

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 31, 2007**

**1:00 p.m.**

Date: 07/05/31

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for the bounty of our province, our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the distinct pleasure and honour today to introduce to this Assembly Ambassador Jose Brillantes of Philippines. Alberta is a province that has more than 30,000 Canadian Filipinos and is a partner in a trade relationship with Philippines that exceeds \$150 million a year. His Excellency Brillantes has been enjoying a couple of days in Alberta right now and will remain with us for a few days. He is accompanied today by the consul general, Joseph Angeles; second secretary and consul, Rhenita Rodriguez; the Philippines honorary consul in Edmonton, Esmeralda Agbulos; and the honorary consul general in Calgary, Mr. Guerrero. I would like the whole Assembly to extend the usual traditional welcome to His Excellency and his accompanying guests.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a distinct pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature two guests, very special guests, who have joined us in the members' gallery, Rebecca Edwards and Brad Rabiey. The young and talented Rebecca Edwards works as a youth worker for Boyle Street and is located in LYNC unit. Rebecca's positive demeanour allows her to successfully work on the front lines with Edmonton's high-risk youth, using an effective harm-reduction and client-focused approach. This positive demeanour especially comes in handy in Rebecca's work after time, when she keeps an eye on my senior policy adviser, Brad Rabiey, who is attending question period with her today. Brad is quite simply an outstanding member of our team, and I'm very proud to have him aboard. I would ask that Rebecca and Brad please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Michael Cheung, a senior financial consultant with MD Management – MD Management is a subsidiary of the Canadian Medical Association, providing financial management assistance to physicians and their families – and Ms Belinda Ferro, formerly with MD Management, now taking on a new role at the Stollery children's hospital. I ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Ducharme:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure

that I introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 50 bright and enthusiastic grade 6 students from the Grand Centre middle school from the city of Cold Lake. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Jackie Crooks, Mr. Cass Claude, Mrs. Pam Wells, Ms Sara Wiebe, and Ms Brandy Berube; parent helpers Mrs. Karen Wehinger, Mr. Mike Longmuir, Mr. Rob Wilken, and Mrs. Donna Cordick. I had the opportunity of meeting with these students back in January in their classroom, and I can tell you that they are very, very keen on government and politics. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me also to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 52 bright young students from the Lacombe upper elementary school. These are two grade 6 classes, one of them a French immersion class. They are accompanied by a number of teachers: Mr. Bob Epp, Mme Christine Graves, and Mrs. Leslie Smale. They're also accompanied by a number of parent helpers: Ms Jannine Donalds, Mr. Darren Howie, Mrs. Cynthia Campbell, Mrs. Sandra Epp, Mrs. Jackie Lunn, and Mrs. Monique Mickelson. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would also ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As part of my ongoing celebration of Edmonton being named the cultural capital of Canada for 2007, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two sets of artists who are joining us today.

The first person I'd like to introduce is Edmund Haakonson, who is a very fine painter and sculptor, indeed so fine he was a finalist in the first national competition for portrait painters in Canadian history. This summer he's doing a special project, the Alcoa project for invited artists on Sir Winston Churchill Square, creating a six-foot by 12-foot sculpture from rebar and aluminum for the Works festival. He is also in his seventh year as president of the board of directors for Harcourt House Arts Centre. I would ask Edmund to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

My second introduction is a group that have just returned from a very successful tour. This is a local company called Guys in Disguise. With us today is the renowned Darrin Hagen, who is a writer, an actor, and I would have to say Edmonton's best-known drag queen. Would you rise as I say your name? Thank you, Darrin. With him today is Gina Moe, who is by far the finest stage manager that we have, and a great honour to have her joining us today. We also have Davina Stewart, who is a fabulous actor and forever elegant. Look at her; isn't she lovely? Also, as a real treat we have Trevor Schmidt joining us today. Trevor was with the company, which just got back from Orlando. Trevor is also the artistic director of Northern Light Theatre here in Edmonton. Congratulations on a very successful tour, folks, and thank you so much for coming down to join us.

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure and honour today to introduce to you the parents of an accomplished young man who is a valued page in our Assembly. That is, of

course, Conor Smyth, who is presently sitting to your right, Mr. Speaker. His parents are here; that's Peter and Cheryl Smyth. Peter is a valued public servant with Children's Services, currently working with high-risk youth. Cheryl works in finance with Big Brothers Big Sisters. Peter and Cheryl Smyth are in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

A second group, Mr. Speaker, is a great soccer club. They were the recipients of the Edmonton-Manning MLA's cup in 2005. That was the MLA's African Nations Cup for that soccer tournament. They're sitting in the public gallery. I'd ask them all to rise as I name them. The manager of the Leone Stars is John Elliott. Please rise, John. The coach is Foday Samura. The treasurer is Alimamy Samura. The team captain is Kelvin Kamara. The caretaker is Prince Thorpe. Three members of the team: Ansu Marah, Jacob Tamba, and David Dominic. I would ask all members to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:10

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Amy MacLeod and Lauren Keating. Amy and Lauren are Palace Casino workers entering their 265th day on the picket line due to this government's failure to protect hard-working Alberta workers from unfair and uncaring employers. Amy MacLeod has been at the Palace Casino for nearly two years as a bartender. Lauren Keating has been at the Palace Casino for three and a half years as a head cashier. Lauren admits that her weaknesses are shopping and reading, and when she's not working, you'll find her doing one of those two things. They are joined today by UFCW organizer Don Crisall. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and a pleasure to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some very special friends that are seated in the public gallery today. I would ask that they please rise as I name them: Gibson Glavin, who is an RCMP officer with K Division; Jerry and Dee Calder from the fine city of Leduc, just south of Edmonton-Rutherford; and Shirlene, Ron, Natalie, and Jamie Sexton, all residents of St. Albert. These fine folks are here today to help me in celebrating the tremendous work that a group called the Compassionate Friends does for bereaved parents and their families who have lost children. I would ask all members to please give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

### Members' Statements

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

#### Compassionate Friends of Edmonton Society

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If there are angels on this earth, then we are blessed to have a number of them in the public gallery with us today. These people all belong to a club with the highest initiation fees imaginable; that is, you have to lose a child to belong.

Mr. Speaker, Jerry Calder and his wife, Dee, lost their son Jay when he fell to his death in 1991 at the age of 21 years. Ron and

Shirlene Sexton lost their daughter Carly to a brain aneurysm in 1993 at the age of six years. Gibson Glavin and his wife lost Brendan in 2002. He was 8 years old.

Mr. Speaker, while these family tragedies are always devastating, these special individuals have turned their personal experiences into something magical by volunteering with the Compassionate Friends of Edmonton Society. This dedicated group provides support and caring for parents and their families who have lost a child. Shirlene has been the driving force behind the Edmonton chapter for 10 years now, while Jerry has shared facilitating duties off and on for even longer. Gibson has shared duties with Jerry and Shirlene for the past few years and speaks each year at TCF's annual candlelight service.

As you may know, Mr. Speaker, I too am a member of this society. A particularly poignant moment came for me when a 92-year-old great-grandmother attended a meeting. We all assumed that she had lost a great-grandchild. However, it turned out that she had lost her 69-year-old daughter, and she was as devastated as we all are in this circumstance. It is simply not the natural order.

As we have seen in the news this week, the need for compassionate friends is never-ending. With the support and assistance of these angels amongst us families can continue to grow as a result of what their loss has taught them about life, humanity, and spirit.

To all those parents who have lost a child and the many more that unfortunately will, I have this message: we need not walk alone; we are the compassionate friends.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

#### Pincher Creek, Alberta

**Mr. Coutts:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the beautiful town of Pincher Creek, Alberta. In 1868 Montana gold prospectors, hopeful explorers of the Kootenay goldfields, camped along a creek north of the border. Following their departure home, pinchers, a mechanism used to trim the hooves of horses, were left behind. Later, in 1874, the North West Mounted Police marched west to bring law, order, and good government to the North-West Territories, and on their voyage the pinchers left behind by the prospectors were found along the creek. Henceforth the area became known as Pincher Creek.

Shortly after, the North West Mounted Police established a large horse ranch in the area as its base of operations. The rolling foothills, mountainous views, and luscious grass quickly attracted many other ranchers to the area hoping to create a new life for themselves in the west.

By 1906 the town of Pincher Creek became incorporated. It has proven to be a town and a municipal district of hard-working individuals, and I'm proud to represent them in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, Pincher Creek continues to be an area which prides itself on its successful ranching sector, yet progressively minded people have been using other opportunities such as natural gas, wind, and hydro power to continue the prosperity within the region. The residents of Pincher Creek are pioneers of a green community. In fact, the largest wind farm in Canada resides within this area. The opportunity placed before the people represented by chinook winds has allowed them to embrace and to use green energy, and it has set a precedent for the rest of the nation.

This summer the community will welcome all visitors to their progressive town to relive history, enjoy their museums, parks, and attractions like the wind farms and the Oldman River dam. Make sure that you put it on your holiday itinerary.

For all of its accomplishments and for continuing its hard-working, example-setting attitude, I would like to sincerely thank the

people of Pincher Creek and district for being the pioneers of the future for a better Alberta.

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

### World No Tobacco Day

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today, May 31, is World No Tobacco Day. World No Tobacco Day was created by the World Health Organization 20 years ago to draw global attention to the tobacco epidemic and the preventable death and disease it causes. This annual event raises awareness of the harmful effects of tobacco use, the business practices of tobacco companies, and helps inspire people around the world to embrace a healthy lifestyle.

Here in Alberta to commemorate World No Tobacco Day, AADAC hosted its annual provincial celebration this past Monday. Nearly 200 tobacco reduction stakeholders from around the province gathered together to share their ideas, learn from leading experts, and build new partnerships.

As part of this provincial celebration AADAC also presented the Barb Tarbox awards of excellence in tobacco reduction. To honour the legacy of Barb Tarbox, AADAC annually recognizes individuals, youth, businesses, and nonprofit groups that make significant contributions in the area of tobacco reduction, prevention, cessation, reduction or protection from second-hand smoke in Alberta.

After being diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, Barb Tarbox made it her mission to share her story with Alberta youth in the hopes of persuading them to quit smoking or preventing them from starting.

Mr. Speaker, the winners of the 2007 Barb Tarbox awards include: in the business category, All Weather Windows; in the nonprofit organization category, Red Deer College; in the individual category, Kathy McKenna; in the youth recognition category, Oliver school's Nellie McClung's BLAST team; and the youth scholarship award went to Trent Nabe of Medicine Hat. Each of these deserving winners has demonstrated outstanding leadership, commitment to their communities, and a dedication to tobacco reduction.

AADAC, Mr. Speaker, also remains dedicated to tobacco reduction and the principles of World No Tobacco Day. Under the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy AADAC and its many partners across the province continue to work towards our goals to reduce the number of young people starting to smoke, encourage and help current tobacco users to quit, and reduce nonsmokers' exposures to second-hand smoke.

Thank you.

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

### Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this weekend I had the honour of walking with Canada's poster child for the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. Peyton is four years old and lives in central Alberta. She has cystic fibrosis, but that doesn't stop her. Peyton was out in front, leading the many striders in the Great Strides walk held in many communities, including Red Deer, Edmonton, and Calgary.

Like most little girls her age Peyton enjoys playing with her dolls, fingerpainting, and camping. She also likes playing with her horse Jezzabelle. I learned from Peyton's mother, Charlotte, that Peyton is learning to count her own enzyme pills every day so that her stomach doesn't hurt when she eats.

Mr. Speaker, May is Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month, and these community events are held to increase awareness of CF. Cystic

fibrosis is the most common fatal inherited disease affecting young persons in Canada. CF attacks the lungs and digestive system. Thanks to advances in research and treatment half of all Canadians with CF are now expected to live into their late 30s and even beyond. Early diagnosis and early treatment have contributed to improved survival. We are proud that Alberta was the first jurisdiction in Canada to implement newborn screening for cystic fibrosis on April 1 of this year. Newborn screening for CF will provide CF babies with early treatment and a better start in life.

1:20

The Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation is a world leader in the fight against CF. Researchers discovered the gene responsible for cystic fibrosis in 1989 and continue to play a leading role in developing new treatments for this disease.

Please join me in congratulating Peyton, her family, all families who live with CF, all the Great Striders, the many volunteers, and the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation for raising CF awareness and for their work in helping to find a cure for this devastating disease.

Thank you.

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

### Lottery Grants

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has landed in hot water over lottery grants to its friends. It's even ignored the Auditor General's own lottery grant recommendations to set up clear guidelines. This failure is of concern to all Alberta taxpayers. Let me give you a few examples.

First, the government ignored the Auditor General's other initiative program recommendations. In fact, volunteers can't even find an application guideline for it on the government website. Second, CFEP. Again, the Auditor General found that the government broke its own rules. Third, Applewood, a well-connected Tory institution, broke Wild Rose rules. Fourth, in this session we learned that the community CIP guidelines were broken 43 times. While we don't question the merit of any of the volunteer organizations involved, what we do question is why one Tory-connected outfit got to splurge so much money on high-end furniture.

In a heated question exchange two weeks ago about this grant program, Mr. Speaker, I said that the department was paying five times more than they deserved anyway. Poor wording, perhaps, on my part. My intent was to say that the department paid five times more than the application guidelines allowed.

The Alberta Liberals have a long history of supporting volunteer organizations. As shadow minister for TPRC I will continue to fight for the thousands of worthy organizations that apply to this government for lottery funds. I will also continue to call into question any grants that have received favourable treatment just because they are connected to top Tories.

Thank you.

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

### Affordable Housing

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past several months we have seen how the affordable housing crisis affects Albertans from all walks of life. Especially hard hit are those living on fixed incomes as are many of Alberta's seniors. Recently we have heard many examples of massive rent increases, which have been labelled as gouging and called un-Albertan. These stories have been receiv-

ing a lot of media attention and have become topics of conversation in this House, in coffee shops, and on main streets throughout Alberta. Often overlooked, however, are the many less public stories that also deserve attention.

While landlords who gouge with \$1,000-plus rent increases are the exception, unaffordable rent increases are becoming the rule in Alberta. While they often don't make headlines, these rent increases are of great concern to Alberta's seniors whose fixed incomes simply do not allow them to cope with the rising rents. When seniors face even a moderate increase in their rents, they're often left wondering if their fixed incomes will allow them to both pay their rents and afford to eat. Surely we can all agree that it's unacceptable for our seniors to be forced to choose between staying in their homes and keeping food on their tables. However, this is precisely the choice that seniors and many other renters are now facing as the government has failed to adopt legislation with the power to help them.

Seniors in Alberta have spent their lives contributing to this province and creating the basis for the prosperity within reach of all Albertans, but the price of this prosperity is unacceptably high for many, especially seniors. Should seniors not also share in this prosperity? Must they now pray and hope that they are eligible for relief from the homeless and eviction prevention fund? What is this government going to do to help seniors remain in their homes? It is time to start showing Alberta seniors the respect they deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition with 530 signatures on it. The petition urges the Legislative Assembly to "request the inclusion of Complex Decongestive Therapy in the list of accepted therapeutic procedures covered by Alberta Health Care." Last year my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview tabled a similar petition with 330 names on it, for a total of 860 signatures today.

Thank you.

#### head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to table the program for the 2007 Edmonton mayor's awards for the city of Edmonton Advisory Board on Services for Persons with Disabilities. There was a nomination in this category for the Fort Road Boston Pizza in Edmonton-Manning, and they do a tremendous job in trying to help people with disabilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table today the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Al Weir, and I would like the government to please read this one particularly carefully because of their concerns about the severe effects of clawbacks on AISH payments when spouses, even seniors on pensions, earn even a modest income.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public

Accounts. The first is a letter dated May 28, 2007, to Mr. Steve Petz, president and chief executive officer, East Central health region, and it is a letter to confirm attendance at the Public Accounts Committee meeting on Tuesday, September 11, 2007, from 10 a.m. to noon.

The second tabling I have today is also a letter of confirmation to attend the Public Accounts Committee meeting on Tuesday, September 11, 2007, from 1 to 3, and this is a letter addressed to Mr. Bernie Blais, chief executive officer, Northern Lights health region, Fort McMurray.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are five copies of a letter from Mr. Robert Hoover to Mr. Bob Hawkesworth, a member of the Enmax board of directors, about the problem of Alberta workers who are dealing with high power lines playing a dangerous game of recloser roulette.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of a brochure outlining the services of VoicePrint. VoicePrint is mandated to broadcast full text readings of current articles from leading publications for all Canadians but particularly their core audience of people with vision and print restrictions. I know that many MLAs in the Assembly have gone to do readings for VoicePrint. It's an excellent organization.

Thank you.

#### head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Tarchuk, Minister of Children's Services, responses to questions raised by several members of the Assembly on May 16, 2007, Department of Children's Services 2007-08 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Snelgrove, Minister of Service Alberta, response to Written Question 12, asked for by Mr. Miller on May 14, 2007.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Environment, responses to questions raised by Members of the Legislative Assembly on May 14 and 16, 2007, Department of Environment 2007-08 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Environment, and the hon. Mr. Hancock, Minister of Health and Wellness, response to a question raised by Mr. Eggen, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, on May 16, 2007, departments of Environment and Health and Wellness 2007-08 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Danyluk, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, responses to questions raised by Members of the Legislative Assembly on May 8, 2007, Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing 2007-08 main estimates debate.

#### head: **Oral Question Period**

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

#### **Racing Entertainment Centre Project**

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's failure to release 1,700 pages of information from Alberta Environment

related to the Balzac project can mean just one thing: they're trying to hide something. For almost four months they have used every excuse in the book to delay releasing these documents. This confirms what everyone knows. This government is involved in this project up to its eyeballs. To the Premier: if your government has nothing to hide, why will it not release these documents to the public?

1:30

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday I gave the answer to the question. In terms of the due date it's June 7, and there are some obligations on behalf of the government for third-party disclosure. The minister has all the information, and he may deliver that information.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, water taken from the Red Deer River to service the Balzac project was always a bad idea. Drumheller has twice said that there is no way they're supplying water to the project. The Minister of Environment stated yesterday that his department is "simply not dealing with it anymore." Now, we know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has met various parties trying to force a deal on water for the Balzac project from the Bow River. My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us who his government has been meeting with to force a deal on water for the Balzac project: with municipalities, with First Nations groups, with water commissions, or any other entities?

**Mr. Stelmach:** We haven't been meeting with anybody to force anybody into anything.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [some applause] I guess they love me. Thank you. Thank you. [some applause] You know, it's a sign of desperation that they'll drown us out. [some applause] Carry it on, guys. Come on. That's your last tactic. You're on the run.

Southern Alberta is facing water concerns that are serious. Communities such as Strathmore and Turner Valley face tough decisions about limiting growth due to the lack of water. Farmers also face water issues . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. Premier. [interjections]

A long time ago I said that when I call it, it goes. You're on TV. TV does not understand any of the clapping or the other noises. All the microphones are live on the questioner.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've identified that sourcing water is a serious matter not only for communities, for agriculture, for industry. That's why we have the Water for Life strategy. We've doubled the budget, a 105 per cent increase in that area working with municipalities. We're going to be moving further with planning in those areas where we have to look at long-term solutions to the availability of water. We're doing that by meeting with municipalities and talking to them and developing a plan.

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

### School Construction

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Albertans continue to pay dearly for the Conservative government's complete failure to plan for our

province's growth. They refused for years to invest in the renewal of our public and separate schools. As we all know, of course, this Premier proudly led the calls from the Deep Six for cuts, and the results are clear. Dozens of Calgary communities are without schools, older schools are crumbling, and transportation costs are skyrocketing. This is another critical issue that this government is unable to deal with. My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain how in one of the wealthiest jurisdictions on the planet so many communities don't have the schools they need and deserve?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the growth in the province of Alberta has been phenomenal not only in the major cities, but you see growth in many rural communities. That is why we put forward an \$18 billion capital plan. It's the largest ever investment of public dollars in infrastructure in the province of Alberta. We also are in the process of introducing a policy that's going to be debated here in the House in terms of unbudgeted surpluses. We're asking that a good portion of those unbudgeted surpluses go towards maintenance so that we can not only maintain the buildings that we've built in the past but set some money aside for future generations to maintain all of the infrastructure we're building today.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I don't think anyone believes this government is getting value for all that money it's spending. Over and over this government tells people that it's spending vast amounts on education. My question will be to the Premier. Alberta governments could afford to build schools in the '50s, in the '60s, in the '70s, and even in the '80s, but for the past 15 years, when this government has never been wealthier, it suddenly can't manage to build schools. To the Premier: is this because of mismanagement or because the government doesn't support children going to school? Or is it simply incompetence?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, again, the opposition leader is totally wrong.

I will defer to the Minister of Education to read out the long list of new school projects, modernization projects in the province of Alberta.

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I think I heard the hon. member say that, quote, we're not getting value for money that we're spending. School boards spend 95 per cent of the budget, so I think the hon. member owes school boards an apology.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since this PC government has come to power, they've taken over \$200 billion in resource revenues out of the ground. They've managed to save almost none of it. Will the Premier admit that Alberta's education system needs truly sustainable funding sources so that we can provide the education system our children need?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, many times as a government we've said that we're looking at how we can broaden Alberta's tax base, reduce the reliance on a major revenue stream, which is oil and gas. One way, of course, to diversify is a knowledge-based economy. Schools, education, play such an important factor in moving towards that goal and diversification of the economy, and that's why we're investing the billions of dollars in public education. We'll continue to do so not only in the infrastructure but in the people that deliver

the programs and make sure that we continue to be one of the best in the world in our public education system.

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

### Investments in Tobacco Companies

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know, today is World No Tobacco Day. At long last the government caucus is finally catching up to public opinion and moving towards a province-wide smoking ban in public places. For that, congratulations are in order. I want to assure you that the Official Opposition is prepared to sit further into this spring and summer if we can facilitate passage of this very important and long overdue legislation. My first question is for the minister of health. This year \$9.1 million is being spent on the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy. Can the minister share with this House the annual cost of tobacco use to the Alberta economy in health care costs, lost productivity, and other costs?

**Mr. Hancock:** Four hundred and seventy-one million, \$8 million, \$9 million, and \$1.296 billion: those are the costs that we incur every year as a result of using tobacco. The \$471 million is the direct health care cost. The indirect cost to our community and our society is \$1.296 billion.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Against that, Mr. Speaker, we spend \$9 million on the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy.

To the Minister of Finance: can the minister share with this House how much money this government has directly and indirectly invested in tobacco-based companies?

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

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows because I have sent a letter to him, the amount is roughly \$57 million.

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly did know. I asked it to share it with all members of this Assembly.

My last question, Mr. Speaker, is for the Premier, and it's a very simple question. On this most appropriate of days will you and your government finally do the right thing: stop sending mixed messages to Albertans and get rid of the investments in tobacco-based companies?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We had a very extensive discussion on this during Committee of Supply, and what I outlined to the hon. member is that we're actually putting all of our investment strategies towards a financial management committee that will be formed almost immediately. We're asking them what it should be. On one hand, we have to say that we should be maximizing the amount of dollars for Albertans versus ethical investment. What is ethical for one person is not necessarily ethical for others. So this is a very important discussion item. It's a discussion item that we have had a lot of talking with the opposition member, and it's something we are taking very, very seriously and will be discussing in this House.

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

1:40

### Royalty Review

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Finance was quoted in yesterday's reports as being nervous about the royalty review. Well, he should be because Albertans are watching. Energy companies' profits are hitting the stratosphere while the government projects declining energy revenues in future budgets. Increasingly, the royalty review looks like a sham, with energy companies crying crocodile tears and the Minister of Finance trying to lower the public's expectations for meaningful change. To the minister: why is the minister so nervous about the royalty review? Is it because he's been torn between the oil patch lobby and the expectations of a public who know they've been hosed for years?

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

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the hon. member is absolutely correct. Any time you take a very critical examination of a revenue stream of roughly \$10 billion or \$11 billion, or close to a third of our budget, you have to be nervous.

What initially we talked about with the review panel was that they need to take a holistic approach on how they look at royalties. They need to take a look to ensure that Albertans receive their fair share as well as keeping the economic activity in the province of Alberta going. I'll certainly respect their decisions, and we hope to have their decisions back by around the end of August. Certainly, they're an independent panel and will be making independent decisions.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, given the minister's public comments about concern about the oil patch and its future earnings, I'd just like to remind him that Suncor's earnings were \$551 million for the first four months of this year. EnCana's first-quarter earnings are up 15 per cent to \$1.8 billion this year. The new titleholder for Canadian corporate profits is EnCana with a \$6.5 billion profit in 2006, which exceeds the GDP of a number of small countries. So my question is to the Minister of Finance. How can he tell Albertans that the energy companies will not invest in the oil sands . . .

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

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The answer is very obvious. EnCana is a world-wide company. It's a world-wide Alberta company that is investing right around the world. Their profits are being made from every other country in the world, being brought back to Alberta, funnelled into Alberta, and being spent in Alberta. EnCana is a true Alberta success story.

**Mr. Mason:** EnCana may be a true Alberta success story, but this Minister of Finance is not.

I would just like to ask him to please come clean with the people of Alberta and tell them that EnCana and other energy companies are making a killing in Alberta and that they're not paying enough in royalties to the owner of the resources, which is the people of this province.

**Dr. Oberg:** Mr. Speaker, our Premier was very wise during the leadership campaign. What he stated was that we would get an independent panel of people to take a look at the royalties, have a very objective look at what the royalties were. Yes, indeed, all eight leadership candidates said exactly the same thing. That is what we

are in the process of doing. We're looking at it from a very objective point of view. The panel that we have put together is full of experts. They've heard probably around 50 or 60 different submissions. In the first week on our website we had 17,000 hits from Albertans. So we're going to be taking all of this information together and formulating from the panel the best possible results.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

#### **Honeybee Die-off**

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albert Einstein once said: "If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe then man would only have four years of life left." No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man. Alberta's honeybees have had a huge die-off this year. Honey producers have lost at least 30 per cent of their bees; some in the north, 80 per cent. Bees are important. Pollination of crops is crucial. Our agriculture needs bees. Alberta exports a lot of honey, some of the best in the world. My question is to the minister of agriculture. When do you expect your ministry will note the extent of the die-off, and what means are you employing to find out given that this is a busy season for producers?

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

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A little bit of history along with a very good question, a timely question and probably kind of a concerning question. Yes, certainly, the bee industry is very important. We get about \$50 million a year out of it, and it certainly pollinates our crops and adds there. We are already conducting a scientific survey to gauge the status of Alberta bees. We extended the survey deadline twice because beekeepers have been late with their surveys. We're now following up with phone calls on the surveys. Although not all surveys are available, it appears that the average loss in Alberta is . . .

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you. A supplementary to the same minister. Honey producers say that U.S. bees are no more dangerous than those from other sources. With all costs included, importing bees from the U.S. is only one-third the cost of importing from New Zealand, the other main source. Given the bee die-off, importation is necessary. To stay in business, cost counts to producers. How will your ministry convince the federal government to allow bees from the U.S. to cross our border into Alberta?

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

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working very closely with both the federal government and our industry on this issue. I have already written to Chuck Strahl, the federal minister of agriculture, representing the CFIA, to conduct their new risk assessment on importing honeybees from the U.S. Given the record challenges facing beekeepers in Alberta and across Canada this year, we are hoping that the federal government will listen to our bee industry and allow the importation of U.S. bees.

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Official

Opposition laughs about issues from rural Alberta and doesn't seem to care very much about them, but these are important.

The honey industry in some parts of our province is extremely stressed. Some producers compare it to the effect of BSE on cattle producers a few years ago. What assistance is available to honey producers who have suffered significant loss due to circumstances beyond their control?

**The Speaker:** Point of order.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right. It is no laughing matter to the beekeepers in Alberta. I would say that in assisting, the Canadian agriculture income stabilization program assists all agricultural producers, and AFSC has been working with the Beekeepers' Association to examine how producers will be impacted and how CAIS could assist.

Just to follow up on the first question that I didn't finish, in Alberta we've lost about 31 per cent this year, and the national average over five years has been about 18 per cent. It's not associated with the colony collapse disorder that we hear about in other countries.

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

#### **Smoke-free Places Legislation**

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the government approved a provincial ban on smoking in all public places in Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister tell this House what the government's proposals will mean for Albertans?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're planning to bring forward to this House legislation which will, among other things, prohibit smoking in all public places and workplaces, including within a reasonable distance from doors, windows, and air intakes; ban power walls and other tobacco retail displays and promotion; prohibit the sale of tobacco products in designated places such as pharmacies, universities, colleges, and health care facilities. We already have seen the tobacco tax increase, so what it will mean to Albertans is an improvement in their health status.

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

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given the support for the government's proposals, can the minister tell this House when government will bring legislation before the Assembly?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there are still a number of processes. We have a very careful policy process in this government before we bring forward legislation. We've been through the policy discussions, and now we need to go through the legislative process discussions, but it's my hope that we'll be able to table legislation this spring so that Albertans will be able to see what we're talking about, see what it means to them, and have an opportunity to plan for its implementation. We'll be talking, hopefully, over the summer with retailers and others because it will have an impact on their business, and they need to know that impact and be prepared to plan for it.

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

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. How does the minister expect this legislation to improve the health of Albertans?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since being appointed Minister of Health and Wellness and in the mandate letter that was given to me by the Premier, one of the four mandates that I was given was to strengthen public health services that promote wellness and injury and disease prevention. Well, the single most obvious thing to do is to reduce the amount of tobacco use because that tobacco use not only impacts us in terms of lung cancer. It's other forms of cancer, it's heart disease, it's lung disease, and in so many other ways it impacts the health of Albertans. By having legislation which is primarily aimed at ensuring that young Albertans do not start smoking, we will improve the health status of Albertans. We also want to continue to encourage adults who have started smoking to stop, and that will improve their lifestyle.

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

1:50

#### Royalty Rates

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1996 published in the *Alberta Gazette* were two orders in council that gave both Suncor and Syncrude the one-time option to change their royalty structure from that of synthetic crude oil to bitumen. My first question is to the Premier. Why did the government sign this sweet deal to allow Suncor and Syncrude the one-time option to pay an even lower royalty rate than they are now?

**Mr. Stelmach:** I was appointed to cabinet in March of 1997, so I don't know what happened in 1996. But we'll get the information and present it to the hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** This is a very important issue, and I'm disappointed in the Premier.

Again to the Premier: how much will Suncor and Syncrude save in royalty payments to the province if they are allowed to pay royalties on bitumen and not on synthetic crude oil?

**Mr. Stelmach:** That's one of the reasons we're doing the royalty review. I guess that there's no answer I can deliver in this House to satisfy the member, so we'll just go to the third one.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you. The constituents of this province, who own the resources, would appreciate an answer. Again to the Premier: is Suncor still using an allowed cost, which is an annual amount of \$158 million, for historical costs which were not being deducted before 1996?

**Mr. Stelmach:** I could be a walking encyclopedia and still have – Mr. Speaker, we are undergoing a total royalty review, not only oil sands but conventional oil and gas and coal-bed methane. That information will be presented to all Albertans as shareholders in this great province by the end of August – that's the due date – and

Albertans themselves will be able to look at the information and answer a lot of these questions for themselves.

Thank you.

#### Affordable Housing Projects

**Mr. Doerksen:** Mr. Speaker, with reference to an earlier question, Notre Dame high school, Hunting Hills high school, St. Francis of Assisi, and Mattie McCullough have all been built within the last 15 years, not to mention Lindsay Thurber and Eastview.

My question, though, is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing about the 13 new affordable housing units that were announced earlier this month. Can he please explain to this Assembly how the priority of these projects was evaluated?

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right that on May 17 we did announce \$50 million worth of projects for affordable housing, which took place in Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Ponoka, Stettler, Westlock. This federal funding was allocated, and the criteria were needs in the community, proposed clients for the project, the proposed rental rates. We also considered the experience of the operator and the availability of land.

**Mr. Doerksen:** Mr. Speaker, based on the two press releases, one dated May 17 and the other dated May 24, a simple calculation shows that the cost of these units varies from as much as \$350,000 per unit to \$35,000 per unit. Can the minister tell us how we are making sure that we get value for our money?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, each individual application in the project is independent. I would say to the hon. member that probably the average cost of a project is \$150,000 a unit. We also have, I mean, some cases that are lot less. Maybe I can use the example of Habitat for Humanity where we have private donations, we have companies that provide supplies, we have donated labour, and the cost per unit is approximately \$50,000. This reduces the cost, then, but does provide for more units and more availability for renters.

**Mr. Doerksen:** Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. I know of at least two other applications from Red Deer, one from the Piper Creek Foundation and the other from the Twilight Homes Foundation, that have applied under this program. Can he tell us how these people can find out where their projects are in the approval process?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, what has happened is that the process has changed. The autonomy of these projects has gone to municipalities. The city of Red Deer is getting over \$5 million. Those individual applications that were not accepted – or there wasn't enough funding for the acceptance of those projects – will be turned over to the city to consider and to look at the needs of that particular municipality.

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

#### Temporary Foreign Workers

**Mr. Bonko:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister admitted that she cannot help exploited temporary foreign workers because



she doesn't know where they are. The government has lost control over the temporary worker program. Albertans have lost faith in their government. How can people have faith in their government when they lose people? This program was bad from the beginning, and it's getting worse now. It's becoming embarrassing. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: how can her department know exactly how many temporary foreign workers are in this province and where they're located?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, I've acknowledged that that's a real challenge, but let's be clear: this is a federal program. This is a federal program where this province is co-operating. We are developing an annex to that made-in-Alberta immigration agreement with the federal government. We become involved when we talk to the federal government about these kinds of challenges. Many of the people that develop relationships with recruiters and contract temporary foreign workers certainly advise the provincial government. Clearly, there currently is no requirement for them to inform the provincial government, but many of them do in the course of their duties. We are looking at different ways and approaches to reach . . .

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The CNRL Horizon project was one of the first Albertan sites to take advantage of the temporary foreign worker program. We all know that there are a large number of Chinese immigrants working on the site. We also know that two recently died up there, but that's about all that we know. To the minister: could she provide to this Assembly the exact number of temporary foreign workers on the CNRL Horizon project, and how can she be assured that they're being treated fairly?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, there are about 200 foreign workers on that site. Principally, the foreign workers that are probably being referenced by the hon. member are from China. There is currently a stop work order in place, in the capacity that embraced the three tanks that were being questioned. Beyond that, we have an investigation under way. We have retained engineers to give us advice about the wisdom of when work could commence in that area. While that investigation is under way, there will be very little that I can provide this Assembly that would be of use.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister argued that she's confident that temporary foreign workers are being protected because her department hired 72 new staff to investigate their complaints. Clearly, the minister does not understand the issue. Exploited workers are unlikely to come forward. They've been lied to about their rights. Many lack the language skills, and this government denies them any sort of labour mobility. In these conditions, they're not complaining; it isn't easy to do that. To this minister: is the government committed to proactively checking up on the temporary foreign workers? If so, how will they do this? They don't know where they are.

**Ms Evans:** You know, Mr. Speaker, I'm listening to somebody who is determined to make a very full glass look half-empty. There are many good things happening with temporary foreign workers in this province. Just recently, in fact at lunch, the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture and myself were privileged to hear about the co-operation of the Federation of Independent Business,

the health and lodging association, the Canadian Restaurant and Food Services Association, and others that are making this a thoroughly successful program. There are many places where we are able to provide that kind of data, but clearly there have been times, and in the case of the Indian workers that came over unsolicited . . .

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

## 2:00 Nonresident Hunting Regulations

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents of Battle River-Wainwright and, indeed, many eastern Albertans have grown concerned over changes to regulations over out-of-country hunters entering the province to hunt. The permits they're entitled to have been reduced to only six days. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: can the minister explain why such changes were made and what policy decision encouraged this new regulation?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to explain the policy change, but I want to first confirm that the first priority of Alberta fish and wildlife is to provide quality hunting and fishing for resident Albertans.

**An Hon. Member:** First priority?

**Dr. Morton:** First priority. Yes.

Having said that, we've always welcomed nonresident and alien nonresident hunters, and we did introduce the six-day alien resident waterfowl licence last year. The purpose of introducing this six-day licence is to monitor the length of time nonresident aliens are in Alberta.

**Mr. Mason:** What's an alien?

**Dr. Morton:** A noncitizen, Brian.

**An Hon. Member:** NDP.

**Dr. Morton:** Not NDP, yeah.  
The concerns are . . .

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

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. American hunters come to Alberta to hunt, spend a lot of money on hotels, food, supplies, and so on, and are a boon to many small communities who count on those hunters and their money that they spend. Now, those hunters, at least the ones that come to my constituency, are crossing the border to hunt in Saskatchewan, and their money is going with them. Does the minister understand the negative impact this policy is having on eastern Alberta border communities?

**Dr. Morton:** Yes. Mr. Speaker, we do understand the economic value of hunting to rural Alberta, and we want to encourage it. But we're concerned about a new trend in what we believe to be rogue guides, who are nonresident aliens who come in, pretend they're hunters, but they're actually guides. Instead of spending two or three weeks here, they spend two or three months here, supposedly hunting with their friends, who, in fact, are paying clients. That's against the laws of Alberta. The only paid guiding in Alberta are resident Albertans. I'm happy to report that just last month we

achieved a conviction of \$25,000 and a lifetime ban from ever hunting in Alberta again for somebody who was found guilty of doing just this.

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

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that laws made to stop a few people who are breaking off and have impact on large numbers of groups who did nothing wrong, will the minister consider changing the regulations and perhaps do some advertising to bring back the hunters to eastern Alberta to help those communities that have been hit hard by the policies of the department?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, at this time we're not prepared to change the regulation, but I do want to assure the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright that we do and will support hunting tourism. Just in the last two weeks we met with Alberta Tourism to encourage greater exposure of hunting in their facilities. We'll be coming forward with a new website, a licensing website, in the next about 18 months which will feature those types of hunting opportunities on the Internet, and we'll also be working to add hunting tourism to the rural development strategy.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

#### Calgary Ring Road

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's incompetence to deal with our overheated economy knows no bounds. To rectify its negligent infrastructure planning over the past years and to help out corporate friends, this government keeps pursuing P3 financing. On March 19 of this year the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation told this House that the Calgary ring road "will be done two years ahead of schedule than if we would have done it the conventional way, and we're going to have savings of hundreds of millions of dollars." My question to the minister is simply this. We're going to ask him to prove it. Will the minister, then, agree today to release a public-sector comparator that confirms his statement to this Assembly?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, you know what has been going on in cost escalations and how expensive prices have been rising. I'll tell you what: that hon. member should be wrapping his arms around everybody that even talked P3 on the money that we're going to end up saving by getting the job done now. Certainly, he can come and see whatever he'd like to see on anything to do with that.

**Mr. Martin:** I'm trying to quit wrapping my arms around people like you.

Mr. Speaker, the point is that we heard the same rhetoric about Anthony Henday here in Edmonton before. When we found out the public-sector comparator was the exact opposite of what the government said, we found out that the taxpayers could be about \$70 million cheaper. My question is again: rather than the rhetoric will the minister release the public-sector comparator that tells the Assembly the figures that he has? We want to know that in this Assembly.

**Mr. Ouellette:** Yes, sir, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Martin:** I'd like to then follow up. We were promised this a couple of years ago, Mr. Speaker. When will he do this in this

Assembly, release the public-sector comparator on the Calgary ring road?

**Mr. Ouellette:** As soon as I have time, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

#### Sign Language Interpreter Program

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past several weeks myself and, I suspect, a number of members of the Legislature have received a number of letters from concerned members of the deaf and hard of hearing community as well as prospective interpreters in American Sign Language. The sign language interpreter diploma program, a two-year course planned for Lakeland College, did not get funding in the recent budget, leaving a number of prospective students wondering what happened. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: can the minister explain why this worthwhile program was approved by his department but did not receive funding?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the program was approved at Lakeland College. They have, actually, two programs that were approved late in the year. The funding envelopes at the time had already been expended to the other course loads because of student timelines and the timelines at the institutions. The previous course, which was at Grant MacEwan College, had very low enrolments. That's where this other course from Lakeland is coming from. We are looking forward to proposals coming from Lakeland College for this fall, and we'll review the analysis of that when it comes forward.

**Mr. Tougas:** Well, in 2006 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that deaf and hard of hearing people had the right to government services in their choice of either ASL or the French alternative. Without funding this year Lakeland College will not start producing new trained ASL interpreters for at least another year. There's already such a desperate shortage of trained sign language interpreters that even Lakeland College couldn't hire one for their graduation ceremony. Is the minister concerned that without this program deaf and hard of hearing people may not be able to get government services in the language of their choice, as the Supreme Court has ruled?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not concerned that they won't be able to get those services. What I'm concerned about is providing the appropriate level of infrastructure in our institutions to provide the courses that the students want and that society demands. Certainly, Lakeland College has been very proactive in providing those two courses, that are actually integrated in a pathway, if you will, for other courses as well. As I said in my previous answer, we're looking forward to the proposal coming to us, and we'll look at the planning envelope and the envelope for this fall's enrolments.

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

**Mr. Tougas:** I have nothing else.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

#### Youth Apprenticeship Program

**Ms Calahasen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With our overheated

economy we all know that there's a huge need for skilled labour. One of the possible solutions is training our own – imagine that – and what better place to start but in the junior high schools. We've had three pilot projects in three school divisions doing exactly that, being very creative, getting students to sample a variety of trade possibilities in the private sector. My question is to the Minister of Education. What results did you receive regarding these pilot projects, and what did they achieve?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, the Member for Lesser Slave Lake is referring to the youth apprenticeship program, commonly called YAP, and it is funded, actually, by Alberta Advanced Education and Technology. The hon. member is correct. It's a six-year pilot project that's now in its third year. This fall we will be looking at assessing the results to date. The project basically allows students to visit work sites and tradespeople to visit schools. The early indications are that it's being well received.

2:10

**Ms Calahasen:** You're right, Mr. Speaker. The project is really well received.

My question is, then, to the same minister. If this program is coming to its completion, could you please indicate whether the program will continue and whether or not we are prepared to do that?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the program has still got several years to run, and the determination on whether to continue it will be part of the assessment that will be taking place this fall. As I said, it is currently funded under Advanced Education and Technology, and I guess, at the end of the day, the determination of whether to continue funding it will be with the minister.

**Ms Calahasen:** I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker, but the intent was to expand it further. If it is going to be something that is going to be really working well and we are going to be satisfying the needs of a labour shortage and we are trying to ensure that our kids stay in school, can we then expand this further into other schools so that we can see it be successful?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, I guess that would be our desired result. There's no question that the one area where we can certainly do better both on high school completion rates and training our own is in the native and aboriginal communities, but again we need to do the assessment and determine whether or not the program is working. Maybe it's even a situation where you change it slightly. That'll all be determined this summer.

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

#### Renter Assistance Programs

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The homeless and eviction prevention fund is a temporary measure designed for renters who need one-time immediate assistance, and it's only good for a month. Everyone else is directed to the Municipal Affairs rent supplement programs, which are income tested. This program won't help Albertans who are spending anywhere from 40 to 80 per cent of their income on rent but are still not considered low income; in other words, anyone over \$26,000 for a one bedroom or \$33,000 for a two bedroom. My first question is to the minister of housing. What is the government doing to help these Albertans? If there are no temporary rent controls, what else can these renters do?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, we do have the temporary support that comes through Employment, Immigration and Industry. What does take place is in the rent supplements. We take individuals that have the most need and address those concerns. We did add \$285 million to the budget of Housing to address those concerns.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of EII. The homelessness and eviction prevention fund requires renters to either be in arrears or to have notice of eviction from their landlords. Why would this government rather force renters into debt, possibly ruining their credit rating, in order to receive support? Why aren't temporary rent caps an option?

**Ms Evans:** The issue of rent caps is something that our ministry is not directly responsible for, but I think there's been quite a significant amount of discussion in this Assembly. Let me just say that we have located 65 people, helping them establish new residences, and 273 families – 273 – that have been given assistance to avoid eviction. So we are providing that support and assistance.

**Ms Blakeman:** These programs are not working. They're too narrow.

Again to the minister of housing. Rather than address the rent crisis in this province, this government's short-term solution is to pay landlords the rent that Albertans cannot afford. Why does this government prefer to subsidize landlords rather than implementing temporary rent caps, that protect Albertans against unaffordable increases?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this government's solution is making sure that there are more rental units available and that we have some stability in the market and making sure that there are more units that are being built. Also, I want to say that we have changed the program as well to try to accommodate individuals who need to have a rent supplement. We deal directly with those individuals and support them for a rent supplement instead of dealing all through landlords.

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

#### Aboriginal Housing Program

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More than \$16 million in new affordable housing projects to benefit aboriginal people was announced last week. Low-income aboriginal peoples and their families living off reserve in Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Cache, Lac La Biche, Lethbridge, Lloydminster, and Wabasca will benefit from 370 new affordable units approved for funding in their communities. To the minister of municipal affairs. Cam Alexis, the chief of the Alexis band in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, is the head of housing development for Treaty 6 nations. He has asked me if another round of grant applications will be considered.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, what has taken place is that this is a partnership with the federal government. The federal government has committed three years of support for housing and housing projects for Alberta. The first round, as indicated, has been distributed. We are in the process of looking at the second round and looking at the individual applications. And yes, they will be looked at.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, again to the same minister: will the minister consider communities like Whitecourt and the Alexis band – Whitecourt using municipal sustainability funds and the Alexis band using this grant – to partner in projects to provide more housing projects?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess the quick answer would be yes. The long answer would be that any sort of partnering that we can do to enhance the support given to communities, working together with agencies, working together with groups, is very positive.

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

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This time to the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs. Given those answers, what is he doing to promote the maximum use of these grants for our native and aboriginal communities?

**Mr. Boutilier:** That's a very good question. Actually . . .

**The Speaker:** I haven't recognized you yet.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** But proceed.

**Mr. Boutilier:** I'm so excited about getting a question, Mr. Speaker, that I jumped the gun.

What I am doing is answering questions that the hon. member has asked about the communication with our First Nations and our Métis settlements in terms of this important, positive government initiative: millions of dollars going to help in terms of affordable housing. We're working closely in partnership with the minister of municipal affairs. I might also add that the Alexis band is an excellent example of the partnerships that this government has formed in the past and, certainly, will do in the future.

**The Speaker:** Was that the short answer or the long answer?  
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

#### **Renter Assistance Programs** (continued)

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, despite numerous appeals for detailed eligibility requirements for the homeless and eviction prevention fund, the minister responsible still has not made clear whether renters in need of assistance will be income tested or asset tested. Rather, the minister claims that this fund has flexibility because the director has discretion on a case-by-case basis. My question to the minister is: when renters contact any of the 59 Alberta Works offices and seek benefits, what are they going to be told? Given that not all cases will go straight to the director, what guidelines are in place for front-line staff to follow? What are the guidelines?

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the comments I could make is that family size, family situation, pending employment: these are all things considered. If a worker needs their truck for work, obviously that's not going to be counted as a negative situation because they have that particular asset. I think it's very responsible to enable the workers to look at the individual circumstances that are facing the families. The policy is to give the director flexibility. That director, in turn, can work with the workers that are counselling

people on their needs for income supports and provide them accordingly.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, can the minister assure us that there's going to be fairness and consistency between offices? I mean, where is the line between discretion and inconsistency here?

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member wouldn't be attempting to speak deleteriously about our staff between offices. Our staff take the policy and strive to interpret it in the fairest possible way. We recognize the pressures on families. We have spoken to all of the 59 centres, assuring them that we want them to be compassionate and considerate of the plights of Albertans. So I'm anticipating that this is a very consistent policy with some kind of capacity for compassion.

2:20

**Dr. B. Miller:** Mr. Speaker, we get information from front-line staff that the information they receive from the department one day is different from the information they get the next day. The question of consistency is really important. I mean, clients are really in need. It's really confusing to them what this program is all about. This government has had plenty of time to come up with and communicate a really clear plan, but Albertans are still confused by flawed and inconsistent programs and policy. Will the minister admit that this government's constant scrambling is impacting services to people in need?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, I think that the 65 families that found new residences and the 273 families that were saved from eviction wouldn't say that we are constantly scrambling. They would say that we are responding. I'd like names, dates, applications that weren't properly dealt with, because that seems to be the inference from the member opposite, so that I can on an individual basis explore them.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, that was 94 questions and answers today.

#### **head: Projected Government Business**

**The Speaker:** The Official Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 7(6) I'd like to request that the Government House Leader share with the House the projected government House business for the week of June 4 to June 7, please.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, June 4, in the hope and anticipation that later on today the Assembly might approve a motion to allow for an evening sitting, we would hope to deal with government business starting at 8 p.m. That government business would include Committee of the Whole on Bill 33, Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act; Bill 26, Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007; and Bill 32, Animal Health Act; time permitting, second reading on Bill 29, Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2007, and Bill 39, Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2007, and perhaps committee on those, time permitting. That would be Monday evening if the Legislature approves a motion later on today.

On Tuesday under Government Motions, depending on progress Monday night, Government Motion 27 calling for an evening sitting on Wednesday would go forward, if necessary, depending on progress Monday night. Committee of Supply in the afternoon would be Infrastructure and Transportation; Employment, Immigration and Industry; and Seniors and Community Supports. That's a New Democrat opposition day. In the evening on Tuesday, again, if the motion is passed this afternoon, Committee of Supply on Education; Employment, Immigration and Industry; Seniors and Community Supports; and Children's Services.

On Wednesday, June 6, in the afternoon cross-ministry day with Executive Council, and again, if we require the motion on Tuesday, the evening session would deal with the same order of business that I talked about on Monday in Committee of the Whole.

On Thursday, June 7, Committee of Supply cross-ministry on land use, and that would involve Energy, Sustainable Resource Development, Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Environment. Then at the expiry of the time for Committee of Supply votes would be scheduled with respect to all matters before Committee of Supply, at 5:45 or earlier if time permits.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, before getting to Orders of the Day, we have at least one point of order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

#### Point of Order Imputing Motives

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier in the proceedings, in an exchange on a question, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning made some comments that under 23 (h) making allegations, (i) imputing false or unavowed motives, and (j) using abusive or insulting language I would argue were inappropriate comments to make. They were sweeping allegations that covered indiscriminately members of the Liberal caucus here, and I would argue that the imputed motives are flat-out wrong and inaccurate.

It was during his question about the bees, and it's interesting because at the exact time he was asking that question, I was having a quiet side conversation with the Leader of the Official Opposition, who was underlining to me how important that whole issue was. He certainly used language in his comments or his side comments that provoked a response from members of this caucus, and they certainly view that language as abusive. It certainly did create a disorder and provoked debate.

I think what's interesting here is that there was an assumption that the Member for Edmonton-Manning heard laughter as compared to the regular hubbub in this House and that he believes that it was made by members of the Opposition. Frankly, how does he know, if it was laughter, that it wasn't made by any of the other 82 members in the House? That can be very difficult to distinguish. And there was an assumption that the response was specific to his comments. There are often side conversations that happen while question period is on. Actually, later in question period I noted an eruption of laughter from the front bench on the government side, and I don't think it was in response to the question that was being asked by the member at the time, but how would you know?

I would argue that the member has contravened all three of 23 (h), (i), and (j) and would ask for a retraction of that comment, please.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on this point.

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm surprised that a point of

order would be called on this matter. You know, I look at *Beauchesne's*, page 22, article 75, and that speaks to freedom of speech. "The privilege of freedom of speech is both the least questioned and the most fundamental right of the Member of Parliament on the floor of the House and in committee." I would think that that would apply to this Legislature as well.

Certainly, in looking at Standing Orders 23 (h), (i), and (j), to say "makes allegations against another Member" speaks in the singular, and I did not in any way make an allegation against another member, Mr. Speaker. Subsection (i) says, "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." I did not make anything to any particular member. "Uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." There was greater disorder prior to my statement than after, in my opinion.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the nature of the issue and laughing at it, it was certainly clear to me that there was laughter coming from the benches of the Official Opposition. I did make some comment as to that, but I believe, from some experience, that there was nothing that would have been untoward in due order in this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Here's what was said: "I know the Official Opposition laughs about issues from rural Alberta and doesn't seem to care very much about them, but these are important." First of all, the imputation of motives under Standing Order 23 does not apply to caucuses; it applies to individuals. So that would be an inappropriate usage with respect to that. Secondly, there was no doubt at all in my mind that there was uproar before the Member for Edmonton-Manning was even recognized to raise a question. In this case the sightlines of the chair go directly to the position of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, and I have to agree about the laughs because I saw them with my eyes. No point of order.

Hon. Government House Leader, do you have a point of order?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, it had been my intention to raise a point of order with respect to the inappropriateness of the question from Edmonton-Gold Bar because it related to specific details and related to a matter that was some 15 years old and would perhaps have been more appropriate in written questions, but I don't think we need to belabour that point, so I will withdraw the point of order.

head: 2:30

#### Orders of the Day

head:

#### Government Motions

**The Clerk:** Motion 24. The hon. Mr. Hancock.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, might it be appropriate to call 25 and 26 before 24?

#### Evening Sitting on June 4

25. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly pursuant to Standing Order 4 convene an evening sitting beginning at 8 p.m. on Monday, June 4, 2007, for the consideration of government business.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just in case we run out of time, 24 could happen another time, and 25 is important for today. When we brought in the new Standing Orders, there was consideration of trying to make sure that we didn't sit in the evenings unless it was necessary. We're coming to the time which has been well

advertised. In Standing Orders for the future we've provided for sessions to begin on the first Monday in February and to end normally on the first Thursday of June. This session, of course, started a little later than that. We have clearly signalled that the intention is to go to the 14th of June.

So we're coming to the close of the spring session. There will be, of course, a fall session called as per the new orders, for I think it's the first Monday in November to the first Thursday in December to deal with the remaining business. But there are some matters of government business which my colleagues have advised me they need to have passed during the spring session, and thus it would make sense to have a session in the evening on Monday so that we can deal with matters that need to come to Committee of the Whole. The Committee of the Whole is a time frame when you perhaps need more time depending on what sort of amendments come forward and in order to ensure that we deal with the business that we have.

We've had a spring session where since the budget came down, Committee of Supply has occupied most of the government business time of the session, which is quite appropriate when you have a budget the size of the government of Alberta budget. It's appropriate to have the time that we've used in Committee of Supply in examining the estimates of each department, but it's also necessary before we rise this spring to complete certain elements of government business. So I'd ask the Legislative Assembly for permission to sit on Monday evening so that we can deal with the items that I indicated in the Projected Government Business section.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are two motions in front of us, three actually, but two about additional evening sittings. We're dealing with them in order. This is dealing with an additional evening sitting on Monday, June 4.

Mr. Speaker, I note that in the revised temporary Standing Orders there is a setting down of the expectations of an end date under usual circumstances, but we're not in that this year. The government chose to come into the Assembly several weeks after it usually does – I think three or possibly even four weeks later – and now there is a great rush to try and get out by a specified date, and frankly there is no specified date. It's not in the Standing Orders.

The government has absolute authority and, frankly, the majority vote to be able to extend the sitting of this Legislature any time it wants. I've already signalled the opposition's reluctant willingness, but willingness, to extend the session during the day and for us to come back and do this business during the day. We did indeed go into those negotiations saying that it would really just need to be extraordinary circumstances for us to be sitting at night. We've had two weeks' worth of additional night sittings now to try and accommodate the government's desire to have the House rise by the 14th of June, and this is adding now a third week, the beginning of a third week of night sittings.

So I would argue that any business that the government needs to get done – I mean, one, we should've come into the session earlier to get that business done; two, to me it's reflective of the disorganization of the government, that it can't seem to organize its business in order to get it done in the time that we have before us; three, if it's really necessary to do it, then let's do it during the day, not calling people back here at night. If we were going to do that, then we could maybe be able to take the time to pass the coming bill on smoking. We'd be happy to do that.

I'm not happy to see this before us. Certainly, the government has the majority vote to pass it, and I'm sure they will today. But I don't think this is in the spirit of what we were trying to negotiate. Why

the government insists on pulling in additional evening sittings instead of just extending the sitting beyond an arbitrary day, I don't know and I don't support.

Thank you.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to get too uptight about this. If this starts to happen next year when we lay out the time frame and when we know it, then I think I would be very upset because that certainly would go against the negotiations that we had. In my opinion, I knew that the 14th was the sort of the deadline, and I expected this time to have night sittings. I don't like them particularly, but I'm not going to get that excited about it one way or the other. I just want to say on record here, though, that I'm prepared to support this motion but with the proviso that this should not be happening next year because that's clearly what we did negotiate when we set the time frame.

In this case this year I would tend to agree that there's been a fair amount of disorganization getting it going and the rest of it, but that's beside the point. We're here where we're at now, and I think most people expected the 14th to be the end date. So I think we might as well get on with it.

But I just do want to make the warning that this should not occur next year because then, clearly, we will come into the Assembly in February, and the end date is June, and there should be no night sittings. It should flow the way we set it up in the House leaders' meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

The hon. Government House Leader to close the debate.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just two points: obviously, if we go past the 14th, there's a constituency week scheduled, so we'd go into the last week of June. The opposition knows that, and if they're prepared to sit, that's fine with them. But it's been very clear from at least halfway through the session that June 14 was our scheduled end date.

With respect to the negotiations that have been referenced, it was clear when we started talking about an end date – and I'll give this to House leader of the Official Opposition, that she always maintained that she didn't need an end date. But most sessions that have a clear, defined start and finish also have what I would call a fail-safe motion. A fail-safe motion is a motion which allows certain legislation to be passed. We agreed not to bring that kind of a fail-safe motion in, but one of the things that we needed then was the ability to either call an evening sitting or extend the session.

So this is not contrary to any of the negotiations or any of the discussions, but I would agree with the hon. member from the third party that this should not be our practice. It wouldn't be our intention to have this as our practice because one of the things that was intended out of those negotiations was to have the type of session where members could have a family life, go home at a reasonable time to their families or to their constituencies and constituency events, and that would be the practice that I would hope that we would intend to follow in the next year.

[Government Motion 25 carried]

head: 2:40

### Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, we will call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2007-08**

**The Deputy Chair:** The committee has before it today the departments of Sustainable Resource Development, followed by International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, and thereafter Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. It's a total of three hours set aside for the Liberal caucus. We will deal with each of these portfolios for one hour beginning now.

### Sustainable Resource Development

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. minister, if you don't mind introducing your officials.

To the officials, I'd just like to let you know that should you need a glass of water or a cup of coffee, just raise your hand and one of the pages will come by and provide that to you.

The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I would like to begin by introducing my very capable staff, who've been a huge assistance to me since I was appointed minister. I'd like to begin by introducing Mr. Brad Pickering on my immediate left, my deputy minister; next to him, Mr. David Bass, the assistant deputy minister for finance and administration; continuing from right to left, the famous Cliff Henderson, the assistant deputy minister for forestry; next to Cliff, Mr. Craig Quintilio, assistant deputy minister for lands; and last, but not far from least, Mr. Ken Ambrock, with his new hip, assistant deputy minister for fish and wildlife.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. minister, you may proceed. After your comments we still have about eight minutes left in your remarks. It'll go back and forth between the Liberal caucus and yourself.

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to begin by addressing some remarks on our estimates of \$353 million for budget year 2007-2008. We believe this budget responds to the challenges of managing our natural resources at a time of significant economic growth and pressures on our resources. We believe our budget and the way it's structured addresses both immediate and long-term needs. It will enable the ministry to better co-ordinate activities on public lands across the province. It also reflects the ministry's internal changes to better focus on forest lands and fish and wildlife.

Our area management model now provides a single window for service delivery, with dedicated area managers assigned to each of the 11 areas in the province. It also allows the ministry to be more responsive to resource management issues. The \$115 million in new money is directed towards the ministry's three top priorities as set out by the Premier, specifically the completion of the land-use framework; the implementation of an aggressive strategy to protect the health of our forest, specifically with respect to mountain pine beetle; and finally the implementation of our biodiversity monitoring strategy.

[Reverend Abbott in the chair]

A few remarks with respect to our forestry budget. The most significant 2007-2008 budget allocation was the addition of the \$52.6 million to combat mountain pine beetle in the province. Unfortunately, the front line in the war against mountain pine beetle has moved from British Columbia to Alberta. I've requested and received a declaration of forest health emergency to ensure that Alberta has the \$50 million from the sustainability fund to continue aggressive action against the mountain pine beetle.

An additional \$2.6 million was added to our base budget to deal with pine beetle. These funds build the capacity for both manpower and equipment. That's the \$2.6 million to our base budget. It allows us to develop and implement a strategic response to changing threats posed by the beetle. It also allows for the hiring of seasonal staff and equipment, to secure contracts for mountain pine beetle related operations, talking now about the emergency funding.

Activities that would be included include baiting for the beetles, trapping, cutting and burning of infested trees, and monitoring and identification of infested trees. We also will continue to assist municipalities, as we did last year, in their efforts to identify and remove beetle-infested trees. Last year we provided more than \$5 million to 16 different communities, and we're continuing that commitment in Budget 2007.

Having identified funds to support communities as they prepare to face increased control activities, we put that into the budget. This all is the result of the large fly-in, or influx, of beetles from British Columbia in northwestern Alberta during last summer, the summer of 2006.

Finally, we've also approved an additional \$5 million to the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta, known as FRIAA, to undertake specific mountain pine beetle management activities.

With respect to forest protection, continuing on that, mountain pine beetle is not the only issue we're dealing with. We have vast tracts of mature forest across the province. Because of the lack of age distribution, the relatively old-age cohort of our forests, our science indicates that this is a significant wildfire threat, so we propose to permanently increase our wildfire base budget by \$45.2 million. This will enable the ministry to achieve a full state of readiness prior to the start of the fire season. In past years these start-up costs were partially funded through supplementary estimates. This year we've made an accounting change, if you like, by fully funding these costs in the base budget. This provides a more realistic model with which to prepare for the coming fire season.

Activities that will be financed out of these funds include the hiring and training of contract fire crews, our network of support staff, and lookout tower personnel. The ministry will also complete contracts for air tankers and helicopters that are all part of our wildfire suppression effort.

In terms of capital spending the ministry is in year 2 of a three-year \$42 million commitment to upgrade our air tanker fleet. As part of this, \$14 million is allocated for this budget year, '07-08, to replace the aging piston engines in these air tankers with state-of-the-art, Canadian-built turbine engines. This change will make our planes 32 per cent more efficient and also reduce our maintenance costs. The ministry is also undertaking significant upgrades to the air tanker base at Fort McMurray as part of our ongoing maintenance of existing facilities, and another \$1 million has been carried forward from '06-07 to complete the work at the facilities at the Springbank air tanker base near Calgary.

Next, I'd like to address a few moments to our land-use framework. This is a top priority of the ministry and also was identified in my mandate letter from the Premier as one of my top priorities. One million dollars in new money is budgeted specifically for the land-use framework in 2007, bringing the total to \$2 million. This will enable the ministry to complete the work and present a draft framework by the end of this year. On April 30 we announced 17 public sessions in 15 communities across the province. We're finishing that public consultation this week. Albertans can also participate by completing a workbook in addition to attending these public information sessions. The workbook questionnaire is available through MLA offices and also online. We're looking forward

to hearing from several thousand Albertans on what their views are on issues that comprise the land-use framework.

In addition, the SRD land-use framework budget includes \$2 million to continue an integrated land-management planning and decision-making process to better co-ordinate the multiple pressures facing our finite land base, and another \$2 million for a natural resource information system to facilitate and improve land-use decisions. These latter two programs are not part of the actual framework development. They relate to dealing more efficiently and effectively with land-use issues at hand today.

Next, I'll spend just a moment addressing the oil sands strategy. The ministry received \$2 million in new funding to address recommendations from the provincial oil sands strategy. This will address the significant increase in environmental impact assessment work and approvals relating to oil sands development in the north and also allow us to better monitor and manage the cumulative effects resulting from this increased activity. Staff from the ministry's newly formed oil sands team is responsible for overseeing these tasks.

2:50

We have also received and have allocated half a million dollars, \$0.5 million, for new technology for an electronic disposition system that will improve the management of dispositions issued on public lands. This new system should reduce the turnaround times on applications, provide better service to our clients, and enable the ministry to maintain a better picture of the activity on the landscape.

On the biodiversity monitoring program, another one of the priorities of the ministry and in the Premier's mandate letter to me, we've committed \$4.2 million in new money this year to implement the biodiversity monitoring program. This is a joint undertaking between government, industry, and NGOs that will provide ecosystem-level information on Alberta's living resources, habitats, and the activities that affect them. This is the first operational year following five years of prototype development during which techniques were refined. The Biodiversity Monitoring Institute is up and running.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, hon. minister. I'm sure you'll have a chance to continue in a moment or two, but right now I would like to call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, and I've got my clock going as well. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to say congratulations to the minister on his deliberating on his first budget as well as welcome to the assistant deputy minister and all the other members of his team.

You did speak first of all about the \$353 million budget, and right off the bat you went into the \$52.6 million, I believe, to battle the mountain pine beetle. It's unfortunate, but we've been at this now for two years prior to this date, talking about the mountain pine beetle. Before we were talking about the amounts that we were giving to B.C. When you think about the large scale that we're on right now, it was a pittance compared to now, \$52 million. If we'd have reacted then, maybe we wouldn't be in the position that we are now. But do you know what? That's then; this is now. We'll continue to go on.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

How much of that \$52.6 million that you mentioned is in conjunction with or in combination with federal dollars? I know that at one

point they had allocated or at least were proposing to promise some monies to help with this spread of the mountain pine beetle. How much of that \$52.6 million is federal money as well?

Part of the money you mentioned, \$2.6 million, is base funding for manpower and equipment. I think that's maybe going to be settled out. This is a separate line item, separate from the equipment and services. You said that you have a three-year commitment, so this would just be specifically for the mountain pine beetle, I'm assuming.

We talk about the pine beetle. I know it's spreading, and we've been doing some monitoring with some of our bases throughout the province. We had an exceptionally cold, quick drop in temperature in November. It was in some locations, I believe, around minus 47, and it did hit quite quickly. I'm just wondering as to the effect. I know we've had this conversation, but what would be the overall impact on the pine beetle? I know that we're doing, as you mentioned, some inspections, some cutting and burnings. But what would be the effectiveness of the cold weather that we've been hoping for for the last couple of years? Has it had the impact that we were hoping for? Has it taken out as many as 90 to 95 per cent? Certainly, that would be a big strike for us in combating this. If not, then we know that we're just beginning to do the work here. Alberta is, as we've said before, the battleground for the rest of the provinces that lie to the east of us.

I'm just wondering, then, if I can just go on on some specifics. Last year we cut down some of our budget from last year. We cut down on our forestry protection. That would probably be Cliff, then, who would be answering this particular piece. We dropped about — what is it? — 40 per cent or decreased our budget. I'm not sure if that was just because we're not expecting as high forest fires. I know that it's always hard to predict the volatility of the weather or where the fires are going to come in. Is the minister expecting a similar occurrence this year?

We've seen overspending before, but we're not quite there again, so we've decreased that particular budget. I'm just trying to get my exact figures on that. I think it was, as I said, about a 40 per cent decrease within the budget. We went down about \$140,000 compared to what we were looking at last year. Again, this is just an estimate. I'm assuming that we'll probably go to more specifics later on and maybe do a supplemental supply. I'm not sure how that will work then.

If you're able to break down the forestry protection spending, how much is going to go directly to defend forest fires in your best guess? I know that's a tough one, but if you can do that, that would be great. You've already explained how much is going to pine beetles, the \$52.6 million. Then there was another amount, \$26.2 million, for forestry capital investments. I'm not sure exactly where that money is being spent. If you could maybe elaborate for me on that particular piece, that would be great.

You did talk about leading into the land-use framework. This is something that the province has been dearly looking forward to for a number of years. I'm just wondering at what point you're hoping to round it up, at least by the end of this month, and have a report to Albertans, perhaps in the late year, December, maybe rolling into January.

I'm kind of skeptical sometimes about task forces, or at least this type of exercise, because we did the Affordable Housing Task Force. We talked to a number of people throughout the province. We were looking for information. It was an enormous cost not only to taxpayers, but a lot of people put a lot of time and effort writing out their submissions. We came and compiled it in a short amount of time, yet the majority, more than half of the recommendations from the Affordable Housing Task Force were dismissed. I'm just



wondering how much stock, how much hope people should put within this particular exercise? If they look at the same results as happened in the Affordable Housing Task Force, they were dismissed. I mean, are we going to actually look at what we're getting and take the good with the bad and accept it, or are we going to just cherry-pick like we have in the past?

The Premier, I think, is on record stating that, you know, oil and gas: we're not going to put the brakes on that; that shouldn't be on the table. But, clearly, that has a huge impact on the land-use strategy. Oil and gas has an impact on the lands and our waters. I'm just wanting to know: is that going to be on the table? If there are some negative comments towards the industries and their pace of growth, is this minister prepared, committed to take in some of those recommendations and to do at least a reasonable thing and do an overview as to what the impact of oil and gas is on our overall public lands?

That, clearly, is having a huge effect on northern Alberta and some of the outlying areas as well. When you've got competing interests out there, that's got to be taken into consideration. I know that most people will be giving their submissions on that. I know that the oil industry is already saying that right now they can't afford to pay less on that with regard to the royalties, but this is something altogether different.

I'm hoping that there will be a number of submissions with regard to the land-use strategy for off-road vehicles. There is a desperate need to have some control with regard to the recreational use. I'm not talking about the snowmobiles because we usually have plenty of snow, and they're not usually going out and trying to damage their snowmobiles when there are roots exposed. This is altogether different. Right now, spring, summer, and fall, when you get into the hunting, this is the absolute time that we need to be discussing this.

I've tabled pictures before in this Legislature of some of the activities and some of the devastating effects on some of the areas. You've got a six-foot-two man standing in a trench that has been dug out repeatedly by off-road vehicles. I mean, that's obviously just abuse. I'm just wondering: do we have enough people? We talked about hiring more people. I believe in Public Accounts, when we were there, we talked about 1,900 FTEs. But it's a big province. I'm not sure. I know that we've got them throughout the province on various things – fish and wildlife, fire protection, and various other things – but how many people are actually going around monitoring the responsibility?

I'm not saying that everyone is not responsible, but you know you always have those that aren't responsible when we're using the off-road vehicles. Like I said about the trench, you know, a six-foot-two man can stand in it, and it's up to his shoulders. You've got the repeated use of the trail, which continues to wipe out and wash away valuable watersheds. We talk about towns and municipalities. Some of these people aren't too far out from that.

3:00

Instead of just being critical about it, my suggestion would be to designate some of these public lands that we do have and allow these users that consider this a sport or a recreation to have, you know, square miles designated for specific use of off-road vehicles, whether it be landfills later on, like they do with the Clover Bar dump just east of the city here. That's a great area where people like to take their vehicles. You can rip up and down the land. It doesn't matter because at the end of the day, it's a landfill. It's just being covered over. We're hoping to generate some new growth, some trees and grass. But it doesn't matter. It doesn't affect anyone in the long term.

I'm wondering if the province has thought about, you know, in the northern areas, maybe in the south, and in the middle of the province strictly designating some of this area. Maybe it isn't good for much after. You know, coal-bed methane maybe or some drilling has taken effect, and the land is completely being used. We've got some great areas. Has this ministry considered setting aside some of this land to be specifically designated areas?

We have paths and all that, that they're supposed to stick to, but we know that at the end of the day they do not.

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank the hon. member for his questions. By my count there are approximately six questions with sometimes a couple of multiple questions thrown in there. I'll try to answer them all in 10 minutes.

Is that right, Mr. Chair?

**The Deputy Chair:** Correct.

**Dr. Morton:** Yeah, 10 minutes. Okay.

The question of the allocation for pine beetle of \$52.6 million. There were two questions there: should we have intervened in British Columbia earlier, and if we should have, why didn't we? The problem there, I think, is that the B.C. government didn't respond properly and early enough. There was a similar debate to the one we're having now, I guess, in Alberta about how proactive and how aggressive the fight should be against pine beetle in British Columbia.

I recently received a file of newspaper articles from British Columbia where there were many letters and editorials and groups urging the wait-and-see approach. In the end that's what the NDP government did in British Columbia. They adopted the wait-and-see approach, and the result was that the pine beetle plague exploded and got so big that they lost control. So we didn't help in B.C. because B.C. wasn't helping itself through this wait-and-see attitude. Of course, that's why we are not taking that approach and are being proactive and taking a positive and aggressive approach and an expensive approach, as the hon. member indicated, in trying to prevent the spread of pine beetle in Alberta.

The question about federal availability of funding. The federal government, when the Liberals were still in charge, announced a hundred million dollars that was dedicated, it would appear, solely to B.C. Since the Conservatives have taken over in Ottawa, they've announced another \$200 million. Very little of that has flowed yet. There were some perceptions that that \$200 million was allocated just for British Columbia. As you might imagine, British Columbia politicians encouraged that perception, but I'm happy to report that on my visit to Ottawa in April I was assured that the \$200 million that the Conservatives have put aside for fighting pine beetle is to go where that money can best be used to stop the spread of the pine beetle because the federal government realizes that this is no longer just about Alberta; it's about the whole boreal forest. If the pine beetle were to continue its eastern migration in the type of the massive numbers and density of insects that we've seen in British Columbia, it's not just Alberta that's threatened but, really, the entire north, all the way across the country.

The second question, I believe, was with respect to winter kill. That, of course, is historically how the pine beetle has been controlled in Alberta, certainly in northern Alberta. It has been partly the lack of colder winters that has allowed it to spread. The hon. member is right; we did have a couple of cold snaps this past winter, in November and then again in January, February. I was in Grande

Prairie recently attending a forestry exposition, speaking with a lot of our staff there and also forestry people. Definitely, the research they're doing, the inventory they're doing does show quite a significant winter kill in pine beetle, but at the moment it's looking to be in the 75 to 80 per cent range, not in the 95 to 97 per cent range, that you'd need to really set it back. However, 75 per cent is still a lot better than 50 per cent. Also, the results aren't in yet completely. Unfortunately, the die-off rate from winter kill decreases as you go south, so we still have an issue in the southern part of Alberta.

Your third question was a concern about the decrease in the budget and whether or not that decrease was due to the fact that we expected to do less firefighting this year, and if we didn't, if we thought there were going to be more fires, did we intend to go to supplemental estimates again? I have to admit that the communication on the size of the budget this year was somewhat confusing, but if you go back and look in *Hansard* at my introductory remarks today, you'll see – I tried to explain; I probably wasn't clear enough – that the \$45.2 million that has been added to the permanent base budget of the ministry in past years was being taken out of the emergency fund. It was decided partly on the basis of internal financial control – and also I believe the Auditor General had a suggestion on this – that if that's what it takes, \$45.2 million, to be ready for the fire season, then that money should be part of your ongoing base budget year over year and not considered part of the emergency request. So we did a transfer in, and that's a permanent new addition to our core year-over-year funding.

Fortunately, there was a good snowpack last winter and a wet spring. We haven't had any fire problems yet. We, in fact, have even been able to loan some of our forest firefighters to Quebec and Ontario in the last few weeks, but as the fire season develops, we will go into the emergency fund or the environmental enhancement and protection fund and draw on that to actually do the firefighting, as we have in the past.

Your fourth question dealt with the land-use framework and public input. Will we take it seriously? Is it going to look like the Affordable Housing Task Force, where the allegation is made that that was not taken seriously? Yes, we will take it seriously. You've heard me speak on this subject before. A lot of people came to Alberta for jobs, but I think they stayed here for the lifestyle. This government, the Conservative Party that's formed the government of Alberta over the last 36 years but particularly during the Klein era, addressed issues of serious debt, a stalled economy, and getting that back on track. I think former Premier Klein and his governments deserve credit for that achievement.

But we've clearly turned the corner in Alberta's development, and I think the quality-of-life issues now outweigh the quantity-of-life issues. The land-use framework initiative reflects that. Premier Stelmach, certainly, sensed that during the leadership campaign. Obviously, the opposition parties sensed that, talking to the public. So, yes, input will be taken seriously, and I'm looking forward to that.

Your fifth question dealt with off-road vehicles and damage to public lands and specifically wetlands. We have implemented access plans, or what are sometimes known as forest land-use zones, or FLUZ is the acronym. We've done that with considerable success in a number of recreational areas in the province where we've had this type of problem before with random camping, irresponsible use of off-highway vehicles, and destruction of public lands, particularly destruction of wetlands.

**3:10**

There are, however, some areas in the foothills that are not adequately protected yet. One of those was the area that I visited

over the May long weekend, and there was some media attention put on that. I'm happy to report that we've had two meetings now with my staff as to how we're going to respond to that in the short, intermediate, and long terms. I won't get into those details, but you'll see that on a go-forward basis.

You ask: do we have adequate personnel? Yes. We have added to our personnel, particularly in fish and wildlife. We borrowed fish and wildlife officers to help us with enforcement in that area. This was actually quite a strong priority of mine, and I fought hard in the budget process to get some new fish and wildlife officers. We have 12 new full-time equivalents, but actually in terms of people that turns into 20 new hires. Many of our hires are seasonal, and we certainly will be using them in this context of recreational use on public lands.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Maybe just to go back to a couple of points that I was hoping for maybe a little bit more detail or clarification on. When we talk about the land-use framework, I'm hoping for a commitment from the minister that all recommendations will be considered and that we won't cherry-pick the good from the bad. When you're asking for public opinion, you're going to have to accept good and bad and try and make that balance. But to toss half of them out because they don't, you know, mix with the philosophy I think is a slap in the face to the people when they come out and put their submissions in. So I'm hoping for a stronger commitment from this minister as to how much of the recommendations – I'm not asking you for a crystal ball. When you get them, you know you're going to get good with bad. Are you going to accept all, or are you going to cherry-pick?

The other one. I know that we had a lot of snowpack. The forest service right now is getting its training over in Quebec. I'm assuming that this isn't a goodwill exercise. The men and women that do go get paid, and it's just a transfer between provinces. I'm just assuming that that's how we're doing that in this particular piece.

We talked about that in the north last year or even the year before we had random camping. That's probably a specific incident that may be popping up now. It certainly pops up here in Edmonton in the river valleys. When I was up there in McMurray, they have tight rental accommodations. We know that we have at least a thousand dollars a month on one or two of the only available parks up there. How flexible is the minister with regard to random camping now? We know that we need the people. We're bringing in temporary foreign workers. Even the Minister of Immigration, Employment and Industry says: don't come unless you have a job and you have accommodations. Well, a lot of these people have jobs but are trying to find the accommodations. A lot of these people drag their trailers up there, and they do take advantage of, I guess, the environment and try and do the camping.

I'm not sure if the previous minister was inflexible about this, but if this minister is going to loosen up some of the regulations or restrictions that were once there – because some of these spots that were once held by some of the groups were bulldozed, with large rocks and that. I mean, I'm not trying to belabour that particular point and really get into it. I'm just wondering how flexible the minister is given the tight accommodations up north.

The other part is – I guess you mentioned it – bringing in new staff. But retention like any business is a big concern. How are you dealing with retention as well as attraction? You've got to compete with the private sector, and certainly we want to make sure that we're being competitive. I noted that within the budget there were

some modest increases in a number of the areas, communications as well as some of the other ones, but how much of that is dedicated just to basic salary increases to ensure that we do have the manpower to deal with that not just during the boom in the spring and the summer but fall and winter?

I'm going to switch gears here and talk about – you did mention about the oil sands strategy. The oil sands strategy committee report, otherwise known as the Radke report, was released earlier in the year, and it did make some recommendations to Sustainable Resource Development. It was clear that there was not enough Sustainable Resource Development staff up in the Wood Buffalo region. Without Sustainable Resource Development putting in the amount of people, we can't potentially know about the damage that's occurring in the lands, the forests, and the impact on the wildlife and that biodiversity that we were talking about there the other day and you just mentioned a little while ago. That's again a result of the mining and the oil sands activity and the cumulative impacts of long-term intense development.

So I'm wanting to know about recommendation 10 with the report. It says:

A substantial increase in manpower (FTE's) should be provided to . . . Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to focus on cumulative effects, [environmental impact assessments], research, policy development, monitoring and enforcement in the oil sands areas.

And that's not just specific to Wood Buffalo. I'm sure that particular piece could be encompassing where we do have the activities and seismic development going in, even in particular up in Marie Lake, but right now we're concentrating on the Wood Buffalo. What has the government done to address this particular recommendation?

Obviously, we're talking about an increase in staff. So how much money is going to be dedicated to that? Will it be just short term, or will this be permanent FTEs to deal with the ongoing development of the Wood Buffalo area and the oil and gas? I'm not sure if you have an exact number of staff or estimates that were going to be up there. There was talk about 87 new full-time equivalents in the ministry, so that's like a 4 and a half per cent increase. That would beg the question again: is that directly to deal with the Radke, and how many are going up into the Wood Buffalo? I'm not trying to put numbers and words in your mouth. I'm just hoping that you'll give me a little bit of feedback on that.

How many people or numbers are in the field versus the office? Of course, I mean, it's nice to have a little bit of extra people sometimes at the top, but you certainly need them at the base where all the activity takes place on the public lands, especially in the spring, summer, and the fall.

I asked the minister last year – and this would be with regard to the fishing, and I had received a couple of inquiries. When we have the freeze, we typically get people who are doing the ice fishing or we have people who are doing commercial fishing. I know that there were some payouts with regard to some commercial fishermen's licences up in the Lac La Biche or the Slave Lake areas. I'm not sure why the particular payouts were made in four instances. They were numbered anywhere from \$100,000 to \$150,000 for individuals with commercial fishing licences up north. So I'm just wondering if you'd care to comment on that particular piece.

Getting back to the commercial fishing, we sometimes have derbies, and we've got derby people coming from other provinces staking their claim on some of the bigger lakes, advertising prizes of \$50,000 to \$75,000. When we talk about how many holes you're punching in and how many people you're getting in there, who's monitoring the activity of these fishing derbies? I mean, yeah, it's a great idea, but overfishing is also a concern. So who are we

monitoring, and what is the effect of outside provincial people coming in and taking advantage of our lakes and maybe the lax regulations with regard to the fishing derbies? I wasn't sure where that had gone. It was your predecessor that I was asking, not yourself. I'll just clarify that particular point.

Just got a little bit more on the people or the manpower outside the Wood Buffalo region, then. I know that it's a huge province, and I recognize that we can't be everywhere all the time, but it would be nice to see that some of the work that we do do is appreciated and recognized, so I would certainly give, you know, kudos to the staff that are doing the ongoing monitoring and the hard work out there, especially those in the lookout towers. Their jobs are starting to become very much full time.

3:20

I did have the opportunity to discuss this with them last year. This year during the unfortunate incident where we did have the one woman, the senior lady, who had disappeared – and there were rewards posted, but we've still never found her – we did raise the question about workers' safety and working alone. I had received overwhelming phone calls, e-mails from people who said: "You know what? Just leave that sort of legislation alone. We're quite comfortable. We recognize that part of the benefit of this particular job is the solitude and the tranquility of being out there." So I'm assuming that you're going to continue to leave it just like that.

We're talking about the people that we need out there. Again, getting back to the retention and attraction, how do you retain these people? Last year there were some people that were here 38, 40 years, and I think that's commendable to be in one profession that long. We're just hoping that we can continue with that.

That will lead me into wildlife protection. I know that I'm going to run out in about 50 seconds here. We talked about this. I'm not talking about the bear with the camera on his head; that's just the one. I wanted to know. We did a study. We had a biologist that was in fact let go with regard to maybe speaking out against the report as to the actual numbers of grizzlies that are remaining out there. Best guess: I believe that we're underestimating the amount of grizzlies that are out there. I'm glad to see that the suspension of the spring grizzly hunt will continue, but that still just raises the issue as to how many bears are out there. I know that we do have a number that are hit at crossings and maybe on the tracks. Last year I think there was a 10 per cent decrease because they were females. That's a big issue. During the election that was a huge issue for Albertans. They called in concerned about the grizzly bears.

I'll just leave it at that, then. Thank you.

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the hon. member for his questions.

On the land-use framework: are we just going to cherry-pick the things we like that we're told, or are we going to take everything in? We'll take everything in. This is a consultation with a broad spectrum of Albertans. I can tell you already that there is very unlikely to be a consensus on a lot of the big issues.

I was getting both my internal reports from the media in Lethbridge two days ago, and also the coverage in the *Lethbridge Herald* that indicated that on a number of key questions what was being recommended verbally – we obviously haven't seen the workbooks yet, but just based on the conversations that were taking place with our consultants and officers, our land personnel that are involved in this, there are some very divergent opinions. We'll have to wait to see where the chips fall on that.

With respect to the question of reimbursement for the firefighters that we've sent to Quebec and also Ontario, there are mutual aid agreements between all the Canadian provinces when it comes to helping one another out to fight fires. There are agreed-upon rates for reimbursement, so that is a reimbursed cost.

With respect to random camping in Fort McMurray, random camping is defined as camping of up to a maximum of 14 days. Of course, the problem that we've had in Fort McMurray because of, as you properly indicated, the mismatch between the number of workers and the available housing is that we have seen a number of kind of camps set up not for 14 days but on a fairly permanent basis. Sustainable Resource Development does have the ability to authorize industrial camps for housing of workers as requested by industry, and we have that authority. But I don't think that is quite what you're talking about.

There are, of course, existing campgrounds, and we can and are working with private campground owners to possibly enlarge their capacity, perhaps on a temporary basis, to try to accommodate this. The bottom line is that while Albertans have a right to use public lands, they don't have a right to abuse public lands. The responsibility of Sustainable Resource Development is to protect the integrity of those natural resources.

On personnel retention I have both official and anecdotal evidence to answer your question there. I think we must be doing a heck of a good job because in March, I believe it was, I went to an employee recognition event for number of years of service, and it was so large that we had to have it out at Fort Edmonton. I practically got writer's cramp filling out all the certificates of appreciation to all the people that were getting recognized. I don't think Cliff was the oldest, but he was getting up there. There were a large number in the 20, 25, 30, 35 years of service, so certainly that gave me the impression that our retention is actually quite good.

I have some more specific answers to that question. We do do regular recruiting for all of our different sections or divisions within Sustainable Resource Development. When it comes to forestry and wildfires, we use our Hinton Training Centre to train people there. Many of our seasonal recruits are rehires, who may do one thing in the winter and come back and work for us in the summer. I have met with the forestry department over at the University of Alberta and talked to them about employment opportunities in our forestry division as well. I hope that answers your questions on that.

With respect to the Radke report and the oil sands strategy I believe the question was: has there been a specific allocation of personnel and budget to meet the needs that were identified in that report with respect to the type of both monitoring of impact on the environment and also the licensing of the activities of the dispositions that take place there? In fact, again, if you look at the breakdown in our budget – I might be able to give you a specific page number in a minute – you'll see that there was a very specific allocation made for that.

We have 11 new FTEs that were allocated to the department specifically for the oil sands strategy. Their responsibilities will include basically what you anticipated in your question: co-ordination of environmental impact assessment reviews and subsequent approval and/or placing of conditions, alignment of issue positions and integration of review, development of cumulative effect frameworks and the application of those frameworks. I think that answers most of your question.

The question of the buyout of commercial fishing licenses. I can tell you that this is a program that was implemented in 2003 with the goals of reducing the number of commercial fishermen and the potential conflict between recreational and commercial users,

basically improving the economics of the industry both on the commercial side and also on the recreational side. From an economic point of view there's a lot more economic value in recreational fishing than commercial precisely because it's so much less efficient as many of us know from hard-luck stories.

**An Hon. Member:** You want to talk about yours?

**Dr. Morton:** Exactly.

The number of commercial gillnet fishermen is now below our goal. Our reduction goal was to get to 200. We're now down to 177, which is down from approximately 800 at the start of this program, and we anticipate further reducing that number of 177 down to 140 by the end of this budget year.

**3:30**

Fishing derbies. The fishing derbies, as you probably know, are one of the most popular, particularly winter, activities in many parts of Alberta. You talk about out-of-province people coming in. They often run the derbies, but basically they're derby organizers, and they're contracted out by charities. I think I'm right in saying this: all of the fishing derbies that we authorize are nonprofit operations. They're to raise money. Obviously, the operators are paid a fee to come in and organize it, but the funds raised once expenses are paid go to, usually, good causes in those communities, including often the promotion and the improvement of fisheries and fishery habitat.

You were concerned also about the effect that fishing derbies have on the fishery itself. Almost all of these are catch and release. In fact, part of the problem we have is that we require certain types of tanks to hold the fish so they can be measured and counted before they're released back, and sometimes the specifications of the holding tanks impose some cost issues that are hard on some people to meet. These are factored into the fishing management for each lake they take place on, and while there's probably some percentage of kill just from the handling and so forth, our fisheries people believe that they're done in a good way.

I'll get you information on worker safety and fire watch.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. minister, any other responses you can certainly provide in writing.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, I just want to let you know that there are about nine minutes left in this segment, so if you wanted any responses from the minister, you may want to leave some amount of time for him.

**Mr. Bonko:** Or if I preferred, could he respond in writing?

**The Deputy Chair:** In writing. That is another option as well. Yes.

**Mr. Bonko:** Okay. Wonderful. Thank you. Then I'll just proceed with a number of questions that I do have. I know you may not be able to answer them all quickly, but I'm hoping that I can have some clarification or some explanation and more detail in writing. I'll be a little bit all over the place so I can try and get them all in here.

The Canmore Golf and Curling Club. I just want to ask for some information about the lease that the Canmore Golf and Curling Club has with the ministry. Order in Council 65/2007 in February extended that lease for 25 years, from 50 to 75. I'd just like to ask a couple of questions. If the minister can't provide them, again, written answers would be great. Why extend it now with only 22 years remaining on the lease? I mean, preferably the entire lease. Why did we extend it now and add an additional 50 to 75 years? How much is the land worth as a market estimate, and how much is the

club paying to rent that particular land? It seems a little bit odd that we're doing this now still under the option before the land-use framework is even in place.

The other one is, again, getting back to some of the grizzlies and the wildlife protection. This year the ministry released its general status of Alberta Species at Risk 2005 report, which made it very clear as to how little the ministry does know about many of the species in Alberta's wildlife parks and areas throughout the province. It talks about 4 per cent of the mammals being at risk, but with another 5 to 6 per cent that are undetermined. Even worse, the amphibians, or reptiles: 30 per cent may be at risk. Sixteen per cent of freshwater fish are undetermined and 23 per cent of the butterflies or the gastropods or bivalves. You know, the little shells or snails. I'm not too concerned about them, but that all is particularly embedded within the report.

**Dr. Morton:** You're not concerned about them?

**Mr. Bonko:** Well, snails. It's escargot. Someone is going to be eating them. Right?

Why do we have measures like that if they really don't remotely even address some of the challenges that we're facing with some of these things? Isn't this just giving the ministry an easy target with some of these generalities out there without some specifics? What's going to be done to reduce the uncertainty? How many resources are being devoted to it, and can we expect a little bit clearer picture in the future?

Again, getting back to the grizzlies, why has the government withheld the numbers of the grizzly bears in the areas where the studies are completed? What's being done while we wait to find out how many bears there are?

Getting into the bears, we also talk about species at risk and the caribou. What's being done to manage the caribou management teams? Specific example: perhaps the Little Smoky group there. What impact are they having on protection? I mean, it's a competing interest when we have recreational and forest companies, oil and gas exploration, and they are going into some of the much-needed areas for migration, as we talked about a few days ago with regard to some of the questions.

Getting into the mountain pine beetle, then. How is the government going to address the threat? We talked about some of that. What proportion will be concentrated on clear-cutting in sensitive areas or areas at risk or block cutting? What proportion will be selective harvesting? What proportion will be – and we talked about this before – managed with controlled burns? What will the main determinant be: the value of the timber or the ecological sensitivity of the forest? How are we going to determine if we're going in or if we're not going to go in, or are we just going to leave it because of the age? I know it has a certain market value on it, but sometimes you've got to cut your losses and just allow nature to take its course.

The impact of the infestation. It's going to obviously tell our producers to increase their quotas, but we also know that under the softwood lumber agreement we're going to be over limits. Are we going to be unfairly penalized when we try and bring some of this lumber to market? We know that the product is dropping on the U.S. side, so, you know, instead of letting it sit and rot or at least be susceptible – I think Weyerhaeuser up north were talking about the Grande Prairie area. Some of the areas, the stands, are sitting there to be produced and in some cases are under attack already by the pine beetle there.

I just wanted to go back again to what we talked about in Public Accounts. The Auditor General had made some mention of general reforestation and our ability to ensure that it actually is being done in a timely fashion. Again, for the benefit of the minister, who

wasn't there, we talked about when we do self-monitoring. We did it in school. We used to mark our own exams. A lot of us managed to get a hundred per cent. I'm just concerned about the same sort of thing.

**Dr. Morton:** Say it's not true.

**Mr. Bonko:** Well, you know what? I can't say that because it was true.

A lot of us are just concerned. I mean, it just keeps everybody honest. I mean, I'd like to take everybody's word. You know what? Maybe we can get back to it next year. But sometimes we don't get back to it, and then it's the year after. I'm just concerned about the overall impact of the delaying and the reporting of this mechanism, about not having the actual timelines for reforestation and leaving it up to self-reporting. I'm concerned about that particular case. I did reiterate that during Public Accounts, and again it was in numerous recommendations from the Auditor General.

I'm just wanting to know: how much are we going to do with improvement on that area, reporting, and a little bit tighter guidelines for the forestry companies? What's being done to check for it? We talk about 80 per cent targets, I guess, with reforestation – we were hoping for that – but I'm not sure if that's too weak or if that's just fine.

We'll go to the NRCB. We've had some serious concerns about the NRCB. I know that a number of other members not just on our side but on both sides of the House have raised concerns about that, that sometimes the industry is getting a little bit too close, and it's not protecting the rights of Albertans living close to the intensive farming operations. We've talked about the relaxation in the rules.

We talk about some of the runoff. We talk about the large confined feedlot operations and their closeness to large bodies of water. Slave Lake has one that we were concerned about. It did pass last year, but, I mean, that's their main source of potable water as well as recreation. We're concerned about just the impact on the industry and the flooding, which we talked about, which is certainly a reality here in Alberta. What can we do with the confined feedlots?

Going to, I'm sure, a favourite one of the minister's, the interim Métis harvesting agreement. I know that it's something near and dear to his heart as he had mentioned it during his leadership campaign. He was concerned about the agreement and its workings. What's going to be going on with the agreement? Where do the Métis stand with this particular piece? Is the minister satisfied with the interim agreement right now, or are we going to press for a total agreement instead of making it interim? So far this has been an interim agreement in for the two years, so it's either, you know, fish or cut bait. Where are we going with this particular piece?

3:40

**Dr. Morton:** No pun intended.

**Mr. Bonko:** Yeah. No pun intended on that one. Exactly.

Those are some of the specifics that I definitely wanted to get out for the minister, then. Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, the time allocated for Sustainable Resource Development has now elapsed. I'd like to thank the officials that have accompanied the minister for this important assistance to the minister. Thank you so very much.

**International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations**

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Indeed, what an excellent presentation by Sustainable Resource Development and their staff. I want to say that as we move forward, it's indeed my pleasure to introduce my contingent of staff here today: my deputy minister, Gerry Bourdeau. Gerry along with his staff have been doing an excellent job in terms of our ministry budget for '07-08 of \$67.6 million. We have done our very best in terms of doing this in a way that is easily understood by all Albertans, the 3.4 million. We welcome our questions today.

I want to say that with this budget the Premier has mandated six priorities for my ministry: two Canadian intergovernmental priorities in terms of co-ordinating Alberta's approach to intergovernmental relations and also developing an intergovernmental strategy and one international priority, which is enhancing Alberta's international presence and trade relations, especially with the United States.

Of course, we're all very familiar with – and I want to say all political parties – the success we had at the Smithsonian last summer, I think without question. For those who may not be aware, Canada was offered the opportunity to host in Washington. Canada chose not to take that opportunity, but the province of Alberta did. I know that was quite something. Other provinces would have welcomed the opportunity to have been able to host. Alberta, with its vision and, certainly, its foresight, was able to put on a very successful show at the Smithsonian. I want to say that I think it was a huge success.

We also have three aboriginal priorities: finalizing the aboriginal consultation strategy but also finalizing the long-term Métis governance and funding and building aboriginal self-sufficiency. These priorities, of course, cross most of my ministry's core businesses, and we also work very closely with other ministries relative to these important priorities.

I would also like to say, finally, that we work on addressing specific issues arising from other core businesses. For example, in finalizing the aboriginal consultation, we first need to help First Nations complete and share traditional land-use studies so they can better participate in consultation, and we are making good progress in that regard.

Another component of my very diverse ministry are 10 international offices, which now also include Washington. I don't know if the hon. members are familiar with where the 10 offices are, but based on the excellent work that our staff are doing, I want to say that the feedback I'm receiving from MLAs who've travelled with parliamentary committees through the Speaker – and that's all three political parties. I must admit that I have always appreciated the very positive comments that have come back when people are visiting, be it in Munich or in Tokyo or in Hong Kong or be it in Seoul. Wherever it is, I think that members of this Assembly, when they attended our foreign offices, were very proud to say that Alberta is rivalling, shall I say, one other province who has a very large international presence, and that is the province of Quebec.

What we have done is we have utilized our partnership with embassies to minimize our cost and, at the same time, have a profile for the province of Alberta because traditionally, I think it's important to note, we have observed that sometimes the federal government refers to Alberta along with the other provinces in western Canada as western Canada, and of course we're very proud as Albertans to be a little bit more specific than just western Canada. So the embassy may talk about western Canada; what we have endeavoured to do is to talk about the province of Alberta. Consequently, our offices have been successful.

But I have asked for a review of those offices, which hasn't been done in over 10 years. In the changing global economy that we have today, the question is: are we getting good value for those offices we

have? Should we be considering perhaps closing some or opening others in terms of what we refer to as the BRIC. It's a global term that is used referring to the four countries of Brazil, Russia, India, and China. Of course, we presently have three offices in China: in Hong Kong as well as two in Beijing. One contemplation has been: should we be considering offices in Mumbai? I spoke to my colleagues in Ontario who just had a mission to India, so we are considering them along with South America.

At the end of the day, I've made this comment that it really should be Albertans who are benefiting from these offices, that they are ones saying: hey, keep this office open, or open another office here. I've taken the approach that if we don't have Albertans supporting it, saying these offices are doing very good work, then I will contemplate closing them, but I have been very encouraged by the very positive comments from the hundreds of businesses that have indicated the excellent work that they are doing and the value.

It's really quite amazing. If you look at our export market in Alberta, that natural fact under our international marketing strategy referred to as AIMS, the Alberta international marketing strategy, we are working to increase Alberta in exports to \$81 billion, which is quite something and actually rivals what other countries are very proud to I guess brag about. I can say that it's this collective effort that ultimately is showing and having positive results for Alberta.

With that, I'd just like to summarize my \$67.6 million budget by comparing to Health or Education. I think I can keep health care running for about three hours on my entire year's budget. I think I can keep the education system running for maybe a half a day with the budget. But I will say that please think of our work to be compared to things like dynamite. Some things come in small packages but have a big bang, and I do believe that our ministry does have a big bang in terms of helping Albertans.

Thank you, and I'll take my seat.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to say on behalf of myself and our caucus congratulations to minister and his wife on their very first born.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you.

**Mr. Bonko:** You're very welcome. I know that it wasn't mentioned, and I just want to make sure that . . .

**Mr. Boutilier:** That's Marc. Marc with a C, not a K.

**Mr. Bonko:** Okay.

You started off there with regard to the benefit that Albertans and everything that they have provides not only to Canada, but we're also proud to show it off, which was the result when we went to the Smithsonian Institution down there in Washington. You talked about how it was impressive, and we've done quite well on that. Well, that kind of just begs the question because when we do some of these and we refer to them as junkets or trade missions, whatever you want to call them, we do take staff. It does cost a number of hours, and there is a cost associated with it. How are we able to measure the results from a particular mission or junket? How are we able to measure the effectiveness, the amount of trade that you got from that one particular piece?

We talked about trade relations. You talked about BRIC: Brazil, Russia, India, and three offices in China. How do we know, in fact, that we're getting good value for our offices being there? In some cases we have overbudgeting. In Seoul, Korea, the office was 31 per

cent over budget. It begs the question: what are they doing if they can't effectively manage that particular budget in that area? How are they able to ensure that we're going to get fair dollar and fair trade from that relationship there? I think that's a fair question. I'm sure that the Auditor General would even say: "You know what? How do you measure that?" That's a tough one. I've asked the minister of economic development before when that ministry did exist. I'm again posing the same question to the minister now. Is the minister going to address, like I said, the overbudgets that do exist in a number of the trade offices? I know that there's probably a logical explanation.

3:50

But you know what? I'd certainly like to hear again what tangible benefits those offices bring not only to Alberta, but there's obviously a western Canada, we'll call it, being that we've now got the TILMA. Don't forget that I certainly will be going into that one as well. What checks and balances or measures does the government use to ensure those benefits? So just specifically talking on the trade relations and the overseas trade offices.

That will lead me into my favourite subject, which is the trade investment labour mobility agreement known as TILMA. I know and I recognize that that is an important issue. It kicked in April 1 of this year, and it's set to go with the signing off of the agreement in 2009, April 1 as well. Yet the government, in my opinion and in the opinion of a lot of Albertans, is being quite secretive on the workings of the agreement. You might say: no, no; we've been quite open and transparent on the whole thing, but I want to sign it behind closed doors. It's not yet come to the Legislature for debate in any way, shape, or form except through question period. Albertans and opposition alike as well as unions and voices of Alberta clearly have reason to be skeptical and suspicious of the TILMA.

Many groups, like I said, may support the agreement because, you know, trade agreements work both for best sides, but given some of the early indications of the TILMA agreement, we're concerned about it. So I'd like to ask some specific questions with regard to TILMA. How much money is in the budget that's going to be spent specifically on TILMA-related issues? What kinds of internal government co-ordination will have to take effect between B.C. and, of course, Alberta?

Now, I knew that they had appointed some specific people to the panel. I wrote to the minister in B.C., and he said: well, the minister here in Alberta has that. So we obviously have some people specifically designated to some of the workings of the TILMA. We have a panel, I guess, in place, and I wasn't sure if we have those names. That would be great to eventually have those provided to ourselves.

Again, how much money is going to be spent on this? What kind of information programs for the public who don't know that much about it? Quite frankly, there was just a little informative brochure, and that was about it. A lot of municipalities, like down in Lethbridge, don't know about TILMA and aren't sure exactly what the overall effect will be on their municipality. So I would encourage the government to come up with something sooner rather than later. This certainly would give them an opportunity to have input with regard to this agreement and the overall impact that it will have on their area.

One area I'm thinking of is the corporate registry. This is an incredibly useful tool to find out about businesses in Alberta, who owns what and so on. It provides a public service to Alberta. However, article 11, section 1 of TILMA states that "parties shall reconcile their business registration and reporting requirements so

that an enterprise meeting such requirements of one Party shall be deemed to have met those of the other Party." So I'm not sure.

This is where we talk about trade relations in B.C. If they're coming into Alberta, if they register in one, they don't have to register here? I'm not sure how that effect is going to be able to measure that here. We'd like to have a little information. Does that mean that companies registered in British Columbia are now considered to be equal and equivalent here within Alberta, as I mentioned? Will Alberta corporate registry now have to list all companies registered in British Columbia so that their details are accessible to Albertans as part of our openness and transparency? I'm sure there are other implications for the recognition of the B.C. companies that are considered registered in Alberta as well, but I'd just like to have some specifics on that.

We talked about alliance building.

I know that I've already gone through a number of questions, so maybe I'll sit down here. I know that I'm not quite at my 10 minutes, but I'll give the minister an opportunity to come back on some of the specifics that I've asked. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Yeah. Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. Some very good points. I'd like to first of all say that I'm very pleased that on the issue of TILMA, the trade investment labour mobility agreement, that in front of this Legislature right now we have Bill 38, which is going to be dealing with in a very open and transparent way the penalties. It's demonstrating when both the Premier of Alberta and British Columbia met in our joint cabinet meetings last week – and I might add a Liberal government from British Columbia – where we talked about the seriousness. It's in the B.C. Legislature right now in an open way, and it's also in this Legislature. Of course, Bill 38 is going through the normal course of proceedings here relative to the potential seriousness of fines that will be allocated if, in fact, TILMA is not followed according to the agreement.

I want to go back just for a moment in terms of performance measures, which is a very good point, and it's exactly the point I asked when I first became minister: relative to our foreign offices what measurements do we use? I want to say that three separate client satisfaction surveys now fall under IIAR. The international office survey and the trade division survey are very helpful in determining client satisfaction. Client satisfaction really is Albertans and citizens who are travelling to our offices in terms of: are they satisfied; are they not; what can they do to improve? So we do have measurements. The IIAR program consistently has always scored very high.

I don't know if you're familiar with the actual trade policy program area, but relative to the client satisfaction question, for instance, in Washington, which the hon. member did mention, in the Smithsonian a client satisfaction office was introduced. At the end of the day, pertaining to a five-point scale, the Alberta office in Washington had scored a very high result, between 4.3 and 4.5. The target of the rating is somewhere around 4 on a five-point scale, so we have always been very pleased if we can be at 80 per cent satisfaction or higher. The fact that we were scoring closer to 90 per cent I think speaks very well of Albertans who are working there and also the satisfaction that Albertans are sharing with our offices. So that's just an example of a measurement that we are using because if it's not measured, it's not done. I agree with the hon. member that we need to continue to measure these types of successes.

The international offices survey also shows exceptionally high satisfaction. If you can imagine that in the '04-05 year – and I don't have the results for this year – it was 93.1 per cent. I think that,

obviously, for any of us that are working toward satisfaction, it clearly shows that we're in a top percentile.

The international trade division client survey is new in the '07-10 business plan, and I want to say that we have a benchmark where we want to reach 75 to 80 per cent in terms of satisfied clients. Of course, we'll be reviewing that. Key clients were surveyed within the Alberta government, with ministers, Members of the Legislative Assembly as well as seniors officials, businesses external to the government, and domestic and international private sector. Actual measurements were used to determine if, in fact, we're on the right track.

The ministry also, I might add, in terms of performance will constantly use a variety, a plethora, of stakeholders to evaluate. I want to assure the hon. member that whatever dollar that is spent in any office anywhere, if there is a sense that we can do better based on the client satisfaction rate, we will. Not only will we do a good job in our foreign offices, we will do a good job and then some. If I were to describe my ministry, "and then some" is how I best describe my ministry. These three words really separate the difference between what I refer to as excellent and average.

I believe that as members of this Assembly we take an approach in terms of the A personalities that we have to be in this business of serving the public sector, that ultimately we have an attitude that we can always do better. That is really what I believe is separating our province and our government from other provinces, that attitude. I'm very proud of that, and that will continue.

4:00

I also would like to say on the issue of TILMA, which was an important point by the hon. member, that as we go forward, it's important to recognize that the next two years are going to be a very key time, between '07 and '09, when we will of course be having a very complete consultation process with municipalities, with business associations, labour bodies, chambers of commerce, industry groups, academic groups. I'm very proud, when I was a private member, to have taught at the University of Alberta in the school of business. We're looking forward to working with the U of A, who will provide us with important input as well. By the end of June 2007 our formal consultations with the municipal associations, the AUMA and the AAMD and C, but also with our academic institutions as well as school boards and health boards – at the end of the day we want to ensure that whatever we do in this agreement, it is to help the taxpayers, that all of us have been elected to serve in this Legislature.

Our job is to ensure that we get good value and that there are not unnecessary barriers. When there are barriers, it is ultimately our voters who are being hurt because it means they have to dig deeper into their pockets. No one likes to dig deeper into their pockets in terms of obtaining value. So my commitment to all of these public institutions is: what can we do to get even greater value for what we do by working together? I must say that the Premier of British Columbia with our Premier had a very positive joint cabinet meeting talking about: how do we help jointly our 7.7 million citizens from both provinces when it comes to working together in terms of getting the best value? That is the ultimate objective of TILMA.

You asked some important questions, I want to say, on the issue of the Korean office. I think the comment was regarding being over budget. It's really important to frame this in context. Essentially, the Korean office is located with the Canadian embassy. Rather than Alberta just going out and having its own independent office, we partnered with the federal government at the time. Because we are

with the embassy, we are obligated under this partnership to abide by the federal local hiring guidelines. So we set aside funds for what is referred to as future compulsory one-time retirement payments because there are no pensions. Similar to the fact that we have no pension in this Legislature, well, we have the same approach in other foreign offices.

For the Korean office it's important to get the detail. It really is not over budget. What it really is about is that we had two local employees, and in lieu of a pension the cost in terms of when we are obligated to provide them with a separation when they leave the office – in fact, their office experience goes on for many, many years, so we're obligated. We followed the federal government rule on how their employees are treated; we're doing exactly the same.

Ultimately, it's important to recognize – and I'm sure the hon. member would agree – that we treat people fairly. I might add that they're local people from that country that are working there, and we are just treating them with the same respect and the same approach that the federal government has been doing. That was the reason, hon. member, in terms of what I believe is a very good question, and that kind of accountability I welcome because there are also very good explanations for that.

With that, I'll take my seat and welcome more questions.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just getting back to some of the specifics that the minister mentioned with regard to TILMA and his intent to bring this subject to the forefront with regard to municipalities, universities. I'm not trying to assume anything, and I'm not trying to put any words in your mouth. Would you be doing somewhat of a consultation such as we've done with the Affordable Housing Task Force, gathering stakeholder input and recommendations to enhance or claw back the agreement? If this agreement by the mass that are being consulted is not palatable, is this government prepared to pull back TILMA? That is the big question right there in itself. If, in fact, the AUMA and the AAMD and C as well as the other stakeholders are not in full support of this particular piece, is the government prepared to pull back that agreement before 2009?

I'm hoping that we do get this started sooner rather than later because this is a huge, impactful agreement which affects B.C. and Alberta. I'm hoping that we do give this much-needed time and consideration to do a really thorough and full consultation instead of something like the Affordable Housing Task Force, where it was a quick 45 days and turn around and bang something out, and we're still fighting about it.

This is huge, and like I said, a lot of people in Alberta in the small towns don't have an idea as to the vastness or the scope of this particular agreement. Can you give us some sort of an idea as to when you're prepared to bring this forward to Albertans? I'm hoping that we do have a good opportunity to really get in and pick it apart to ensure that what we're promising is in fact going to be the real goods because, again, without the proof and without the actual debate we're concerned about this, just like a lot of people would be skeptical. At that point, when we've in fact done the debate with the stakeholders, will it be brought forward to the Legislature to have a full debate as well as the opportunity to either pass or reject this agreement?

Those are two particular pieces that I certainly would like the minister to comment on.

If I could go on, then, next to another important component of this ministry, it would be aboriginal and Métis issues. Certainly, we talk



about the long-standing tradition that the people have had in Alberta and their contributions to it, and a lot of this ministry's budget is devoted to the aboriginal and Métis people in helping them continue to get out – no pun intended – from under a rock and be successful like the rest of the province, we're hoping, is successful as well. But it's tough.

Getting back to question period today, we talked before about displaced Albertans, aboriginals, farm people, and then Canadians. I think when we're bringing in these temporary foreign workers, we are absolutely and totally ignoring the workforce out on the reserves. The Member for Lesser Slave Lake mentioned trying to get people in the youth apprenticeship program or the registered apprenticeship program. That's an untapped resource of the aboriginal youth and areas out there that we're ignoring when we continue to bring in – and we'll just call it what it is – cheap labour. And it's being abused, labour. But you know what? I won't belabour that point because I know we could be here all day on that.

I'd just like to know some specifics about the particular program, about the resource consultation: how it works and what it is specifically going to be for. For example, this year it's gone up over 2 times and almost \$3 million. Just some specifics as to why that would be. Which areas are they consulting over? Is the government consulting on behalf of companies wishing to extract some of the resources, or is it just government dealing with First Nations and Métis?

I'm concerned about some of the Métis people. This is where it gets into a grey area, when you talk about the reserves and some of the settlements there. When they do have the opportunity to have resources and they own the land – of course they own the resources, but when you have companies that are going outside of the boundaries and they're directional drilling to take out those resources, in my opinion, if that's happening, that's just theft. I'd like the minister to comment on that because, surely, we should be able to allow these people to have the same benefits as the other companies from the oil or gas exploration boom and allow their community to benefit from the resources that are right there on their inherent land. When you allow other companies to go outside and, like I said, do directional, I've got some real concern with that particular issue there.

So, again, with regard to dealing with the First Nations with regard to the resource consultation, is the amount embedded with the dialogue, or is it with regard to just some compensation there as well? I know there are a number of questions in here.

#### 4:10

If we go with the Métis settlements ombudsman, there is no extra funding for this office. I've had some conversations with him over the past, say, eight months since I've been appointed to this particular ministry, and he certainly does get a lot of concerns and calls on it. With the current rate of inflation this effectively means that it's going to be losing money, or it may not be able to continue to do the job that it does right now because with inflation it's going to have to do more with less. That's something that a lot of us complain about: doing more with less. Well, you're going to say, "You've got to be a little bit more prudent with money," as we ask our foreign trade offices to do. But I'm sure that they do get a line item and an increase in the budget. So in this particular case why was there no extra funding for the ombudsman there? Is his office, like I said, going to have to do less, or is it going to work more efficiently, then?

I've gone about seven minutes here. I'm hoping to have a little bit more information. There are a number of questions in there for you.

Thank you very much.

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much. I want to say that on the issue of TILMA I think it's important for the record to be very clear. As someone who sat on a local municipal government for 12 years and as the youngest city mayor in Fort McMurray, the relationship, I'm very proud to say, that I had in my former ministry of municipal affairs with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, I can assure you that they will be 100 per cent onside as we go forward. The reason, in consulting with them, is because as all of us in this Legislature are elected, we want to ensure that we get the best value for our citizens, be it in British Columbia or in Alberta or wherever that is.

That being the case, I have met with them. We have consulted with them. We are consulting with them. When they raise an issue, we deal with it in a way that makes sense for both them and us and the British Columbia counterparts, the Liberal government in British Columbia, who sees the value in this. I'm quite certain that the hon. member will see the value in this.

Unlike – what are they called? – the Council of Canadians. Let me use them as an example. They said that NAFTA would fail and the world would come to an end. Well, ultimately that was proven wrong 15 years ago. As we look forward to TILMA, this is about getting best value for our citizens, that elect us. If someone wants to stand up and say, "I'm against getting best value for my taxpayers and my tax dollars," then I guess I will argue with them forever because I believe that it is a very worthwhile, critical principle to follow through with.

So we are consulting. We are also consulting with professional associations, I might add. They're taking place not only with municipalities. But TILMA does not apply to municipalities in 2009. I'm very optimistic that by that time we will have, by consulting with our key stakeholders, the best deal possible.

It will not be coming back to this Legislature. It's not necessary because of the fact that this is a trade deal. It's a trade deal helping citizens. There is no law that is required. It is about simple, good, old-fashioned common sense. My grandfather would often say that the whole problem with common sense is that it's not so common.

In listening to the Council of Canadians, one would think that the sky is going to come down. For some reason they think that there is some ulterior motive. There is no ulterior motive. You have a Liberal government in British Columbia working with a Conservative government in Alberta trying to say: what can we do to bust barriers to get the best value for our citizens? That is the principle behind what we are doing.

Now, the hon. member raises a very important point relative to aboriginals being part of the solution when it comes to the issue of employment opportunities. I'm very proud of what has taken place. But let me reiterate, and these are exactly the words that came from our Premier regarding the issue of foreign workers. This government has a policy: first and foremost is Alberta, second is Canada and other provinces and territories, and third is foreign workers. So Alberta first because it just makes good sense – and I say good sense: s-e-n-s-e and c-e-n-t-s – rather than having someone come from another part of the world.

Aboriginals and the training with the RAP program and Careers: the Next Generation. My very good friend Eric Newell, the former

CEO of Syncrude. Of course, I'm very proud to say that Syncrude Canada is the single largest employer of aboriginals in this country at over 25 per cent. It's because of a long-term plan, and that plan is being employed with tremendous economic opportunity. The approach that we are taking as a government is Alberta first, Canada second, and other provinces and territories and foreign offices third. That is the approach of our Premier and our government, and we remain steadfast to that approach. I want to assure the hon. member that that will continue to be and, without question, that aboriginals will continue to be part of the solution relative to successful employment opportunity and training.

Alberta is covered, by the way, under a First Nations consultation, which is an important point. Alberta is covered under Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8. More than 30 land claims with potential liability are out there right now. The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled – and Alberta is following this ruling – that the First Nations must be consulted. We are consulting with them. Alberta's aboriginal consultation policy and guidelines is a cross-ministry initiative where rights are respected, risks are mitigated, and greater investment certainty is provided for everyone involved, with tremendous opportunity.

First Nations and industry interact every day over resource development and exploration. Policy and guidelines help to avoid conflicts involving Crown land. I'm very proud to say that the province of Alberta is viewed by the rest of Canada as a leader. Why are we viewed as a leader? We had 15 land claims in the province of Alberta, and of the 15 land claims, working with the federal government and our First Nations, 12 of them, over 85 per cent, are complete. No other province can match that impressive work that has been done. I say that because of the good work and the relationships we've built over the last 15 years with the aboriginal people. They are a part of our solution.

I want to also say that as we go forward, the work that we are doing I believe is very important, and we'll continue on that way because at the end of the day we want to do what is best for our citizens, who are paying the bills in this budget that I present today.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I was just intrigued by the comments that the minister was making about TILMA. I disagree very strongly with the take that this government has on TILMA, that it's just a trade deal, so it needn't come before the elected representatives in this province. You can consult far and wide, but that is not bringing this matter before this Assembly and allowing the people of Alberta to have their say through their elected representatives. Once again I see this government doing things behind closed doors, secretive and arrogant. That's what this TILMA deal is.

You're not kidding me that this is just a trade deal. This is affecting every part of our lives, and more importantly, you guys are selling away, giving away our ability as local governments on any level to enforce public policy. If you now want to bring in public policy that contravenes what's in TILMA, you're stuck because TILMA is going to be paramount. If you've negotiated something that says otherwise, I'd like to see it. Table it in this House. Because what I've seen so far says that TILMA is paramount.

Just let me pick something out of thin air. For example, let's say you've got schools – and a number of them have done this. Let's say that you've got a school that, you know, sells pop and chips and chocolate bars and stuff, and they decide that in the future they want

to do something that is going to be better for their student population and for their students' health, and that is to not renew their contract with Coke or Pepsi or whoever has been supplying the carbonated beverage and not renew their contract with whoever is the distributor of the food that goes into the vending machines. But this is now a B.C. firm that has this contract or this agreement, and they go: sorry, but you're impinging upon our right to make money and to invest in this, and the school must keep providing these vending machines in the school.

So you've got a situation where local authorities, like a school board, a city council, a municipality, a provincial government, want to make transformative policy to either encourage the behaviour of its citizens or discourage the behaviour of its citizens through public policy. You are now limited by the terms that are under TILMA. That's the problem. It is arrogant beyond belief – and this government doesn't even understand how arrogant it is – that it did not bring that agreement here. You can be as flippant as you want, that it was a Liberal government in B.C. that did this, but that Liberal government actually had the respect for their citizens to bring it before the Legislative Assembly in B.C. and allow it to be openly debated. None of this 10 hours of debate, and then you've had too much, stuff. They allowed it to come before their Assembly and be openly debated for as long as people wanted to keep that discussion going.

4:20

We have an agreement here that affects every part of our lives. It affects labour. Let's not kid ourselves: this is going to affect the standards of labour here. We have some trade unions that have higher standards in this province. You think that B.C. is going to come up? I don't think so. It's going to be about Alberta's standards going down. Let's look at the differences right now between the standards of accreditation for nurse practitioners between Alberta and B.C. Do you think Alberta is going to end up going up or down to meet B.C.? It's not going to go up, folks. It's going to end up going down. Why as a legislator, why as a government would you people go in there and negotiate something that is going to put me and other Albertans in a worse spot than we were before? How could you do that on our behalf and then not even allow us to talk about it, supposedly in an open and democratic society?

This is not a new government. I'm looking at the same 60 people here that are approaching things in exactly the same way as they did six and eight months ago. It's about: we know better. It's completely paternalistic. It's done behind closed doors. Then all the citizens get a pat on the head, that you really know best, and they should just all fall in line and agree to it. Well, I think we're beginning to see that some of the provisions that came through under free trade and now under NAFTA have not been, particularly, to the benefit of citizens. I think there'd be a number of people who would be arguing that they'd rather have those jobs that are now being done offshore by somebody in India or Latin America. They would rather have that job here and be employed and have a salary and some dignity in their lives.

There's a lot more to TILMA than meets the eye, and I am extremely disappointed in the continuing intransigence of this government to refuse to get out there and support your beliefs in an open forum. What I'm getting right now is very one-sided. Even individual members of the public that have gone to meet with backbenchers in the government are patted on the head: oh, you don't really understand what's going on. Well, I'd argue that some of those citizens do understand what's going on.

I really am concerned that this government has gotten us into something that is not going to be to the benefit of the citizens of Alberta. I don't know why the government continually makes choices that put the profit and the health and wellness of the business sector ahead of the autonomy of our citizens. That's not to say that there's anything wrong with the business sector. There's not. They're very successful. They make a lot of people a lot of money here. They supply us with many goods and services. It's a well-respected profession. There's nothing wrong with them. But I don't understand why this government always opts for policies that favour that sector over their citizens.

Who else is going to speak up for the citizens? There's just us. That's our job, to look after them, and I don't understand why this government always abdicates that in favour of another sector. The business sector doesn't need a lot of help. They've got a lot of money. They've got a lot of connections. They've got good marketing skills. They've got lobbyists working for them. They're doing pretty well. They're pretty smart guys. They're good at looking after themselves. I don't understand why you always fold, every time, in favour of our own citizens. It doesn't make sense to me.

Once again, the refusal to bring it before this Assembly is really wrong. I cannot see how you can defend that choice. If you've got nothing to worry about, if you're so right about the choices that have been made here, if people are going to be so excited by this, then, great. Bring it before this Assembly for debate. Let's see how excited everybody is.

Thanks very much.

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. In fact, I'm very pleased by what the hon. member said in her preamble, when she said, and I quote: the British Columbia government at least have it in front of their people in the Legislature. We, the government of Alberta, are doing exactly the same thing that the British Columbia government is doing in front of the Legislature, so I can interpret from that that the hon. member is obviously very pleased in terms of what we are doing. We, also, under Bill 38 have it in front of the Legislature. Obviously, the hon. member is not a free trader.

**Ms Blakeman:** Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

#### **Point of Order Imputing Motives**

**Ms Blakeman:** Under 23(h), (i), and (j).

Don't twist my words. I very clearly was talking about bringing the whole idea of supporting that contract before this Assembly for debate, not one section of it that allows the fines to go through the court system. So don't twist my words. Don't impugn motives to me.

**The Deputy Chair:** Through the chair, please.

**Ms Blakeman:** Mr. Chairperson, of course, through you. But please remind that member that, you know, if he's going to quote me directly, then he should quote me directly and include in that the intent behind it. Don't impugn motives to me. Don't assign things to me that I didn't say. Very clearly, in almost 10 minutes, I talked about bringing approval of that trade agreement before this Assembly to debate in its entirety, not one tiny little clause that allows the

courts to assign a benefit if somebody tries to sue us and we lose. And this is what he's claiming is bringing TILMA in front of us?

I'm sorry; I'm wandering into debate. I apologize for that, Mr. Chairman, but clearly the member's remarks have provoked debate.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. minister, on the point of order.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Well, there's no point of order, in my judgment. Having said that . . .

**Ms Blakeman:** He's the chairman. Allow him to rule.

**The Deputy Chair:** The minister has the floor.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Well, Mr. Chairman, in terms of twisting her words, I am not twisting her words. The words came out the way they were, and I do not believe I have twisted them. We have Bill 38 in front of this Legislature, under which is TILMA. It is in front of the Legislature. I will quite simply say that the facts are the facts, and I'm not twisting anyone's words.

I'd like to proceed with some of the other comments.

**The Deputy Chair:** Anybody else on the point of order?

Hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-Centre did rise on a point of order citing Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j), I believe. The hon. minister has also responded on that matter. Every member of this Assembly is an hon. member, and we would like to respect every individual and believe that what they are saying is based on factual information. I hope that what transpired right now will be something that will clarify the position of both the Member for Edmonton-Centre as well as the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. I'd like us to proceed with the debate that was before us.

The hon. minister.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have interpreted that it's obvious that the hon. member, in making this observation, is clearly not a free trader. That is an observation, with the utmost respect. This government and the Liberal government of B.C. are free traders, and they're free traders in this way: they want the best value for the citizens that elect them. I'm quite certain that the hon. member wants the best value for the citizens that elect all of us in this Legislature, so that is the motive behind what it is that we're doing.

I would like to also say this, and I use a quote. I might add that everyone really listen carefully, and I will attribute the quote: we look forward to continuing to work with our counterparts in the B.C. government to facilitate labour mobility between both provinces; we believe that registered nurses in Alberta should without any barrier be able to go from one province to the other. That is of course said by Mary-Anne Robinson. Now, you may ask: who is Mary-Anne Robinson? She is the executive director of the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta.

As much as we are all here supporting health care in terms of providing the services, I don't think anyone in this Legislature would want to stop a nurse. Now, one can only interpret by some of the other comments that it's almost like we don't want health care professionals coming from other provinces to Alberta. Well, we want them to come to Alberta, and that is our motive behind this mobility trade agreement.

We want to not have buses going from one province to another and then simply coming back empty. We want to barrier-bust. We want the best value. We want to ensure it. Rather than a truck of goods and services that used to stop at the B.C. border because the regulation was different in B.C. versus Alberta, we want to be able to allow the goods to flow to the other province. You know why? Because it means a lower and best-value cost to the taxpayer, be it of Alberta or B.C.

The fine example that we use is in Golden, B.C., where we have an Alberta vehicle inspection office. This is an inspection office where bales of hay that used to be reloaded at a border are now done in a joint Alberta/B.C. inspection office where we actually have joint mobility for inspecting our regulatory regimes that we have in a co-ordinated approach. It is harmonized. It avoids duplication. Who is the winner in all this? We do not compromise standard. We do not compromise safety. Ultimately, the people that are paying for that product and those goods and service are going to be the ones that benefit because of that, because we are more harmonized. That's what TILMA is all about.

4:30

I am proud to say that I am a free trader. I believe in the best value. I think every hon. member in here does support free trade. Contrary to the Council of Canadians, who on their website believe that myself and the hon. Liberal cabinet minister from B.C. are going to make sure that the sky falls because of TILMA, nothing could be further from the truth. Let me say one other thing. It could not be further from the truth when an hon. member suggests that the government, not a person, is arrogant. I can only say to you that this government is not arrogant. We are consulting. We are transparent. We are doing exactly what the British Columbia Liberal government is doing in their Legislature. Consequently, one can interpret from that that we are clearly, without any question, far from arrogant but, if anything, a consultative government that believes that we want to get the best value for our citizens.

**Ms Blakeman:** A complete fabrication.

**Mr. Boutillier:** On a point of order. She suggested a complete fabrication. She's calling me a liar. That's not true.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. minister, first, the chair did not recognize you on the point of order. Secondly, there was no citation.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, just for your information, we have about nine minutes left in this segment, so govern yourself accordingly.

**Mr. Bonko:** Oh, boy. Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think the whole thing comes down to standards. I think we in Alberta are very proud of the standards that we've achieved as far as being journeypersons or being recognized as health care professionals. I think that's what the Member for Edmonton-Centre was trying to get at, that we're very proud of the distinction and the high standards which we govern ourselves by. When you bring in people with lower standards, that's when we do take exception. When we hired sheriffs, we were concerned about it being dumbing down. That's what the whole thing is about. Why would we lower our standards when we have been come to known as the province with exceptional standards? That's all I'm going to say about that particular piece.

**Dr. Brown:** B.C. is not a Third World country.

**Mr. Bonko:** Not at all, but they have lower standards. Why not come up to our standards? Then we're all competing on the same thing: an apple to an apple, an orange to an orange, but not three years versus four years. There's a big difference right there in itself because we go to grade 12 and they go to grade 13 there, so you get an idea of where I'm going here.

I'm going to talk about the Métis settlements transitional funding and about this program that relates to the significant opportunities and challenges listed in the ministry's business plan. This is clearly taking over from the Métis settlements funding, which ended this year. I'd like a little bit more information as to where the money is going to go and the single biggest chunk of it as well.

Could the minister please tell us what that particular money is going for? How will the minister's consultation with the Métis settlements work? What are the discussions to be with the public, or at least will there be an opportunity for public input? Is this one-off funding or is this long-term funding that's going to take the place of that other funding that was cut off there? What kind of end result is the minister looking for for his government with the relationship with the Métis people?

Again, this gets back to: how do we know of the effectiveness of the money? How can this be measured? Do we have tangible results so that we could say that from this point on there's been an improvement in area X, Y, Z? But just to say, "Well, there have been improvements," how do you measure the effectiveness and the use of this money? I'll just end right there specifically with some of that part on the transitional funding.

The other part that I'd like to raise is aboriginal health. We know that there are some real concerns with health strategies that need to be in place, and it's more about educating than, I guess, telling them. It's a long process because there are a number of them that have serious health concerns, and the biggest one would be with diabetes. I was at the one conference there, and that's one of the biggest single issues that they have to deal with right now, the increase in diabetes. How is the minister going to be dealing with the continued aboriginal health strategies, which were indicated on line 4.0.3 with the overall heading of aboriginal health?

I'll sit down and listen for some specifics, but just one more question before I do. I would like a little bit more specific, tighter timelines with regard to TILMA. When will we begin consultations with the public? How much time are we going to allow? Again, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre said, it would be fantastic to say that we did bring it before the Legislature, that specific bill, TILMA, the same way that they are bringing it before their Legislature in B.C. That's exactly what we're looking for: open, transparent debate, accountable to the public which elected us through our representation to be their voices. That's exactly what we're looking for.

Those are the specifics that I'd like to ask the minister for. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Boutillier:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member raises some excellent points. First of all, addressing the issue of aboriginal health care, I'm very proud to say that, of course, diabetes has been an identified area within aboriginal communities. I must admit that I'm not aboriginal but also have a chronic disease, type 1 diabetes. Many of my aboriginal friends do as well, so we have something in common.

I'm very proud of Alberta Health and the cross-ministry initiatives that they have undertaken, working with the aboriginal communities.

The hon. minister of health, who was here today – I want to say that it is my understanding that these cross-ministry initiatives are working very well and will continue to work well because of the commitment of our government.

On the point of TILMA and its consultation the consultation and speaking with Albertans is taking place as we speak, and it will continue to take place over the next two-year period. That is very important to ensure that the process that B.C. is undertaking, that we're taking – we're both in the Legislature now on this component of TILMA. I can say that I'm very optimistic with the excellent advice that we get from many of the professional groups, nursing association, teachers.

We have a situation now where a teacher would actually move to Alberta with their spouse, be it male or female. They'd get here, but they would not be able to teach right away. The reason they weren't able to teach is because we did not have a harmonized approach. So this is really an example of, you know: here we are; our province is growing. We are building more schools with our capital budget. We have more teachers coming in. Ultimately, we're trying to ensure that we have the educators that are required, and TILMA will be another barrier buster to achieve that objective.

Consequently, I want to say that that consultation will continue in an open and transparent way. I'm very pleased that we're discussing it right here, right now, in my budget. I can't think of anything for the people of Alberta that would be more transparent and open than what we are doing as we speak.

The other comment that I was going to answer was on the issue of transitional funding on Métis settlements. Of course, we have eight Métis settlements. I work very closely with the president of the Métis settlements, Alden Armstrong. I just recently met with him again. We have \$9 million. The ultimate goal – and I know that the hon. member will agree – is self-sufficiency, building our communities in these settlements in a way that they are self-sufficient.

I want to say how pleased I am working with the Métis settlements council. The Premier has met with them. If you have an opportunity to see the most current *Métis Matters*, that messenger that just came out, you'll see where the Premier was awarded the important sash from the Métis settlements by Mr. Armstrong and his executive. I'm very proud of that relationship.

I might say that \$7 million of the \$9 million – of course, we're waiting for the business plan, which the Métis settlements are bringing back by the end of June. I've been informed by the chair that they are making excellent progress with the \$7 million that is being used for the business plan that they are doing relative to sustaining their communities. Also, I believe that there is \$2 million in addition. That is a million at the front end and a million at the back end of a successful business case. What we will be doing is evaluating the business case and the practices that are going to be utilized in terms of successes on Métis settlements across, you know, many, many areas.

I want to assure the hon. member that this initiative is a very positive one, and I do not view it as an expense but, actually, as an investment in terms of building that self-sufficiency within our Métis settlements.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just some more specifics. Will the public be able to have input with regard to those discussions on the transitional funding? Again, how do we know the effectiveness of the money? How can the effectiveness or the results be

measured? That's the big thing that we're looking for. It's easy just to throw money, but how do you know that the money is being well spent, and what are the results that we're getting from that money?

4:40

**Mr. Boutilier:** That's exactly part of the analysis, Mr. Chair, that we will be covering. This will be coming back to government, but right now we have tremendous confidence in the Métis settlements and their leadership. Their leadership are carrying out this very extensive review within their people, within the settlements. What we will be doing is working in partnership with them. We'll be coming forward and evaluating the business case. It's intended to be back by mid-summer. That was a commitment made by the chair. I have every confidence that there is no indication that any of those dollars that are being utilized for this self-sufficiency initiative are in any way deviating from that. In fact, quite contrary: I have been hearing very positive successes.

So we're measuring it, but I think it's fair to wait until the business case comes back, to allow the peoples within the Métis settlements to finalize with their traditional knowledge, with their examples of good work that will be done.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, the time allocated for the Department of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations has now lapsed. I would like to thank the department officials and any other support staff for providing assistance to the minister. Thank you so very much.

#### **Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture**

**The Deputy Chair:** I'll invite the hon. minister to begin his opening remarks and introduce the officials present in the Assembly.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present the estimates for Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture for 2007 and 2008. Joining me here today are a few of my key department staff who help keep my ministry running smoothly: on my immediate right, Fay Orr, my deputy minister; on my left, Sue Bohaichuk, acting assistant deputy minister of culture and community development; Dave Nielsen, acting assistant deputy minister of parks, conservation, recreation, and sport; Bob Scott, assistant deputy minister of tourism marketing and heritage; and Pam Arnston, executive director of financial services. Also, seated in the gallery is Susan Cribbs, executive director of policy, planning, and legislative services.

Mr. Chairman, our ministry is known as the quality of life ministry. We help create a strong and vibrant province. Our investments in culture, recreation, parks, and so much more generate economic benefits and create jobs for Albertans. Our volunteer organizations and nonprofits employ 176,000 people and have an economic impact of \$9.6 billion. Recreation and sport grants generate impressive returns. For every grant dollar that's spent, this generates \$5 in community spending. Our provincial historic and cultural sites contribute \$61 million to our economy, while our parks contribute \$1.3 billion. Also, our tourism industry alone generates over \$5 billion for Alberta's economy, and it employs more than 103,000 people.

Mr. Chairman, it's clear that our investments are sound ones, but the main focus of our department, our vision, is to foster a superior quality of life to make Alberta one of the best places to live, work, and visit. Our mission is to promote, develop, and preserve tourism, culture, and heritage in support of vibrant, active, and inclusive

communities. The work of our ministry touches the lives of all Albertans. With our population growing every day, it is vital that we continue to invest in the well-being of our growing communities for current and future generations. That's why Budget 2007 focused on managing growth pressures, one of our government's top priorities. With your approval and support our department will help meet some of the challenges we are facing.

Our 2007-08 program expense is \$756 million, a net increase of \$300 million, the majority of which is one-time capital grants. We have allocated \$40 million for the first year of a three-year \$69 million commitment to the Calgary Olympic Development Association capital renewal project. Another \$80 million in one-time capital grants will support major athletic facilities, fairs, and exhibitions. We have allocated \$140 million a year for two years to create the new major community facilities program. This program will help nonprofit groups, municipalities, and aboriginal communities build, maintain, or upgrade recreation and cultural facilities for public use. These commitments have been made in response to the incredible growth and demands we are experiencing. Mr. Chairman, other budget allocations have also been based on the need to grow along with our population.

We have listened to what Albertans want and what Albertans value. The rights of all Albertans are always of utmost importance. Educating Albertans and protecting their rights are key to making our province a safe and welcoming place to call home. Ninety per cent of Albertans say that the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission is important to ensuring that our rights are protected in our province. With that in mind, we will increase support for the commission for programs promoting fairness, diversity, and inclusion by 7 per cent.

Another important group representing the interests of Albertans is the Francophone Secretariat. The secretariat represents more than 205,000 francophones in our province. An 8 per cent increase in its budget will support initiatives promoting French language and culture and will help to preserve a rich part of our heritage.

Other aspects of our heritage are preserved in our provincially owned historical sites and museums. Four million dollars more has been allocated to these attractions to help with operating costs and refurbishing displays and exhibits. The Royal Tyrrell Museum has already unveiled its plans to renovate a permanent gallery. Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump will produce a new presentation for their main theatre. Exterior and exhibit improvements will also be done at Historic Dunvegan, Stephansson House, and Fort George and Buckingham House. Our museums and historic sites are major attractions for Albertans and other visitors alike, attracting some 850,000 visits in 2005.

Our provincial parks are another major draw for visitors, attracting 8 and a half million visits per year. We will address service and maintenance in these popular areas with an \$8 million injection. That means more conservation officers, interpreters, maintenance, and gate staff to serve visitors and protect our lands and facilities. Mr. Chairman, as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of Alberta's provincial parks this year, it is the perfect opportunity to invest in these valuable resources.

Our natural areas are very popular with Albertans perhaps because over 80 per cent of adult Albertans participate in some sort of recreation or sport. Albertans are interested in leading healthy, active lives, and we are committed to fostering this. Lottery funding for the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation will increase by 15 per cent, an additional \$3 million. The foundation uses its total budget of \$26.6 million to support programs like the

Alberta Games, providing grants to more than 100 associations to train coaches and much more. By helping to encourage Albertans to stay active, we are lowering diabetes and cancer rates, promoting higher academic achievement, and involving families in their communities, another sound investment.

Albertans also like to get involved with our artistic and cultural communities. Most Albertans, 87 per cent of them, feel that the arts are an important contributor to our quality of life. That's why we will invest \$65.9 million in the arts and cultural programs this year.

**Mr. Strang:** How much?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Sixty-five point nine million.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts, which supports festivals, exhibits, artists, and more, received an additional \$4.5 million in lottery funding. This is an increase of 20 per cent over last year. Our festivals and events draw millions of visitors each year, and they are a highlight for Alberta's tourism industry.

Promoting our cultural attractions, our exciting adventures, and our beautiful landscapes in a very competitive industry is a challenge. Our efforts to improve our tourism industry will receive a \$9 million boost this year thanks to increased collections under the tourism levy. These additional funds will help us attract visitors from key markets and will allow us to focus on emerging markets as well. Albertans continue to be our largest market and represent about half of Alberta's total tourism expenditures. With new Albertans arriving every day, we will continue to encourage people to explore our province and all it has to offer.

Increased funding will also go towards developing new and improved tourism products that will help us to be competitive in this competitive industry. Initiatives like the Canadian badlands come to mind. The Canadian badlands are being branded as Alberta's next tourism icon. Reaching from Stettler in the north to the Montana border and all the way from just east of Queen Elizabeth II highway to the Saskatchewan border, the Canadian badlands include an impressive mix of history, art, culture, and adventure perfect for any traveller. The Canadian badlands are a great example of how we are building on our natural advantages and our past successes and making smart investments in our future.

By supporting the 2007-08 estimates for my ministry, you are supporting our efforts in helping us make Alberta one of the best places to live, work, and visit now and for the years to come.

Mr. Chairman, I would be pleased to answer any questions that the members may have.

4:50

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and participate in the budget debate for the Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. I want to congratulate the minister for deliberating his first budget debate, and I want to thank the minister as well as his staff for their hard work and great effort in presenting all the paperwork.

First of all, I would like to start with some key issues and questions in regard to this ministry. I'll start with arts and culture. Mr. Chairman, overall funding for culture is being reduced by \$3.84 million. Even with a slight increase to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, according to the most recent Stats Canada figures available, Alberta ranks 11th of the 13 provinces and territories in its per capita funding for the arts. Even though we are the richest province in the

country, this government only spends about \$63 per person on the arts.

This contradicts a recent poll indicating that 55 per cent of Calgarians believe the government should invest more in performing arts, and 33 per cent of Edmontonians feel that the province doesn't spend enough on arts and culture. Young professionals in Alberta want to live in vibrant communities that value arts and culture. They want to have a variety of high-quality arts and culture events available to them.

Artists in Alberta have shown how incredibly entrepreneurial they are by finding ways to adapt to this government's neglect of their profession. They find creative ways to raise money and budget, but they have to accept low wages as the price of pursuing their dreams. Understandably, artists often leave Alberta to go to provinces where governments are more supportive and encouraging.

Stats Canada also reported that the economic impact of the culture sector in Alberta was \$4.3 billion in the year 2001. The arts are an important tool in job creation and economic diversification. The Alberta Liberals recognize the value of the arts and culture sector and have developed policies that include immediately doubling the budget for AFA and considering substantial increases in the future; reviewing the operations and the mandate of the AFA; establishing a \$500 million endowment fund for the arts, social sciences, and humanities.

Estimates, page 355, line 5.0.2. Funding for the arts is decreasing again this year by \$1.167 million, or 37 per cent. Why hasn't this government made arts funding a real priority yet? How will this money be utilized this year? What groups, organizations, or programs will be impacted by this funding cut?

Estimates, page 355, line 5.0.8. Funding for assistance to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is \$26.634 million, an increase of 21 per cent. Although this increase is welcome, it is once again far below what the arts sector requires in this province. Is the new minister prepared to work with the arts sector to ensure that their concerns are addressed? Is the minister willing to commit today to making arts funding a real priority for this government in years to come?

Arts groups have been asking for a substantial increase in funding for years. It has been estimated that the arts contribute approximately \$150 million annually to the economy of this province, yet this government continues to rank among the poorest supporters of the arts in Canada. The point here, which is agreed upon by many stakeholders, is: why does this government consistently fail to support the arts when municipal and federal governments recognize the importance of the arts? Can the minister explain to these artists why they are always underfunded? Can the minister explain to the citizens of Alberta why this government ignores their wishes and continues to underfund the arts sector? Previous ministers claimed that the Tory caucus did not support a substantial increase to arts funding. What is the new minister going to do to change this ongoing problem?

GOA strategic business plan, page 36. A goal of this government is to create a cultural policy. What groups has the minister consulted? How do professional artists fit into the cultural policy?

Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture's business plan, page 307. How does the minister expect to meet the goal of attracting and retaining knowledge workers by enhancing Alberta's reputation as a sophisticated, modern province with a thriving cultural sector without providing professional artists with more funding and opportunities?

The next issue I want to talk about is parks. Estimates, page 354, line 2.0.3. Funding for the parks operations is increasing to \$39.6

million, or by 18 per cent, for the maintenance, operations, and more parks staff. What problems with the parks operations has the minister identified that require additional financial support? How will this additional money be used? Which parks have requested additional funding? Which parks will be receiving this money? Is there a long-term plan that sets priorities for infrastructure renewal and conservation plans? Where do the Alberta river valleys fit on this government's list of priorities?

Estimates, page 354, line 2.0.6. One million dollars is allocated for nominal sum disposals. What is included under this line item? Where does this money go?

TPRC's business plan, page 308. "To keep pace with population growth and high visitation rates, new provincial parks and recreational areas that provide additional outdoor recreation opportunities, facilities and services need to be pursued." What areas are being considered for designation as provincial parks? Are municipalities and communities being consulted?

Now I come to sports. Estimates, page 354, section 3, recreation and sports. What plans does the minister have for implementing the Alberta sports plan? The Alberta Liberals have been very vocal in urging this government to implement the Alberta sports plan and make sports, recreation, and healthy living a priority.

Estimates page 354, line 3.0.4. A new recreation and sports facilities grant is being established this year. What are the guidelines for this \$90 million fund? Who is eligible? Who can apply? Where can interested groups find more information? Who will be overseeing the distribution of this fund? What limits or conditions are in place for this fund? Has the minister been working with the minister of health to develop sports and recreation programs?

5:00

I have a few miscellaneous issues and questions that I would like to ask the minister, Mr. Chairman. The new major community facility program is intended to provide funding for projects identified as a priority for communities. Given the fact that rules in other granting programs such as the community initiatives program were clearly broken by this government, will this minister guarantee that the rules governing this \$280 million program be consistently followed?

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

**Mr. Goudreau:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First, I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for his kind opening comments. I really appreciate it, and certainly my staff, who have done a tremendous amount of work on our budget and on our business plan, also appreciate that.

Your discussion started off by talking about arts and culture. You're aware that one of my mandates is to look at drafting a cultural policy that will encompass Alberta's cultural, historical, and natural advantages. My goal is to have a policy that reflects the widely held view that culture is recognized in a broad sense.

You talked about arts funding. Certainly the arts are very much a key element in quality of life, and improving Alberta's quality of life is one of my goals and one of our government's top priorities. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts received an additional 4 and a half million dollars through this particular budget, raising the foundation's total budget to \$27.3 million. In total, then, the foundation has received – and I have to emphasize that – a 63 per cent increase in lottery funding since 2002. This year's increase, at about 20 per cent, takes that to 63, so it's a significant change from where we were in the past. I'm not sure where your numbers come

from, hon. member, but in 2006-07 the numbers that we have ranked Alberta fifth out of all the provinces and territories in per capita funds awarded by provincial arts funding agencies.

We looked at funding that's given to other groups aside from the Foundation for the Arts. For example, a half million dollars is dedicated to supporting the 2008 Juno awards in Calgary. Resident companies of the Jubilee auditoria are given reduced rental rates, and those savings range anywhere from 6 to 7 per cent to 85 per cent. In addition, the government supports the arts through Alberta's educational institutions, where over 5,000 students are enrolled full-time in fine arts programs. Advanced education operating grants to institutions like the Alberta College of Art and Design and the Banff Centre exceeded \$21 million in 2004-05. So if you compare the dollars provided to the community, then you need to include those dollars and not just strictly the dollars that are provided to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. We can talk about the province's film industry, and that budget is receiving a 24 per cent increase, totalling \$18.3 million.

No doubt, as we evolve the cultural policy, arts funding will become a very, very strong element of that particular policy being developed for the province. In talking about the cultural policy, you've asked as to who we would have inquired or who we would have talked to. I need to indicate that extensive research has been completed to define the scope and the content of the policies. We've had a number of public opinions, research. There have been nine focus groups. There have been telephone surveys of over a thousand Albertans. We've had 13 stakeholder consultations and dialogue with other ministries and other jurisdictions on all of those policies and programs.

We've basically identified the key components of the cultural policy. We're establishing priorities and strategies and the desired outcomes. Those are going to be reviewed with further consultations that will be happening throughout this particular summer. Again, it will provide an assessment of priorities for the use, then, in developing the associated implementation plan. Certainly, as we move forward with that particular cultural policy, there will be additional budget dollars that will be tied to that, and we hope that we'll be able to introduce that in next year's budget.

You also talked about other funding, and I want to indicate to the hon. member that we've been supporting other groups and facilities. I just want to touch base very quickly on the Art Gallery of Alberta. You're aware that the provincial government has committed \$15 million to the Art Gallery. We are one of the largest contributors to this project to date, and certainly those dollars came from the centennial funding.

We recognize that the Art Gallery has a shortfall of \$32 million and that they've made a formal request for funding. That is being considered through our regular process, along with other government priorities and commitments, so as we speak we are considering the shortfall. We're committed. We want to see the Art Gallery proceed in the province and are prepared to cover some of those costs.

The question on nominal sum disposals. Basically, we are looking at the possibility of transferring ownership of assets. There are some discussions that we might be disposing of some provincial recreation areas. There are a number of sites that we are reviewing that we might be able to divest ourselves of and transfer those particular assets to local municipalities. That's where the \$1 million comes from.

I'm just going through some of the questions that you might have had otherwise. You indicated a decrease in the total overall arts and

cultural budget. Last year we had given about \$600,000 to support the 2006 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC. It was a one-time commitment; that \$600,000 is not reflected in this year's budget.

As well, we had injected \$12.5 million as a one-time increase that was approved by our ministry and the government of Alberta to address the backlog of approved grants for the film industry, the film development fund. That 12 and a half million dollars is not in this year's budget. So if you look at 12 and a half million dollars and \$600,000, total those numbers up and remove them from our budget, you will actually see that our budget is increasing quite dramatically, rather than decreasing, as you indicated.

On the Alberta Foundation for the Arts we are doing a program evaluation as well. Certainly, we want to make sure that the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is providing the effectiveness that is required, and we are seeing how we might be able to make some improvements and actually increase its effectiveness for the province of Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, I'll sit down now and entertain additional questions.

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll move on to the horse racing and breeding renewal program. That program is receiving about a \$56 million subsidy, an \$11 million increase over last year. How is this industry sustainable? What is the long-term funding strategy for the for-profit horse-racing industry? Why does this government continue to subsidize horse racing at the expense of other programs?

In the year 2006 the Auditor General's report recommends that the ministry approve its system for selecting private operators to run provincially owned parks and for monitoring contract performance. Have these recommendations been implemented yet? They were supposed to be implemented by December 31, 2006. What specific changes were made to the contracting process? How are improvements being measured?

5:10

The next question I have is about the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, which is no longer able to issue special permission for an underage musician to perform in a licensed premise. This move will limit opportunities for young performers to learn and practise. According to musicians, being able to perform in licensed facilities is an essential part of developing and applying skills. What involvement did the minister have in making this decision? Given that there were never any complaints about underage musicians working in these establishments, why was the decision made to ban them? Will the minister reverse this decision?

I'll move on to the film industry estimates page 355, line 5.0.5. Can the minister explain why the Alberta film development program overspent in the year 2006 by \$12.5 million? Can the minister explain why funding for this program is back down to \$18 million, a reduction of 33 per cent or \$9 million? How does the minister justify this cut given the slowing pace of production in Alberta this summer? Is the minister developing other incentives to attract the film industry to Alberta?

On tourism. On May 10 I asked the minister to release the Leitch report. The tourism community is waiting for the final report that identifies gaps in the accountability in the current tourism framework and recommends options to close those gaps. Will the minister make that report public immediately? What changes to Travel



Alberta's governance structure is the minister considering? How much of the \$57 million tourism budget does Travel Alberta control? What involvement does the tourism industry have in deciding how these funds are spent? We hear that there is an opportunity for tourism revenue growth in rural communities, especially agricultural tourism. How much support is being allocated specifically for agricultural tourism? What is being done to assist rural communities in creating marketing and development plans?

Mr. Chairman, I have a couple of other miscellaneous questions. I asked the minister questions about the Alberta Provincial Museum project that is delayed for the time being. I just want to know what progress has been made so far.

One of my constituents asked me about the name of the ministry. We call it Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. How come culture comes last? It's not even alphabetical. Arts and culture are so important, and culture is last. Even the former Premier of this province was suggesting that there should be a separate ministry for arts and culture. I'm really shocked to see the name of the ministry – Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture – with culture named last. I think we should think twice, I mean, a hundred times before naming this ministry. I want to know who named this ministry, and what's the secret behind this?

I want to ask another question about tourism. You know, it's the fourth largest industry in Alberta. Do we have the proper plan for this? If not, are we going to make a sustainable plan for this industry? If we have a proper sustainable policy for this sector, I think most of the stakeholders I talked to said that we can increase this industry to maybe a \$10 billion industry. If we have a long-term sustainable plan for this, I would love to see that plan. I want to know what the progress is on this sector.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Goudreau:** Well, thank you. I'll keep on responding to some of the initial questions first and then move on to the second series of questions that he had.

There were some discussions initially about the \$90 million under the ministry's budget. The hon. member was asking why \$90 million had been allocated towards recreation and sports facilities as grants. Those are one-time grants in the capital plan. There was \$10 million being allocated to Rexall Place, \$10 million for Pengrowth Saddledome, \$15 million for Commonwealth Stadium, \$15 million for McMahon Stadium, and \$40 million for Canada Olympic Park in Calgary. Certainly, \$40 million is a start towards \$69 million of improvements that we're doing to help train our Olympians for the 2010 games.

The provincial parks, a question there about the plan. Certainly, the ministry will develop the parks plan in three different phases, starting with the comprehensive needs assessment and reviewing sort of the deferred maintenance issues in existing parks. We're looking at some of the deferred maintenance there, and we're looking at options to expand the outdoor recreational opportunities. We're also looking at opportunities for new provincial parks, that will respond to increasing provincial growth and the overall services we offer to our visitors. Our visitors' expectations are rising all the time. We want to provide additional services there.

On the Alberta gaming and liquor control that the hon. member talked about, certainly that's not a mandate of my ministry. All of those regulations fall under the Ministry of the Solicitor General. Those questions would have to be directed at him. We are not

involved at all there. From the revenues that we get from lottery funds, we administer the revenue side and the spending side. But when it comes to the rules and the regulations and the control of the gaming machines, for instance, then that falls under a different ministry, so you would have to direct the questions there.

Going to horse racing. Certainly, the horse-racing industry is a controversial one amongst the opposition, but I need to indicate that we truly believe in the horse-racing industry in the province. It has a very, very long history in the province of Alberta. It generates some strong economic benefits and employs over 8,000 Albertans in the province. The thing that I need to indicate is that, you know, although they do get some revenues, a third of the money that's generated through the lottery comes back to the province of Alberta, and a third of those dollars are some of the dollars that we do use to support activities like the arts.

5:20

Certainly, they're not any different than other organizations where they actually work and earn a portion of the revenues from the casinos. They'll keep a portion. The other portion comes back to us as a province, and we allocate it back to other priorities that this province has. Last year there was \$41.8 million of slot machine revenue that was invested in the horse-racing industry. We need to remember that that \$41.8 million generated \$385 million of economic activity for the province of Alberta. So we still look at it as a positive investment, an investment that provides not only returns on the portion of the casino revenues but a portion of the revenues coming back in additional economic activity.

The horse-racing association, as well, has a business plan that they need to follow. That particular business plan is monitored very, very closely by ourselves as a government. The funding has to be used for very, very specific purposes. It's for the racetrack operations and capital. It's for breeding improvements and, certainly, purse enhancements. We are still supportive of the horse-racing industry. We want to see it grow. We want to see it evolve in the province of Alberta.

Going back to the Leitch report very quickly, the Leitch report has been made public over the last couple of weeks as information to you as hon. members. The four options that the Leitch report provided are there. They're on the Travel Alberta site. The Leitch report was released to the tourism industry and is being looked at and reviewed, and we expect comments from our stakeholders in the tourism industry.

When we look at the work that we might be doing in agricultural tourism, for instance, the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council advises the government on tourism. Generally, about a quarter of the funds that are collected through the levy is reinvested or expended in rural Alberta or targeted to rural Alberta initiatives. Right now, Travel Alberta spends about \$49 million for marketing out of the \$57.3 million that is collected under the levy, of which, as I indicated, a portion goes back to rural Alberta.

The question was asked about the overspending on the film industry. The hon. member needs to understand that the film industry budget went up by \$3.5 million. Last year we injected an additional \$12.5 million in one-time funding to the film industry, and that was to catch up on all the applications. There was a backlog of applications. To the member, that's a very, very positive thing.

We see the film industry growing quite rapidly in the province of Alberta. We are adding additional dollars to that particular sector, and we hope that it will keep on growing. At the rate that it's growing, we anticipate that we'll probably be again in a deficit

position this year and may have to go back sometime in the next year or two with, you know, maybe an additional one-time funding to catch up on shortfalls. We anticipate that a certain number of films might be filmed in the province of Alberta. We don't know how many will actually be filmed, so we tend to be somewhat, maybe, after the fact in terms of trying to support that particular industry.

But we are committed to the industry. We want to see it develop and grow. We want to eventually move into series productions in the province of Alberta, and we're looking at different alternatives to see that happen. The growth in the film industry and the television industry is basically due to Alberta's really strong winning combination of diverse locations that we can offer in the province. We're getting some very strong crews that are becoming experts in the film industry. We're having better and better producers in the province of Alberta. Certainly, the film development fund – all of that combined provides incentives to both our domestic and foreign productions.

The last comment that you had was on the word “culture” being part of the name of this particular Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. I need to remind the hon. member that the word “culture” had not been in the name of any ministry, well, for the last 15 years, probably.

You know, I had a chance to sit down with our past Premier Lougheed after he had made his comments. Premier Lougheed had not recognized or realized that “culture” had come back as part of the full name of a ministry. After he made his comments, I pointed out to him the fact that “culture” was back into a ministry name. He was very, very pleased to hear that. Certainly, we're heading in the right direction. The opposition member might say: well, it's the last name. It's at least within the name of the ministry.

On the Royal Alberta Museum the project renewal . . .

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the staff coming down and being on the floor to assist the minister today. I do appreciate the efforts of the minister, and I appreciate that he's made some attempts to get out and attend some of the artistic offerings in my city, Edmonton. I know that I've seen him at the opera and the ballet. There is much more in our cultural offerings, and I encourage him to continue to explore that. I think he's a nice person, and I think he's trying, but this government has set him at a task where he is coming from very, very, very far behind. What's that saying? A day late and a dollar short? Well, this would be about, oh, I don't know, 15 years late and \$20 million short.

I was going to say that I was disappointed in the efforts of the government around culture. I'm not disappointed; I'm flat out exasperated. You guys have missed the boat over and over and over again. To try and stand in here and say that we've increased funding by 25 per cent and 50 per cent or whatever number you're pulling out, you're funding the whole amount by so little that we have not allowed growth.

We had an amazing artistic community here, and in the last two incarnations of this particular Tory government, with the stagnant funding for the arts and the minuscule increases that we've had of \$2 million, \$3 million, or \$4 million, we've lost companies. We've lost theatres. We've lost dance companies. We've lost publishers. We've lost musical producers. The film industry was almost completely decimated by choices that the government made in the early '90s and has been rebuilding ever since then. So we're coming from way, way behind and trying to make up for the lack of support

and in some cases the outright hostility of this government towards our artistic communities. That's an editorial comment.

There are two particular issues that I'd like to raise with you today that have been brought to my attention. I appreciate the efforts of my colleague who is the shadow minister for Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture to have gone through a wide range of questions on this ministry. There are two things that I'd like to address. One is a situation where there has been an unlevel playing field created both in Edmonton and in Calgary. I'm referring specifically to the Winspear Centre and the EPCOR centre in Calgary. Those facilities do not receive funding for the operation of the facility. It's a commonly held misconception that funding the symphony is funding the Winspear Centre. It's not. They're separate organizations; there are separate boards of directors, and they have separate needs. The ESO is getting funding and does what it does, but the Winspear does not receive direct core funding as a facility, and neither does the EPCOR centre in Calgary. What we have is that they are trying to compete with the northern and southern Jubilee auditoriums, which are subsidized in one form or another by this government, so we have an unlevel playing field.

5:30

To the credit of the people that I've been talking to at the Winspear Centre, they're not asking particularly to start receiving money, but they are saying: let's make it a level playing field. I guess what I would say is that if you're going to continue to subsidize and make sure that the Jubilee auditoria never run deficits – which, let's face it, is a way of subsidizing them – then you need to have some kind of program that benefits the other medium and large performing spaces in Alberta.

Now, you currently have a program called major facilities where there are grants available to the Citadel Theatre and EPCOR centre, but that is grandfathered, and it's only those two organizations. Despite attempts by the Winspear Centre to be included in that grant, the government has refused, saying that it's grandfathered and it's going to be phased out. We have a situation where an artificial economy has been set up, where the Jubilee auditoria in both places are funded by Public Works and several other provincial agencies, which is creating a situation where the Winspear Centre has to remain competitive in a marketplace while not having the same benefit of support.

There is an inequity that has been created here, and I would like to see that inequity addressed specifically. I really would prefer not to have a bunch of excuses about how the Jubilee auditoria aren't really funded, because they are. They are owned by the province. They are never allowed to go into debt, and there is direct and indirect funding that goes in there. But here we have a well-respected – frankly, world-class – musical centre, and it doesn't get direct funding. Funding the ESO or funding other groups that use that facility does not fund that facility. In order to keep it sort of in the marketplace for other not-for-profits to use, it has to be competitive in the rates that it's offering, and that's not possible right now.

Again, they're not necessarily looking for ongoing funding, but they are looking for some kind of level playing field. To say, “They got lottery dollars once. That's government funding,” well, lottery dollars, as you keep telling me, are not out of general revenue, so I can't accept that argument. I'm happy to put the current minister together with the general manager of the Edmonton Concert Hall Foundation, which is the official name for the Winspear Centre, to see if we can get resolution for this.

I'm really concerned. We've lost two medium-size playing spaces in Edmonton with the Kaasa, and we have gained a number of them

in Calgary, thank goodness, with the Vertigo Theatre space and the Grand Theatre space.

**An Hon. Member:** Great support from government.

**Ms Blakeman:** Great support from government, that's true, because the other initiatives fund, that amorphous slush fund of the government, God bless them, came through and funded those two theatre spaces. So we have medium-size theatre spaces available in Calgary. We don't in Edmonton. While the Winspear is not suitable for all spaces – it is a smaller place than the Jubilee, for example – it's in competition with the Jubilee. So we need to look after that Winspear and make sure that it's available for groups to access. I would urge the minister to continue to look for opportunity. I'm happy to give him personal advice on how we can create – we literally need to build or modify, renovate, to create another mid-sized playing space in Edmonton because the loss of the Kaasa has really hurt us. The Catalyst and Third Space and even the additional spaces at the Citadel are not filling that gap.

The next issue that I wanted to bring up was brought to me by an individual artist who has actually just returned to Edmonton. He's quite frustrated by this whole idea of a one-grant policy. I remember when that came in because somebody got it in their head over there that the artists were double-dipping – oh, horror, horror – and that they should only be allowed to access one grant. What we had before was core funding, for example, or operating funding going to a theatre, and then the theatres could often apply for a special project grant for a special project. It wasn't for ongoing funding. It was a special project. Sometimes even artists could get additional funding if they were doing something unique or one-time only or special or a very large project that fed into that. So it wasn't double-dipping. It was about augmenting special projects.

If we want to keep our artists here, we have to help them and support them in the work they're trying to do. With this one-grant policy you've basically restricted artists to a particular field, and they're not eligible to apply for grants in more than one field. You're losing your cross-disciplinary people, which, frankly, with new media is where we all need to be going. You're cutting off a group of people from being able to access funding they should be able to access. I'm asking you to relook at that whole idea of the one-grant policy because it does restrict artists from practising in more than one discipline or arts organizations from doing that.

The second comment that I had from the individual was the frustration with the very odd timing of the new grant program, Alberta creative development initiative, which won't be announced until the fall. Then they're told that there's an intake deadline for these programs that will be, sort of, very shortly after the day of the announcement, and everything has got to commence before the fiscal year-end of March 31. You know, these groups are darn good at planning. Most of them have already announced next season, and now we're expecting them to come in and very quickly put together a project without knowing what the parameters are or very quickly after learning the parameters. It's not working, and you need to address this particular program.

Thanks.

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

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. member for her initial kind comments at the start of her discussion. I want to re-emphasize that, certainly, on the arts funding the information that we have ranks Alberta fifth in all of the

provinces. You know, I agree that we might be low. We're heading in the right direction. We want to do more, and we want to go ahead and add to the support that we give. The cultural policy will allow us to move forward in that particular area. I need to re-emphasize, although we talked about percentages, that 63 per cent over the last three years or 20 per cent this year is still a very, very significant number, in my opinion. It certainly beats 6 per cent or 7 per cent, and we're going there.

When it comes to the film industry, again, we are doing well with the film industry. We certainly want to grow that particular side. Mr. Chairman, I see that we're slowly running out of time, so I'll try to be fairly quick with my comments.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. minister, we have another about six and a half, almost seven, six minutes, 45 seconds to go.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you. That's fine. The review of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts that we're doing certainly will ensure that we have appropriate and optimal use of grant funds to meet the needs of our artists and our arts organizations in the province of Alberta.

The Winspear, you know, to talk about facilities, will certainly be invited to also participate on the cultural policy, and we would hope that that particular message would come through as well. The Winspear has never formally approached me as a new minister to ask for funding, and certainly they could do that. I'm not aware that they've ever approached us.

On the EPCOR centre. They are getting a couple hundred thousand dollars a year for their operational side. We are giving them some support there. The Citadel also receives a fair amount of funding in that way. So, generally, we encourage the Winspear and the Citadel or any other group, if we're looking at new mid-sized type facilities, to look at the major community facilities program that we've just announced. Certainly, that particular program, the \$140 million a year for the next two years, is aimed, aside from recreational facilities or health-related type of facilities, very much at cultural facilities. Those dollars are going to be there, and if there's a group that would approach us with a particular proposal, we'd be looking at it as a possibility in that particular area.

5:40

On the new program that you talked about, our recent partnership that we announced with the Canada council certainly will directly benefit, again, our arts and arts organizations. That's an additional \$6 million that's being injected into the particular community.

I'm going to close by talking about the Royal Alberta Museum. It's one question that I wanted to talk about initially. Our government is still committed to having one of the finest museums in Canada at the Royal Alberta Museum. We're still looking at a series of options to best implement that particular museum renewal, and we are committed to a museum in the city of Edmonton.

Mr. Chairman, I will sit down at this stage.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, the three hours that were allocated for the Liberal caucus has elapsed. Is there any other member who would like to participate for the next three minutes that we have left? If none, I can recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have one more question for the hon. minister about the website. Normally when we see the website about all the grants, we don't find the full details in

there. It's sometimes misleading. When you see the website, you see the total amount of money and the name of the group. They don't say exactly how they get the grant and whether they are matching grants or nonmatching grants and some other qualifications. It's not there.

Another question I wanted to ask you is about the Human Rights Commission. I think that in the last budget the government hired two full-time employees. I just want to know whether the government has any plans to hire some more people because the workload there – what I heard from some of the stakeholders is that the applications are there for years. I mean, they have to wait a long time. So what's the plan for hiring some more people there?

The third one: as the minister knows, in CIP grants and CFEP and other initiative programs in the Applewood community the rules were broken, and even the Auditor General's report recognized that. Are we going to improve the system? I mean, even with the Applewood community, as far as I know, we couldn't recover that money from them.

So those are a few more questions. I would really appreciate if you would answer them in a couple of minutes. If not today, maybe some other time in writing.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon minister, we have about a minute.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Okay. Very quickly, then, Mr. Chairman. On the grants, on the website: we're evaluating what information is provided there, and certainly we're looking at and committed to making improvements and providing additional information while at the same time respecting the names of individuals. You know, we can give more information and provide additional materials there to be more open and more transparent. Certainly, we want to show individuals what those grants are all about.

Under the Human Rights Commission we presently have 50 staff. We are adding two more, and you will note that this year we've been able to process more applications. Our total numbers actually . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but I will now invite the officials to leave the Assembly so the committee may rise and report progress.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(9)(a) the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

**Rev. Abbott:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the departments of Sustainable Resource Development; International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations; Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture relating to the 2007-2008 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

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

**Hon. Members:** Concur.

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

head: **Government Motions**  
(continued)

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

#### Evening Sitting on June 5

26. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly pursuant to Standing Order 4 convene an evening sitting beginning at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, June 5, 2007, for the consideration of main estimates in Committee of Supply.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Colleagues will recall that a few weeks ago we had occasion to debate I think it was Bill 34, Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. At that time it was necessary to reschedule the afternoon of that Thursday that we debated Bill 34 for third reading, and it's therefore necessary to find the replacement time period for what was scheduled for that afternoon. I believe it's fair to say that all parties agree that it should be rescheduled for the evening of June 5. We now need the motion necessary to put that into effect and call the session for the evening of June 5.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed, I'm happy to support this government motion. I'm not happy that it's sitting in the evening, but I understand the circumstances. I'm happy to support it because it was very good of the government caucus to agree to move their time to make way for a longer debate time on Bill 34 for the Residential Tenancies Act. That was a bill that everyone was interested in having before the House. So I appreciate the effort from the government caucus, and I'm happy to support having it moved to the evening of Tuesday, June 5.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Any others?

The hon. Government House Leader to close debate?

[Government Motion 26 carried]

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

#### Referral of Bill 31 to Community Services Committee

24. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly refer Bill 31, Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, to the Standing Committee on Community Services for the committee's consideration, review, and comment and request the committee to report to the Assembly on or before the first week of the fall 2007 sitting.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Both yesterday and the day before we debated similar motions with respect to Bill 1 and Bill 2. I think, if I may just say, that Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, is a particularly important bill to put before the policy field committee. There's a wide range of viewpoints with respect to community treatment orders. The committee will have the opportunity, I believe, to hear a variety of views with respect to community treatment orders themselves and their use, will have the opportunity to hear the concerns of families that have adult children with a mental disorder and who have a need of another tool. They'll also have the opportunity to hear concerns about the civil liberties of the individual, concerns about the ability of our health system to provide

proactive treatment in the community. That's a very important public discussion to have, and I can think of no better place to have it than in the policy field committee and then recommendations, perhaps, of amendments to the bill or at least a report on what they've heard back to the Legislature before we consider the bill for committee and third reading.

5:50

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I think this is a great opportunity, and this should be a very interesting bill to explore the many different facets of the particular policy field committee that this bill is being referred to for all of the reasons that the hon. Government House Leader has outlined. We are stepping into uncharted territory here. We don't really know how these committees are going to operate. I'm pleased to hear that the Government House Leader is open to having presentations made from the public. I'm hoping that we can have some experts brought in to present as well, perhaps have some additional research and literature reviews done for the members of the committee to help educate and explore the issue to the fullest extent possible.

This is a highly charged issue, and I think it's entirely appropriate that we get to move the issue to a policy field committee and open it up so that there is wider participation. I'm looking forward to this debate. I'm not on the committee, but I'm certainly going to be looking for my opportunity to attend and perhaps even participate in the proceedings. I'm pleased to see as well that there is a report-back date that's included in the referral motion from the government so that we know when it's going to be coming back before the session. I'm assuming that if there are recommended amendments

or observations that the committee is going to make, then they can be dealt with further in the Assembly during the fall sitting.

I urge all of my colleagues in the Assembly to support Motion 24 to refer Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, to the Standing Committee on Community Services. Thank you.

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

**Rev. Abbott:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the sponsor of Bill 31 I also support Government Motion 24. I'm glad to see all sides of the House agreeing on this, and I also look forward to bringing this bill to the policy field committee. I have received several letters of correspondence from different groups that are interested in having input on the bill, so I think this is going to be a great process.

I, too, urge all of my colleagues to support Government Motion 24. Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Any others?

The hon. Government House Leader to close debate?

[Government Motion 24 carried]

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It being 5:53 on a Thursday afternoon, I would move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. on Monday, June 4.

[Motion carried; at 5:53 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1 p.m.]

