responses. With that, I want to say that we are going to consult with municipalities because I do not believe the right direction is to implement what I think the solution should be, but I do believe that we need to work together with municipalities on finding a solution on how they can work together with our support.

When you look at municipalities that work together, there are so many opportunities. There was mention made on one of the previous questions that the request was made by ourselves for a meeting with His Worship the mayor of Calgary. There was no request to meet, Mr. Chairman. There was an offer to meet. I didn't say to the mayor or to anybody else: you will come and meet with me. If you have any questions about the funding, my door is open, and that is exactly what happened.

The definition of head-butting. Mr. Chairman, the mayor supports his community. He needs to support his community in the best way he knows how. Our government also needs to support municipalities, not only one municipality but, as mentioned by the hon. member, other municipalities as well. We need to support all municipalities in Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, the municipal sustainability initiative was designed for two purposes, sustainability and predictability, and the other one being that we have some planning for communication, collaboration, and co-operation. That is the essence of the funding. That is the focus of this ministry and the focus of this government.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I wanted to speak on the financial sustainability towards the municipalities, but the minister said a word that usually sets me off, so I would like to address that first. Of course, the word was seniors. Mr. Minister, with all due respect, secondary suites, as I certainly know them and have been exposed to them, are primarily in basements. I do not want mama in the basement. She can't go up and down the stairs. It's dangerous for a fire. The other thing is that seniors are prone to depression, and living in a dark basement is not where it's at. If you're talking about a granny suite that happens to have decent light and is probably on ground level, I'm with you all the way. I do believe that secondary suites, particularly for students, or even just a boarding situation is the answer to that. But even the thought of seniors being in a basement is sort of a trigger point for me.

Having said that, on page 239 of the business plan, strategic priority 5, you say that it's a priority to bring forth a response to the recommendations from the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability on the roles and responsibilities and new long-term funding arrangements. The operative term, I believe, is "long-term" and not over a three-year period of time. The government's had this report for some time, but as far as I know, we have not had access to that or seen exactly what's going on in that. Could the minister provide some clarity as to what's happening and how this may roll out over many, many years to come?

The other thing is: can the minister provide any indication as to what revenue-generating instruments the government is looking at in terms of increasing the dollars to the municipalities, and could he give an indication of some possible tax tools? Now, I know that there are a couple of things that have been mentioned to be able to give that power back to the municipalities. The property tax transfer tax is one of them. Certainly, anyone I've spoken to is more than opposed to that.

Now, the minister's council is the mayor of Calgary, the mayor of Edmonton, the head of AUMA, and the head of AAMD and C, but

many of the people that I've spoken to in mid-sized towns, cities, and certainly in some of the smaller cities are not even aware that some of those conversations have gone on. I do believe that there's a great discrepancy out there over who actually supports giving extra tax responsibilities to the municipalities.

As a former municipal alderperson I'm not sure that that is the proper way to do things. I think what would be proper is that if the dollars that had been taken away in the first place by the provincial government would be restored, that would help a lot because a lot of the infrastructure responsibilities plus the social responsibilities that are truly the mandate of the provincial government have been downloaded to the municipalities. The responsibility is there. Neither the authority nor the dollars to do anything with them are there. They have had to change mill rates accordingly, and it's because the provincial government cut back those funds to begin with.

I agree with the minister in terms of sitting down at the same table and talking things through. I also agree that I think the province has become very siloed, particularly in terms of the health care boards. But by giving dollars to municipalities with strings attached, you're still not recognizing municipal governments as a true level of government. You're still going along on the Municipal Government Act, which is still legal and in force, as if municipal governments are the children of the province.

I believe that that would have to change. Certainly, the Liberal caucus would look at a constitutional amendment to enshrine in the Alberta Act that municipal governments are a legal level of government. This also is a conversation that has been going on at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities level, certainly for as long as I've been around, and it's probably 11 years. I think it's something that warrants deep consideration because municipal governments truly are the front line and can understand.

Sitting down with the provincial government I think is a good idea, but one of the places where the municipalities should be allowed to sit down – and again I'm not altogether sure that it should be the minister's council – is at the budget table in some fashion. When municipalities need a budget, they should be able to tie into the provincial budget by being able to say what their budget needs are, and then it could be adjusted accordingly. I believe that's where good input could be given. In strategy 1.4 at least you're talking about sitting down and talking to municipalities, but where does the equal part come in?

4:00

The Canada West Foundation in the 2004 report *Sustaining Prosperity Together* wanted the creation of the Alberta infrastructure council to drive the commitment to eliminate the massive municipal infrastructure deficit. That deficit didn't happen overnight as we all know. We're talking about the last 12 to 13 years. Again, it was because the dollars were not coming from the provincial government. We the Liberals believe it's a strong mechanism to work with the municipalities directly on infrastructure needs.

You were talking about regionalization. To a certain point I think that some groups are working together. Certainly, the economic development portion is working in terms of regionalization, and it appears to be fairly functional. They have goals, and they are getting closer to them. What do you envision when you talk about bringing municipalities to the same table?

I don't believe that the province should ever give money to the municipalities with strings attached – that promise of no strings, actually, had been made by the Premier – because it isn't fair. They're the ones that know how to deal with it. I come from a rural area where people, I think, perhaps get along in a different manner because there aren't as many of us. We don't have that same

problem that you have in Edmonton as you're trying to bring everybody together. Anyway, I just think it's very important that there are no strings attached.

Again, I believe that I've said this about treating municipalities as the children of the province. Those days really have gone by, and I haven't seen an attitudinal change with this particular Premier. I think that democracy is not well served when each level of government doesn't have its own freedom to do what it sees best for the people that it's responsible for and who they answer to.

One other concern that I might have is how municipal powers would be directed under TILMA. If the provincial government gave dollars to the municipalities to do A and TILMA came along in terms of investments and said, "No, you can't do it," how does the government protect those dollars that they've given to municipalities if they give it to them with strings? How does the provincial government protect that mandate, that they've given it to use it for such and such a thing, if TILMA is against it?

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me, first of all, clarify that when I spoke of seniors and I talked about secondary suites, I never at any time mentioned basement suites. Secondary suites can mean a suite that could be located on the bottom floor; it could be located on the main floor. It is a suite that is accessible for rent, that an individual can rent out. I mean, you can twist it however you want, but a secondary suite is a secondary suite. So don't make those changes. Seniors can also create some revenue and, I would say, the opportunity for companionship with students by offering up secondary suites.

Mr. Chairman, the report that was identified was the minister's council on sustainability, and there were twelve recommendations. If I can make reference to the hon. member that had the questions, this is the recommendation – and maybe I need to make it very clear that this report was the recommendations of the four individuals that the hon. member had mentioned to the government. That report you have availability to. You said: I haven't seen it. Well, it's been available, I believe, since the end of March. It's available on the website. It's available in hard copy. Let me read to you – you mentioned the municipal revenue sources. This comes from the report.

The Government of Alberta should enact enabling legislation to authorize municipalities, at their discretion, to levy and collect additional own-source revenues as a means of strengthening municipal capacity to address ongoing operational sustainability and better respond to growth pressures. The specific additional own-source revenues recommended are:

- a. Amusement Tax;
- b. Tourism Tax;
- c. Property Transfer Tax;
- d. Vehicle Registration Tax;
- e. Expanded Scope for Development Levies in Support of Directly Related Local Services; and
- f. Limited Split Mill Rates within the Non-Residential Property Class.

This is what they have asked for. This is not what the government has said.

**Ms Pastoor:** What four people asked for. Four.

**Mr. Danyluk:** This is not four people.

**Ms Pastoor:** Yes, it is.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Hon. member, these are representations of cities and representations of associations.

**Ms Pastoor:** That's not what they're telling me.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. minister, it would really help us if you spoke through the chair.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Chairman, I would be very glad to do that, and I thank you for that suggestion.

I would also suggest that in any group there are presidents. There are chairmen, as you have very eloquently pointed out, so I will speak through you to the whole body, no different than speaking through the president of the AAMD and C to his body or the AUMA to that body.

I can also say that the hon. member had talked about members not having access. Well, I happened to be at the AAMD and C convention when the recommendations were released. This was passed out to all of the members. I attended two AUMA regional meetings. There was, by the way, at the one in Red Deer a member from the opposition at that meeting, which discussed the recommendations from the minister's council. Mr. Chairman, they are aware.

The hon. member opposite also talked about downloading and that funding should be provided to municipalities based on what they need and put into the budget. Mr. Chairman, we have continuing consultation with the municipalities, a \$3 billion support, \$600 million a year: the Alberta municipal infrastructure program, \$776 million to municipalities for support; \$400 million on the municipal sustainability initiative. That does not include the amount that is put in for other infrastructure supports.

4:10

Mr. Chairman, if we took the city – and I'm not sure exactly which city would be used, but let's take Calgary, for instance, in '07-08: \$5.2 billion in support. I'm not sure what the hon. member would like and how much they would like to see. All of Alberta has a challenge with the growth pressures. We are trying to as a government support those municipalities the best that we can.

The hon. member also made comments about not having the legislation. Mr. Chairman, the Municipal Government Act is available, I'm sure, from the Library, and it is good bedtime reading for all of us. It does very specifically point out some of the focuses, some of the authorities that the municipalities and also the provincial government have. The budget needs to be worked on together, and that is what we've done.

We've talked about strings. [interjection] Very good. The hon. member, you know, says elastics. That's absolutely right. The phrase "strings" came from Calgary. [interjection] The Calgary mayor. I'm very sorry.

It is not any kind of strings. It provides opportunity for funding with some conditions. What are those conditions? Those conditions are to ask municipalities to get together and talk about some of their projects and how they can work together, how they can plan together, maybe, with the opportunity of collaboration or co-operation. Mr. Chairman, our budget in municipal affairs very much talks about the sustainability of municipalities, giving them predictability for the future so that they can plan, so that they can work towards the future in a sustainable manner. We need to work with municipalities. We need to work together as we are.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. I'd like to pick up where I left off, which was with some questions on disaster planning. I had just

outlined for the minister that the budget allocation for this year is down from what it was last year and significantly down from the year-end forecast for the '06-07 year, which had a year-end forecast of \$14.8 million. The budget for '07-08 is \$9.9 million. Can the minister tell us how the government would feel they are enhancing their ability to respond to disasters when there's a decrease in the funding?

Along with that, can the government explain why they are downloading the responsibility for disaster planning onto the local authorities without providing adequate support to go along with that to make sure that the municipalities have the resources needed to develop and maintain effective emergency plans?

I'd also like to know what funds are being allocated to allow municipalities to adopt the recommendations of the Environmental Protection Commission. Now, this was a critical report that the government commissioned in response to the Wabamun disaster, and I would like an update or status report on where the government is on implementing these recommendations.

What steps is the minister taking to implement a provincial 911 system? How is the minister expecting municipalities and others to build an emergency management framework and to train people to respond effectively when there is so little money allocated for training? Perhaps he's got a different way of looking at this, but I would be interested in what's happening there because I think emergency and disaster planning and response are going to come into play and be very important when we look at things like pandemic response, which we are expecting within the next one to three years. It's particularly important around business resumption, around public service recovery for, for example, utilities, waste treatment, sewage, you know, repairing and getting all of those systems up and working again, delivery of local governments, plus all the other disaster service training that's going along. I'm interested in how this is all going to happen with a corresponding cut in the budget.

I'm going to go on to some specific issues around inner-city housing. Now, I'll briefly outline this by saying that we have sort of three levels of housing. One is the emergency shelters, also called a mat program, which are really dealing with people between one and three weeks. That area of funding and policy also covers battered women's shelters and detox facilities. Then we have transitional, which is usually between three weeks and three months, and that, of course, is covering some transitional housing, again for battered women and their children – battered spouses in some cases, I suppose – but also for people segueing between detox and treatment programs for drug and alcohol use. Then we're looking at sort of a third stage transitional, which is beyond that to a year.

I noticed in the responses to the task force on homelessness and housing on page 6 of 12, recommendation 3: increase funding for temporary emergency homeless shelter spaces. The government does say that it will allocate \$35 million per year for transitional housing and homeless supports, and \$30 million would go toward operating costs for 25 emergency shelters throughout the province, that this is an expansion of the program. I'd like to know if this money was in the budget last year, and if so, how was it allocated? If it is new money, where did the money come from, and is the money matched? Is it corresponding with any federal housing homelessness programs? I'm wondering if there's any attempt here to leverage money out of the rest of the community.

Recommendation 4 is on establishing and funding an Alberta transitional housing initiative. It does say, "Government will establish the Alberta Transitional Housing Initiative and provide \$2.5 million in funding for support services for residents in transitional housing." When would this program be operational? Is the \$2.5 million expected to be start-up money, or is it expected to be

annual operating money? What is the performance measurement that would be put in place to be able to judge whether this was a successful use of money?

Is the government planning on developing a partnership with organizations working in the community? For example, I think it's called the champion centre, which was operational in Lethbridge, and I think they might have also been working in Medicine Hat, very good group, providing concentrated support services for hard-to-house. Two point five million dollars is not a lot of money for transitional housing initiatives, so I'm wondering exactly how the government thinks this is going to be successful and whether it's looking at the same amount of money in the future or adding to it.

I'm also looking at recommendation 5, the Alberta rent supplement program allocation, and note that the government will increase funding for the rent supplement program to \$33 million, with an expectation that this would assist up to 2,000 households per year. Could the minister please provide us with the exact criteria of eligibility or qualification for getting people into these programs? Is it income tested? Is it asset tested? This is an existing program. My understanding is that it's for either unwaged or very low wage.

4:20

But I also note that out of this money, the \$33 million, \$1 million is going to be directed to Fort McMurray to assist essential workers – included in that are nurses, police officers, teachers, et cetera – with a rent supplement program to allow them to obtain affordable housing. What are the criteria under that million dollars? How do you qualify for it? Where do you apply for it? How much money is available to each individual? Is it asset tested? Is it income tested? Will it be based on a monthly allocation, a monthly rental cheque they would somehow get from the government? Is it applied directly to a landlord? Is it based on the space, or is it based on the individual? If you could answer those questions, that would be helpful.

I'd like to go to page 10 of 12 of the task force report, under strengthening the nonprofit sector. I would like to know why the government is not accepting the recommendation to stabilize and enhance operating funding for community-based nonprofit groups. The government says in its response: "Government does not accept this recommendation. Government follows a three-year planning and budgeting process." So perhaps the minister could explain exactly how that comment answers the task force recommendation to stabilize and enhance operating funds for community-based NGO groups. You're saying that because you've got a three-year program, you can't work with nonprofits to stabilize them? It's very fuzzy thinking. I'd like to know what the minister had exactly in place.

What we are seeing in the NGO sector is a hollowing out of their capacity to deal with anything new or unusual. Because the government is consistently funded on a line item funding without any ability to build capacity in the organizations, they're hollowed out. They have no additional capacity to deal with new things.

I'm also interested in the explanation of why the government did not accept the recommendation to provide a guide or facilitator in the public service to assist smaller communities and not-for-profits.

I'd also like to know the reasoning behind why the government did not accept the recommendation to "create a non-profit service provider to encourage regional alignment, minimize duplication and create synergies for similar non-profit groups." The government says, "Strong support networks already exist." Could I have a listing, please, of the support networks that the minister feels are filling this criteria, that they would not have to give any additional support to the not-for-profit sector? Could you give me a list, please, of all of the organizations that the minister believes are fulfilling this? I would be eager to share that with the organizations

and support networks that the minister thinks are already doing this. The ones that I'm talking to are saying that they don't have the additional capacity to step out and to help the government with anything else beyond what they're already doing on a voluntary basis or a charitable basis or through a contract position with the government.

I believe my time is almost over, so I will take my seat again. I look forward to a very thorough explanation to my questions. If the minister is not able to provide them verbally, I would expect to receive them within two weeks in writing. I thank you for the opportunity to ask the questions of the minister.

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I don't think we need to put anything in writing. We'd be glad to answer all the questions right now.

First of all, Mr. Chairman, I need to refer the hon. member to page 261. Page 261 very specifically talks about the question that she has on a decrease in the budget. This government does not plan for disasters in such a way that we say that we pay for disasters. If she could refer to page 261, line 4.1.2, disaster recovery, that funding there was money that was spent on disaster recovery that was not budgeted for.

In fact, we added \$1.7 million to the budget. The addition of that funding is in actuality to deal with an emergency management body or agency. I can say that at present we have hired a director for that management body, emergency management. That, by the way, is one of the recommendations that came from the report. His name is Dave Hodgins, and we're very happy to have him on board. I want to make it very clear to the hon. member opposite that the funding that is being allocated in that direction is very much going to answer some of the questions that she had, to deal with municipalities. We need to deal with search and rescue; we need to deal with fire departments; we need to deal with the fire commission and for them to work together with our provincial ministries to make sure that we have a one-window approach.

Mr. Chairman, we've also had discussions with our federal counterparts, in discussion on mitigation, in discussion on a national alert system, in essence preparing our citizens in case a disaster happens, saying: no, the funding is not less; the funding is more. Maybe I should mention just a little bit on the mitigation aspect. We are looking at the province and looking at some of the areas that have experienced flooding and looking at how the federal government and ourselves could work together in trying to mitigate that possibility of flooding happening.

Let me also go to housing. The hon. member divided the housing into three categories: the one to three weeks and who was included in that category, the three weeks to the three months, and also maybe the long term. You talked about the \$2.5 million, which is a new program, the transition program. Are we expecting that funding to increase? I mean, I would hope that it does. Is \$2.5 million, you know, enough money? It's a new program. We need to get it started. We need to get it going. We put \$2.5 million in that program. We just can't throw money into a program and hope that it works. Our focus and our direction are to continually increase that program and assess what the needs and demands are going to be.

You talked about what the criteria were for some of the homeless programs, and is it income tested or needs tested?

**Ms Blakeman:** Asset tested.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Asset tested. Well, you know what happens, Mr. Chairman: the homeless usually don't have money, and that's, I



guess, acid tested. I mean, they don't have anything, so you tell me where you're supposed to go with this.

You talk about the rent supplement: yes, it is income tested. Hopefully, that can provide that answer. When I say, with the homeless, to have asset tested, is if an individual has assets, they usually won't qualify for the criteria that's necessary for the homeless.

4:30

Mr. Chairman, we provide \$143 million for housing through management bodies throughout the province, through municipalities. We provide them with financial support on an annual basis. We also provide legislation through the Alberta Housing Act, and we provide support services directly from our staff in the housing division. The hon. member talked about fuzzy thinking, and I am not sure exactly what that meant, but we provide funding to municipalities. Municipalities are the best judge of where and how funding should be allocated in their areas. Those municipalities have asked for that autonomy, and we have granted that autonomy because they know best as to where funding should go.

Mr. Chairman, we have supported the homeless support, increased the shelter support to \$35 million, up from \$23.1 million. We have increased the homeless initiative to \$6 million, up from \$3 million. The funding will enable the department to extend the initiative to additional municipalities and increase funding to seven identified communities currently receiving through this initiative. Now, the program is delivered through community-based operators. We have also allocated \$68 million through the municipal sustainability housing initiative, that gives the opportunity for municipalities that have needs in their communities, for them to apply on an individual basis or a project basis for funding from our department.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that we have taken a very balanced approach, from emergency to housing. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, I have exhausted the list that was provided to me. If there are no further speakers, we could go on to Seniors.

Okay. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you. I'd just like to wrap up a little bit. First off, I neglected to say that I thank the task force for the work that they did. I was privileged to sit on a task force, and I realize just how much work is involved in that. Travelling around the province and making sure that all of your concerns are heard by that task force and actually reported out is really a lot of work, so I do thank them for that.

Just one other thing too. Again, I would like to go back to something that the minister and I have been talking about. I would respectfully ask this minister to please check the numbers of secondary suites that are below ground. Now, the unfortunate part is that I would suspect that a lot of these suites that are below ground, or even suites above ground, really – a huge portion of those are illegal. I'm not sure how you're going to identify them, but I would appreciate him trying to look up those numbers.

The minister has also talked about millions, billions, and what sounds like a gazillion dollars that are being thrown at many of the problems that have come forward. Again, I think that we have to go back to the principles of democracy and, in fact, that the elected people make the proper decisions at their level. Some of the business of having strings attached really boils down to the golden rule, and it's: he who has the gold makes the rules. I'm not sure that that really is the best way to govern a province.

I'm going to repeat this. I really do believe that it's true that there has been created a massive municipal infrastructure debt through

huge cuts in transfer payments over a number of years. The government of the day attempted to put the provincial government on the backs of the cities and towns by cutting those transfer payments. If those transfer payments were put back to what they were, restored, I think municipalities would have a much better crack at it.

One of the other things is that the funding comes tied to priorities downloaded from the province, such as Water for Life and affordable housing. I'd like to sort of speak to the Water for Life initiative. I would like to see more dollars from the department of advanced education put into that because this is a huge issue, and the universities and certainly Lethbridge College are addressing that. That comes under education, so I'd like to see some dollars go into that.

Affordable housing. I think that under Bill 34 we have pretty much gone around the merry-go-round on that one, but the problem remains that there is a crisis. The crisis is now. There is no inventory for people to move into. The other big concern that has been mentioned is, in fact: where are temporary foreign workers going to live? My understanding is that we'll be getting 2,500 in the Toftfield area. Where are they going to live? More importantly, who are they going to displace if the company can afford to buy the condos and put these people in? Who are they displacing? Are they displacing Albertans?

The other thing that certainly the Liberals would do – and I've spoken about it before. I think there should be a separate ministry or certainly a separate deputy minister in charge of housing. Moving housing from Seniors to Municipal Affairs I believe was the right thing to do. In fact, I think that your deputy minister and I were at a conference together at the Delta hotel, I think it was, when that conversation came up, and I'm glad to see that it's happened.

The other thing that I see that I think has to be addressed in a much more aggressive fashion, really, is emergency funding. It isn't just flooding. Who knows what our emergencies might be? We hear nothing but pandemics, and certainly when we had the BSE crisis, it showed just how important it is that we are ready to move, and right away. If anyone has read the book on the SARS crisis, they will realize that actually it was very poorly handled and partly because they weren't prepared.

One of the other things is that we have an increase in population, which is no surprise to anyone in this House or to actually anybody in this province when you speak to them. One of the things that immigrants use – and there are huge statistics to back this up – are libraries. There aren't any extra monies to cover what libraries are really struggling with throughout this province, not just in the big cities but certainly in the smaller centres, where many immigrants are coming to to begin their lives. Some of them certainly migrate into cities, but a lot of them are coming to smaller communities, where they've either been church sponsored or sponsored by local social groups or, in fact, just sponsored by other families or the families that have come ahead of them. They are using libraries. The libraries are strung right to the end, and this is part of helping immigrants integrate into our society.

4:40

Libraries need money. But like everything else libraries need staff, and staff has to be highly trained in libraries. Throwing money at problems in this province I don't think is always the answer. I would like to see some reviews of where this money is being spent. As I said, we're talking about million, billions, gazillions, but where is it really being spent? We have to go back and see, and I would like to see that libraries would be at least be part of that conversation. Where is the money going? Does it actually filter down, again, to those front lines?

Some of the other emergency services don't have to be huge that would be large enough to attract the federal . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, the time allocated for the estimates of the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing has now lapsed; however, the minister is requesting, if he receives your consent, that he would take about a couple of minutes at the most to respond to the last questions that were presented. Is that agreeable?

[Unanimous consent denied]

**The Deputy Chair:** Okay. We will then request the minister to provide them in writing.

We will now proceed with the Department of Seniors and Community Supports. The hon. minister.

### Seniors and Community Supports

**Mr. Melchin:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We're delighted to be here this afternoon to talk about the estimates for the Department of Seniors and Community Supports, the best department in the government with some of the best, finest employees among any of the departments, none excepted. So all those other ministers around here, take a good look at the fine quality of personnel. That's true, actually. I must admit that I've been very impressed with the quality of people that do work in our public service in all of our departments and this one not to be excepted.

I'll introduce Tim Wiles, our deputy minister. I've got Reegan McCullough right beside me, our assistant deputy minister, disability supports division. Chi Loo is the assistant deputy minister, seniors services division. We've got, let's see, Susan McCulloch, the senior financial officer of corporate finance. Then we have Bruce West, director, supportive living/long-term care development branch, community support programs in strategic planning division, and then Jim Menzies, executive director of finance and IT services. I might also mention that in the members' gallery there is Pam Livingston from my office and also Janice, who's our communications director for the department of seniors.

Oh, yes. Last but not least and certainly one of the greatest inputs and support of this is the chairman of our Seniors Advisory Council, the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, who does an outstanding, superb job. Could I say that one more time? The Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne is just a tremendous advocate on behalf of seniors and their issues, and it's enjoyable working with him specifically.

**An Hon. Member:** How good is he? How can you relate?

**Mr. Melchin:** He is really good, and if you want to know how good he is, then we can put that on record. Did I mention the Member from Whitecourt-Ste. Anne?

Seriously though, this department really provides some outstanding services and supports for seniors and those with disabilities. It has actually been very insightful for me to have this opportunity of working with our group of people, going around those with various disabilities, really, the work that we're trying to do to see that they have equality in access and participation and the ability to be part of our communities, one that our department very much supports in direction. We know of the seniors' great contributions to this province, making it the place that we have, the structures and institutions that we support. We thank them so very much for their ongoing contribution to making this province an ongoing great place to live and work and raise a family, all of the things which are priorities of not just this government but clearly of Albertans.

The department itself, the estimates that we have before us, has a program expense of almost \$1.8 billion. This is a 7.8 per cent increase since last year's budget and, actually, just under a 10 per cent, 9.8 per cent, increase since the 2006-07 forecast, once again a substantial increase responding to the needs of a group of individuals where there are substantial needs that we're trying to address and ensure that we can help all of these people to seek the degree of independence and strength and ability which they can achieve.

I might just touch on a few of the services that are included in this department. I'll be happy to answer any questions as we go through as well. The first area is the estimate for the seniors' services division, \$389 million. It includes a number of programs that we are well familiar with. For example, 40 per cent of seniors, 142,000 seniors out of 358,000, received monthly assistance through the Alberta seniors' benefits program. Now, they might receive varying amounts depending upon their income. It's an income-tested program, but it has responded to trying to ensure that there's financial assistance to those in the greatest of need, and it was really designed for that purpose. In that respect it encompasses \$275 million of the \$389 million. The large percentage of our seniors' programs are about providing financial assistance based on an income test.

We also have an education property tax assistance program. That has been in for a few years now. Any increases in the education property taxes will be covered so that seniors are no longer subject to any escalating challenges to being able stay in their own home, trying to facilitate that they can live in place and the education property tax not being one of the barriers. This was put in so that they would be relieved of that.

The other area of seniors, the dental and optical assistance program. These are things very much in response to being able to live in place and receive the health benefits required. In fact, many of the seniors do receive further supports, among them Blue Cross and also the waiver of Alberta health care premiums, to ensure that they do receive the health benefits that they might need.

The other one of the main areas of our department, the disability supports, has a budget of \$751 million. Encompassed in this group would be the AISH program, one of the largest, most significant portions of this budget, that provides assistance to 36,000, this year estimated to grow to, likely, 38,900 individuals that might qualify for assistance under the assured income for the severely handicapped.

This has been increased, as has been previously announced, from \$1,000 to \$1,050, which represents the substantial portion of the increase in the budget. That was in relation to some work that's been done for some time, looking at and working with those on AISH over the last three years. There's been continued support for increasing that amount. It was \$850 just a little over two years ago. This is the third year in a row where there's been an increase, and it's really an acknowledgement of just that, that they might be able to keep pace with the rising cost of living.

In addition to the monthly financial payment of the \$1,050 a month, there's the health-related assistance to address issues with respect to all the health benefits for those that are on AISH. So it's a very comprehensive health benefit program: premium-free Alberta health care, prescription drugs, eyewear, dental care, emergency ambulance services, essential diabetic supplies for AISH clients, their spouses, and dependents. That would take up about \$162 million of the supports.

4:50

The Alberta Aids to Daily Living budget has increased another \$2 million to \$86 million. That's really to supply aids not just to those

on AISH but to Albertans to assist in their daily living. Another program, the brain injury initiative, helps about 2,500 Albertans that have acquired brain injuries, and that budget has been increased to about \$14 million this year. A third area of community support programs is strategic planning. This budget estimate of \$604 million includes such areas as public guardian services and protection for persons in care, supportive living and long-term care, and other seniors' housing programs. Finally but very significantly, the persons with developmental disabilities program itself.

There are a number of increases in all of these areas, both to the public guardian and the protection for persons in care, but the one of most significance of this department is the program for persons with developmental disabilities. This budget is \$526 million this year, up over \$18 million from last year. It provides supports for about 9,100 individuals with developmental disabilities. A very substantial resource, and it has increased about 90 per cent in funding since 1999. There has been a very large, rapid growth in funding to accommodate the needs of a group of people who have very substantial disabilities, some of them multiple disabilities, and we acknowledged the challenges and pressures.

We'll be delighted to answer the questions as they come forward. Thank you.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I neglected to perhaps clarify how we're going to do that, and I can't remember. Was that 10 minutes, 10-10, or do you want to do 20-20?

**Mr. Melchin:** As you wish.

**The Deputy Chair:** Just advise the chair, and we will do it.

**Ms Pastoor:** Okay. Let's do 10-10, then, if that's okay.

**Mr. Melchin:** Sure.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you. Sorry. I should have had this arranged ahead of time. I did for the last one, though.

I want to certainly thank the minister for coming in and having all his staff. Maybe he'd like to loan me a couple.

I'd like to start with the continuing care part of it. One thing that I would like to get right off the bat is the definitions. I know that this is something that we've gone around the merry-go-round not only within Seniors but certainly within Health because there is so much overlap. So I think that we are aware that when we speak of some of these things, there are overlaps between those two departments.

When I speak about continuing care, I will go back to my mantra that I've used for two and a half years, which is that I'm speaking about anyone that's in care, that I want provincial standards that are enforceable. I don't care where they live, and I don't care who delivers the care. So it's anyone that's in care. It could be from the brain-injured 18-year-old to the 42-year-old mother with MS or the 95-year-old that is living in what is long-term care. Long-term care, in my mind, comes under continuing care, and it really is what we would recognize as the old nursing home that then became deregulated into sort of the two different departments.

I know that the government has said that they want to increase long-term care beds. I'm not sure what long-term care they're talking about. Are they talking about continuing care or long-term care? Long-term care, again, is not necessarily defined in each region as meaning the same thing. I can certainly speak to the

Chinook region because that's where I worked. It really is saying that it's someone that needs 24-hour RN assessment. I agree with that.

However, I think that where the problem may lie is in the actual assessment, how people are assessed to go into wherever they are. These assessment tools, called InteRAI, which I'm sure you're all familiar with, after a fashion, although it really falls under Health, can be used to say: this is the care you need; therefore, this is where you'll live. Families are often not involved in that process, and I'm not sure that that is a fair process. Where it overlaps into Seniors is that then they go into the housing that Seniors is responsible for. So it's pretty complex.

On page 26 of the government's strategic business plan, it explains an updated plan to expand long-term care and improve standards of care that would be brought forward: "Government will work with stakeholders to promote seamless health and accommodation services for seniors and persons with disabilities, through an updated plan." I wondered if I could have, perhaps, a little bit more clarification on that. Again, back to the overlap, how closely is the minister of seniors working with the minister of health to develop this plan? What strategies are being considered? How many employees are working on the plan? How much money is the strategy receiving? When do we think that that strategy may be finalized and implemented? Would those strategies fold in under the standards that are now being rolled out in terms of housing? There are some standards being rolled out for the care side of it, but that's another issue.

Also, what was mentioned was introducing training plans for operators. I'm not sure that I'm clear what that means. What's involved with the training plans for operators? The operators on the housing side really end up with the housing, which would include everyday living sorts of things. Sometimes it includes the physical help to the person, and other times it just includes the physical environment that they live in. The cost for the training: is it covered by the government, or is it covered by the operators? Would that be mandatory? Who would be creating the criteria for that or the curriculum?

I would assume that one of the things is the safety, the fact that the building would be built to accommodate equipment. When I say that, I of course worked in an old building and worked in a new building, and the lifts and the equipment that we use now are so much bigger than they used to be. The doorways for sure have to be bigger. The doorways to the rooms have to be bigger, and the doorways to the bathrooms have to be bigger. It's those sorts of things that are safety factors.

On page 281 of the estimates, line 4.1.5, it shows that there's a 165 per cent increase, \$4.8 million, to supportive living and long-term care. What I always hear from the government is all the millions and billions and gazillions of dollars, and it doesn't really mean anything to me. I really want to know what the end outcome is: what is that going to give me for those dollars? The other thing that I'm very interested in – I think I spoke to the minister ahead – is that this is one 'schwack' of dough that we are putting out there. Before we put out even more, I would like to see some really in-depth reviewing of where this money is going because I really don't see it getting down to the front lines, where I think it's necessary.

What is the breakdown of the funding for long-term care compared to assisted and supportive living? Again, here we go into definitions. In the Chinook region, of course, we have designated assisted living, which does have that little extra level of care that would be provided by the Health side of it. The breakdown of this money: is it the breakdown in how many people we're serving or how many units are involved with these dollars?

Has the minister of health handed over responsibility for long-term care to the minister of seniors? It would be passed over as a complete package. It would be very difficult to do, but I think it might be a good thing to look at. Then again, are we talking about only seniors in long-term care, or are we talking about seniors in continuing care, that could well have Down's syndrome? Down's syndrome people are living much, much longer. One of the things that they've found out lately is that as Down's syndrome people age, certainly beyond the ages of 45 and 50, more often than not they end up with severe Alzheimer's. So they end up being very, very high care, not necessarily needing nursing care other than for the assessments but certainly require a lot of personal care, personal direction, and as far as I'm concerned, they need a lot of love. We need time to love people.

5:00

Real enforcement, in my mind, is something that doesn't exist in Alberta. It's a deficiency that was identified by the Auditor General and the MLA task force, and improvements have widespread support of the public. There's a huge fear factor out there in some of the public that I speak to and have spoken to. They actually are afraid to come forward and complain because (a) they're not treated with respect when they do it or else they have some kind of confrontation, and they're thrown out of the institution of where their loved one is. Then we get the police involved, and it just deteriorates from there. We need strong, strong support for people when they come forward and that they're not afraid, that their concerns are addressed. Having said that, I do realize that it's very difficult for people to put loved ones into long-term care, and sometimes their expectations are way beyond what possibly can be delivered because the staffing component isn't there.

When might the minister support the introduction of legislation as recommended by the Auditor General and the MLA task force that outlines standards, monitoring and enforcement, and clear lines of accountability in continuing care?

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Melchin:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In response to the questions from the Member from Lethbridge-East, there were a lot of detailed questions that have come up, many of which we are going to have to respond to in writing later. There were a lot of questions about various quantifications of beds and people and the like, so we will respond to those in due course.

I would say this, though, with respect to the continuing care issue that – and you've been involved with the standards that have been set – as of April 1 we have implemented a number of standards for ongoing care, and this fits into both facilities and for the care itself. There was some discussion about the enforcement of those standards, and I would concur with that. If you're going to set some benchmark in standards, you need to ensure that there is a compliance and enforcement of that. That's the only way you can gain some confidence in any system. Be it for you or I or our parents or anyone else involved, you need to ensure that there is an enforcement and compliance to the standards that is met.

A lot of work has gone into it, as you're well aware yourself having participated, Member for Lethbridge-East, a very good contribution on those standards that should be implemented not just for long-term care but for all facilities. I'd say from the feedback we have from the service providers that those have been well received. A lot of work has been done to implement them. They've just come into effect as of April 1.

This first year is going to be an interesting one. We're just trying to make sure that we get around through the year to ensuring that

people are both educated and up to date and work with them on the compliance questions. I think part of our work this year is to ensure that we do just that, that we do get around to all the facilities, monitor the progress that they've made, certainly give them all the accolades we can for compliance, and/or if deficiencies are there that some plan of action is met so that we can ensure compliance of all facilities. Then the enforcement will come for those that choose not to comply or are faulty in those standards. Thus far I'd say that overwhelmingly it's a very good response to that standard of care.

That said, when you mentioned if it has been transferred from health to the department of seniors, this still remains a shared responsibility. It is work that I'd suggest we'll forever have to work on, whether long-term care becomes fully in one or the other. There's probably no perfect or utopian solution to whether it should be entirely in one department or the other or be a shared responsibility. I know from our own department that while you have many of the issues of housing and seniors, one of the greater challenges, really, is the care component if it's really a health delivery portion of it. Those are the things that people have responded to more than just, you know, the standard of the facility though we have to ensure that they meet the specifications and door widths, and you mentioned some of those kinds of accessibility questions.

Therefore, I'd say that there certainly is an understanding of the need for both sides of it, whether it could meet specifically under the jurisdiction of one department. We have had a number of meetings already in that regard. Both the minister of health and myself have met as well as our department and officials. Whether it ever gets to a resolution – it should rely on one – it's too early to prejudge though it is something you can't choose to just ignore. There needs to be a tremendous amount of facilitation and ongoing co-operation so that we don't miss who's ultimately responsible for the various tasks. But I would tell you that there is a high level of support for ensuring that for seniors and those in long-term care facilities as well as any form of supportive living facility, whether it's long-term care or various supportive living care, that both the health and facility issues would be attended to.

I concur with your thought about it really doesn't matter what facility they're in; the standards ought to apply uniformly. I guess that's a question we'll have to think through in the rollout of all the facilities. If there's a standard of facility that's requisite, maybe if it's long-term care because of a health issue, they may require some specialized equipment and/or a structure or facility to accommodate that, but other than that, most of them should be pretty common as to an expectation regardless of whether it's a lodge or supportive living or any other form of housing.

You mentioned also about outcomes. And you're right: we get into talking in hundreds of millions of dollars that are spent, and it becomes difficult to translate that. I, too, would focus in on what the right outcomes are that we ought to address. I support that thought. That's the real challenge. The ongoing struggle, I guess, is making sure we've defined the right outcomes and the benchmarks. How do we then report against them, and how do we ensure that we are making progress against that? We'd be welcome to any suggestions and thoughts as to those that could be improved or those that might be added. I think an emphasis on all of our budgets has to continue to be driven towards outcome. These are individuals. What is it that we would want for you or me or our parents or anybody else that's in any form of care or under the supervision of anyone else? There is a standard of outcome that we would demand.

The other ones. I wasn't clear on one of your questions upfront. I know that you were addressing primarily long-term care. We have a range of facilities, everything from living in your own home all the way through supportive living like our residential living: the lodges, assisted living, and the enhanced assisted living, through to the long-

term care facilities. Those are far more defined by level of health need. In fact, that is more the definition. It's really a health issue defining the requisite need of attendant health care that would then designate them to the need of a higher level of care with an option.

I would say that, uniformly, people are looking more and more to support that direction. How do we help facilitate people living in their own home, living in their own facilities for as long as possible for a variety of reasons? It's what most people prefer: to live in surroundings that they know and understand and feel comfortable and have some confidence with. How do we integrate the health to support the people living in place and in home as long as we can and then even more integration amongst some of these other facilities?

5:10

I must admit that one of the confusions I've had is going through and looking at: what makes this a facility? We have some different ones called unique homes. What makes it a lodge? What makes it assisted living? You go into some complexes that are integrated, and they have them all. The only thing that I could really define as being different wasn't so much the building structure most of the time. Sometimes, but mostly it's not the building facility; it is the level of health care that's a requisite for that person in that setting.

If that's the case, there's much that I think we could do in moving towards: regardless of where they are, how does a person live in a place longer in whatever description of a facility that that might mean? There's going to have to be a lot more collaboration with Health and with the regional health authorities as to following the provision of health services to where they are versus just moving a person from place to place to place. I think, though, that a laudable goal and direction that I would fully support, not just me but from what we've heard from various stakeholders: much more thinking of the facilities that we support, of the integration of that from the outset. How do you prepare for that facility being able to support maybe a range of services?

That said, we'll respond to the more detailed questions you have in writing because some of them are very specific in nature. I'd be happy to entertain some more questions.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. As the minister may or may not be aware, I have a very high percentage of seniors in my constituency. I know that there are some centres in Alberta, like Lethbridge and Camrose, for example, who are at 15 per cent or even higher than that. My constituency is also at about that level. By far most of the seniors in my constituency are independent. We have one long-term care facility, and that's the General hospital, which is now climbing towards 400 beds, I think, if I've got my memory right. Overall my people live independently and are trying to stay that way.

I have a couple of specific questions for the minister. He referred to the denture program when he was doing his opening comments. We're finding that that is not working as well for our people, but perhaps I've missed something. So could he, please, explain how that denture program works and how it's an improvement? I'll tell you where it's failing for us. Dentures are expensive. You're looking at, you know, sort of \$3,000 to \$6,000 for a set many times, especially for people who have additional complications. Of course, many folks of that age do. They're dealing with some kind of chronic ailment as well, which complicates matters.

It used to be that they could get assistance through the special needs program for dentures, but then the special needs program was changed to specifically exclude assistance for dentures, and they're somehow supposed to get it through some other program. We've

been struggling with this. Now, I know that people need to get permission in advance, and they need to have this all filled out in advance. Yes, yes, all of that. But I'm more concerned that what we're seeing is increasing numbers of seniors who are not being successful in getting dentures because they actually can't find the funding anymore. The new program that's in place actually is not as helpful as the old program was. I'm happy to find out that I'm wrong and that the new program, in fact, is an improvement. So, please, tell me exactly how this program works and how people that need dentures, that are quite expensive, would be able to access assistance to do this.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

I'm going to move on to a new category. I really have a wonderful constituency because I also have a lot of people on AISH supports. Of course, they're living downtown because they want to be close to both the community supports but also agency service support for what they need. So I always get questions. I understand that there was another AISH review done somehow, behind closed doors or some MLA committee. What we would like to know is: when is the next increase scheduled for AISH? If the ministry does not have a scheduled time for an increase in AISH, why not?

I would like to know, as well, what government policy it is that will not consider an indexing of AISH for any kind of annual review. Whether that's a COLA or rate of inflation or the Alberta weekly wage index, I really don't care. The MLAs' salaries are linked to the Alberta weekly wage index. I don't care which one it's hooked to, but I'd like to know what government policy it is that is precluding the indexing of AISH to anything on an annual review basis. If there is no policy, then why isn't the government indexing AISH every year?

I'd like to turn now to the business plans for budget 2007. I'm particularly concerned about what's happening in the long-term care workforce. It's interesting because I was talking to some folks in health sciences today, and they're really concerned about a lack of staffing. They mentioned – and they're not the first ones – in particular, care facilities for seniors. If you move away from what we're calling a long-term care facility now, which is one in which there's a medical portion assigned to it, and start talking about supportive living and designated living and enhanced living and all the other versions that we seem to hear about, in fact you are dealing with staff who do not have any medical training, for the most part. Then we really are competing to get staff into those facilities. We're competing against Tim Hortons and other groups like that.

I note that under Significant Opportunities and Challenges appearing on pages 251 and 252, you identify as opportunity and challenge number 2, work opportunities, that we have an increasingly tight labour market . . . resulting in difficulties attracting and retaining skilled workers, particularly in the health and human services sectors. At the same time, high employment rates encourage options to retain mature workers, such as flexible work arrangements and pension programs.

But what we're hearing is that, you know, hourly wage people don't get pension programs. So even if they are a mature worker, it's not enticing them to stay when they could go across the street and work for McDonald's for 15 bucks an hour or Starbucks and get a share of the corporation. In here you're seeing it as, I suppose, an opportunity when I quote you as saying: "There are increased opportunities for underemployed groups, such as persons with disabilities, to participate in the labour market."

I also note that you get quite specific in item 7 under the same category, entitled Changing Environment for Caregivers. You're noting there that "fewer paid caregivers results in increased pressure

on unpaid caregivers," which, of course, are family members for the most part, occasionally friends. There is "reduced quality of life, increased financial burden, and economic loss from increased absenteeism and stress-related health impacts." Of course, our guardians and parents are aging, themselves, and will die, and we will lose that volunteer, unpaid workforce very quickly.

So I would like to know: what are the detailed health workforce, care workforce plans that the ministry has? Are you working with the Minister of Advanced Education for spaces in postsecondary institutions for personal care attendants? Are you looking at any kind of standardization for employment criteria in these designated, supported, enhanced living arrangements? What is going to happen here? Clearly it's going to be a challenge to get people in here and pay them. What is the ministry doing specifically to attract, train, and retain a workforce in these spaces for our seniors?

In addition, what programs is the ministry looking to either create or enhance with existing programs that offer respite to families? I mean, there are a few programs, like changes, for example, where we're dealing with Alzheimer's and dementia in patients. You can take them in for the day, and that offers some respite to family members who are caring for them. But we need a whole bunch more of these, and we're going to need them pretty quick, and I'm not seeing the ramp-up in activity out of your department that would tell me that there is significant activity happening there to deal with the opportunities and challenges that you're looking at.

5:20

I note as well under challenges and opportunities in item 3, the rising cost of living, where you are noting that many of your clients "have relatively low or fixed incomes." I'm wondering how the minister relates the government's refusal to put on a rent cap into this particular opportunity in that issue that you've identified here as a challenge. In many cases, low income or not qualifying for rent subsidies in any way, they're just hooped. Why are you not an advocate for a rent cap, particularly given item 3 there, rising cost of living?

I'd also draw your attention to number 6, shift to community-based supports, which notes that increasingly people are coming out of facility care to community-based care or home after shorter hospital stays, and their care needs have to be met in the community. Now, this shift is requiring Albertans to "absorb a significant portion of the costs of equipment, supplies, drugs, transportation and other items that would have previously been covered by facilities or through the acute care system." It's another download onto the individual. How is the ministry expecting the vulnerable people that they deal with – and I would specifically note people on AISH, PDD, and seniors – to recoup these costs? So question 1: are you expecting those vulnerable people to take over these costs? Question 2: if you're not, where is the corresponding increase in programs and financing in your department that you are going to cover these costs for these individuals?

Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Melchin:** Okay. Thank you. We'll attempt to get through a number of those. If we miss some of the questions, we'll be happy to supplement them in writing as well.

I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Centre mentioning that her constituency has a high number of seniors, mostly independent. I think that's an outstanding statement to make, actually. That's a good sign if there are a high number of seniors independent. One of the challenges we have is a demographic planning commission as one of the mandate letters in helping not necessarily this generation

of seniors but even future seniors to plan for the time they retire. We live longer. It's going to be an enormous challenge, really. How do you make sure that you have the resources necessary and the ability to retire and maybe get rid of some of those barriers if people want to continue to work? But I congratulate her for having a lot of independent seniors in her area.

The dental program that's mentioned: I just want to mention dentures. There was a change, I guess, in the Blue Cross coverage plan that was put in for a dental program, but that just broadened the coverage. Dentures are included, so they do qualify for dentures. There's a cap, though, that says the maximum benefit is \$5,000 every five years.

With some of the service providers, there's a fee schedule that's identified with most of the dental programs, and that's pretty typical of most insurance coverages, to have a fee guide. Some dentists charge more than others. It's five years in particular, but the dentures were a program really responding to the fact – I'd say a very good step forward with the five years kind of a question. I'd be happy to have that in discussions with our Blue Cross people when we're looking at the plans: what are the best priorities for positioning the funds available for a plan? I'm certainly willing to take that under advisement as we look at and review these kinds of plans. All I can say is that to date that's what it is. There is coverage for a variety of basic services. It includes X-ray, polishing, scaling, extraction, root canals, and procedures related to gum disease and dentures.

As I've mentioned, actually with a number of seniors' programs there's much that we can do. The challenge gets into, I would say, in many respects prioritizing that which we should do and targeting which seniors might be best targeted. It's hard to accomplish meeting the demands of an ever-growing number of seniors that are going to come and accommodate doing everything.

So I'd say that the budget has been increased and will continue to be increased over the years. That would be the support and direction still of this department. So it gets into priorities, really, of selecting. Out of all the things that we can do, where would you best position the funds that we should? I think that's part of the discussion that needs to happen among the groups. Yes, there's opportunity to change and improve benefits, but it's not that easy to increase and improve benefits for all the range of things, of everything that could possibly be asked. To me that would be kind of coming back and working with the seniors groups: where would they see is their best and most urgent need?

The next area was with respect to AISH. As you know, in the last three years there has been an increase in each of those years for the monthly payment of AISH. There's a question with respect to indexing and tying it to index. I'd say that it is and has been the commitment in each of the budgets that we have done. That's one of the significant areas for looking to increase on an annual basis. That's what we have been doing, and that's the direction we've certainly been following.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

As to tying to, like we do as MLAs, an index or something, that is the ongoing work that I guess we'll have to assess as to if that's the best way or not, but certainly I don't mind that we have those types of considerations and thinking through what's best. It is and has been the direction of the government that we've been increasing it over the last three years. The requirement was for us to do an ongoing review. That was one of the recommendations that came, to say that we would have a biennial review.

Therefore, it does get into that we will be continually reviewing. This isn't something that will be looked at and then put away for a

long time in the future. It is a matter that we will review every year, every budget. Really, that's a commitment we make. Every year when we put out a budget, we will be considering this as a high-priority issue, with regard to those that are on AISH. I fully support that that would be the expectation, don't have any difference of opinion on that. Therefore, we will look towards that area.

One of the things that I would say that we're also trying to do – and you get into a lot of the opportunities and challenges. Maybe I'll segue a little bit into this. As I've gone around and we've met with many of the service providers and those under the various programs or the various range of disabilities – be it PDD or AISH, it doesn't matter; they may not even qualify for one of our programs because there are many people with disabilities beyond those that qualify for AISH – as I hear the feedback, they want to be included. They want to have the opportunity to be included, barrier-free access being one, those kinds of things, accessibility being one, but also the opportunity to be included to the extent that they can in those things that we do: having work and being able to contribute.

One of the things we did identify as a priority we wanted to work on was: there are 36,000 people on AISH, and it's a growing number. I really do worry. These are individuals for whom the best way that we could help to work with them is to help them reach the maximum amount of independence that they could possibly attain themselves. In some ways I think reframing it from thinking about this as a permanency – now, for some it might be temporary; it might be forever. I don't mean to say that some will get there, but having the hope and the aspiration that everyone can attain and achieve more regardless of the level of their disability and the hope that they could rise to whatever extent they can.

Work is one of the greatest values that we all have by which we sustain our lives and from which I've heard and really been inspired by many success stories. That's what we're really trying to encourage one by one. This isn't about massive numbers of 36,000 going to 38,000. But how do we help that one person get to a measure of greater independence that they possibly can rise to and the hope that this isn't something that we will put into a dependency category? We might sustain the life, but I really do worry at times about how to help them sustain their strength as an individual of abilities.

5:30

In fact, I've been really encouraged by some of the service providers thinking about not focusing in on their disabilities – and I'm glad that we don't focus in on all of our weaknesses – but focusing in on the abilities that they have, the talents, and the interests, and it's in that way that I think some great things are being transformed. I'd just say that because of the low unemployment one of our great opportunities is to start getting people, employers, and all of us to rethink about those with disabilities and how to engage them and have them part of our community rather than abandoning them into a life of dependency. It's in that that we will work as individuals. These are unique, and they'll have their unique circumstances, and we're going to work very hard and very proactively on assisting them to earn.

Part of the AISH program that we don't focus on at times is that we improved the exemptions a little while ago up to \$400 before there's any cutting back of any AISH. We want to ensure that we get flexible in helping those individuals when they think about the opportunity for work, and that's going to be very uniquely positioned. They will have different strengths and different capabilities to offer, but we need to engage, I think, more of society, employers, and everybody alike to look at how we can better integrate those with disabilities into our communities.

So it's as an opportunity that I view it. Is it a challenge? An enormous challenge but we want to look very proactively at that.

Those are really the solutions. They all want and all of us want an opportunity to contribute, to explore and develop our talents to the extent we can, and have that ability to provide the income and sustain our own life to the extent one could.

That said, underpinning all of that will be the programs there to support them, and they'll still be there. They aren't being taken away other than to help the system go forward.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. About two and a half years ago when we were elected, I can remember that my House leader would say to me, "I need you to talk for 10 minutes," and I would absolutely panic. However, 10 minutes is nothing now, so I'm going to try to go really fast. It'll sort of be a shotgun approach on some of this stuff. [some applause] Thank you. I know that you're just waiting for everything I have to say.

Just a couple of comments about dentures. Good dental care for seniors is probably one of the most important things that can be done because it affects their eating habits. Certainly, people have been known to quit eating or just go on liquid diets because their mouth has not received the care that it needs.

You spoke about the demographic planning commission. What would the cost of that commission be, and what exactly are your measurements? What are you looking for out of this commission? Other provinces like B.C. have set specific, measurable targets to increase the number of long-term care beds by 5,000 by 2008. What targets have been set in Alberta, and is the minister of seniors collaborating with the minister of health to set those targets? Again, we're down to the definitions of long-term care because, in my mind, we don't have enough of what I consider to be long-term care because they're being pushed out.

The Liberals are certainly concerned about the deregulation and the unbundling of health support and housing services, but we all understand how we're going around the circle on that one. Changes by this government over the years have redefined the complex health care needs of the seriously compromised, high-risk, ill people as housing. It goes back to: how are people being assessed? Should they be assessed for care first or housing first? Again, the chicken and the egg. But often they are assessed for housing with basic health care services that go with them.

Given that the ministry appears to support that shift towards supportive living, what steps are being taken to prevent the trend of having more and more costs of those long-term care services shifted onto residents and their families when, in actual fact, long-term care services are often medical and are being delivered by people who truly aren't trained? I'm thinking about tube feeds, people that are on trachs. Yes, once you've learned those skills, you're right. But you still have to have those assessment skills, and again you're looking at the proper handling and sterilization of those pieces of equipment that you use, particularly in invasive services.

I'd like to switch over to PDD. There are approximately 9,200 adult Albertans with developmental disabilities, and it's obvious that it's essential for these people to have quality supports. As you have said yourself, we're trying to get them to live and be able to perform to their very highest ability in terms of their independence. But it appears that this is an awful lot of money for a small number of people, and according to the disabilities community, funding isn't adequate. So, to me, there's a huge disconnect between these numbers and that particular question.

Are there ways to ensure that this money is being spent in the right places like front-line staff? The question that I would ask is: how is this money being spent? I'd like to look at it line by line because the money goes from the province to the health authorities to the PDD

boards to the contract operators, and then it finally gets down to the front line. So I think that a total review of how these dollars are being spent is in order.

When the PDD board was restructured, \$11 million was turned back into the department, but that \$11 million, I think, came back out in the last go-round. It was \$11.3 million that was put back into PDD. When that board was eliminated, could not some of that money or that staffing also have been eliminated? How was it distributed through the rest of the department? Has the minister reviewed the effectiveness or the benefits of these reforms? I realize that it's probably just a little under a year, but I'm wondering just what measurements are being used in terms of that evaluation? Have these changes really improved service delivery? Have the changes resulted in any cost savings?

The increase was 3.5 per cent, but of course we know that inflation is higher than that at 5 per cent. Would this small increase accommodate the caseload growth and the agency staff retention pressures? The caseload growth, I think, is a question that has to be looked at very closely because some of the criteria that have been put out lately actually stop people from being put into the system that perhaps should be.

One of the things we were talking about was people meeting their highest level. Some of the complaints that I've had are that before, when there were PDD supports for people, often they helped people go to Special Olympics, and now that's been cut back. So that's one less program that people can access that really does help them keep up their physical mobility. In terms of PDD people moving forward, we certainly have different levels of cognitive abilities, and again a program that I think has been hit is the one where there is help for going to college or university. I have a young man in Lethbridge who would not have gotten through college and become a taxpaying member of society had he not had that continual help to get him through what he was trying to do.

Service providers have been eliminating day programs, and I think that's part of where the one-to-ones come in. When they don't have that one-to-one and they go into larger programs, that's not a bad thing, providing the same level of cognition is put with the same groups. I think sometimes where that comes out wrong at the other end is in group homes. It's so difficult to place people in group homes where the levels are exactly the same. One care worker may be able to look after three people if they have almost the same level of care that's needed or the same cognition, but if you've got three people with high needs all of which are different, it's very difficult for just one person to be able to look after them. That's where, again, of course, staffing comes in.

**5:40**

I think that you probably have seen that report A Human Resource Crisis in the Disability Services Field – I'm sure that it has been given to you – where they're actually identifying a crisis. I think we're almost at catastrophic crisis now because people really are being left by the side of the road. As I know that you're more than aware, staffing has fallen down. In fact, our college doesn't even offer the program anymore.

So, again, we should be looking at the department of advanced education. What they can they offer? How can they offer it? Should they perhaps be looking at the same thing as the health care workers, where, in fact, they can learn on the job. I think it's Bow Valley College. I'm sorry; I can't remember the name, but there

actually are distance learning programs where people can learn on the job, and perhaps that would be a help towards getting more people into working. It's not an easy job, and you really have to have the heart for it. You cannot go into this kind of field only for a paycheque. It just doesn't work, and it certainly puts anybody at a disadvantage.

I know that you're aware of the inequality of wages for government positions and community positions, which I think is something that certainly has to be addressed.

What is the minister doing to ensure that these qualified, experienced staff remain in the sector, and how are you recruiting staff?

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. minister, you have just about one minute left.

**Mr. Melchin:** Dentures are good. Demographic planning commission: we're working on it. PDD: there are 9,200 adults. I agree that there's an enormous challenge here and disconnect in my mind, too, about the amount of money versus the numbers of people being served. As you actually are aware, today we even have some meetings with kind of some brainstorming sessions. We're starting to take a look with some service creative people: how do we improve this? It's one that should help address in the end that dollars can get down even to those that are providing the service. The most important benchmark to me is the person, those 9,200 people with PDD. It's all about them, and it's less about supporting all of our structures. So, to that end, that'll be part of the outcomes that we have.

How much time do I have? Very limited.

Caseload growth . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, but pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(a) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

**Mr. Mitzel:** Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Seniors and Community Supports relating to the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

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

**Hon. Members:** Concur.

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

The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we do now adjourn until 7 p.m., at which time we reconvene in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:47 p.m.]