

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, May 15, 2007

7:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/15

head:

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. The item for discussion tonight is the estimates of the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. The members may have staff on the government side, provided a list is given. I don't have a list or a day's notice that was required for the opposition. Does the hon. member have an explanation?

Mr. Chase: The information was walked over on Monday to the appropriate departments. Why it hasn't been received, I have no idea. When I spoke with the Sergeant-at-Arms, he suggested that he would very much like to receive a copy of the notification. I would be very pleased to provide you with that notification. But if it puts you in a position of compromise, I can go it alone. I would prefer not to, but I am prepared to do so.

The Chair: The first day the notice came out requiring one day's notice, I allowed unanimous consent because there was no opportunity for a day's notice, and from that point on it was intimated that a day's notice would be required. But I'm here to serve the Assembly.

If I could recognize the hon. Member for Peace River. Did you want to speak on this issue?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Chairman, not to interfere with the rules of the House and your ruling on this matter, but the government party certainly has no objection and no idea what happened to the notice. We're not going to object to the presence of a researcher.

The Chair: Well, with that, I will allow for unanimous consent of the Assembly. Are there any opposed to the hon. member having his staff member there? Hearing none, when the opportunity arises for you to speak, would you introduce the member.

head:

Main Estimates 2007-08

Infrastructure and Transportation

The Chair: I will now introduce the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Before I begin, I'd like to introduce members of Infrastructure and Transportation's executive management committee and senior officials present. To my left I have Jay Ramotar, my deputy minister. To my right I have Winnie Yiu-Young, executive director of finance. Next to her I have Rob Penny, the assistant deputy minister of policy and corporate services. Up in the balcony I have Steve Callahan, executive director representing transportation safety services. Maybe you could wave so they'll know who you are. I have Larry James, executive director representing the department's properties division, and I have Barry Day, the assistant deputy minister of capital projects. And everybody knows my assistant, Warren Chandler.

Alberta has one of the best transportation networks in North America, and our province also has one of the strongest economies in Canada. The link between transportation and economic prosperity

is clear. It is also clear that the ability to move people and goods safely and efficiently is vital to our prosperity. Roads and infrastructure play a critical role in the success of our province and Albertans' quality of life.

Alberta has experienced phenomenal growth over the last few years. Since 2001 more than half a million people have moved here, and since 2002 more than 300,000 vehicles have been added to our roads and highways. This has put significant additional pressure on transportation routes and accelerated the wear and tear on our roadways. As the province grows, so do the challenges faced by the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

The state of Alberta's core infrastructure and our roads and highways has become a high-priority issue for this department and for this government. Building and maintaining roads is directly related to the Alberta government's priorities of managing growth pressures and providing safe communities.

The Alberta government recognizes the important roles that infrastructure and transportation play in the success of our province. It demonstrated its support with unprecedented funding for infrastructure in last year's three-year capital plan and again in this year's plan. The estimates I am presenting today are closely tied with the capital plan. Thanks to ongoing support from the government, the ministry continues to undertake a number of programs and projects in '07-08. I'd like to share some of these with you as I present the ministry's estimates for the '07-08 fiscal year.

This year the ministry's estimates to be voted will be approximately \$3.2 billion for expense and equipment/inventory purchases, a nearly 16 per cent increase from the '06-07 forecast. Of the \$3.2 billion, \$372 million is for noncash items such as amortization, nominal sum disposals, and consumption of inventories.

When the noncash is excluded, the ministry has a \$2.8 billion spending target for programs. This includes more than \$421 million, primarily for highway rehabilitation and maintenance. Approximately \$297 million will go towards provincial highway maintenance and systems and \$124 million into highway rehabilitation. Nearly \$41 million will go into transportation safety services. This funding supports vehicle and driver safety programs, monitoring of the commercial carrier industry, and a number of traffic safety initiatives, including implementation of the new traffic safety plan, which is one of Infrastructure and Transportation's three mandates.

The traffic safety plan is designed to reduce deaths and injuries on provincial highways. It outlines key initiatives to help prevent collisions, build safer roads, enforce traffic laws, and better educate Albertans about traffic safety. Some key aspects of the framework being developed for the plan include a focus on community traffic safety, co-ordinated enforcement, legislation based on best practices, and an emphasis on the safest engineering practices. More than \$1 million will go towards the Transportation Safety Board.

A key element of the ministry's program expense is capital support to municipal infrastructure. More than \$1.2 billion in grants will be provided to Alberta municipalities in '07-08. These grants will allow municipalities to target funding at infrastructure pressures that they deem to be priorities. Using these funds, local governments can direct funding at projects, including roads, bridges, public transit, water and waste water, and emergency services.

One of the notable programs under municipal support is the Water for Life strategy, which provides cost-shared grants to eligible municipalities to assist in the construction of high-priority municipal water supply and treatment and waste-water treatment and disposal works. Over the next three years the ministry will provide \$422 million for the Water for Life strategy, of which \$103 million is specifically for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. A hundred and fifty-nine point three million dollars was approved in

the '07-08 budget, \$35 million of that, again, for Wood Buffalo; \$174 million was approved in the '08-09 budget, another \$34 million for Wood Buffalo; \$88.3 million was approved in '09-10, another \$34 million for Wood Buffalo.

Also included in the ministry's voted expense category is \$360 million for government operations. This funding enables the ministry to maintain the day-to-day operations and maintenance of government-owned properties as well as leases, the Swan Hills Treatment Centre, and capital and accommodation projects.

In addition, funding for natural gas rebates in '07-08 is budgeted at \$477.3 million, a \$114 million increase from the '06-07 forecast. This reflects the projected increase in natural gas prices.

The ministry's capital investment budget will be nearly \$1.5 billion in '07-08, an increase of \$549 million over the '06-07 forecast.

Approximately \$201 million will help fund several major projects such as the Royal Alberta Museum's renovation and expansion, the first phase of the construction of Edmonton's new remand centre, and the Brooks crop research greenhouse. Notably, Infrastructure and Transportation will invest in provincial highway systems and the strategic economic corridors: \$626 million is allocated for the strategic economic corridor investment initiative, including the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads and the north-south trade corridor.

7:10

At this time I'd like to take a minute to clear up any possible misunderstanding about the cost of construction on Anthony Henday Drive southeast. The '05-06 provincial budget provided \$83.3 million for this P3 ring road, but the Infrastructure and Transportation annual report for that period shows an expenditure of \$118 million. The additional \$34.7 million recognizes the actual amount of work completed by the end of March of '06. The \$34.7 million does not represent a cost overrun as the cost of this project was fixed. This amount will be reduced from future budgets to stay within the project cost.

Continuing with program expenses, more than \$385 million will be used for provincial highway systems. To clarify the funding for provincial highway systems, it includes buildings and enhancing provincial highways and bridges so that we can continue to meet the transportation needs of Albertans and others who drive through our province. For example, this funding will accelerate the construction of the highway 4 bypass by Milk River, the interchange on the Trans-Canada at highway 1 and highway 9 near Strathmore, and the new bridge on highway 49 over the Smoky River west of High Prairie. The funding will also help build projects such as the highway 2 north Innisfail interchange upgrade, the highway 2 median widening from Crossfield to Acme road interchange, and the twinning of highway 779 in Stony Plain.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: I'd just remind all members that the time allotment for this item is an hour and a half. If a person is occupying the floor at the time, I'll allow them to finish their time, but that will take time off the next item of discussion because we do rise and report at 10 tonight.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I know all about time off for bad behaviour, having been a teacher for 34 years.

I'd like to begin by introducing my esteemed assistant, Sam Lyon. I want to thank the minister and the deputy ministers and the array of assistants both on the floor and in the gallery for being here to answer questions, and I look forward to those questions being answered.

I also want to indicate – and I apologize, Minister, for not remembering your assistant's name – that I did appreciate the phone call clarifying the \$34.7 billion. He explained to me that it wasn't a cost overrun, as you've indicated tonight. It was, rather, a requirement of the Auditor General to list it in that format. We had a brief discussion: is this the best way to do it? But that's the way you've been asked to do it, you did it, you've clarified it, and I appreciate it.

What I would like to do tonight is give you a sampling of some of the communities who have indicated their infrastructure concerns to me, and if you could sort of provide me with an update: "Yes, that's in the works," "No, that hasn't been approved," or "We've got a 2008 schedule for beginning construction" and so on.

One of the qualifications I would appreciate right off the bat – you know, at the end of my first 10-minute segment – is what your Department of Infrastructure and Transportation believes to be our current infrastructure/transportation deficit and how you calculate it. We all know the province's history. We know the cutbacks of 1994. When the Premier announced that the debt was paid in full, we had a different opinion: that a large part of that debt, rather than being addressed, was basically downloaded in the form of an infrastructure deficit. It's something that the municipalities are struggling to overcome. But when I sent out letters to all the municipalities and to the school boards – and just while I mention that, a bit of clarification. Something that I had been pushing for and the Liberal opposition had been pushing for was the return of the responsibility for infrastructure and transportation at least to the ministries of Education and Health. I think that for the most part that's been accomplished. A question that I would have is: is there any sort of chain of approval whereby the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation has to sort of cosign the cheque, or are the ministries of Education and Health and Wellness able to operate independently? Our feeling was – and obviously the government recognized the wisdom – that in order for the departments of Education and Health to have any degree of independence and get on with their projects, they needed to have control of their infrastructure budget, and I believe that that's the case.

When I sent out the letters to the various municipalities, the overriding concern, the most common concern that I received was water management, whether that was water treatment or whether that was water being supplied by pipeline or by sewer. There was a concern that the infrastructure, whether it was a small summer village or whether it was a large municipality, was experiencing difficulties with old water systems that were requiring upgrading. I know that, for example, the cost of upgrading another filtering system in Calgary doubled over the time period because of inflation and the fact that we'd been waiting for the funding to come in.

Anyway, I'll start with some specifics, and as I say, if in the response you could tell me if it's been addressed or where we're at and at what stage. Sorry; one more little bit of delay. There were a number of municipalities who were reluctant to give me permission to table their information, and therefore the examples that I'm using have given me that permission. It's very important that that be realized because I would not be bringing forth their cases should I not have had their permission or should I not have had direct discussions with the mayors or councillors involved.

Municipality of Jasper. Their top three infrastructure priorities were upgrades to the municipal water supply systems, development of new water wells and treatment; number two, modifications and related energy efficiency upgrades to the community's recreation centre – they note that the facility is almost 30 years old, is in need of modifications and modernization – road and street infrastructure improvements, sewer collection, water distribution, utilities repair, and upgrades to meet design capacity.

The municipal district of Lesser Slave River. Their priorities were funding to cope with resource traffic on municipal district managed roads that is not only sufficient but allows for the municipal district to engineer projects, to receive funding for the engineering so that projects can be staged and let to tender at opportune times; i.e., remove the requirement to fund the whole project over a limited period of time. Secondly, ensure funding for water and waste-water facilities and a collection and distribution line. Number three, ensure provincial regulations regarding vehicle heights; give consideration to the fact that haulers eventually leave the provincial highways to travel on local roads built in a different era. Heavy vehicles and increased heavy vehicle volume led to the deterioration of roadbeds and shortened life cycle of roads. This begets cost to the local ratepayer. Their fourth priority was to include driver education in the Alberta high school curriculum, which sort of falls under the recommendations of the McDermid report for improving driver safety.

The second most commonly referenced concern of municipalities after waste-water treatment was the deterioration of roads from heavy equipment that was travelling to and from oil and gas sites or, in the case of Fort McMurray, up to the oil sands. It was felt that there should be some form of charging or recognition of these vehicles, which were not from the local municipality but were travelling through, whether it's through Drayton Valley or Trochu or Three Hills or any other district, that the wear and tear should be recognized and supported.

7:20

The village of Longview. Their priorities are – and they provided me with several charts, but I brought it down to five – off-site levy assessment, a water treatment study to produce a capital plan, maintenance of sanitary manholes, sanitary flow testing and video inspection, waste-water treatment plan evaluation.

Now, I had a great meeting with the mayor of Norris Beach summer village on Pigeon Lake, and he opened my eyes to a series of problems that summer villages such as his face. I believe that there are either 10 or 12 summer villages around Pigeon Lake. They have rather unique problems. Their small population means that they don't have a large tax base, but what happens is that the way the province funds the summer communities is that they only recognize those that are there year-round. So while every single individual who has a property on the lake is taxed and contributes and pays into the coffers, the only ones that get recognized in the grant program are those that are there on a permanent basis. Because of the small pockets of population, they sort of get treated in a one-off manner rather than taking into account the entire population. If that entire population were taken into account, then the support for waterlines being hooked into the sewage programs instead of having their local . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

Mr. Ouellette: I might have to jump around a little bit here before I remember which part you went to. I think I'd like to start off, then, by maybe addressing the Water for Life strategy portion: how important water is to this government and how important we all believe clean water for everyone is. I mean, I'll go to an old statement. I don't know who actually said this statement: whiskey is for drinking, and water is for fighting over. I'm sure you've heard that many, many times.

I will say that to address water amongst all these priorities that you were talking about with all the different municipalities, we have what we call the Alberta municipal water/waste-water partnership, and in that it provides cost-shared grants to eligible municipalities under 45,000 population to assist in the construction of high-priority

municipal water supply and treatment and waste-water treatment projects. This program ensures that Albertans have access to safe water supplies and environmentally acceptable waste-water treatment. I will tell you that the program that we have and the amount of money we have in our budget is way oversubscribed, as you would know, a lot. Again, it goes to our very, very hot economy, to how strong our full economy is in Alberta and the amount of people moving in here.

All the municipalities are reaching that. Are we almost at our limit of what the waste-water system we have now can handle? Is our treatment centre enough? As a government we definitely do say that regional systems are a great way to go. Whether or not we can afford to fund them all or help them fund them, it may take a little time, and we do have to, like all the rest of our programs, prioritize them and see who needs the help the most. We try to help as many people as we possibly can. If summer villages developed a regional strategy for supply of water and treatment of waste water, Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation would certainly be willing to work with them and help them. We try to help all of our municipalities with everything, whether it's engineering on their roads, planning all sorts of different things. We try to supply people from our ministry to help them with that.

It took a while to get us on the same page on: why did the Auditor General make us show this extra \$34 million? I'm really glad that you've understood that now. Maybe you'll realize how good a deal P3s really are, especially in times like we're going through in Alberta right now with this high escalation of costs and stuff. We're saving hundreds of millions of dollars because we're guaranteed that there are no prices rising. For the one that we just started in Calgary, the northeast ring road, it would be unbelievable a couple more years down the road how much more money it would cost, and we're protected at that one price, that it can't cost us any more.

You also were asking about capital maintenance and replacement requirements on our roads, what kind of deficit we had. Our capital maintenance and replacement requirements are a maintenance activity that was not performed when it should have been or was scheduled to be and was put off or delayed.

For the purpose of reporting capital maintenance and replacement requirements, is the cost of restoring a facility to its current use or its as-built condition? Infrastructure currently has a capital maintenance and replacement requirement backlog of \$1.6 billion for roads and \$87 million for buildings, for a total of approximately \$1.7 billion. It's rapidly increasing each year. To give you an example, we've only been doing about 350 to 400 kilometres of rehabilitation a year on highways, and we should be doing about 1,500 for the amount of kilometres of road that we have out there. Now, there are a couple reasons for that. One is cost, and another is capacity. We've been having meetings with most of the road builders and contractors and stuff around the province, that say that they're working on increasing their capacity. Cost: as a government we've put more money into the budget, and we do lots of planning within this department.

What you've got in front of you is our current three-year plan. We also have an internal five-year and 10-year and 20-year out plan. I'm working on a four-year plan right now to catch up on this backlog. In this three-year current budget plan we've got 2,500 kilometres of rehab in there, and we believe that we're going to be increasing that over the next couple of years.

I hope I've answered all of the questions that you've come with so far. I'm willing to carry on.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate that you've answered a portion of my questions. So far you've come up with a figure that I believe was approximately \$1.7 billion. The former Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation's figure, in terms of the overall infrastructure and transportation deficit, was \$7 billion, and that was last year. So we may not exactly be talking about the total budget. I know that you referred quite a bit to roads, and maybe what you were referring to dealt directly with roads.

As for converting my enthusiasm for P3s, I would like to think I'm not ideologically bound, but if these roads had been repaired, if these buildings had been maintained, then the costs we are currently talking about in the form of P3 savings would never have had to have been realized.

7:30

There has been a neglect since '94 of infrastructure and transportation, and the magic bullet of P3 is not going to resolve all that problem. The biggest part of the P3 equation, that gets left out in discussion, is the fact that we have no idea over the next 30 years, which is the average time for a P3 project, what the interest rates are going to look like. Those interest rates aren't fixed. While we're paying off bits and pieces of the principal, the interest continues to accumulate. It is my belief that the increase in interest rates reduces whatever savings may be initially provided.

With P3s there's also the ownership question. At what point does the project revert to the public owner and become a liability as well as an asset? There's a lot of discussion about P3 schools, et cetera, but I know that that's not your area. It's unfortunate that 30 years from now we'll have that answer, and neither of us is likely to be around in this House. Therefore, the responsibility for those decisions that were made at that time will not fall upon our shoulders. Somehow I'd like to see that accountability extended.

Back to the discussions with Bruce Fowlie. What he noted – and you approached the answer somewhat – was that the community paid out \$25,000 seed money trying to get the government to recognize the true combined population if you took in all the summer villages. They felt that if they approached it as a collective, if that were permitted, then they would be able to apply for a \$75,000 cost for the grant implementation, which I gather is the maximum for an exploration grant.

One of the difficulties – and this has to do with the regional planning, and I came across this difficulty in Red Deer county versus the city of Red Deer – is that sometimes the regional co-operation isn't the greatest. This is something that we hope the government will take a leadership role in. For example, when I was talking to the municipal district of Red Deer, I said: "Well, why don't you get your water from the city of Red Deer? Why aren't you hooked up by a system of pipes? Why isn't your waste water dealt with and treated?" It seemed like there were a whole series of small water treatment plants as opposed to a large line, that I felt would have been more effective. But we run into this.

In some cases it's regional pride. You know, say the town of Bragg Creek wants money spent on their water treatment plan. It's maybe not necessarily the way they politically want to go: ship it to Cochrane or Cochrane, in turn, ship it to Calgary. But it seemed to me that it would make sense to have the infrastructure through pipelines with a processing facility both for water treatment and for the waste treatment. I mean, I don't want to take away from individual municipalities' decision-making, but it seemed to me that at some point with government support and funding and sort of chairing some of these regional committees, not dictating but chairing, some of these bits-and-pieces solutions could be dealt with.

To go further on Norris Beach – and I know it's a small area, but

we've got a lot of small villages and towns that are very important in Alberta and are struggling to survive: the development of a regional infrastructure plan for the purpose of orderly planning around the lake that will serve the needs of residents and the public and acknowledge the environmental challenges, septic tanks versus a collective waste-water treatment system, such a plan emanating from a regional study would consider existing and planned development, public access to the lake, roads, emergency services, and all environmental considerations.

We all know that in the winter probably the population of these villages drops to, you know, one-tenth of what it is during the summer when people come down from Edmonton and so on to enjoy them. It's kind of like what happens in Fort McMurray when everybody comes to town and the hospital is needed and the various facilities. Another concern that they had was road maintenance and upgrading within the municipality to handle the increased traffic resulting from increased development activities. In the village of Sangudo, again, the waste-water distribution system came up as well as upgrades to the village reservoir.

From the city of St. Albert a concern that the Member for St. Albert has brought up: the west regional roadway currently under construction on the west side of St. Albert, the north leg of the Anthony Henday Drive and its currently planned alignment proximity to some neighbourhoods in south St. Albert, a freeway which they consider is too close to residential areas. General infrastructure maintenance and expansion are ongoing needs.

Now, when the minister indicated that he was trying to answer my questions, I don't know whether in your information you can give me anything about the Jasper municipality or Lesser Slave Lake or Longview or Norris Beach or Sangudo village. If that's not possible tonight, it would be wonderful to receive that information, sort of a progress report, so that both you and I could get back to these individuals who have expressed their priorities.

The town of Taber. Again, waste water comes up there as number one, a new waste-water treatment facility, phase 1 at a cost of \$10 million, in 10 years phase 2 at an additional cost of \$18 million, and that's funded in 2006 dollars. The northwest storm waterline comes in at – again this is a 2006 figure – \$2.7 million. A 57th street connector connecting downtown to highway 3 over the Canadian Pacific Railway tracks: \$2.5 million has been paid to CPR to relocate their spur lines, \$2 million for road construction.

The city of Edmonton. I'm going beyond their three priorities because of the large population. They've noted a \$3,068,000 total for unfunded projects. Oh, pardon me. That's in the billions, I gather, rather than in the millions: \$3,068,000,000. Sorry. I misread. Based on the approved 2000 budget summary for the city of Edmonton, unfunded elements of the plan, total cost of over – oh, pardon me. I'm making a mistake. I've got a series of millions and billions here in place. It says \$3,068,000. Excuse me for my confusion there. Of this 54 per cent relates . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

Mr. Ouellette: Well, hon. member, I've got to clear the air here a little bit. You're jumping all over the place. I don't know how anybody can follow any questions you're asking. I answered all of your questions before, but I will say that it took 13 letters and five phone calls and how many times in the House to get you to understand what the Auditor General was talking about in \$34 million. So maybe I will have to reanswer all these questions 12 times.

I want to say that you're really talking specifics here about separate municipalities. We have grant programs that every municipality can apply for on every single issue you talked about tonight, and that's what we're doing with just about all these

municipalities. When you talk about summer villages at Pigeon Lake, yes, there have been a number of programs there, and different people have taken the lead to partner with them. I'll give you an example of one. Wetaskiwin took the lead for a study along the south shore at Pigeon Lake, but the project fell apart because the summer village residents did not want anything that may allow more growth. They didn't want their little paradise to be shared with anybody. They said: we'll cancel this project.

7:40

We have grants available that they can apply for. One of them is the AMIP program. The program provides financial assistance to municipalities to develop capital municipal infrastructure to maintain and enhance economic, social, and cultural opportunity and well-being while protecting and improving the quality of our environment upon which people and economies in Alberta depend. Funding under this program supports the development, enhancement, and rehabilitation of core capital infrastructure projects such as municipal roads, bridges, public transit vehicles and facilities, water and waste-water systems and facilities, storm drainage systems and facilities, emergency service vehicles and facilities, and infrastructure management system software. Included in the list of eligible projects are design and engineering services, construction and rehabilitation, vehicle purchase, and land acquisition. In addition, the program may include barrier-free transportation initiatives to improve accessibility for seniors and persons with disabilities.

Where the core capital infrastructure needs have been addressed, the available funds may also include other capital projects such as cultural and recreational facilities, community environmental and energy systems and facilities, solid waste management systems and facilities, municipal buildings, and other municipal infrastructure.

We were talking about P3s and having to worry about 30 years. That's another one that you're very, very, very misunderstanding. It's completely warranted for 30 years. The only place that any cost can differ on the full price of that ring road for 30 years is that in our contract they can tie the annual maintenance fee just to the rate of inflation. There's no such thing as interest rates. There's no such thing as anything like that that could increase the cost of that road. We get the road back after 30 years in the same shape – we can do an engineered study on it. It has to meet the same engineering criteria after 30 years as it did the day it was built. They're responsible for all of that maintenance. That's when I say that it's such a good deal, especially in times of cost escalations like today.

Yes, you could say that our total maintenance and replacement requirements across government are more than the \$1.7 billion. The \$1.7 billion is our department: \$1.6 billion of that on roads and \$87 million on buildings. As of March 31, '07, our total capital maintenance and replacement requirements across government will be \$5.8 billion. I'll go a little further. The backlog of capital maintenance and replacement requirements is expected to exceed \$12 billion by 2012, but we're talking replacement cost of buildings here. We're talking buildings here that are 75, 85, 95 years old, some maybe less, and they never ever were built or designed for that period of time. So that's also the cost if we replaced all that square footage.

When we talk about roads, you can see by the great economy we have in Alberta the increased amount of truck traffic and heavy traffic and traffic that's beat up our roads a lot quicker than we had expected them to from our original design requirements with less traffic count on them.

Did I catch all of them yet? No. There's one more here, I see: the St. Albert bypass. We have been working with the city all the way along. We've been doing the functional design and study with them. They're going to look at building the road, and as long as they build

that bypass road to our government specifications so that when we need to do the complete bypass or take it over, if it's to our specifications, we can do that, and we can actually pay them out for the money they've spent on that road because it would become a provincial numbered highway.

We want to help every municipality that's under pressure, but like anything else, there's only a certain size of pot of money. We want to stretch those dollars as far as we can. That's why we ask all of our partners to help us with different ideas. How can we streamline our designs, our engineering? Can we make P3s work better to stretch our dollars further to help taxpayers? But I will guarantee you, hon. member, that we will always do that due diligence. If a P3 doesn't make sense and doesn't work better for the taxpayer of Alberta, we wouldn't go there. That's the thing that I speak about to our officials all the time, that they do the proper due diligence. They have the degrees in the fields that they work in, they wear the engineering rings on their fingers, and I'm just there to make sure and try to help them manage that we look after taxpayers' dollars properly.

Are there any other ones that I've missed? I think I've caught all the questions from this round, hon. member. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. If I accused the minister of hyperbole, it would be the equivalent of the pot calling the kettle black, so I won't make that accusation. But I will note that it wasn't 12 phone calls, Mr. Minister, and an equivalent number of letters.

Mr. Ouellette: I was being a little sarcastic.

Mr. Chase: Oh, I see. Okay. I appreciate the qualifications.

Going back to Edmonton and trying to speed up because I want to raise a number of concerns beyond the priorities given to me. Roads: \$1.3 billion in funding is currently underfunded; an additional \$683 million is needed for public transit projects; \$68 million is needed for drainage system changes. The section on project management and construction, including emergency response facilities and public works buildings rehabilitation notes: \$322 million in unfunded projects; \$120 million is requested for police buildings and equipment. Currently the most urgent needs have been met by expanding the city's debt. Tax-supported debt reaches \$50 billion under this budget.

Similar story in Calgary. Based on the approved 2007-2008 capital budget, \$2.8 billion in additional capital projects have been identified as needed but are unable to be funded within the 2007-2011 capital plan. This unfunded list forms what the corporate infrastructure status report has noted as a \$5.4 billion infrastructure funding gap over the next 10 years. A hundred and forty-two million dollars in properties and buildings. Basic maintenance and construction in Calgary's parks is unfunded by \$153 million. Unfunded recreation expenses total \$213 million. Expansion and maintenance of Calgary's public transit system needs another \$440 million.

While \$93.5 million in needed projects will be funded over the next five years, an additional \$110 million will go unfunded. Major transportation infrastructure will go unfunded to the tune of \$9,898,000,000. Equipment, critical computer infrastructure, and service locations are in need of over \$317 million over the next five years. The 2007 unfunded capital projects totalled \$297.8 million. By 2011 the total unfunded liability of the city of Calgary will be \$2.8 billion. This is why our municipal minister and our mayor are doing quite a bit of travelling, both in the air and on our roads.

7:50

In 2005 the mayor, Melissa Blake, from Wood Buffalo came down in the spring and called upon the government to recognize the extraordinary needs of the Wood Buffalo-Fort McMurray area, and it was a \$1.2 billion request. The amount the minister has mentioned comes nowhere near that \$1.2 billion. Because there was such a delay and such an underfunding, in the spring of 2006 Mayor Blake came back with a joint proposal with the surrounding area, a need for \$2 billion.

So I'll let the minister and his associates do the math, but you'll find that whether it's the city of Calgary, whether it's the city of Edmonton, the city of Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, there are billions of dollars of infrastructure and maintenance required. In the city of Calgary, for example, just the public part of the school board is approaching a half billion dollars in deferred maintenance, and that isn't even dealing with the 40 schools that have been requested.

Anyway, progressing. The Radke report raised a number of large issues. Many haven't been dealt with in this budget. This was the government's own report done by a former ADM, yet they have only partially dealt with its concerns. I'll address issue 23 of the recommendations, transportation infrastructure in the RMWB: the need for four major interchanges in the urban service area, even over the twinning of highway 63 south. The east Athabasca corridor road should be fully funded by industry, which is an interesting suggestion. It is primarily a corridor road that industry uses. It calls into question: what is the provincial infrastructure transportation responsibility, and what is the responsibility of the private sector? A lot of discussion there. The need for completion dates on AI and T projects so that the municipality knows what's going on and can co-ordinate.

Issue 29, the industrial heartland: what planning has taken place? The report states that I and T "has not participated directly in planning the roadway system in the industrial heartland and has no money budgeted in its current three-year capital plan for financial support of extraordinary requirements for road construction." It doesn't seem that this capital plan is any better.

What's going on with these recommendations? What's been done? As far as we can tell from the budget documents, this is what the ministry is doing: twinning highway 63 south. We agree with this, but it would be nice to see the minister explain why they're ignoring the recommendation by Radke to put this on hold. Now, you can't have it both ways. Highway 63 has been a major concern that we have brought out as a Liberal caucus since the late '80s. Possibly the minister could give us an update as to how many kilometres of highway 63 have now been twinned, say in the 2005-2006 year, and where we'll be in terms of kilometres accomplished in twinning by the end of this season. That would be nice to know.

The bridge is listed in the capital projects but only as a proposed project. Can the minister clarify what is going on? The interchanges are not on board yet at all. What's the plan? When? Who pays? Municipality, the province, the feds?

No word on the east Athabasca corridor road. The EUB report 2007 to 2013 has suggested that the Alberta government should be taking a lead role in co-ordinating this. Radke thinks it should be fully funded by industry. Can the minister sort out this difference?

No word on Upgrader Alley and planning there.

The list of questions appears almost endless, but to cut down to the core of the problem, what is the government doing to make sure they aren't lacking any plan for this development as they were lacking one for Wood Buffalo? We know the possibility of 10 upgraders. What's the plan?

We need clarification on all this. The health care concerns raised

in Radke were dealt with straight away. Why the delay on infrastructure and transportation?

We also need more accurate costing: part 6 of recommendations from page 144.

Alternative financing, otherwise known as P3s: a little bit more detail. There's an increase of \$53.6 million on last year, 36 per cent. What is this for? Is it just the northeast ring road, or are there other project increases? What is the government spending on through alternative financing? What kinds of alternative financing are going on? We've heard about P3s. I'd be interested in other creative mathematics.

In the business plan, page 207, alternatively financed projects dropped from the \$202 million this coming year to just \$5 million in the year following. They then increase slightly to \$31.9 million after that. Why the decrease? Aren't these commitments that have to be paid? Isn't the whole point of a P3 to spread out payments over the years, not fluctuate? What is the province's P3 debt? How much is the province on the hook for over the next 20, 30, or, if any projects have been extended, out to 40 years?

The capital plan, page 85, suggests a figure of \$513 million for the two ring roads. Is this the total cost other than what you mentioned as an interest increase based on the maintenance only? I would love to have that written down, that the only fluctuation in interest is in maintenance; it's not over principal.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, hon. member. I've got to start out again. You were all on city grants again. You were all on somebody else's total infrastructure package or planning or deficits. I don't know where you want to go with that because it is not an actual responsibility of Infrastructure and Transportation or the provincial government.

The provincial government is doing everything they can to help Edmonton and Calgary and any other municipalities with their own plans, but those are their plans that you were talking about, how they're short for their different projects that you were naming. I can't remember them off the top of my head because I was just listening to you, saying: every time we've addressed this, we say what our responsibility is and all the different grants they can apply for from us, but that really is their responsibility. We try to help them with that, and in a short period of time of the last five years or so we probably went from – and I'm doing a little bit of guesstimating here – around \$400 million to municipalities to today: this year going to be \$2 billion going out to municipalities. If we could do more, we would do more.

But what you were actually addressing here or trying to say was that our problem was city planning. Yes. I agree. They're suffering the huge growth of the province the same way as we are. Hopefully, we can work together and come to some solutions to address all those facts.

You were talking quite a lot about highway 63. We do not have highway 63 on hold. I don't know where you got that from, but highway 63 is not on hold. We're going to probably spend – maybe somewhere in these notes I have the exact figure – well over \$500 million in the next three years just on roads in the Fort McMurray area. We're right now in the process of building a five-lane bridge across the river in Fort McMurray to the tune of about \$150 million. We're working on the interchanges you're talking about. We've just tendered from Fort McMurray south to 881, twinning that section this year. You wanted to know how many miles were twinned. I don't know those miles exactly, but we're twinned from, oh gosh, the other side – I don't know if we could call it the Syncrude plant or Mildred Lake area or somewhere – back to Fort McMurray. We've already spent \$200 million over the past few years. Funding

approved in the current '06 to '09 capital plan totals \$548 million, reflecting all the growing infrastructure needs.

8:00

Rapid economic activity in the Fort McMurray region has increased the movement of goods, equipment, and people to the region. This work has included repaving 55 kilometres on highway 63 at locations between Fort McMurray and south of Mariana Lake to preserve the existing highway, including grading of the Stony Mountain truck staging area as well as clearing 60 kilometres on highway 63 in preparation for future twinning.

Within Fort McMurray 13 kilometres of paving was completed, including five intersection improvements, construction of an innovative alternative lane south of McEwan bridge to reduce congestion, and installation of high mast lighting to improve visibility. North of Fort McMurray 17 kilometres of grading was completed for the future twinning between Suncor and north of Mildred Lake. On highway 881, 70 kilometres of base paving and 102 kilometres of final paving was completed to allow a continuous paved surface between Lac La Biche and highway 63.

The current capital plan for a \$543 million investment is to complete additional improvements in the area, including base paving to complete the twinning, again, to Suncor, repaving northbound and southbound lanes within Fort McMurray between Hospital Street and the Athabasca River bridge, commencement of construction of a new Athabasca River bridge, repaving the grade widening on highway 63 south of Fort McMurray to south of highway 69, twinning of highway 63 from south of highway 69 to south of highway 881, grade widening on highway 881 from east of highway 63 to Gregoire Lake park, and base paving of the Stony Mountain truck staging area.

Longer range plans include twinning south on highway 63 all the way down to highway 55, completion of a staging area north of highway 881, and construction of an interchange at Thickwood Boulevard in Fort McMurray. It goes on and on and on and on. We aren't forgetting about any of our responsibilities there. The main thing is that we're trying to get as much done as we possibly can for the dollars we can afford to put in it at the time or for the capacity that we have.

Alternatively financed projects: a \$53.6 million increase is primarily due to the commencement of construction on the Stoney Trail northeast ring road in Calgary. There was a \$120 million increase in statutory funding for the commencement of the Stoney Trail northeast ring road, offset by a decrease in funding for the Anthony Henday southeast ring road as this project will be completed in October '07. Statutory programs are not voted by the Legislative Assembly. The projects are set up to recognize the liability but do not require a cash payment during this fiscal year. When a cash disbursement is required, the Legislative Assembly will vote on such an appropriation.

Under the P3 model a private consortium will design, construct, finance, operate, and maintain the asset for a period of 30 years. Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation will make payments over 30 years instead of paying for the project as it is built, the old, traditional way. The government will have accumulated a \$513 million capital lease liability related to these projects when they are all completed, and that consists of the capital costs only for the Anthony Henday southeast ring road, which was about \$356 million, and the Calgary northeast Stoney Trail ring road, which was about \$156.9 million.

There was something else about ring roads that you were asking me. No, I think I got it all now, right? We're jumping around here a bit, but I think I've covered them all. Are we missing anything?

I think we probably have covered all of that for this little session. I don't know if there was more. I'm just trying to think if there was more that you asked about on the Radke report. There was very little about that.

Oh, you were asking about industrial heartland. Highway 21 is part of the industrial heartland. We're twinning that right now. All of that stuff comes into effect. I've met with the chamber in Fort Saskatchewan. We've talked with Sturgeon county and Strathcona county. They're going ahead, working on plans. The actual St. Albert road that you were talking about is part of the industrial heartland. So, yes, it's very high on our radar screen. We're very concerned here. We want to make sure that we're out front of this, that we don't have another Fort McMurray on our hands.

There is an industrial heartland working group. The other morning I was actually in Fort Saskatchewan speaking to the chamber, and I was mentioning: "I'm a little worried. We've got to get this." The fellow stood up and said: "Hey, hey, hey, back off here. We're way ahead of the game on the planning." That is so great when private industry steps up to the plate for that.

Another thing you were asking about, now that I'm thinking of it, was another road. The east Athabasca road is not a provincial road. Just in secondary roads alone we have 16,000-some kilometres. As we're doing a review, looking at all these roads – and I've got to be very careful how I say this because I don't want to scare the municipalities and say that . . . [Mr. Ouellette's speaking time expired]

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. One area, minister, that you haven't addressed yet – and I'll look forward to your answers – is where we're at with Upgrader Alley in terms of planning dollars laid out.

The other answer that I would be pleased to receive is that P3s assume the government is going to cover the cost over a 30-year period. If everything were to stay in a boom mode, that wouldn't be a consideration. But what happens if we make promises at this point which we can't finance 30 years down the road? If alternative energy sources become more attractive, there's a concern over pollution that we haven't been able to potentially sequester. The environmental damage is such that our one-trick pony of natural resources that provides us with the majority of our money is no longer there. How will we pay for those bills? How is that built in? That's a concern I have.

Also, the way P3s are recorded. It says that P3s are recorded as capital leases, but there's no entry for capital leases in the estimates or business plan. So where is the figure for '07-08? This may be part of the Auditor General's requirements, and maybe you've got it in different wording. I'm quite willing to hear how it's being explained.

Sustainability. I started talking about the Liberal plan, which according to our number crunching suggests that by 2020 we'd have set aside \$120 billion so that there wouldn't be the dependency that we currently have on nonrenewable energies. There seems to be no similar savings account in the provincial government plan. The government has no long-term guarantees for infrastructure spending. There's no savings fund to back it up. With the Alberta Liberals' plan for the future we would eliminate the infrastructure debt, drawing on an increased royalty scheme partly but also setting aside 30 per cent of all revenue from nonrenewable energy to address these costs so that we wouldn't get a nasty surprise 15, 20, or 30 years down the road.

The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development copied our plan and would have put 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource

revenue into a savings plan. The Minister of Finance wanted 20 per cent put away. Jim Dinning, endorsed by over half the Tory caucus, said he'd put at least 30 per cent into savings and possibly as much as 50 per cent. How are we going to back up our infrastructure projects? Without a substantial savings plan the province has no chance of maintaining an acceptable level of funding for infrastructure. Why hasn't the government done anything about securing our future so that when these payments come through on our P3s, we would be able to actually pay them off?

8:10

Highway quality. How is this living up to keeping Albertans safe? In the business plan, page 201, we see measure 1(b), showing that the government is aiming at 21 per cent of provincial highways, over 1 in 5 kilometres of road, being in poor condition by the years 2009-10. Also in the estimates line 3.0.2 shows that spending on provincial highway rehabilitation is going down by 13 per cent even before the 10 to 25 per cent construction inflation. At the same time, goal 2 of the business plan is to provide a safe, secure, and reliable provincial transportation network.

The Premier and all the ministers keep touting the pledge to keep Albertans safe. There's a disconnect here. How can the minister justify letting the province's roads deteriorate so badly? Isn't this a result of the massive underfundings in the 1990s that's coming back to haunt us and the consequence of a complete lack of planning? Could the minister please provide the most recent vehicle fatality rates in Alberta? Does the minister expect that with twice as many roads in poor condition in just three years' time, the rate of accidents will increase?

Construction inflation. The business plan says that inflation in the construction industry is running at 10 to 25 per cent. If it's as bad as the top end of that, then we're looking as much at the I and T budget shrinking in real terms. This is, of course, just the result of the government's failure to plan and the deferral of massive infrastructure debts from the cuts in the 1990s. The minister talked about a figure of \$12 billion, which I consider to be extreme lowballing. The Premier was at the table when these cuts happened. Now Albertans see ever-increasing amounts of their tax dollars going in to catch up. An acknowledgement of the impacts of the failure would be appreciated. How do the ministry's long-term highway maintenance contracts with private firms address the inflation? Are they proofed against it? If not, the 27 per cent increase in the maintenance budget suddenly becomes pretty paltry, potentially really only 2 per cent as inflation cuts into it.

Local management. Stop micromanaging funds. Get government out of local projects. The reaction of Mayor Bronconnier is just one example of how this government's interference causes problems. Why did the Premier make promises of no-strings-attached accountability for municipal infrastructure and then turn around and hand out less than expected and direct where it could be spent? I refer to the dispute of the province treating the city of Calgary as some recalcitrant child who is unable to manage his accounting. The minister, when I listed a long list of debts and projects, said that those are all problems of the city, that the province has no responsibility to address those public infrastructure needs.

These aren't luxuries. These are requirements: water treatment plants, roads, LRT. What will the government do about providing the real funding needed to build light rail transit in Calgary? Albertans are already so reliant on cars. Do we want to make them more so? I hope not. The government needs to take the lead on sustainable transportation in this province.

Transportation safety business plan goal number 3, page 202. It's interesting to compare this with last year's business plan. Last year

the performance measures for seat belt usage were as follows: the last actual measure from 2003-04 was 84.9 per cent of drivers, though the target for this year just past was 88 per cent. Now look at this year's. The last actual measure has gone down to 82.9 per cent. We're already meant to have reached what we're now only expecting in three years, so it seems that the expectations of this government are going down rather than up. One of the things that we as Liberals and myself over the last three years as the shadow minister have called for is the full implementation of the McDermid report, that takes into account safety measures such as seat belts. Of course, we've put forward the notion of getting rid of handheld cellphones, which, fortunately, a number of companies have done voluntarily.

Would the minister please explain why ever fewer Albertans are using their vehicles without wearing a seat belt? Why is the ministry weakening its target so dramatically? Isn't this evidence of a failure of the government to make our roads safer? Why isn't the minister being more aggressive on and I would say implementing and funding the McDermid report? It addresses so many of these safety concerns.

Percentage of drivers in fatality collisions who have consumed alcohol. Again comparing last year's data with this year's, the last actual figure came out of the 2004-05 year, 19.1 per cent. This year's target is 19 per cent. If you keep lowering your expectations, you'll probably meet your target. This year the last actual is 19.2 per cent, '05-06. The target for '07-08 is 18.9 per cent. Again, it seems like the government achievement tests. If the kids don't make the grade, we lower the expectation rather than raising the training. The target for '08-09: 18.7 per cent. For '09-10 it's a decreasing target of 18.5.

Why didn't things drop over the past year? Given that there has been no improvement from last year to this year, if anything a slight worsening, what is it that makes the minister think he can lower the rate of drinking drivers and fatal accidents? What new tactics will the ministry be using? I can partially answer that. There are going to be more sheriffs out on the roads, and I appreciate that there's going to greater policing, although I'd rather have RCMP if given the choice.

Percentage of drivers in injury collisions who had consumed alcohol. The actual figure has gone up from last year too.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Chairman and hon. member, I have to say that from what you're reading somewhere, you got all your information backwards again. I'm going to read it to you if you understand. When we were talking seat belt usage, combined percentage of urban and rural seat belt usage in Alberta, the last actual result for the Alberta percentage was 82.9 per cent. The national rate for the same period was 90.5. So, yes, we're 8 per cent lower than the national average, but we went way up, especially in rural Alberta, from where we were before.

You were saying that with our target we were targeting less. It says right here that the ministry's target is to reach compliance rates of 95 per cent by 2010 in compliance with Canada's national target. The higher the percentage the better the performance. Can I say it a little slower? The higher the percentage the better the performance.

Then we go to the drinking and driving casualty collisions. Measures indicate the percentage of vehicle operators in casualty collisions, injuries and fatalities, who were judged to have consumed alcohol before the collision. Data is taken from the Alberta collision information system. The lower the percentage the better the performance. So we're going from 19, asking for 18.5. The lower

the percentage the better the performance. Do you understand that now, that we actually are shooting for better targets than where we are?

You were asking about provincial highway rehabilitation, an \$18.9 million decrease primarily due to work required to be done in '06-07 to accommodate highway rehabilitation in resource development regions in the northern Alberta transportation corridor. Provincial highway rehabilitation allows highway pavement and bridges to be restored to their original condition at the most cost-effective time to avoid irreparable deterioration. Timely rehabilitation results in substantive cost savings in the long term. The reason for the decrease: the '07-08 estimate actually had already increased \$57.1 million compared to the '06-07 budget, so it ended up a \$57.1 million increase. You can take \$18 million off that, but it was actually increased from our '06-07 budget. That reflects that adjustment.

8:20

I think you were asking about our percentages for the physical condition of provincial highways. Our percentage in '05-06 in good condition was 63 per cent. Our target in '07-08 is actually 57 per cent. That is one where we're actually going down. We realize that we're not keeping up to our target of getting all of our roads up to the 80 per cent range. Percentage in fair condition is 24.1 per cent. Our target for '07-08 is going to be 26 per cent. Our percentage in poor condition was 12.9 per cent in '05-06, and we know that's going to jump to about 17 per cent this year.

I'd just like to comment a little bit. You were talking about, you know, the Liberal idea of doing things. With all due respect here, I just almost hate to tell you this because I know that it may not be the most politically correct thing, but I honestly believe that if your philosophies were in place in this province, our poor economy would be at its knees in a very short period of time because of the philosophies of not understanding that you have to work with everybody in this province. You can't just say: "You know what? I'd fix all that stuff tomorrow by charging more royalties or doing this or doing that."

We do have some pretty good relationships with some of the industry where they come out and actually spend a lot of their dollars on our roads. If we go to them at times and say, "You know, we have a safety factor here; we need this intersection done; your industry, your business has created this extra traffic," they actually step up to the plate and put the millions and millions of dollars on the table for us to fix the intersection. You can't always try to tax people into fixing your problem because if you do that, all of a sudden you don't make things very good for any small business to survive in an economy. I just wanted to preach a little.

Ms Pastoor: I didn't hear increased taxes.

Mr. Ouellette: No. I heard increased royalties, and you can't just jump and do that, and you can do it.

Another thing that you were getting at: not putting money away and doing that for things. I guess what you asked is: how do we make sure that we still have the money 30 years out if the economy changes or whatever? That's where the planning of this government has done very well by having a sustainability fund and a capital fund. We have \$7.7 billion in our sustainability fund as of March 31, '07. So you can say percentages that you'd put away in the heritage fund. These are all part of the heritage fund, and it's money being put away in a sustainability fund for that time when different revenues drop. We can carry on with holding our budget because we have a sustainability fund. We also have a capital account for

capital spending on all the capital projects that are in line, and that capital fund is at \$6.1 billion, hon. member.

Overall, as you can see, as often as you seem to think, "Where's your planning and where's your planning?" tonight we've actually talked a lot about planning. We've talked about all the different plans we have within our own ministry. We've also talked about our sustainability fund, which has been a plan that we've been working on for a long time out to make sure that we can sustain the budgets that we actually put out there to look after all of our great citizens of Alberta.

Traffic safety is a very high priority of this department and this government. It was actually mandated by Premier Stelmach, mandated to me in a letter. We are working on a traffic safety plan, and we are going to implement . . .

The Chair: You can't mention members' names in the House.

Mr. Ouellette: Sorry, Mr. Chairman. Just our Premier.

We're working on a traffic safety plan. We're going to be bringing different things forward. We're looking at a number of different things, and cellphones is one of them that we're also looking at. It doesn't mean that it'll come forward. We want to make sure that the studies are proper. We just don't want to jump on the handwagon because it's the popular thing to do.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chair's Ruling Committee of Supply Procedure

The Chair: It's been indicated by the opposition that because of the time there's a desire to move on to Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Before I recognize the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, I'd like to read two letters from the Speaker, and I'll just read a paragraph from each one.

The first one, dated April 30, 2007: "Each Minister must provide, in writing, the names of the officials to be admitted to the Assembly floor to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly with a copy to the Sergeant-at-Arms."

The next letter, dated May 8, 2007: "Each caucus must provide on one day's notice, in writing, the names and job titles of the officials to be admitted to the Assembly floor to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly with a copy to the Sergeant-at-Arms."

I did receive a copy from the minister of employment and immigration of the staff she wishes to be admitted to the floor, but I did not get the one day's notice, so I would require unanimous consent of the Assembly as we did earlier tonight for the opposition.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: Hon. minister, you may invite your staff in and introduce them, and you may proceed with your comments.

Employment, Immigration and Industry

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, and thank you to all the members for your support of the staff of Employment, Immigration and Industry that are with us this evening. If I may, to my immediate left is Rick Sloan, who is the assistant deputy minister in charge of the area which is principally involving the economic development file from the previous economic development ministry. To my immediate right is acting deputy minister Alex Stewart, and Alex has fulfilled the role of acting as an assistant to the deputy minister and a senior officer in Employment, Immigration and Industry. Beyond

is Shelley Engstrom, who is one of the senior staff members in corporate services looking after the area of budget and finance.

8:30

We are very pleased to represent this ministry here this evening, recognizing that this ministry and its business plan are a collaboration of six ministries which have been formed into one unit that comprises some of the most exciting parts of our governance structure, from the people that are employed in Alberta, from the people that we have defined as the working poor, to the industries that provide jobs and opportunities for Albertans to engage in commerce.

We believe that Alberta is in a fortunate position. Our unemployment rate is the lowest in Canada. Our employment rate is the highest. We have \$169 billion worth of projects on the books.

One of the challenges we face is to manage our growth to build a stronger Alberta. In order to do this, we need to invest in our workforce, and that is why Employment, Immigration and Industry is allocating some \$300 million to support employment in Alberta in areas like skills training, English as an additional language, and academic upgrading. We're also working to ensure that members of underrepresented labour-force groups have access to the labour market, groups like First Nations and Métis, immigrants, people with disabilities, youth, and older workers.

Besides investing over \$6 million in specific aboriginal training programs, an aboriginal workforce action plan is being developed in partnership with Alberta's First Nations and Métis organizations. Government also provides funding to some schools on reserves so that aboriginal people can take academic and occupationally focused training.

Increased spending on immigration will also help address, not solve, the province's labour shortage. We're increasing immigration funding by \$9 million to a total of almost \$68 million. Alberta has 10 per cent of Canada's population but only about 7.4 per cent of the immigrant population. Our target this year is to work towards an increase to at least 10 per cent of Canada's immigration. We want to increase that to 10 per cent, or about 24,000 people. This additional immigration funding will expand the number of nominees under the provincial nominee program to 2,500 in 2007-08, 5,000 in 2008-09, and 8,000 in '09-10. It will also provide international marketing in credentials recognition and up to 500 additional spaces for English as an additional language and bridging programs.

Mr. Chairman, the new funding supports the made-in-Alberta immigration strategy that was announced last week. We're also putting together, in co-operation with the Minister of Health and Wellness and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, a health workforce plan, an action strategy that will help us address labour-force issues within the health care sector.

Our department is helping industry develop strategies in areas like tourism, hospitality, construction, energy, and manufacturing to address specific labour-force concerns. The strategies are being developed by Alberta's leaders in business, industry, and unions, including Syncrude, the Alberta Chamber of Resources, Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Merit Contractors, and the Alberta Building Trades Council.

Alberta's long-term prosperity hinges on the province's success in securing a position as a globally competitive economy where innovation and knowledge are applied to add value to our traditional commodity sectors. To that end, our department is investing an additional \$2.5 million to develop policy and deliver programs with industry to address the developing high-performance environments component of the building and educating tomorrow's workforce strategy. This includes initiatives to raise awareness of productivity

issues among industry, the addition and expansion of existing industry development programs, and the lean enterprise assessment program.

Employment, Immigration and Industry is expanding funding by an additional \$900,000 to enhance rural development capacity and programming activities with partners and stakeholders and provide additional resources for initiatives for projects to support focused strategies and leadership.

You will also see that the department has gained 72 full-time equivalent positions. Mr. Chairman, I'm quite proud to say that the Alberta Federation of Labour has actually sent an unprecedented thing, which is a letter of congratulations and thank you for the increased staffing that will help us support Alberta's labour market.

The positions help us with occupational health and safety assessments and employment strategies. Twenty-two positions are supporting immigration in areas like the provincial nominee program, researching and developing immigration policy and marketing Alberta to the world. Thirteen are focused on occupational health and safety, among them five new investigators who will be responsible for increased compliance and enforcement. Nineteen positions, including 10 investigators, are addressing employment standards compliance. Seven are addressing workplace relationships, meaning things like labour mobility, foreign credential recognition, and the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement. Eleven positions are getting the province's new office of statistics and information up and running. Mr. Chairman, this office will help us with the management of our labour negotiations by providing a comprehensive tool for all ministries to use to gather statistics that are relevant and determine trends.

Albertans receiving income support are going to see a 5 per cent increase in their benefits starting this July. This will enhance Alberta's approach to giving people a hand up and not a hand out. We're helping people find new opportunities to enter and be successful in the workforce by ensuring that they get the training and support they need.

Just before I conclude, I'd like to address a question that one of the hon. members gave relative to temporary foreign workers. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was asked today: what happens when temporary foreign workers come? Where will they be housed? Well, they will not be able to qualify for the homeless and eviction fund. It is very clear by the documentation that is in place for the temporary foreign worker that low-skilled and semiskilled workers will have to be provided for by the company that brings them over. They will have to do that planning.

Beyond that, we have the minister's affordability task force that is working on housing strategies. We have municipalities engaged in housing strategies currently, and we have a number of different groups. I think that by the time you see the next upgrader built, when Total sites its new upgrader 15 to 18 months from now, the first phase, you will see that there will be sufficient housing in place for the construction workers that will be availing themselves of that opportunity. I wanted to just cite that before we were prepared to answer any questions. I invite those questions from the members opposite.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. minister for her presentation. A lot of statistics I didn't catch, but I can read about them in *Hansard*.

I was pleasantly surprised to get a report from the department called Economic Outlook for Alberta: Spring Update, which is kind

of in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. I don't recall receiving this before. I don't know whether that has always gone to all members of the Legislature, but I find it amazingly helpful in giving us a kind of snapshot view of the economy.

Some of the things you've already mentioned, Madam Minister: GDP growth of 6.8 per cent in 2006, more than double the national rate; Alberta's population, of course, increased 109,000 in 2006; 86,300 new jobs created in 2006; bankruptcies at an all-time low; \$11.6 billion spent on oil sands projects in 2006, projected to rise to more \$16 billion this year.

Then this presentation talks about the downsides and that this growth is not sustainable, which is an interesting comment considering that one of the goals of the department is sustainable economic growth. There are all kinds of problems in terms of sustainability: the housing shortages, rental vacancy declining from 3 per cent to .9 per cent. House prices are way up, 50 per cent increase last year in Edmonton, and are continuing to rise. The consumer price index was 5.5 per cent, so I'm not all that impressed by the 5 per cent increase to core funding for income supports. Labour shortages are acute, and that's a particularly challenging aspect for this department. Over 8,600 experienced engineers and technicians are required each year for the next 10 years. There are so many issues there.

8:40

Of course, Mr. Chairman, there are other ways to measure economic growth. GDP measures money changing hands, and Alberta certainly has grown in terms of GDP over the years. But economic growth is only one way of measuring growth. The downside of economic growth indicates that in terms of quality of life there are other indicators to look at. I particularly appreciate Mark Anielski's work with the Pembina Institute, where he's developed the idea of a system of genuine progress indicators, which examines trends in the area of quality of life. In looking at the trends that he has studied, crime in Alberta has increased considerably, the divorce rate has increased considerably, substance abuse has increased, poverty has increased. It'll be interesting for the department to consider actually publishing a genuine progress outlook for Alberta as well as an economic outlook for Alberta, which leads me to look more closely at the employment section in the estimates.

That's the biggest proportion of the Employment, Immigration and Industry budget: \$644 million. The estimates are on page 112. It's interesting that this whole section is entitled employment and not social services. You know, whatever happened to the ministry of social services? It seems to me that when I was beginning to get really active in my efforts at fighting against poverty back in the early 90s, when there were lots of cuts, there was a ministry of social services then. It seems to me that social development, which is really what this section is about, and economic development should be seen as one, yet it appears that social development has kind of been subsumed under economic development.

Now, I understand that that's typical of Conservative governments in recent years, which try to connect social assistance with workforce strategies. Sometimes it's called workfare or work first or, in the case of Alberta, Alberta Works, with the goal of reducing social assistance caseloads and increasing workforce participation. But for this movement to happen, there need to be adequate programs in place and services to enable people to move.

Now, I have the same problem with this department as I have with Municipal Affairs and Housing. When you're looking at housing, it's really important to have sufficient programs in place to move people along the continuum of housing from emergency housing to

transitional housing, subsidized housing to affordable housing. In the case of social assistance programs the programs have to be sufficient to move people along off the social assistance into the work world. In other words, there has to be an adequate, quote, welfare mix. I think that's the term that's used so much now in the writings that I've been reading: an adequate welfare mix.

So I want to talk a little bit about this welfare mix. One part of this welfare mix that's really important is, of course, health benefits. I commend the department for the emphasis on the health benefits. So along with the Canada child tax credit and along with things like Alberta family employment tax credit, I guess, which is administered through the Finance department, there is the issue of health benefits and the continuation of health benefits, which follows a person when they move from social assistance into the work world. That's commendable. I mean, it has been one of the problems in the past, I think, that people often fell back into welfare and social assistance because getting into the work world and making so little money, maybe \$8, \$9, \$10 an hour, they didn't have the benefits like health benefits.

This is a program that's been in place for a while, but I think it's commendable that health benefits like prescription drugs, eye exams, glasses, dental care, emergency ambulance services, essential diabetic supplies, et cetera, actually follow the person when they leave social assistance and move into the work world. I'm not sure how long those health benefits last. I mean, it would be good if they lasted a couple of years, at least, while people are getting themselves on their feet.

Now, that raises an interesting issue because one of the suggestions that came up in the Affordable Housing Task Force is: why couldn't there be a comparable thing for housing? In other words, in the social assistance program the income support program is broken up like the core program and the core shelter. Take a single person, a single adult; the core essential is \$234. Then there's core shelter, which is divided up into living with relatives, social housing, and private housing. I don't understand that at all, I mean, why you would have three categories under core shelter. It seems to me that one would be sufficient. I'd like to have an explanation as to why there are three categories. Living with relatives for a single person, \$100; social housing, \$120; private housing, \$168: all of which are really low. I don't know how anybody can live with those numbers.

But it seems to me that if a person is moving from social assistance into the work world, it'd be great if they could take that core shelter benefit with them. I mean, there has to be some supplement in the area of income. If we're not going to have rent controls, we've got to have a greater emphasis on the income side, some sort of wage supplement or core shelter benefit. It would be great to have something like that. That would help people manage this terrible housing market, where the rents are going way up.

For example, there is something in B.C. and New Brunswick, apparently, called the self-sufficiency project, which actually provided wage supplements to single parents up to three years after they left social assistance. Actually, that kind of program would cost the government no more because people would be moving off social assistance and beginning to pay income tax. That would be a way of promoting the person moving away from social assistance into the work world, helping people move out of poverty and towards independence and self-reliance, which surely is what the program of income supports is all about.

I'd like to look closer at the core benefits program and the numbers here. You know, I'm struck time and time again by such low numbers. The Edmonton Social Planning Council has issued a report recently. I'll come back to that.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. May I just say that the focus that the hon. member has given, first of all, by starting out with appreciation to our department for the production of statistical evidence to support MLAs is very much appreciated. I have appreciated the initiatives to gather the members of the opposition's perspective on things like our office of statistics and information. Those kinds of things help us.

Well, thank you for focusing on the employment program. This employment program is built with the premise that the best social program is in fact having a job. Much of the initiative here is to not only provide supports for people who are not expected to work but for those that are expected to work or that are temporarily unable to work and those that want to work but want to be retrained in some other position. Much of the theory behind linking both the employment and the industry was to in fact do exactly what the hon. member suggested; that is, to link the employment opportunities, the trainer, the person that's counselling people to get employment with the part of our ministry and our government initiative that deals with ministry and the employer. So I think that that in itself in this new structure gives us a chance to tie those ends together.

The question about whether or not we have adequate programs to do that. One of the things that I think is really clear is that we have not only provided assessment services in 59 various Alberta Works offices but counselling for people who may need to have an opportunity to find out what they're best suited for. We look at the opportunity to tailor a program to the needs of the individual, so if they need more skills training, training in writing resumés, and job placement, if they have a disability, if they need only part-time employment because they're planning to go back to school, if they are a learner and they are going to school and they are living with family but can't quite make ends meet, we have programs that provide core shelter supports for people, for individuals, that tailor the expectation of what they would receive based on whether they are expected to work or are working, people who are not expected to work, or people who are temporarily unable to work because they're learners.

8:50

I'm glad that the hon. member opposite recognized the benefit of having a health benefit program available for people so that they have an incentive to continue to earn more dollars and their health care supports stay with them. Those health care supports bridge their income from barely adequate to making sure, at least, that they themselves as adults or their children have health care support that assures us that on dental, on glasses, on things that they may need to sustain their health, they are adequately looked after. That is a good part of how we help people as they engage back in the workforce and need extra supports.

In terms of the income supports for learners we make sure that the rate of increase, which will take effect August 2007, will help them with the increased demands that we have on the learner living allowance, so dollars there are going to help them with that opportunity. What the hon. member was obviously talking about in places like New Brunswick and other places is covered by the rent supplement program that's part of municipal affairs, so if they only need some additional supports for their rent to make sure that they can manage on the dollars they receive, that program is also available.

When you look at our homeless and eviction prevention fund, the fund has the stream of dealing with the \$7 million for people who are in dire emergencies, who need shelter support, who might need damage deposits, who might need utilities paid for, who might be faced with eviction, so we can provide some assistance. If we

determine that in the short term rent supplement is adequate or in the longer term a more permanent arrangement for rent supplement can be provided, there's an opportunity for us to help them navigate into that part of our support services, and our department has been bridging with Municipal Affairs and Housing to make sure that those supports are provided.

All and all, with this housing, with the supports for people, it is targeted at people that do have the needs who have not been recent immigrants. But if we have people that are new Albertans that have no place to go that have been looking for shelter, there's extensive work done through our offices to try and make them comfortable by linking them with other program supports that may be available.

I look forward to continuing to answer questions of the hon. members opposite. I do thank you for these questions on the employment side. I should state at the outset here for all of you that will be questioning our budget this evening that if there are things in our review of the Blues that have not been responded to, well, we'll certainly try and fill those gaps. But as nearly as I can identify, the question about the adequacy of the programs: it seems to be working well because we've noted that even since the conversation about housing supports has been presented in this House, we have very few people coming to the offices soliciting program support, activities, or program responses. We are doing our best with those, but it hasn't been a huge encumbrance because there haven't been many people asking.

With that, I will sit again and look forward to further questions.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you very much, hon. minister. Rent supplements are one aspect of enabling people to move off of social assistance into the work world. I notice that one of the government's responses to the task force also identified the possibility of actually putting money into the hands of renters apart from rent supplement. Rent supplement is when the cheque goes to the landlord. But I think what I was after is some sort of housing component or housing support system that would put money into the hands of people on social assistance and then continue with them as they move into the work world. When we went around the province, we heard from people that actually putting more money into people's pockets gives people who are living in poverty more choices, and I would think that for a government that's stressing all the time the importance of choice, that would be something to investigate. Anyway, I just wanted to look at some of the numbers in the income supports a little further.

Public Interest Alberta issued a report just recently which I found quite fascinating in which they surveyed Albertans about what the real needs of Albertans are. What do we need to have a living wage in Alberta? They came up with some interesting statistics. It just gives one example, and this is an example of a single parent with three children. If you add up the basic costs – food, housing, transportation, utilities – it's about \$2,000 a month. Household costs – clothing, furnishing, housekeeping, recreation – \$643 a month. Cost of services – child care, primary education, et cetera – \$1,000 a month. Long-term expenses, \$517. It comes to \$4,635.

If you look at the social assistance – and it doesn't matter what program you look at, whether it's those who are expected to work or those not expected to work or learners – the numbers are quite low. For example, for a single parent with two children before August 1 the core program was \$1,391, and there's a 5 per cent increase, \$70. After August 1, \$1,461 plus the national child benefit supplement of \$306 is \$1,767. Well, hon. minister, that's less than half of what Public Interest Alberta came up with. So I'm not really impressed by a 5 per cent increase.

What does it cover? Does a 5 per cent increase cover all these

programs? It's very difficult to tell from the budget because some items appear to go up; some appear to go down. For example, for people expected to work or are working, it appears to go down whereas for people not expected to work, it goes up.

I have a document here which gives an idea of the average monthly caseload. For example, not expected to work is about 11,400 households representing 17,600 people, including 5,200 children, and for temporarily unable to work the caseload is 6,600 households, and so on. This is from an Employment, Immigration and Industry release.

It's very difficult for me, and I have to do some thinking. Perhaps the minister could provide me with some help in understanding how the caseloads have gone through the last couple of years because, I guess, there's a 5 per cent increase in the budget. But if the caseloads go down, the numbers would come out differently. So I'm not quite sure. It's a bit hard to figure out. I was wondering: is there a new category here? The 5 per cent increase is for not expected to work and temporarily unable to work. Are those the same? Is temporarily unable to work the same as expected to work, or is that a different category? We have a new category now. We have not expected to work, temporarily unable to work, expected to work, and learners. Or are expected to work and temporarily unable to work the same? I don't know.

I have problems with using all of these categories and identifying people in terms of work. I know that the hon. minister would disagree with me on this, but I guess if I draw on my theological background as a preacher, I was always preaching that human beings are made in the image of God, and they have inherent dignity regardless of whether they work or not. You know, when you talk to somebody, you immediately say: "What do you do? What do you do for a living?" We almost assume that a person doesn't have value unless they contribute something to the economy, but I think that's a terrible mistake. People who are actually unable to work are unique individual human beings. So I think that putting them in a category like "temporarily unable to work," "unable to work," or "not expected to work" is a kind of slur. It's an undignified way of referring to a group of people. I don't like that kind of stereotyping.

9:00

Anyway, another issue that I would like to draw your attention to is one that I'm sure is dear to the hon. minister's heart. I mentioned as an example a single parent. I mean, one-quarter of the families in Canada are single parents. I was surprised not to find very much emphasis in this budget on women's issues. Isn't women's issues an Employment, Immigration and Industry responsibility? Where is it in the budget? I can only assume that maybe there's somebody who works in the minister's office who has responsibility for women's issues, but that doesn't seem to me to be adequate.

For example, there's an interesting program that I read about in Ontario. On March 27 of this year the McGuinty government in Ontario announced that more than \$1.2 million will help low-income women develop new skills. It's a program called WIST, women in skilled trades program: instruction in welding, carpentry, landscaping, construction. This is actually in addition to \$2.7 million over two years that was already there to provide training and information technology for low-income women. I think that's marvellous.

Maybe I've overlooked something, hon. minister, but it seems to me that if we are going to encourage – and you did mention that the workforce has to look at people who have special needs, aboriginal people and people living in poverty and the disabled. Certainly, we need to have more women in our workforce, especially women who have lived in poverty and especially lone parents, women who really struggle and need to be educated to learn a skill so they can contrib-

ute to the Alberta economy. So I was looking for something like that, and I didn't see that very much money is put into that, but perhaps I've misunderstood the budget.

Well, I think I better not go onto something next because I want to get into another topic altogether. So, Mr. Chairman, can I ask the minister for a response at this point?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Dr. B. Miller: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you so much because I was just sitting on the edge of my chair wanting to get up and respond. I just have to say this: as a woman I have found it very objectionable that frequently governments, including the federal government, will list the disadvantaged this way: disabilities, aboriginal, Métis, Inuit, women. You know, like, I really take exception to that. There are a lot of men that have disabilities as well. When I was doing the round-table on family violence and bullying, men frequently reminded me of that.

So I'd like to disabuse the suggestion right off the bat that women aren't in this budget. Under 2.1.2, on program delivery and support, the person that liaises with the status of women federal programming initiative is housed. But throughout our government this government gives more support to women in various programs than any other government on a per capita basis in Canada. May I remind this audience that Children's Services was struck so that women and children and families that needed supports were getting that kind of tailored support.

The supports for families with the family supports for children with disabilities; the welfare act for the enhancement of child delivery service that the Minister of Children's Services will speak to; in our budget 2.1.3, child support services, over \$5 million, \$5.313 million; all of those things are areas where we are able to provide support to people that are living on low incomes, principally women.

In many respects the other areas in this budget include that support for women who are seeking new skills, training. If you go and look at programs we support, like the Changing Together support services that we provide many project dollars to, there are 3,000 immigrant women that come into that program, many children as well, and they get support from dollars within the budgets here. So a great deal of the supported benefits are provided here for women.

Now, I'm going to logistically draw something to the attention of people here. When we categorize by department budgets for very specific programming – the hon. member has said it's been confusing because we are giving less in some categories and more in others. We had found that we had fewer academic people that were expected to work as a category because we found them jobs. It was those that were not expected to work that rose. You couldn't categorize them as people expected to stay home, people expected to stay home part-time only, and learners. You have to find a way of categorizing that they are expected to provide some opportunity for work. And they do want that opportunity for work. Many of them are so thrilled to get a job for the very first time. We found that with this ministry Alberta Works has been so successful at that that we have a reduced demand for people in that category because they are getting opportunities to work.

So, simply put, if you're a learner and you need a hand up while you're going back to school, we provide that, and we provide that kind of support. But if you're a person that doesn't have the

opportunity to go back, that you can never go to work again, we also support people in that category with income supports, supplementary health benefits, additional kinds of supports in other categories of financial support.

If you stack what's given in many areas, including to those people that don't pay health premiums, those people that are paying a lower tax rate, and certain categories, if you did a full analysis of what they are given in terms of supports, what their cost of living is – admittedly, in the last few months with the significant growth there are some places where people could be expected to pay more, and that's where we step in.

We don't give them a continual support. But, for example, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North looked at her paper on the weekend and saw that we gave \$6,700 to relocate a family to Prince Edward Island. Now, that was because they needed the support. They had family there. They had a job there. They had an opportunity to provide better services for their children there.

In the long term this government looks to what is best for the people that are in question. One month you might get \$1,000 for support, a damage deposit, your utilities paid, your rent arrears paid, and three months later you could be coming back and asking for more. You're not able to manage your costs, you need that extra support, and there is significant flexibility built in the capacity of the counsellors to provide that, especially on this homeless protection fund. The staff have all acknowledged that it's important to make sure that people aren't living with the mental pressure of not having that support, so there is significant latitude in them making those kinds of decisions so that people don't have core shelter problems.

Admittedly, if you look exclusively at the rates for the single parent with three children, you don't see much money in that category, but there are other areas in which we provide them supports. It's part of this budget, and it's part of the Children's Services' budget in some cases. People have particular disabilities or situations where they require supports: taking apprenticeship, self-employment, training, workforce training for First Nations, any of the agriculture skills service programming, occupational training programming.

I want to close with just one wonderful story. We had a 57-year-old that was laid off, a woman that was no longer able to work at her chosen career. We gave her retraining. We gave her an opportunity to learn about occupational health and safety. Today she's running her own business. She is a successful businesswoman, retrained after 57 years of age, and five years later is a successful breadwinner and highly successful because of contracts that she's been able to get in southern Alberta with a variety of companies. That's the kind of thing that we target, giving people that dignity in the workplace, providing them technical supports when they need it, bridging for them so that they can have that extra capacity they need.

9:10

I have to tell you that I've been so proud to meet the staff that we have in the offices. They really are geared to providing more for people.

The real question is: what happened to the department of social services? The member posed that earlier. The department of social services is now two departments plus an opportunity to learn more about the workplace. We have that rolled into this Department of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

If you added up what's spent in Children's Services and Employment, Immigration and Industry on the poor, the disadvantaged, the disabled, the aboriginal person, there will not be another government that will even closely approximate what we are providing. I haven't

even touched on the area of education and some of the other programming.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Well, thank you, hon. minister. But I need to be convinced still. For example, compared to other provinces, social assistance for a lone parent with one child – this is in 2001 – placed Alberta 10th; I mean, last among the provinces. The assistance was only 51 per cent of the LICO cut-off. That's the low-income cut-off amount. You're arguing that it's better today. I hope so. Your pride in this social assistance program I hope is true. We'll have to look at the comparative statistics and see where that comes out.

Now, you mentioned that there are things covered by Children's Services and other departments. I don't know how you deal with the silo of a problem there. Child care is with Children's Services. Family employment tax credits with Finance. Housing is with Seniors and Community Supports or Municipal Affairs and Housing. Their health benefits are with Employment, Immigration and Industry. I really don't know how you can develop a holistic kind of comprehensive approach with just the right mix of welfare, which actually can save the government money down the road because, you know, if we have the right kind of programs that provide the kinds of supports that families need, then they can get on their feet faster.

I'm thinking of a really, really great program called families first, which is based on the research that Gina Brown did at McMaster University, which proved that supports for recreation, for example, for single-parent families save the government a lot of money down the road in terms of, you know, dependence on the health system and the criminal justice system and so on because kids are involved with sports and recreation and so on.

You mentioned the importance of the workers. I think they have a great responsibility. I commend them. I think they have to look at not just what people are entitled to, but they have to look at people holistically and really understand their needs so that we can sort of bridge the gap between the real needs that families have and the supports that they need.

I want to move on to a completely different topic; that is, the labour standards and workplace safety, which is another section in the estimates. I want to just begin by referring to a press release from the department recently about the provincial occupational fatality rate being lowest in more than a decade. I think that it's laudable that last year saw fewer workplace deaths, disabling injuries, and lost time claims in Alberta. There were 124 occupational fatalities in 2006 compared to 143 in 2005, including 33 motor vehicle incidents, and you know that's still high. The hon. minister is quoted in this press release as saying that even one workplace death is one too many, and I agree. So I'm encouraged by the commitment of the department to deal with this.

In the business plan there is mention about the provincial lost time claim rate, that for 2006 was 2.3 per 100 person-years, and that's down from 2.41 in 2005. But in terms of the goal of the department, it's to even get it down further, and I was wondering what it will take to get us to a better rate.

You mentioned in the beginning, hon. minister, about the inspectors, the additional hiring of inspectors to examine workplaces, and it was too quick for me. I started to write down how many new inspectors there would be doing different duties, and there's an increase in the budget of about \$7 million, from \$29 million to \$36 million. That's commendable if there are more inspectors. You mentioned that the AFL had sent a congratulatory letter.

I think we are really concerned that there be adequate safety inspectors in Alberta. There was an announcement recently about one particular oil field service company being sentenced for workers' injuries, and that's interesting. I don't know how often that occurs and whether we have enough safety inspectors to actually provide the evidence so that that kind of prosecution can take place. I hope that that's going to happen in the future, that more employers are held accountable.

Now, I'd just like to say a word about the fact that 33 out of the 124 deaths were from motor vehicle accidents. In last year's budget I raised the whole issue of safety on the highways because there was the McDermid report in June 2004, which states that 3,875 people died on Alberta roads between 1992 and 2002 and that traffic crashes take six times more lives than homicides. The response to the McDermid report: I'm not convinced that it's adequate.

I know this department is not involved directly. It's the Solicitor General, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation – I heard the hon. minister talking about their response to the McDermid report a little while ago – and the Minister of Justice. But because so many of these motor vehicle accidents happen while people are engaged in work – and, I mean, so much work is done in the province with the use of our vehicles, whether you're talking about truckers or talking about workers moving from sites in northern Alberta and the oil sands down to Fort Saskatchewan. Surely, there must be an involvement in terms of cross-ministry efforts to respond to the McDermid report. I know that there is something called the traffic safety plan. I don't know whether this department is involved with that or not.

While we're on this topic of labour standards and workplace safety, a very important aspect of the budget in regard to workplace safety is the area of employment standards. Employment standards are very, very important in protecting the physical and financial well-being of Albertan workers. Job security is an important part of a worker's quality of life.

In announcing the employment standards review in 2005, the department of human resources noted that the employment standards code was last reviewed in 1988, and since then technological advances, globalization, and changes to family and workplace demographics have altered Alberta's workplaces. As a part of the employment standards review there was lots of involvement: 50 labour, employer, and social advocacy associations. Five thousand and five hundred individual Albertans contributed to this review through the public consultation process.

Clearly, this is a very important issue to the health of Alberta's workforce, but my question to the minister is: where is the employment standards review? Is the review process complete? When can we expect to see the report? Are there recommendations that should be implemented? Is there something that's blocking this report from being publicized? I think lots of people throughout Alberta who contributed to the review process would like to know where that report is at.

9:20

A couple of other items that I'd like to raise that I think are really important. I think Alberta is the only province in Canada that doesn't have a compassionate care provision in the employment standards. I was wondering if there was any intention on the part of the department to investigate compassionate care because, you know, in terms of our work responsibilities we often have to take time off to care for people, and all of us have had to care for elderly relatives, especially those who are terminally ill. To not have a compassionate care provision seems to be an oversight.

Another area that I'd like to see more investigated is working

alone regulations. I know that there is a regulation under employment standards for working alone. But it's interesting. I came across some reference to the development of legislation in B.C. They call it Grant's law, which focuses on gas station workers, named after a fellow named Grant De Patie, who was killed trying to prevent a gas-and-dash robbery. On that . . .

The Chair: Unfortunately, time has elapsed.

It's time for the hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Well, thank you very much. Perhaps I should just take a moment and comment about the interest the hon. member has expressed in safety and keeping people safe and looking at this whole area of workplace health and safety and the dollars we're expending and how we're expending it there.

I'll talk a little bit, first of all, about the area of the safety culture and the programs that the hon. member is asking about. I know that a good part of what was initiated last fall was a program to help what they describe as the rookie worker, the student in school that might be engaged in the workforce for the very first time. School programming in junior high and high school is beginning to build on the principles of safety that students are taught, hopefully, from the time they're born and build on what they need to know when they go into the workplace for the first time.

When I spoke with Dr. Louis Hugo Francescutti, he said that the best time to start training somebody to be safe in the workplace or safe anywhere in society is from the time they were born, to teach everything from turning the porridge pot in so that they won't reach up and grab it, and that the various things that a parent does in teaching a child are probably the most significant things that can happen to children in their growing years. We've also discovered that the rookie at any job needs to be taught. The first six months of almost any endeavour are sometimes the most hazardous because people don't know what they don't know, and they need a lot of mentoring and training to make sure that they're looking after things well.

So a good part of our employment standard positions – we've actually got 19 employment standard positions, including 10 investigators, in this budget to address compliance and education issues. They're the most excited team. I met with some of them in Calgary when I first got this ministry, and they're the most excited people to go out and engage people in meaningful dialogue about how to make the workplace safer.

What I feel that this budget is trying to do is really engage the workplace today in safety practices. I've spoken to Exxon Mobil. It's a fascinating boardroom. Their biggest and only sign in their boardroom is: nobody gets hurt. Their first agenda item every Monday is safety: what are the accident rates? It's been very heartening to talk to the major industries about what they're doing. We have to build on that, and that's what our thrust is.

To be perfectly candid, my department would very much have liked to see us able to table an employment standards review in this session, but we have, I think, a little bit more work to do on some facets of it. It's something that they have been doing their due diligence on over the last four years to try and make sure that it's ready for consumption in the House. I'd have to say that they have shown significant initiative around the employment standards review, but I think that in this legislative session we've got a pretty full plate.

Looking at other areas that the hon. member has cited, like motor vehicle accidents, like things contained in the McDermid report, there may be an opportunity for us to engage in a full debate on that at some future date. Clearly, the design of highways, the design of

communities to prevent motor vehicle accidents is something that our transportation officials are looking at. When I speak to people like Ian Reid of Finning, he reminds me of the importance that he places on no use of cell phones in vehicles. Schlumberger has also moved to that policy. Many of the larger industrial providers that our friend Mr. Sloan talks to every day have those kinds of safety practices in order so that they are doing their part to make sure they reduce accidents. The RCMP are working with the Solicitor General on programs. They illustrate at county and community fairs the impact of accidents when people aren't driving at safe speed limits and aren't buckled up. So I think there are a number of programs that are hoping to address the motor vehicle accident initiative.

What I feel best about, if one can feel good about bad statistics, is that with the increased number of jobs this past year, we actually have a reduced number of people that met their death as a result of an activity, an incident at the workplace or associated with illnesses and disease affiliated with the workplace. So we are reducing that.

However, one thing the hon. member might like to know is that besides the lost time claimed, we are looking at a new statistic that was introduced by my predecessor relative to the modified time claim, which really shows the people that have been placed back in the workplace even though they have an injury. They don't do the same job, but we're adding those stats. I believe that that's going to give us a clearer picture. The net result and the reason why we keep reducing the numbers – while we would hope we have no more deaths, it may be unrealistic to get to that level in one year, but we keep setting the bar for fewer deaths so that people keep sensitive to the fact that ideally we would have no deaths in the workplace.

One program that Shell Canada provided for me was a very exciting and almost heart-rending program, where they took pictures at a sour gas plant of all the employees' children, and they posted them around the sour gas plant along with slogans saying: Daddy, come home today; Mom, I'm looking forward to seeing you after school. These big, blow-up pictures of the children are there to remind parents to get home safely. We are promoting this.

I had a meeting with a former senior officer from one of the major Edmonton-based industries the other day who spoke to me about something he believed would be an incentive, and that was that if there's a death in the workplace, the person that's responsible for that plant should know that they are released from their employment. Now, I'm not proposing we go that far at this time, but I am seriously looking at all of those things that can be incentives to better performance, which is my preferred route to the disincentives.

You'll see a track record in this government of higher fines for people that fail to report incidents, especially emissions and those sorts of things at the industrial level. I remember probably about 13 years ago an unprecedented judgment to an industry who had failed to report emissions that breached standards. I think you'll see today less and less tolerance for an unsafe culture. Our Premier would probably say that it was un-Albertan.

One other point on compassionate care. We recognize that the federal government has introduced compassionate care although it is not currently part of our employment standards. People with some of the small businesses have reminded me that if we did introduce compassionate care in the same manner in which it's been introduced federally, it may well be a burden that's too big for the small business owner to keep and retain a position for someone if they were away time and time again and with the extended family. They've noted that. But we'll look at that when we come back with any further legislative template on the employment standards.

With that, I'll sit and wait for more questions.

9:30

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Yes. Thank you. I just have one more item to add to this area of workplace safety. Working with high-voltage power lines is an extremely dangerous job. Recently an EPCOR worker died as his crew was working to replace a wooden power pole. The issue I want to bring to the minister's attention is not the safety of workers because there are safety rules and lots of education in place for linemen working with high-voltage power lines. What about the safety of nonworkers, of ordinary citizens who may find themselves close to fallen power lines? Trained linemen can deal with live wires, but what about children and youth?

A retired systems operator in a control centre has explained to me that it is the common practice to re-energize a line – this is called a reclose – without knowing what caused the outage to happen. By reclosing the line without complete information about the nature of the fault condition, non utility workers and ordinary citizens might unwittingly be exposed to the possibility of injury or electrocution.

Now, I have the benefit of reading a paper that's produced by a member of your department, Ray Cislo. I think it's a really important, well-written discussion paper on this question. It's called *Manually Reclosing Electrical Breakers Following an Outage: Safety Implications for Non-utility Workers*. A question was asked about this in 1988 by Mr. Tannas, who asked the minister of labour about this very issue, but that's a long time ago. What has been done about this issue since 1988? Is it the policy of the department to accept the reclosing issue as an acceptable risk? I guess that's the issue. If that's the case, why should our provincial standards be lower than other jurisdictions?

Now, this is a very complicated issue, and I think that some companies, like Enmax, are dealing with it through more advanced technology. Still, it's of great concern on the part of a retired systems operator who had the responsibility of reclosing the line and felt the responsibility very deeply that somebody could be injured. Even if it was a balloon that hit the power lines and somehow the balloon was still connected to the power lines when the reclosing took place, then I don't know what would happen. I think it's a serious issue. Anyway, it would be nice to hear a reply about that. I was going to ask it in question period, but I never got the question out.

I want to move on now to immigration. The minister has signed an immigration policy with the federal government as part of a made-in-Alberta immigration strategy. I don't have many details about this agreement. I assume that it's to deal with the provincial nominee program, which the hon. minister mentioned in her introduction. There is an increase in budget to deal with the provincial nominee program. Manitoba's program brought about 6,600 skilled immigrants to Manitoba last year. Alberta is way, way down. I think the hon. minister mentioned some goals, that you expect to bring under the provincial nominee program many more immigrants, in the thousands, in future years. This, I think, is a really important part of the workforce strategy for Alberta. You know, this is completely separate from the temporary foreign workers, which we may want to talk about next. It's really important for Alberta to have an immigration policy that brings people here in such a way that they can stay here in Alberta and contribute to our workforce.

Now, the typical problems of immigration in Canada do occur here in Alberta. I mean, for one thing, it still remains to be the case that the proportion of immigrants living in poverty is much higher than for a native-born Canadian. You know, it's amazing how many

years after immigrant families come to Canada that they still are not finding a way to be a part of the workforce the way they want to. I mean, I think the statistics from your own department indicate that 52 per cent of immigrants who have come to Alberta were not able to find a job in their intended occupation. There's something that doesn't fit here. If we're intending to get skilled workers to come to Alberta to be a part of our workforce and we're desperate for workers, how is it that so many people come here and don't find the job that they really want?

I can think of one particular temporary foreign worker who responded to an ad in Mexico to come to a farm in southern Alberta because they wanted somebody with veterinary experience, and he had a master's degree in veterinary science. When he got here, he didn't do anything of the sort in the area of veterinary work. He worked as a mechanic. He even drove a truck on the highway, and he didn't have a licence. He has since gone back to Mexico. It's a problem. It's really a black mark on our immigration program when things like that happen.

The retention of immigrants is a huge issue. Between 25 and 30 per cent of immigrants abandon this province after living here for a couple of years, compared to only 10 per cent in B.C. I've asked that question in the House to the hon. minister about this, and the response has been: "Well, they didn't fit into the community. They had problems with adjusting to the community." Really, when you look at the housing issue, surely that's a big part of it, that they can't get into the workforce right away. There's a time where they're really struggling. They're struggling to pay for housing, and they give up, and they go somewhere else in Canada. I think that's a huge issue.

You know, I'm happy that in the budget there is lots of money for programs that would support, for example, the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, settlement services, enhanced language training, and so on. That's really important although I noticed that that money hasn't gone up.

There's more money for the provincial nominee program and international marketing. I'm not sure what that is. Is that a desk in every embassy in the world to attract workers? I'm not sure what that is.

There's more money for attracting immigrants to this province, but what about money to cover settlement services? I mean, one of the problems of retaining immigrants is to recognize their foreign credentials. Now, it's a problem not unique to Alberta but across Canada that immigrants have too often been underemployed or unemployed because the credentials they bring are not recognized, so it's important that we have adequate mechanisms in place to ensure that recognition takes place. We need the government to work more closely with professional associations to somehow speed up the process of recognition.

I mean, the statistics: one-third of immigrants never worked at a job that was related to their professional skills. One-third. Two-thirds of immigrants had to take over one or two unskilled jobs to support their families. That is not acceptable. We need to speed up the process somehow of recognizing credentials. I don't know whether the minister can shed some light on that.

I think that's all I want to say right at the moment. I'd like to raise the issue of temporary foreign workers in the next round. Thank you.

9:40

Ms Evans: Well, I'm just delighted to have an opportunity to respond on the immigration program because, quite frankly, this is an exciting initiative. In fact, when I first came into government 10 years ago, I would never have dreamed that we would have an actual

profiling of immigration in a ministry at the provincial level because of the capacity the federal government brings to still examining the immigration file from the standpoint of the safety, security, and health of the individual coming forward.

Under direction from our Premier it's very clear to me that the first people that we bring to bear to the job market are Albertans. That includes aboriginal, both on and off reserve, and Canadians next. So very, very clear in my mind in this mandate for this minister is to make sure that we do as much as possible to provide Albertans an opportunity for working.

Now, the increased incentive to move forward on the immigration file is really because of what we perceive is the shortage of labour in a variety of positions, and previously they may have been predominantly in the skilled or academic area. When we look at the larger construction projects, the building of an upgrader that might take up to 4,000 individuals, it's very clear that we need to take a look at what our capacity is for labour mobility; hence, our B.C./Alberta TILMA agreement that gives us some options. Then we have to look at a number of other things. It's a very interesting process because there's no way you can address immigration in a simple yes or no.

For example, foreign credential recognition is an important part of what one does and the labour intensity that's involved in making sure that people have the capacity to engage in the jobs to which they have ascribed. A good part of what we are doing is working with the professional regulatory organizations – APEGGA, the chartered accountants, other professional groups – to make sure that the credentials that people bring to bear on these jobs are credentials that they can accept. One of the areas that's been most difficult, as the hon. member knows, is with the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the qualifications of some 10,000 physicians in England that we would like to attract and bring over here. They might be missing obstetrics, so we have to figure out ways to bridge that so that they can become accredited here. There's significant work with the credentials for professional licensure.

For the skilled trades Alberta apprenticeship and industry training, AIT, is the only regulator of the trades. These assessments allow tradespeople to challenge the exam within 180 days of arrival in Alberta. These are things that we take very seriously. They must pass those examinations. If I get any complaints, it's frequently that people miss the exam by a small margin. We have to make sure that employers work at educating tradesmen, and that's another area of our engagement here.

Finally, the employers themselves. Given that approximately 15 per cent of the trades and professions are regulated and 85 per cent are unregulated, employers are responsible for recognizing the qualifications required on the job and their prior work experience in giving them those options for learning.

We've also placed in this budget another \$500,000 for work on international credential recognition. We're up to \$1.7 million. We have significant programs, bridging programs that enable people to get engaged. It's very interesting that many of the nonprofit organizations in some of the communities also help with their own bridging programs, so they can initiate the capacity of someone to get involved in the workplace, and they're doing magnificent things.

I would invite the hon. member to join his colleagues from Calgary someday who have gone to the wonderful activities there where they honour and recognize and provide awards to those people that have done so well. You can see the real efforts that have been made by the community in helping in the bridging programs. I do mention Calgary because 60 per cent of the immigrants that come to Alberta currently are residing in Calgary, and in that heated economy people would say: well, can they survive? They're not

only surviving; they are absolutely glowing. I have to cite Lina, who is an incredible example of an Italian woman who started a small business, and it's mushroomed so that she literally employs immigrants from all over the world. So it's exciting to see what's happening here.

Our whole immigration program will expand on the foreign credential recognition, expand the numbers of provincial nominees from six years ago, 128, to about 2,500 provincial nominees this year, which will enable us to get chosen specialized trades, skilled trades, and professionals to help us build the capacity. In effect, it allows us to bypass the queue with those people that are particularly qualified. To the hon. member opposite: I think it's exciting that the federal government has agreed to write back to those people who have applied to be in the health care professions – doctors, physiotherapists, nurses, and pharmacists – and say: you wanted to come to Alberta for this purpose; here's your opportunity. We hope to get 2,500. We hope to tap in on international students so that we can really build that part this year.

The temporary foreign worker program is harder to respond to because it's contingent on, as I've mentioned before, the employer identifying the need, citing that need, going through the labour market opinions, getting that endorsement from the federal government in consultation with us, and then moving forward on the numbers that would be required.

I think that what I find most exciting is that this made-in-Alberta immigration program has been the result of workers that I have accompanying me, that are seated with me and also upstairs: Susan Williams, Ellen Hambrook. I see Mark Asbell up there and Neil Irvine, people who have brought together pieces of other ministries and have just gathered all of this immigration up and totally embraced the opportunity. I'd like to pay special credit to about 12 people that Rick Sloan has had working with him on the immigration agreement, which took an unprecedented 28 days to negotiate with the federal government and is a better agreement by far than the Ontario agreement because it doesn't cap the number of dollars that we are going to achieve for support of this immigration file.

The feds, for their part, have doubled up the amount of money on the integrated settlement services, and we believe that the pilot project on health, the additional co-operation and the partnership between Canada and Alberta, will bear fruit. There is a disputes clause, and in five years the government can review the capacity of this agreement to serve the needs of Albertans. Essentially, I think what we have is the groundwork for some very positive results.

Now, one more point to the hon. member. I would really ask the hon. member to provide me a copy of that interesting study that he cited at the beginning of his remarks relative to injuries that might be unintended consequences of being involved in the workplace, and I see, Mr. Chairman, that there's an indication that he may be willing to provide that. I look forward to it. Our staff are expressing great enthusiasm to have a look at it and see if there's any part of that that we can use in a measure of helping us with any of our safety issues. They are striving for the healthiest, safest workplace possible, so I look forward to receiving a copy of that at the appropriate time.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity to participate in this discussion on the budget for Employment, Immigration and Industry this evening. Certainly, I would like to state on the record at this time to the hon. minister that there are some very diligent, compassionate, and kind citizens working in her department. Specifically, I had the opportunity to

meet some of them in the employment standards office recently, in the last six weeks, and they are a fine reflection of the entire civil service. Hopefully, someone is not going to come by and hire them away for more money than what she is paying them, because they're worth every dollar that the province pays to them. They do their best under what I consider to be difficult circumstances.

9:50

Now, the minister just talked, you know, about our made-in-Alberta immigration program. I don't have the same confidence that the minister has in this program or her promotion of this program because I'm seeing first-hand through our constituency office the horror show which is this temporary foreign worker program. I have a number of questions, Mr. Chairman, in regard to that.

First, before I get to my questions, I would like to explain to the hon. minister that she cannot pawn this off on the federal government and say that this is a problem with the government because I have a document here that is from the Alberta government, from a department of the Alberta government, that is a letter indicating the qualification of a prospective temporary foreign worker before he comes into the country, before he even pays his \$10,000 fee to the broker that is skinning him of his hard-earned money before he comes here. This is one reason why this government can't distance itself from the failures of this program, because this is an assessment of the workers' qualifications before they're allowed to come into the country.

I will read part of this. From your date of arrival in Alberta you will have 180 days to write the exams and obtain your Alberta certification. If you are unsuccessful with the exams to gain certification, you will no longer be able to work in this trade in the province of Alberta. The individual that's listed in this letter is an individual who holds a compulsory trade certificate. We are allowing all these individuals into this country and giving them 180 days to qualify for a red seal.

Now, we had a brief discussion on this, an interesting discussion, last week in Public Accounts. I would urge the hon. minister and her staff to read the responses that came from Advanced Education there because they are in contradiction to what is stated in this letter. Not only is this letter dated and signed by government officials from this province, but also it is used as a supporting document by the broker. All this is happening before the individuals get into this country.

Mr. Chairman, the questions that would also apply in this case are: what happens to these temporary foreign workers when the company who has the labour market opinion – the company is operating in Alberta and is listed on the visa as the employer – fails to provide the jobs listed? I have an example here of six if not seven welders, and we're always complaining that there are not enough welders in this province. These people paid megabucks to some unscrupulous broker to get to this country. They pay their own way here, and when they get here with these temporary foreign worker visas, there are no jobs. They're told at the same time by an agent of the broker in this country that they have to do what they say. These workers are being intimidated, they're being bullied, and it's wrong. It's not Canadian. It's un-Albertan, as the Premier would say. It's totally wrong. This program is out of control. Now, what happens to these temporary foreign workers? If you could explain this to me, I would be very grateful.

Also, Mr. Chairman, is this visa, which places so many restrictions on these temporary foreign workers for their employment in Alberta, a violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights? Do you have a legal opinion supporting that these visas here, which limit and restrict what the temporary foreign workers can do, are not a violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights?

What is the department doing to stop the agencies from charging these enormous fees to arrange these temporary foreign workers' visas, these fees and the promises that these people are making? I'm pleading with the minister and the department to get some sort of controls on these so-called agents.

If a temporary foreign worker has a six-month job opportunity to weld in this province, why are they only being issued four-month visas? If we've got 180 days to test them, they can work for four months, and their visa is going to expire. They're going to be long gone before any of the welds that they do are possibly X-rayed. There's something wrong with this program.

I can't understand why we're continuing with an immigration policy when we can't handle what we're already doing. We cannot blame it all on the feds. Some of it is certainly their fault but not all of it. And there's the whole issue of security. It takes people in this province longer to get a passport than it does some of these workers from different places in the world to get a temporary foreign worker visa. How exactly does that work?

Now, in the time I have left, Mr. Chairman, I would also like to ask if the department at this time is considering doing any work to study the possibility of giving WCB coverage to construction workers for cancers that are related to their workplace activities. I'm very grateful that the firefighters have WCB coverage now for some work-related cancers. Is the government studying the cancer rate particularly for welders and for boilermakers who do vessel entry and other tradesmen who are in direct contact with catalysts and other parts of the industrial processes? When can they expect to be covered for work-related cancers? Is the department doing anything to document that?

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I have one more question. I would urge the hon. minister at some point to visit an English as a Second Language class with me. I'd be delighted to make the arrangements, and she could come and meet some of these new Canadians first-hand. I'm sure she has met many. I don't think we're paying them enough to take their English as a Second Language courses on a monthly basis. I think we need to increase that rate to reflect what

it costs to rent an apartment, what it costs to feed and clothe their families, and I really would again ask the department and the minister to have a second look at this as their immigration policy. Let's support family immigration from all over the world, and let's quit this corporate 21st century slavery that's going on in the form of these temporary foreign workers.

Thank you.

10:00

The Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(c) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Infrastructure and Transportation and Employment, Immigration and Industry 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 Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:03 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1 p.m.]

