

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, June 6, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/06/06

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Werner Baumann, ambassador of Switzerland, and his charming wife, Susanne; Mr. Walter Deplazes, the consul general from Vancouver, and his wife, Siegrid; as well as Mr. Andreas Bayer, the honorary consul from Calgary, and his wife, Yolanda. It was my pleasure to meet them all at lunch and earlier today to welcome them to Alberta.

Two-way trade between Alberta and Switzerland averages about \$200 million per year, so we have a bonding relationship with them. The Swiss have also had an important role in building Alberta. The town of Stettler in central Alberta was founded in 1904 by Carl Stettler, a prominent Swiss immigrant, and the Swiss mountaineers were crucial in the development of Banff as a world tourism destination. I would ask that all the honoured guests who are seated in your gallery today please rise and receive the traditional and warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**

Roberta MacAdams

The Speaker: Hon. members, just a bit of background before I call on the next member to do an introduction. In 1916 in this Assembly an act called the Alberta Equal Suffrage Act was passed. That act did two things. One, it provided for the first time the opportunity for women to vote. As well, it also offered an opportunity for women to run for political office. In 1917 a second act was passed that's relative to comments being made now, an act called the Alberta Military Representation Act. Remember, Canada was at war in 1917. That particular Military Representation Act indicated that in the next provincial election in Alberta two seats would be available for men or women of military background to earn a seat in this Assembly.

The provincial election of 1917 was held on June 7. The first woman in the history of the British Empire, one of the first women anywhere in the world, Louise McKinney, was elected as an independent in the constituency of Claresholm. At the same time servicemen and servicewomen had the right to elect two members of this Assembly. They were all located, of course, in northern France, in the trenches.

A lieutenant nurse by the name of Roberta MacAdams was in London, England, in the summer of 1917, and she visited a lithographer, who took a picture of her. The picture to my right, your left, is a painted portrait of the original picture. She then went and had a campaign poster printed with a very interesting slogan. It would

turn out that there would be 21 people contesting this election in the trenches in northern France for these two seats in Alberta. Her campaign slogan, very skilful, said, "Give one vote to the man of your choice and the other to the sister." At that time "sister" referred to a nurse. Twenty-one people contested that election in the trenches in northern France: one woman, 20 men.

Under the slogan, "Give one vote to the man of your choice and the other to the sister," Roberta MacAdams became the second woman to be elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. She received 4,023 votes, which was almost 700 votes ahead of her closest next competitor on the list. The other 20 competitors, of course, were men. Ninety-plus per cent of the people voting for Roberta MacAdams in the summer election of 1917 in northern France were men. So she joined Louise McKinney as one of the first two women ever to have been elected anywhere in the British Empire.

When she returned to Alberta, she became the first woman in the British Empire to have a piece of legislation introduced and passed. The bill that she introduced and passed was on the War Veterans' Next-of-Kin Association. This is a remarkable part of the history of this Legislative Assembly and a remarkable part of Alberta's history as well.

Little has really been known about Roberta MacAdams until now. Last evening a book was released in co-operation with the University of Calgary press. I'm now going to call on the Minister of Public Security and the Solicitor General for the appropriate introductions.

I might add one thing. This picture was commissioned in 1967 as a centennial project here in the province of Alberta. It's a painting. It then rested in the archives for years. It has been retrieved, and we're now going to place it on permanent residency on the 5th floor of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta so that all people in the future can come and see it. It'll be accompanying the Famous Five in the gallery.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

(continued)

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, last evening in the Legislature rotunda we jointly participated in a book launch for *Give Your Other Vote to the Sister: A Woman's Journey into the Great War*, a story of Roberta MacAdams, one of the first two female members elected in 1917 to the Alberta Legislative Assembly. I'm very pleased, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly family members of our former colleague, Roberta MacAdams, and also the author of this work and her family. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery.

I would ask our guests to rise as I call out their names: Robert Price, son of Roberta MacAdams; granddaughters Nancy Long, Jane Price, and Cathy Price; great-grandchildren Phoebe Price, Lucy Marsden, Brittney Price, and Kelby Price. With Roberta MacAdams' family is Debbie Marshall, author of *Give Your Other Vote to the Sister*, who happens to be a constituent of mine in Stony Plain; and Monica Newton, daughter of Beatrice Naysmyth, Roberta's campaign manager. There are also a number of Marshall and Newton family members sitting in the members' gallery. They are Monica Newton, Jr., Rosemary Heidinger, Heather Marshall, Rachel Culbertson, and Tom Davey. I would ask all members to offer their warmest traditional welcome.

The Speaker: All members will soon receive a copy of the book *Give Your Other Vote to the Sister*. It makes wonderful reading.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. It's a pleasure for me today on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of youngsters and parents from Rosemary school. Twenty-four students are here in the Assembly along with 14 parents, and accompanying them are two teachers, Mr. David Blumell and Mrs. Lenora Dyck. Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I would ask them please to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:10

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of children and adults from the Lacombe Christian School. This is one of the 10 private independent schools in my constituency. There are 41 exceptionally bright young children in grade 6 and 15 adults. The teachers accompanying this group are Mr. Tim Van Doesburg, Mrs. Stephanie Littel, Mrs. Trudy Veenema, and Mrs. Noella Van Doesburg. The parent helpers are Mr. Herman Scholing; Mr. Martin Folkerts, who is also the principal, but he is accompanying one of his children; Mrs. Darlene Kleinjan; Mrs. Anita Zuidhof; Mrs. Marja Van Dam; Mrs. Lisa Bailey; Mrs. Lin Luymes; Mrs. Sandy Ubels; Mrs. Vivian Kooyman; Mrs. Teresa TenHove; and Mrs. Gwen Luymes. I believe there's a bus driver with them, Mr. Nick Den Oudsten. They're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them also to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had the pleasure of being introduced to representatives from the past in this Legislature. I'd like to now take an opportunity to introduce to you and through you some of the future of this Legislature. It's with great pleasure that I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two grade 5 students who are challenging the best of us in their roles as minister and deputy minister for the day. Today Mr. Eric Taylor of Calgary is Alberta's Environment minister, and Miss Briana Raffael of Lac La Biche is Alberta Environment's deputy minister.

These students are in Edmonton as part of the minister-for-the-day program to brief me about their environmental concerns. I had the pleasure of meeting with them as well as 10 of their peers, who are serving as Alberta Environment's assistant deputy ministers today. With these students are their teachers. They have some strong ideas on what should be done to protect our environment and how each of us can take action in our own homes, schools, communities: lessons we all take to heart this Environment Week. These are our future environmental leaders, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the members of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some special guests representing one of the crown jewels of Alberta's cultural sector, the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. Now, this is a particularly personal introduction for me because I have a very long-time connection to the orchestra. My sister has played in the symphony since she was a young child in the 1960s, and she continues to play in the symphony now. I'm also a long-time season ticket holder along with my wife. The symphony is

Canada's fifth-largest professional orchestra. They have represented Alberta in Ottawa and at the Smithsonian in Washington, and they have always done this province proud. The Edmonton Symphony Orchestra plays a vital role in music education in this province, mentoring thousands of talented young musicians.

Today the people I am introducing are here to celebrate the appointment of a new managing director, Mr. Jay Katz, who is a new arrival to Alberta and to Edmonton. He brings many years of experience, and we wish him well. I would ask Mr. Katz to rise in the members' gallery. Joining Mr. Katz is the musical director of the symphony, otherwise known as the conductor, Mr. Bill Eddins, who I think has completed his second season and does a very exciting job leading the symphony. With Jay and Bill are a number of others, and I would ask them to rise: Steven LePoole, vice-chair, Edmonton Symphony Society; Marc Carnes, fund development manager; Melayne Shankel, publicist; Nora Bumanis, harpist; Susan Ekholm, viola; Stefan Jungkind, viola; John McPherson, trombone; Donald Plumb, French horn; Colin Ryan, cello; Chris Taylor, bass trombone; Jan Urke, double bass; and, of course, my sister, Rhonda Taft. Please give them a warm welcome.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some very special students that are joining us today from St. Joseph's high school in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. There are seven visitors today. They're accompanied by their teachers and group leaders, Ms Gerry Dawson and Mrs. Cheryl Place. I would ask my constituents and the students from St. Joe's to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a number of people who are gathered today with regard to the seismic testing and activity on and around Marie Lake. The people here are Bethany Bekolay, Nickara Bekolay, Pat Bekolay, Hal Bekolay, Don Savard, Charlene Bekolay, Sheldon Bekolay, Roger L'Abbe, Genevieve L'Abbe, and Sebastien L'Abbe. I'd like them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour and pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my constituent Chris Goss, who raised the issue of seismic activity in and around the Marie Lake area, which is known to be the nesting ground for the American white pelican and blue heron. He's seated in the public gallery with a large group who has the same issue. I want to thank them all for coming to the Leg. I request him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions this afternoon. Firstly, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two people that I'm very proud to be associated with: Mr. Nigel and Mrs. Helen Asplet. They are volunteers at the Heritage Senior Stop-in Centre

in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, and I can assure you that that fine facility would not operate without the hard work of particularly Nigel. Nigel, it's interesting to note, was a recent nominee for the minister's seniors' service awards. Unfortunately, he wasn't one of the successful winners that were announced today, but he was very well deserving of being nominated. I would ask them both to please rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, I did indicate that I have a second set of introductions as well.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you.

I also have a group of concerned citizens that are here today to hear their concerns raised about Marie Lake, and I would like to have them each rise as I name them and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly: Ms Sarah Murphy; Mr. Josh Brown; Ms Debra Pelechovsky; Ms Irene Thompson; Mr. Jim Thompson; Mr. Leon Lechasseur; an old friend from my days of making rubber stamps for the bridge branch at Alberta Transportation, Mr. Ian Lawson-Williams; Gail Cunningham; and Brandon Cunningham. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the following guests who have come to express their concerns over Marie Lake. When I've called all their names, would they please rise to receive the customary greeting from the hon. members of this House: Leila Darwish, Don Heigh, Robin Haugen, Brett Finch, Harold Faerriit, Joanne Douchet, Dean Woods, Anke Feifried, Neil Goeson, Hilda Goeson, Robert Gibeault, Joan Ross, Roy Bibeau, and Robina Sobey. Please rise and receive the greeting.

1:20

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly three strikers from the Palace Casino. The strike is now in its 271st day due to this government's refusal to pass first contract legislation. The names of the individuals are Marnie Kenworthy, Madelyn Tamag, and Daisy Hernandez. Marnie has been a dealer at the casino for three years. She is originally from the Philippines and came to Alberta in the year 2000. She's newly married and has spent most of the first year of her marriage on strike. She is also a guitarist. Madelyn has been at the Palace Casino for three years as a dealer. She is the mother of two boys who enjoy singing. Daisy has been at the Palace Casino for two years in the maintenance department. She has been married for 23 years, and she and her husband have two children, a 21-year-old boy and an 11-year-old daughter. Accompanying them is UFCW representative Don Crisall. I would now ask that Marnie, Madelyn, Daisy, and Don rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Environment Week

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For more than 30 years Canada's Environment Week has taken place the first week of June to coincide with World Environment Day. We should all have the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to take action for a healthier environment. Everyday actions make a difference, and Environment Week is the perfect time for Albertans to learn more about their environmentally sustainable practices. The more we understand environment issues, the more environmentally minded decisions we make.

Communities across the province are doing their part in hosting Environment Week activities, activities such as nature walks, community cleanups, recycling and hazardous waste roundups, and wetland education, Alberta's theme for Environment Week. There are many more activities that I can mention. The end result of each is a better understanding of environmental issues. Albertans are encouraged to contact their communities to find out how they can take part.

Protecting and conserving our environment starts with all of us in our own backyards, neighbourhoods, schools, offices, and communities this week, next week, and all year. We are all stewards of the environment. No action is too small to make a difference.

Thank you.

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

Minister's Seniors' Service Awards

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to pay tribute to several outstanding Albertans for their volunteer service and dedication to Alberta's seniors. More than 100 nominations were received for the 10th annual minister's seniors' service awards from across the province.

At Government House this evening the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports will recognize the six individuals and two organizations who have been selected as this year's award winners. They are Neva Brierley of Rocky Mountain House, who supports seniors and their families with chores by helping them in times of illness and grieving; Edward Eschak of Mannville, who makes his town a great place for seniors to live by fund raising and helping to organize recreation activities; Swati Fernando, who helps senior immigrants in Calgary with completing forms, going to appointments, and learning about health issues; Robert Thompson of Claresholm, who visits hospital patients and helps seniors at the local seniors' centre; Rose Hayes of Keoma, who was instrumental in obtaining funding for a seniors' club and who plans and invites town residents to events; and Gordon Heaton of Evansburg, who volunteered nearly a thousand hours to renovate and convert an old seniors' lodge into self-contained suites.

The two organizations receiving awards are Pioneer House Club 50 of Fort Saskatchewan, which has been supporting seniors through recreation programs, health clinics, and other activities for more than 30 years, and the Seniors Outreach in Brooks, where seniors can access specialized services such as Meals on Wheels, Lifeline, home supports, and transportation to appointments.

I'm proud to recognize the 2007 minister's seniors' service award winners for their commitment and service to Alberta's seniors.

More information about their accomplishments and the awards program is available on the Seniors and Community Supports website.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Chancellor Richard Davidson
Dr. John Gogo
Dr. Terry Royer

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, last week in Lethbridge, Thursday and Friday, we celebrated the convocation at the University of Lethbridge, and there were three people that were honoured over those two days that I would like to point out to all the members here in the House.

First, Richard Davidson, a lawyer in Lethbridge, part of the oldest law firm in Lethbridge, by the way, Davidson & Williams. Richard was inducted as the new chancellor for the University of Lethbridge.

Then on Friday afternoon it was a special event for me in the sense that two friends of mine received honorary doctorate degrees: John Gogo, a friend of many of the people in this House and a former MLA, and Terry Royer, a businessman currently out of Calgary but, of course, who grew up in Lethbridge.

I met Terry when I first moved to Lethbridge many years ago. In fact, we played hockey together. Terry went on to a very successful business career and also had a couple of terms as the chair of the board of governors of the University of Lethbridge.

John Gogo was a friend and a mentor as the former MLA for Lethbridge-West, first elected in 1975 and here until 1993. So we're very, very proud of John, and I believe that we'll hear a little more about him shortly.

Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that in these three men we have a lawyer, a politician, and a businessman all receiving honours, and despite what American pop culture might say about these professions, these are very honourable men in very honourable professions, and I want to say congratulations to all of them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, then.

Dr. John Gogo

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also congratulate Mr. Richard Davidson as the new chancellor for the University of Lethbridge and the recipients of the honorary doctorates but most specifically a former member and Deputy Speaker of this Assembly, John Gogo.

John was conferred with a doctorate of laws *honoris causa* from the University of Lethbridge on June 1, '07. Mr. Speaker, no candidate has been more deserving. John was honoured for his extraordinary service to humanity. John served his country as a sergeant in the Canadian forces from 1949 to '62, serving in the Korean War and Germany in the airborne artillery.

John served his province as an MLA from '75 to '93. His responsibilities included chair of AADAC, Deputy Speaker, minister of advanced education, and Deputy Government House Leader. His Bill 207, the Remembrance Day Act, was assented to on May 31, '84. Bill 207 ensures that Remembrance Day is observed in all schools.

John served his local community through his participation in many community associations. He was an adviser to community boards as well as to the average person on the street. John had a soft spot for the military cadet corps in Lethbridge.

John served his family. He is the father of five – Susan, Stephen, Sandra, Sharon, and Shannon – and is grandfather to 14 grandchildren. Every step of the way he has had the support of his wife,

Joyce. She is a strong, self-sustaining, talented woman, a great mom and grandma.

His work ethic was to be emulated. His integrity was to be emulated. He shared his knowledge, he listened, and he cared deeply. John was a political mentor to the present sitting members from both Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West, and I am very privileged by his friendship.

I ask this House to recognize one of ours, Dr. John Gogo.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Contribution to Premier's Leadership Campaign

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The unethical donation solicited by the Premier's top fundraisers is at odds with provincial regulation 75/92 and raises doubts about whether government decisions on funding and regulatory matters will be made fairly and objectively. There are critical public policy issues at stake, and Albertans have a right to some credible answers. To the Premier: on Monday the Premier claimed that the unethical donation was returned "upon receiving funds from this commission." Let's be clear. Funds were unethically solicited in August 2006. Funds were used to help the Premier get elected . . .

The Speaker: I'm afraid we're now to the response side.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, again I'm going to repeat: after Christmas when the campaign was complete, I had directed a team of volunteers – and, again, these are professionals in terms of being chartered accountants – to review all the donations. They found this one. They sent the money back. It went back. It's over and done with. In fact, I also said that if there were any others that were sent back – there was one other one that was brought to my attention. That was an offer made by a tobacco company, and of course that was rejected as well.

1:30

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, on Monday the Premier claimed, "I'm sure that the money was sent back. We didn't accept any money," which he has stated here today. One out of two may not be bad, but it's not good enough for a matter of ethics. The money was sent back, but the truth is: it was accepted, cashed, and used during his campaign. Is the Premier willing to correct the record of this House and admit that he did accept the money and that he used that money to help him win the leadership?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, it's not like there were hundreds of volunteers every day in the office watching every donation coming through. It was a small group of volunteers that assisted me but after the campaign made sure that the files were reviewed very carefully. This one in particular, although – and, again, I'm not a lawyer – it was said that it was legal, it was considered to be unethical, and the money was sent back.

Dr. Taft: Half a year passed between receiving the money and refunding it. On Monday the Premier tried to suggest that he was somehow required by FOIP to not disclose who his donors were, yet the commission has confirmed that they did not request their donation to be kept secret. To the Premier: if the commission did

not ask for it to be kept off the books and covered up, can the Premier tell us who did ask for this to be kept secret? It was used.

Mr. Stelmach: There were no donations as I said before. I said that I'd have the committee review if there were any donations from municipalities or other commissions. There are none that we would be not disclosing under FOIP because there weren't any donations received, period.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's explanations for unethical fundraising from a body established by this provincial government and subject to provincial regulation are simply not credible. The Premier is attempting to claim it was returned because it was unethical. The letter from the campaign team simply says that they no longer needed it. The Premier's desire for this issue to go away is getting in the way of public accountability. To the Premier: which is it? Will the Premier admit returning the money had nothing to do with ethics and everything to do with expediency?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, and to all the people watching, the process here is that I have media availability Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the two opposition leaders sit in there. They listen to the questions asked by the media. There were a few media members running around with a letter that they had. Again, very public. This was given to them by the Beaver regional association. It was a letter that was sent back. It was a very polite letter not saying that this is unethical, but you know: "Thank you so much for the donation. We've met our goal. Here's your money back. Thank you very much." This thing about six months coming up: that's perhaps been the volunteers' approach to the association.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The commission has revealed that other Tory leadership contenders also approached it for money. The Premier has confirmed that it was unethical to seek funds from a public body since such activity undermines the integrity of government funding and regulation. To the Premier: will the Premier direct his ministers to reveal which of them also approached this commission and any other public body for funds, which ministers and which public bodies, or will we have to question them one by one?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, he just indicated he has the information, so you don't have to question. Just stand up and give the names. You said that you have information from the commission that there were dollars given to other ministers. I'm not aware of it, but stand up and give the names of the ministers, and we'll follow the same policy, but give us the names.

Dr. Taft: They're your ministers, Mr. Premier.

The Premier has again blamed overzealous volunteers for a mistake that he's ultimately responsible for. That's not good enough. Running a government should mean that the Premier takes responsibility. To the Premier: if the Premier really believes soliciting these funds was unethical, why are two of the individuals who solicited the funds remaining on the executive of the PC Party? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know which officials he's

referring to. One of the things that they brought up is a serious allegation. The member says that he has evidence that ministers have received money from the commission. I suggest that he table that evidence right now – right now – because he said he has the evidence, so now's the best time. This is the second allegation that this member has made in the House. First of all, a secret deal, and we've been here now till day 40, I believe, today, still waiting for evidence of the secret deal. Another false allegation made, and he can't present the evidence.

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

Resource Development in Marie Lake Area

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today concerned residents of Marie Lake have presented a petition with 1,206 names in an attempt to save their pristine lake from harm. To recap, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development very quietly sold the mineral rights under Marie Lake without any consultation and now is considering allowing disruptive seismic testing. This will have adverse effects on the aquatic and the environment. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: will you initiate a full public consultation regarding the proposed seismic testing on Marie Lake?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I regret to say that once again the hon. member has his facts wrong. Sustainable Resource Development does not sell mineral leases or dispositions. That's done by the Ministry of Energy. But as I've said many times before in this House, we're simply following the process. The Liberals that used to govern this province a hundred years ago understood that. The exploration process comes first. The development process comes second. We're in the exploration process right now. There'll be at least two more opportunities for public participation, intervenor input before the environmental impact assessment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, section 41, requires by law a full environmental impact assessment if "potential environmental impacts of a proposed activity warrant further consideration." This is a law, and it must be followed. You were asked the question before. We didn't get an answer, so we'll try again today. To the Minister of Environment: will you commit right now to conducting a comprehensive environmental impact assessment on any proposed seismic testing or drilling activity on or under Marie Lake?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again his facts don't exactly equate with reality. I've indicated on a number of occasions that should an application for development of the resources under this lake go forward, an environmental impact assessment will be required. As of today's date no such application has come forward, so for that reason an environmental impact assessment is not necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are wondering if everything is for sale in order to get the money here. Recently Albertans have weighed in with their thoughts on some extremely

important issues, only to be ignored. On affordable housing, climate change Albertans have been ignored. Marie Lake is a beautiful jewel in Alberta, and industrial activity will have adverse effects that cannot be reversed or fixed. The people around Marie Lake and, no doubt, Cold Lake and Bonnyville do not want this area damaged. To the Premier: will the Premier commit right now on behalf of his government to deny permission for testing or further development on Marie Lake if the majority of affected members of the public are opposed? Will you listen to them, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this question was raised April 4 in the House with respect to Marie Lake, and I said that no development will occur on Marie Lake until the questions are answered. That does include any new relevant concerns that are raised either in the House or by members of the public.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Bitumen Exports

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. During the Tory leadership race the Premier along with a number of other candidates for the leadership of the Conservative Party promised to do something about the growing export of unprocessed bitumen from this province. In fact, the Premier likened it to scraping off the topsoil on the family farm and then selling it. He promised that he would take measures to reduce the amount of unprocessed bitumen exported from this province, yet there's a dramatic increase, and there's another plan from Exxon and Enbridge to pipe Alberta bitumen all the way to Houston. It was announced yesterday. My question is to the Premier. What have you done since you've become the Premier of this province to reduce the amount of bitumen that is being exported to the United States?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this same question was asked the day before by the same member. We are of course moving in a positive direction in terms of adding value to bitumen. As I said in the same answer to the hon. member, there are many things to consider. One of them is working with the environment. Second is having the people in place to build the plants. There are other considerations in terms of housing. We do process about 65 per cent of the bitumen, and we want to increase that more because the taxes paid on the added value will be paid here in Alberta as opposed to leaving and being paid in some other jurisdictions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, yesterday at the NEB hearings on the Keystone pipeline the vice-president of TransCanada PipeLines admitted that he doesn't even know how much bitumen will be shipped south through that pipeline. He says that that will be up to the oil companies. My question is to the Premier. How much bitumen will be shipped through the Keystone pipeline and the Alberta Clipper pipeline, and does the Premier believe that that's okay? Has the Premier done anything to limit the export of unprocessed bitumen out of this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, his member sitting behind him in this House said: we must have absolute – absolute – reduction in emissions. He is a leader saying: no, we've got to add more upgrading, create more emissions. I just ask: "Where are you as a

party? Do you want absolute reduction in emissions?" Fine. If we want to do this in a very pragmatic, thoughtful way in terms of finding the balance with the environment, we have to hold those discussions with the various companies that want to invest in the province of Alberta, look at all the environmental concerns, labour, and housing.

Mr. Mason: You know, I had a little trouble following that logic, Mr. Speaker. The Premier seems to be saying that if we export it and it's upgraded somewhere else, then we don't have to be responsible for the emissions, or something to that effect. But in any event, he completely avoided the question because he has done nothing since he's become the Premier to keep his promise to reduce the amount of bitumen that is exported from this province in an unprocessed form. My question to the Premier is: why haven't you kept your promise?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is one area where we are working very diligently in terms of increasing the amount of bitumen processed in the province of Alberta. I didn't say that I was going to work to decrease the amount. I said that I want to increase as much of the value adding of bitumen as possible. But, again, here's a good example. Here's another member in the House saying that we should now, in order to find this balance in environment, take Alberta money, send it out of this province, maybe invest it in China or in Russia, and buy offsets so that we can keep polluting more in our province. This is the kind of flip-flop on so many of these policies that we've heard over the last number of months. You don't know where they are.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Resource Development in Marie Lake Area (continued)

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. OSUM Corporation has applied for seismic testing on leases they have purchased from the Alberta government at Marie Lake, in the Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency. A large portion of the land area which will use explosive charges for seismic testing was identified as an environmental protection area by a ministerial order back in April 1988. This order restricts activities which may have a negative impact on the surrounding area. To the Minister of Energy: as part of this lease is in the environmental protection area, will he cancel the land purchase agreement with OSUM Corporation?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, no, I won't. The mineral rights that were sold to OSUM were sold in accordance with the province's Cold Lake integrated resource plan, and cancelling a lease at this particular point in time would be inappropriate. The Cold Lake subregional integrated resource plan was approved in 1996, and it directed that Marie Lake be managed for recreation and ecological value. However, the same plan also directs that mineral activities might occur at Marie Lake where environmental issues can be properly addressed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my understanding that back in 1992 an application for seismic testing on Lake Wabamun was refused by the government of Alberta. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can the

minister tell me why that application was refused, and can that precedent be used to refuse OSUM corporation's application for seismic testing at Marie Lake?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the application for seismic testing at Lake Wabamun was rejected in 1996 because the company involved did not address all of the concerns this ministry had about the effects of its testing. However, I'd point out that this is very much the exception, not the rule. Since 2002 seismic activity has been approved on 23 lakes, and in fact in one of those lakes, Lake Newell, the fish have done so well that now it's on the draw system for walleye. Sustainable Resource Development is working with OSUM corporation. We've conveyed our concerns to them and are waiting for answers. When we get all the answers we want, when we get the information, we'll make an appropriate decision at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In answering my question on April 4, the Premier assured Albertans that prior to any oil sands development on Marie Lake it was critical to maintain the quality of life for the residents of Marie Lake and to absolutely protect the environment. Scientific evidence would have to satisfy the protection of the environment and the people living around the lake. However, hundreds of scientific questions asked by the residents remain unanswered. My question is to the Premier. Will his government hire an independent seismic research group to review OSUM corporation's seismic proposal and evaluate the risk of environmental damage to Marie Lake if this seismic project is to proceed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, earlier today I received a petition that was handed to me by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I believe that 1,292 people had signed the petition. I remain committed to the position that I took earlier today, that no oil development will occur in Marie Lake until all of the relevant information is presented. We have two ministers responsible that will bring this information forward. To whatever degree they have to evaluate the information, I'm sure that they'll do it appropriately, and then we'll await those results when that information comes to our government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Calgary Concerns

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As MLAs our first loyalty must be to our constituents. Calgary Conservative MLAs' subjugation to their party has consistently trumped constituents' concerns, as evidenced by their *Hansard* voting record. Whether it is public transportation, affordable housing, environmental protection, or school maintenance and construction, this Conservative government has failed Calgaryans. To the Minister of Education: why has this government presided over an entire generation of such neglect that Calgary school boards now face infrastructure deficits of over half a billion dollars and 40 communities are without schools?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, shortly we'll be in a position to announce some initiatives relative to school construction in Calgary. I would like to say, however, that I was pleased to see that the Calgary public board last night came forward with a balanced budget and was happy with the funds that they are going forward with.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many seniors in Calgary are the most vulnerable to the excessive rent increases some landlords have made. Their fixed incomes cannot stretch that far. This government has been blind to their plight. To the minister of seniors: why did the government refuse to implement temporary rent caps to assist seniors in Calgary on a fixed income who want to maintain homes in the city but cannot afford the disproportionate rent increases?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we had a lengthy debate in this Legislature about rent controls, and we certainly could go into that further, but I would want to point out that this province has one of the most generous programs of seniors' assistance of anywhere in this country. [interjections] We do. You can mention about how we've redesigned our programs to assist those in the greatest of need. They weren't meant to be universal, but we are looking towards those seniors in the greatest of need. How can we help and assist them in the future? We will continue to ensure that our programs are targeted to help those in need as they require.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. On June 12 I'm sure a number of those seniors will be out to vote.

We Calgaryans appreciate the wonder of our location. We also love living in the natural beauty of the Rocky Mountain foothills, but that natural beauty is under government-sanctioned threat in the form of clear-cutting in protected and sensitive areas. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: why won't the minister protect our Calgary watershed, wildlife refuge, and recreational areas from the devastating effects of clear-cutting? How does his action or inaction contribute to Calgaryans' quality of life and environmental sustainability?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, my ministry is protecting the inhabitants of Calgary and all of Alberta on a sustainable forestry basis. I'd be happy to take the Member for Calgary-Varsity down to examine some of the forestry plots I've visited in the last week and show him. Where pine beetle sets in, you get the worst reforestation of all. I'd be very happy to take the member and show him with his own eyes, and he would stop making these accusations.

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

Violence in Licensed Premises

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue of violence in and around bars and nightclubs has many Albertans concerned. The government held two round-table sessions and released a report with a variety of recommendations. My questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. As a result of the round-table sessions conducted by the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission and the Solicitor General, what action is the government taking to address violence?

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

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government takes

the issue of violence in and around licensed premises very seriously. The round-table summary report, released last year, included numerous recommendations. We have been working on these recommendations, and I'm pleased to update you on these activities. First of all, we're doing research to identify regulatory and operational best practices that we know will make a difference. We're going to be doing a public awareness campaign aimed at bar patrons. It's being developed. A security/door staff training module will be added to the current Alberta server intervention program this fall.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister. You've mentioned a public education campaign to address violence. Haven't we seen similar campaigns from the city of Edmonton and others? How will this campaign be different?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are currently developing a provincial public education campaign specifically targeting young males aged 18 to 24. The campaign focuses on getting people to think beyond the heat of the moment and to be aware of some of the triggers and avoid getting into a fight or other confrontation. We're looking at a variety of materials and ways to best reach this audience, including drinking establishments, liquor stores, TV, and movie theatres.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. The idea of mandatory training for security and door staff in licensed establishments has been discussed for years. Can you tell me more about what is being done on this?

Mr. Lindsay: As I stated previously, the security staff training module will be available this fall. This module will be added to the existing Alberta server intervention program. Since 2004 this program has trained over 18,000 servers about the responsible and safe serving of alcohol. The security training module will cover many topics, including communication skills, screening patrons, crowd control, defusing conflict, and intervening with intoxicated individuals. The curriculum will be developed in consultation with industry, licensees, and police agencies.

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

Electricity Generation and Demand

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The EUB report released yesterday is a testament to the failure of electricity deregulation. It confirms the worst about electricity deregulation. Unfortunately, we are now locked into permanently high prices for electricity due to this government's incompetence. I am very disappointed that the Premier is showing no leadership on this issue, and the Minister of Energy is in a total state of denial. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that the government has bragged for years that electricity deregulation would increase our electricity generation capacity, why was there a net loss of 330 megawatts of electricity generation capacity in 2006 in this province?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I am in a state of denial with respect to answering such a ridiculous question. The truth of the matter is that there is no deregulation in the province of Alberta. Every part of the electrical industry in this province is regulated. The systems that are in place with respect to transmission, with respect to distribution, and with respect to the retail part of the electrical business are completely regulated, and there are at least as many or perhaps more regulations on the generation side. What we've done, of course, was to open up the generation of electricity in the province of Alberta to a market-driven system. It has been a complete success. Four thousand additional megawatts . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was a valid question but a ridiculous answer from the hon. minister.

Now, the EUB's 2007 through to 2016 outlook notes that "over the next year, very little will be added to Alberta's generation capacity, while demand is expected to increase by 3 per cent." This means that electricity prices will be higher while we struggle to meet our power needs. Again to the Minister of Energy: how many more blackouts will Albertans experience over the next year? Is this a benefit of deregulation?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again a ridiculous question. I don't actually recall where we've had blackouts other than a natural disturbance that took down some transmission systems. There are no blackouts that are relative to the restructured electrical industry.

Mr. Speaker, on the idea that we will have no additional electrical generation in the province of Alberta, we have a program in place, \$239 million, in the biofuel/biogenesis piece of the business in the province of Alberta. We're going to have 1,800 megawatts of additional power, hopefully, that people are looking at with respect to hydro generation. We have in front of us, according to the same group of people, 7,000 megawatts of additional power that will come to the province of Alberta soon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Am I to assume that the hon. minister thinks that this EUB report is totally wrong and that it's incomplete given that they indicate in there that the average wholesale price for electricity through to 2016 will be over 9 cents per kilowatt hour? How does this minister expect consumers to have that added onto their bill and be satisfied with electricity deregulation?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is not my position as I stand here to allow or disallow the hon. member from assuming anything. If we publish information that's very direct, very concise, and, in fact, accurate, he can assume whatever he likes.

The truth of the matter is that what we've done is we have allowed the people of Alberta to see the cost of energy for what it is. We have absolutely zero, no public debt with respect to our system. This system is: use energy; pay for what you use. That's just a go-forward basis for us. We believe that it's the correct way. We do not want to leave debts to our children and grandchildren on the back of energy that we consume.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Long-term and Continuing Care

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, concerns are being raised about the future of continuing care in Alberta. Some seniors are seeing long-term care spaces in their communities replaced with supportive living. They are wondering what this means for the level of care offered to residents. My constituents are also wondering if this is just the government's way of saving a few dollars. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Why is the government moving towards providing more supportive living and less long-term care?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, one of the great things that is happening is that seniors are not just growing in numbers but are living longer, healthier, and are more active. It's changing the way we need to respond to the services we provide for seniors. We shouldn't just provide a one-model, hospitalized type of nursing care facility. We're responding to what seniors are asking for. How can they, first and foremost, live in their own homes? How can we provide the services to where they are, not just build them a different place where they'd rather not be? In respect to assistive living, not everybody wants to be in an institutional hospital setting. They can provide different levels of care in a different facility without it having to be called long-term care.

2:00

Mrs. Jablonski: To the Minister of Health and Wellness: what is the government doing to ensure that long-term care will remain locally available to those seniors who have high health care needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It should be said that the article that I think the hon. member is referring to was written by a member of Public Interest Alberta. I really appreciate people who want to engage the public interest in discussion of necessary issues, but they should get the facts right, and they did not in that particular article.

Let me be clear. There's no move to change the structure of funding of continuing care services. Albertans who require continuing care services will get the services that they need in the most appropriate setting. This includes long-term care where necessary. As the minister of seniors said, there is a spectrum of continuing care which goes to supporting seniors in their own home if that's their choice and, if that's appropriate, in lodges, assistive living, and yes, long-term care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. My last question again is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Are there plans in place to privatize Alberta's continuing care system?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, this isn't about a change in direction: privatizing or not. We do support what seniors really do want: to own their own private home, to stay in their own private home, support services in their own private home. When it comes to other facilities, we've always supported a mix of public and private facilities. Since 1999 we've supplied funding that built over 4,200 additional units of supportive living. It's because of both the public and the private sectors that we're able to supply the spaces for the seniors when they need it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Protection for Persons in Care

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Abuse of vulnerable Albertans is a serious problem. The 2005-06 Protection for Persons in Care annual report reveals that the overall number of complaints of abuse increased by 5 per cent to 818, and complaints of bodily harm increased by 22 per cent over the last year. There were almost a hundred complaints from nursing homes and hospitals that facilities were failing to provide the necessities of life. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: will the minister legislate a resident bill of rights outlining the treatment and care that residents should expect from Alberta's continuing care facilities?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of work. The hon. member has worked also on the continuing care standards. We've implemented much work this past year, effective April 1 of this year, to implement new standards, a higher level of standards to ensure that there is an appropriate level of care. But it's also been, the facility has mentioned, that complaints can – sometimes there are mistakes. We want to ensure that there is a facility for people to come forward, that there is enforcement of some type if there is any abuse. None of those things will be tolerated. We want to ensure that seniors and all people are cared for, and if there are mistakes and we hear about them, then we'll enforce those mistakes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister almost answered my second question as well, but I'd like to put it to him again. Often the investigations result in recommendations, but there's actually no enforcement to make sure that those recommendations are met. Would he put measures in place so that the protection for persons in care office actually has the authority to enforce compliance with the recommendations?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the protection of persons in care, the enforcement: a very valid issue. We have to ensure not only that we have standards and laws but that we have the ability to enforce infractions when they do occur. Those are things which we are looking at. There are many ways that we can cause enforcement, not just through that piece of legislation. There are many other laws and many other ways that we can ensure that people are protected and safe.

Ms Pastoor: Results of the satisfaction survey indicated that there was a very low level of satisfaction with the time that was taken to complete the complaint and the investigation process. Given that the budget for the protection for persons in care office did not receive an increase this year, how is the minister going to reduce the length of the process?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question. I'm not certain of any of the specifics. As to the length of time increasing, that is something that I'd be happy to follow up and ensure that there is timeliness. That's one of the other aspects that I would fully support. We have to ensure that when people bring forward complaints, they can get a timely response and a timely investigation to ensure that their issues are attended to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Public/Private Partnerships for School Construction

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, we have an infrastructure deficit dealing with schools. We hear that there are going to be some announcements about new schools, especially in Calgary, but we know from the Nova Scotia experience with P3 schools that they result in nothing but problems: poor custodial services, less money for field trips, less access to gymnasiums after hours, you name it. The P3 school scheme put in place under a Liberal government in Nova Scotia was so bad that even the Conservatives had to shut them down. My question is to the Minister of Education. [interjections] I've got them moving here. Given the sordid history of P3 schools in this country, why is this minister . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would agree that probably if it was implemented by the Liberals, there would be a lot of problems, so we won't follow that method. I would just ask the hon. member not to jump to any conclusions as to what we're going to announce. When we do, I will have that discussion with him.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, after the announcement is a little late for the discussion. We're trying to help you from making a major mistake here.

A P3 school will be run like a private business. One of the first things they'll do is contract out services. There's a study here in the Edmonton public that shows what a disaster that would be. Again to the same minister: why is he so determined to push through P3s when all the evidence indicates that they don't work very well dealing with schools?

Mr. Liepert: I can only repeat, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member is making some assumptions, and I don't know where he's getting his facts from. I haven't said any of what he's just been talking about. I'd ask him to wait till we come up with a plan, and then we'll talk about it.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I've seen this minister in this House talk about P3s. Is he now saying that he's seen the light and he's moving away from P3s and that we're going to do it by traditional funding? Is that what he's saying?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I've consistently said in this House that we're going to look at innovative, alternative, creative ways of getting schools built where kids live, and that's still what we're going to do. When we unveil what we have planned, then we'll be happy to have that debate. I'm not going to get into a debate on a bunch of hypothetical garbage that may or may not be true.

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

Calgary Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the population of Calgary grew by a record 36,000 people. That's about 100 persons a day. And last July Calgary joined the club of cities of 1 million. From a small town called Cowtown to a metropolis of 1 million people in less than 10 decades. Now, I've been told that the cities

of Paris and London took 1,800 years to get to that level. In 2006 Calgary also broke the record for construction values, more than \$1 billion, higher than Toronto and double that of Edmonton. My question to the minister . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry. That's it. [interjection] That's it. Please. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm very much anticipating what he was going to ask me today. It was about funding to help Calgary deal with their infrastructure. The city of Calgary will receive about \$95 million this year, which is based on the city getting 5 cents per litre for road fuel sold within the city limits. The city can use this funding for public transit capital purchases if they wish. Calgary will also receive \$177 million this year . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. Now we'll go on to part 2.

2:10

Mr. Cao: Thank you. From the usage of the light rail transit in Calgary, the boarding every day is 260,000 persons. To follow the answer from the minister: what is our provincial funding to help light rail transit in Calgary?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, there are a number of different levels of funding that we have: the \$95 million from the transportation fund, the \$177 million for the municipal infrastructure program. The city may use this funding for capital purchases, whether it's for C-Train systems such as a new rail line or new cars or new stations. What's key is the city's decision on how much of this funding it wants to use for a light rail transit system. There's also \$71 million that comes from the new deals for communities . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps due to a misunderstanding of mixed messages some of my constituents expressed concern about the construction of the existing LRT extension in the northeast and northwest of Calgary that they started a couple of years ago. They had to stop because of lack of provincial funding. Can the minister clarify that?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, despite a lot of talk lately about strings attached to provincial funding and grant programs, all of the programs I mentioned earlier have very, very few strings attached, if any. Really, we've always tried to help all municipalities, but never have we gone out and planned or said we would pay for their internal transit systems. We do that by way of grants. I just think that Calgary has to decide for themselves what their priorities are, and we support that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on high-tech research facilities at our universities. The University of Alberta has certainly benefited in this regard. At the same time, undergraduate arts and sciences students still attend classes in old, sometimes poorly

maintained buildings, not the new shiny monuments that are sprouting up across the campus. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: would the minister agree that arts and humanities students across the province, who make up the bulk of the student population, have been overlooked as the government rushes to build high-tech, high-profile facilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It hasn't been in the past the department's responsibility to set the priorities at each institution for their capital expansions or the needs-based analysis that they're doing individually. What we are doing right now – and the hon. member heard me say this in estimates – is that we are preparing a province-wide needs analysis for all of those academic and those curriculum areas based on what the student requirements are, based on what societal and industry requirements are as well as where Campus Alberta needs to go for infrastructure and capital. We're preparing that capital plan as a total provincial plan.

Mr. Tougas: Well, Mr. Speaker, most students do not get access to the high-end research buildings. They do, however, pay the indirect costs of the operation because universities and colleges have to pay for maintenance from base funding, the funding intended for facilities and programs for all students. In 2005-06 the shortfall at the University of Alberta alone was an estimated \$110 million. Will the minister commit to funding all of the indirect costs of the research labs at Alberta's postsecondary institutions so that base operating funding is not used to make up the gap?

Mr. Horner: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, we don't set a lot of the priorities within the individual budgets of the institutions. I might also add that it may be a little bit off to say that the students are subsidizing other areas of the university when we're paying 70 per cent of what it costs to educate those students in most of those fields.

Dr. Taft: Baloney.

Mr. Horner: Well, do your math, hon. member.

The other thing that I would add to that, Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor, and this is not a grocery store where we're asking the meat clerk to provide something.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, on the funding formula side I've said in this House in the past that based on the roles, responsibilities, and mandate framework that we're bringing forward collaboratively with all of the other postsecondary institutions, we intend to take a look at the funding.

Mr. Tougas: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a desperate need for improvement in the student/faculty ratio at the U of A. Again, because of insufficient base funding over too many years, this ratio has steadily increased. In the early 1980s the ratio was 12 to 1. Today it stands at an overall average of 24 to 1. In the social sciences and humanities it can be as high as 40 to 1. To the same minister: does the minister believe that a university student is getting a quality education with a student/faculty ratio of 40 to 1?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the faculty ratio is one aspect of quality in our institutions. I would suggest to the hon. member that the

quality of our postsecondary institutions is very, very good. That would be referenced by many of the studies and reports that have been put out by national accreditation agencies.

As it relates to the ratio, Mr. Speaker, again in our roles and responsibilities framework that we're putting forward with all of the postsecondaries in a collaborative fashion, we're talking about how transferability within the total system may allow some of those institutions to increase that ratio. Some of the students have better opportunities in other institutions. We're going to look at it from the students' perspective to ensure quality, accessibility, and managing the growth pressures that we have in the system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Deer Overpopulation

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Some of my constituents and, in fact, people that I've talked to from other areas of Alberta as well are concerned about the excessive deer populations in specific spots in the area and the problems they bring with them. In fact, my wife, who is probably my most important constituent, is extremely upset, having to continually chase them off our property after they've eaten her flowers, her bulbs, and her vegetables. What is your ministry, Mr. Minister, going to be doing to help curb these higher than normal deer populations in this and other areas of Alberta during this hunting season?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I recommend that the hon. member, when it comes to his own backyard, perhaps assist his wife in dealing with that particular deer. But for the rest of the province I'm happy to report that the number of deer licences that are being issued is very high. We estimate last year 78,000 general licences and another 29,000 special draws. Some of these are accompanied by multiple tags. We haven't done the final deer count this year, but we anticipate something similar this year. If we see excessive populations in a particular area, we can give multiple tags.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. In southeast Alberta there used to be a three-week season that quite some time ago was changed to four weekends of three days each. There has been some talk of changing this back to a full season again. Mr. Minister, will you be looking at expanding the three-day hunting seasons, as I mentioned, to allow hunters more time for their hunting trips?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the three-day hunting season, which is common for the deer hunting season in the southern parts of Alberta, was brought in to strike an appropriate balance between the interests of the deer hunters and also the agricultural landowners. Striking this balance is critical. On the three days, we don't have any intention at the moment to change that. It strikes an appropriate balance. It gives ample hunting opportunities for the hunters and ensures that landowners for four days of the week don't have . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is also to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. There was a recent announcement of Sunday hunting this year in the Cold

Lake and Bonnyville areas. What about Sunday hunting opportunities for hunters in other areas of Alberta?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, there are already ample Sunday hunting opportunities in the province. Most of northern Alberta for many years has had Sunday hunting. This coming season we have added the WMUs 501 and 258, that are adjacent to Cold Lake and St. Paul, to the Sunday hunting areas. These changes were based on information and feedback we got from the local fish and game associations and also the MDs and counties. At the moment we don't have any intention to expand Sunday hunting in southern and central Alberta, but if this is of interest to landowners and hunters in southern and central Alberta, they should let us know.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 84 questions and answers today.

We are now going to revert to the Routine.

head: 2:20 **Members' Statements**
(continued)

The Speaker: Today is June 6, a very important day in our history. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

D-Day Anniversary

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, June 6, marks the anniversary of a pivotal event in world history, the D-Day invasion of occupied Europe by Allied forces. Canadian troops joined the Allies from Great Britain and America in the greatest seaborne invasion in history. In the early hours of June 6, 1944, Canadians assaulted Juno Beach, one of the five Normandy beachheads. Over 14,000 valiant Canadian soldiers from all parts of Canada attacked Hitler's fortress Europe, assisted by 10,000 sailors of the Royal Canadian Navy. Another 450 men were dropped behind enemy lines by parachute and glider.

The attack on Juno Beach was a brilliant success but not without cost. In the first six days of battle 1,017 Canadian men died. Canadian casualties in the next 10 weeks of the Normandy campaign were more than 18,000, including over 5,000 dead. Over the following year Canadians, by land, sea, and air, continued to play a major role in the campaigns to liberate Europe from the monstrous tyranny of the Nazi regime. By war's end well over a million Canadians and Newfoundlanders had enlisted in our armed forces, and more than 45,000 had died in the gallant service of their country.

Mr. Speaker, it is appropriate for us to remember on this anniversary of D-Day all those who have served and those who continue to serve in Canada's armed forces in defence of our values of freedom and democracy.

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

Youth Emergency Shelter

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to celebrate the Youth Emergency Shelter. April 20, 2007, marked the 25th anniversary of the Youth Emergency Shelter Society, or YESS. In that time the organization has assisted over 20,000 youth in crisis.

Their mission is to give youth at risk a chance and provide opportunities for youth and families to become confident and self-reliant. YESS provides residential care, support services, education, and training to those youth who, for various reasons, don't have the benefit of a warm and secure home. Otherwise, these children

would have to fend for themselves as they face the perils of the street.

Despite the enormous challenges that the staff and volunteers face in delivering these programs, the Youth Emergency Shelter manages to raise almost half of its \$2.4 million annual budget through various fundraising activities and events, such as Homeless for a Night, their annual golf tournament, and their annual winter campaign, which usually runs between December 1 and January 15.

This year the Edmonton-McClung constituency team is proud to support the Youth Emergency Shelter. On June 24 our third annual McClung community barbecue will be held in partnership with the Willowby Community League, with all proceeds going to support YESS and its important work. Representatives from YESS will also be on hand to answer questions and to collect cash donations. We will also help them collect items such as clothing, toiletries, and sports equipment, which are always in high demand.

Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that services such as this are needed, but we should be proud of the great work that the Youth Emergency Shelter Society does in assisting these youth in crisis. As we all know, being a teenager can be a difficult and confusing time, and when it seems like no one is there to help, the Youth Emergency Shelter has been a comforting resource to turn to. They have been extremely successful in helping young people to reach their full potential.

I would like to congratulate the board members, staff, and volunteers on reaching this important milestone. Happy 25th birthday, sincere thanks, and best wishes for another quarter century of commitment and service.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 1,206 signatures from residents of Alberta.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to immediately conduct a comprehensive environmental impact assessment and initiate full public consultations regarding the proposed seismic testing on Marie Lake, and to deny permission for testing or further development if possible adverse effects are identified or the majority of affected members of the public are opposed.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ninety-four more signatures on the petition which reads:

Whereas the ongoing rent affordability crisis is contributing to Alberta's worsening homelessness situation, we, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate, meaningful measures to help low-income and fixed-income Albertans, Albertans with disabilities and those who are hard-to-house maintain their places of residence and cope with the escalating and frequent increases in their monthly rental costs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition that I'll submit here. It's signed by residents of Strathcona and Sherwood Park constituencies as well as others in the capital region. They're urging the government to introduce legislation to suspend a graduated driver's licence if the driver is involved in a serious accident.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) to advise the Assembly that we will be accepting written questions 15 and 16. I give notice that motions for returns 7 and 8 will be dealt with on Monday, June 11, 2007. There being no additional written questions or motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper, there are none to stand and retain their places.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings concerning Calgary infrastructure and transportation, which I will briefly summarize. The first is a letter from Bill Wilson of Wheatland Developments Ltd. expressing concern over the lack of public consultation regarding changing the design criteria for the Calgary northeast link of the ring road. Among a series of specific transparency and accountability failings Bill notes that transparency and accountability . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, let's give the name of the person, three words describing it, table it, and we're moving on.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My second tabling is a detailed letter from Rob Lerouge expressing concern about Calgary's worsening affordable housing crisis. Rob emphasizes that "leaving the supply of housing to market forces does not work when many jobs remaining open do not pay a living wage."

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling seven more letters from Albertans who are angered by this government's unwillingness to sit down and negotiate with teachers to resolve their unfunded pension liability.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of a letter from Bob Borreson. Mr. Borreson is very concerned about the export of raw bitumen to be refined outside of Alberta. This plan, he feels, does not benefit Albertans.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of tablings from my constituent Chris Goss. He's concerned about seismic testing in and around Marie Lake and damage to the habitat and food stock of a variety of fish, mammals, and birds.

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 Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Insurance Act the Alberta Automobile Insurance Rate Board annual report for the year ended December 31, 2006.

On behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-

McClung on May 28, 2007, Department of Justice and Attorney General 2007-08 main estimates debate; responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for West-Yellowhead on May 30, 2007, Department of Justice and Attorney General 2007-08 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, response to a question raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly Clareview on June 5, 2007, Department of Infrastructure and Transportation 2007-08 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(continued)

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

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During question period – and I'd like to have it on record – we had the opportunity to see a group that came from the Holy Family school in Grimshaw. They did come in. They observed question period and now have left. They were 10 visitors from Grimshaw. Grimshaw is a community in my constituency that's 500 kilometres northwest of here. They were accompanied by Charlie Bouchard and Mrs. Tracy Zweifel. Certainly, I just wanted to acknowledge that they were here.

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you six bright and shining representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who I see in the members' gallery today. They are serving two years on a mission. They interrupt their education. They work and pay for their own missions and go all over the world. These particular missionaries could be from anywhere in the world. I know, I've had three sons serve missions. I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-North West has also had a son serve. I'd like to introduce you to them. If they come to a door near you, remember that they like to eat. Their names are Elder Ruiz, Elder Johansen, Elder Parry, Sister Boren, Sister Walker, and Elder Walker. Could I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: 2:30 **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'll call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2007-08**

The Chair: The time allocated: the first hour and a half will be to the Official Opposition, the next half hour will be for the ND opposition, and the last hour will be for any member in the Assembly.

Executive Council

The Chair: We will start by inviting the hon. Premier to give his opening presentation.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's once again a pleasure to be able to present estimates. I missed it last year because I resigned from cabinet, but it's great to be here presenting the estimates for Executive Council.

Mr. Chairman and all hon. members, I'm pleased to appear before this committee to discuss the 2007-10 Executive Council budget estimates and business plan. I'd like to first introduce from my office the staff who are with me today, the small team of political staff, who are led by Chief of Staff Ron Glen. Though he's unable to be with us here today, I'd like to recognize Ron Hicks, who is our Deputy Minister of Executive Council, who oversees the public service. On the public service side of my office and with me today are Paul Whittaker, deputy secretary to cabinet; Marcia Nelson, deputy chief of policy co-ordination; Leanne Stangeland, who is the managing director of the Public Affairs Bureau; and, of course, Elaine Dougan, executive director of corporate services. Some of my staff are also up in the gallery, including Jordon Copping, my executive assistant; Paul Stanway, director of communications; and Tom Olsen, director of media relations.

Before I get into some of the details on Executive Council's estimates and business plan, I'd like to touch on what I see as my role as Premier and how crucial it is that Executive Council help me fulfill that role.

I've said before and will repeat today that governing is a privilege; it's not a right. It's a privilege that I take very seriously. As Premier of Alberta, I lead a government that has wide-ranging responsibilities. I see my role as threefold, and those three pieces are the cornerstones that make up Executive Council. First, as a government we need to identify what our agenda and priorities are for government. Second, I need to manage the machinery of government, so to speak. It's vital we have a good decision-making process in place. Third, we need to communicate those decisions and priorities back to Albertans.

Mr. Chairman, my remarks today will include a brief fiscal overview of 2007-08 followed by some details on upcoming initiatives from the business plan. Executive Council spending for 2008 is forecast at \$23.2 million. When the transfer of corporate internal audit services to Treasury Board is taken into account, this represents a \$1.6 million increase from last year.

The increase is dedicated to three main areas: \$1 million, the larger part, will cover the cost of the board governance task force and supporting team, \$500,000 in additional funds will allow the policy co-ordination office to meet the increased demand and need for strategic policy development and co-ordination, and salary increases matching those allocated across government make up the balance of the increase.

I'd like now to offer an overview of Executive Council's program areas and priorities as outlined in the business plan. My offices here in the Legislature include communications and correspondence and the McDougall Centre in Calgary; the deputy minister's office, which provides advice and support to the Premier on policy and organizational issues and leadership to the Alberta public service, cabinet co-ordination and support; the policy co-ordination office; the Board Governance Review Task Force Secretariat; the protocol office; and administrative support for the office of the Lieutenant Governor and the Alberta Order of Excellence Council and the Public Affairs Bureau.

Executive Council has outlined the following strategic priorities in the '07-10 business plan. The first is to establish a board governance review to provide recommendations on how the government can improve its transparency, its accountability, and governance of its agencies, boards, and commissions; develop democratic reforms that include opportunities for all-party commit-

tees to work together; strengthen policy support and facilitate enhanced policy development capacity; implement a strategic communications plan for government; and implement a corporate communications policy for government.

These priorities are in line with Executive Council's focus on promoting government-wide achievement of the five priorities I set out when I became Premier. For example, we have made great strides on the priority of governing with integrity and transparency. We now regularly post ministerial expenses and flight information on the government website. We have implemented democratic reforms, which include fixed sittings of the Legislature, a fixed budget date, and all-party field committees. We still have much more to do, and we will continue to move forward in the next year.

Another important commitment that I made was to conduct a review of government agencies, boards, and commissions. As you may know, there are about 130 agencies, boards, and commissions in the province that manage over 50 per cent of government spending. This review, conducted by three task force members, is focused on helping these entities provide better governance, fiscal responsibility, and accountability processes for the programs and services they provide Albertans. The budget for carrying out this important review is estimated at a million dollars to cover staff expenses, remuneration, travel, and other associated costs.

Now, the policy co-ordination office is the next piece of Executive Council that I would like to talk to you about. It plays a key role in providing long-term strategic planning, promoting effective co-ordination of cross-ministry initiatives and other strategic initiatives. This year their mandate has expanded to support the identification and implementation of government policies, support decision-makers by ensuring that they have the best possible information on which to make decisions, and to promote a corporate cross-ministry approach to policy development that is aligned with government priorities. The funding increase of \$500,000 for the policy co-ordination office will allow it to expand and fulfill its mandate.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to touch briefly on our protocol office. It's a very busy office. As you know, this office is responsible for provincial government ceremonial events and visits from senior international dignitaries. The staff also provide protocol advice to government offices, community groups, the private sector, and individuals for special events. In fact, next week the Prime Minister of the Netherlands will be visiting our great province.

Mr. Chairman, the final piece of Executive Council I'd like to highlight is the work of the Public Affairs Bureau. The bureau supports all five of the government's priorities through external communication activities and provides internal communications leadership and support to government ministries. We need to communicate with Albertans. It is vital that they receive clear communication about the programs, the services, and directions of their government. It's also important that Albertans are given a way to provide feedback. Something new this year has been the development of a strategic communications plan that is being implemented across government to enhance the quality, co-ordination, and consistency of government communications and provide Albertans with improved avenues to access information and provide feedback.

We have recently redesigned the government website, which is becoming an increasingly important means of communication. We've refocused the site to improve user access to government services, ensuring that Albertans have the best information they need as quickly and as easily as possible.

2:40

The PAB has also developed a new corporate communications policy for government. This policy will clearly define what

Albertans can expect in terms of communicating with their government. We have a strong commitment to two-way communications with Albertans, and we want to make that clear. The policy will provide government staff with guidance in conducting communications-related work. The PAB has also led the responsibility for public communications with the various emergency response plans in place for the government of Alberta. As I mentioned before, the bureau has taken on responsibility for internal communications. Of course, we can't forget our internal audience. It's important that we keep our own public service employees informed about government policies and directions.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, that concludes my introductory remarks. I welcome members to ask any questions they might have.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour to rise and discuss the budget of Executive Council with the Premier. I congratulate the Premier on his first presentation in his capacity to the Assembly. I hope we can have a constructive discussion here.

An Hon. Member: More, more.

Dr. Taft: There may well be many more. Time will tell.

The amount of information provided is fairly limited in the government estimates book. In fairness, it's a very small percentage of the overall provincial budget. One of the striking things that comes out as I look at it and, I think, the kind of question that anybody's going to ask is just about the nature of the increase. Right now I'm on page 154 of the '07-08 government estimates. Over the last two years, as I'm reading the figures on page 154, the overall budget of Executive Council has grown from \$18,387,000 to what is predicted to be this year, \$23,209,000, if the Premier is on the same page as I am on this issue.

That's a growth over two years that has occurred even with corporate internal audit services being transferred from the Executive Council to Treasury Board, I believe. So an explanation of why there's an almost 28 per cent increase – I think it works out to a 27.8 per cent increase – in the budget of Executive Council over two years would be of course appreciated.

That increase actually, turning to page 156, becomes even more dramatic when I look at the first category there, the office of the Premier and Executive Council. In the last two years the budget has increased from \$6,214,000 to \$8,887,000, the overwhelming proportion of which is driven by the office of the Premier and Executive Council, a very small portion driven by increases in the office of the Lieutenant Governor. If you work that increase out over two years, it is a 42 per cent increase. Again, that draws questions. You know, what's behind such a dramatic increase over the last two years?

Of course, one year to the next, if we only look at one year, there are significant increases. Because it's just one year, it's not as large, but the trend is of ongoing increases despite the fact that some services have been moved out of Executive Council. If the Premier would be able to give some details and explanations of that increase and, frankly, justification to the taxpayer, I'm sure we'd all appreciate that, and some details which could elaborate on the functions performed by the different groups or functions itemized under Public Affairs on page 156. Corporate services is one, strategic communications is another, and then they seem to sort of merge. The two titles merge in the third line, 2.0.3, corporate communication services. What do those services perform? What do those people

do? Could you break it out separately and explain it category by category? You know, what's the difference? What does strategic communications do versus corporate communications? That sort of thing would be helpful. Again, why are there significant increases? I know, particularly under Public Affairs, that corporate services have virtually doubled in two years, and it's a pretty dramatic rise.

The very first thing, I think, that any taxpayer or voter is going to want answered is an explanation of the significant increases in expenditures. I note on page 160 that those increases are occurring despite a very limited increase in the number of full-time equivalent employees, going up a very small percentage over the last year. My page doesn't include a figure of full-time equivalent employees from two years ago. That would be interesting to have, but we don't have it here. So where's the money going? What's being done for that increase? I'm assuming, Mr. Premier, that a lot of that is going out through contracted services, maybe. If we're not seeing an increase in the number of staff or, well, exactly what – I don't know.

Once we get through some details on that, then a number of other questions will arise. Having, as I have had, a concern with the function and nature of the Public Affairs Bureau for over 10 years now, I will have a number of questions specific to the Public Affairs Bureau but will save those for the second round of questions if we can do that, if that's okay, Mr. Premier. Back and forth.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I can't speak for the years prior, but I can certainly inform the House about the budget for this year.

Now, the first questions were, I believe, with respect to page 156. In terms of what we get for the expenditures in that particular area, there are various components. This is by element. First, office of the Premier and Executive Council. It's 55 FTEs, \$8.4 million. These are staff salaries and support services for the Premier's offices in Edmonton and Calgary, the deputy minister's office, the cabinet co-ordination office, which provides organizational and administrative support to cabinet and its key committees.

Dr. Taft: Line number?

Mr. Stelmach: It's 1.0.1. I'll cover all those on page 156.

The policy co-ordination also supports the implementation of government policies, works with departments to ensure that decision-makers have the best information to make the decisions, and promotes a corporate cross-ministry approach to policy development that is aligned with government priorities.

Now, the board governance review secretariat that has been established – and it is a major part of this increase, a million dollars – is to assess the effectiveness and the accountability of all our agencies, boards, and commissions. As I said before, about 50 per cent of our public expenditures are done by these agencies, and we want to make sure that we're transparent. There are a number of provinces – I believe Nova Scotia, Ontario, British Columbia – that have taken this route. Some have established permanent offices. I can't determine what the recommendations will be from this committee, but certainly we're going to take their recommendations to heart.

2:50

The committee has met. It's a three-member committee. They have met with our ministers. They have also, I believe, offered to meet with the opposition. I don't know. They were supposed to do

it yesterday, according to my information. But it's to build recommendations to make sure that we improve the transparency; you know, how we appoint people to the various agencies and boards and also how they operate, how they make their decisions with respect to spending this fair amount of money.

Now, it may stay in Executive Council if there's a recommendation that we need a full-time agency, or it may go to Treasury Board as part of its work in the future, but we have to wait for the recommendations. The three people know organizational structure very well, and I have every faith in them that they'll bring forward a number of good recommendations.

The protocol office has been busy. There is no question that the eyes of the world are on Alberta. We are receiving at least double per capita the kind of investment coming to Alberta than other provinces. We have so many ambassadors, consuls general, leaders from other countries coming to Alberta just to get to know us better and to look at how they can invest and also the predictability of our regulatory regime, of course, the questions they've been asking.

There's also funding in 1.0.1 for the Alberta Order of Excellence program. It's a very important program recognizing Albertans for their contribution.

The office of the Lieutenant Governor. There was a contracted position there before. Now we've absorbed that position into government, so there is a decrease of \$33,000 from that vote line 1.0.2. It was a support position.

Corporate services, 2.0.1: \$1.7 million, and there are 14 FTEs. It's an increase of a hundred thousand dollars, includes the office of the managing director of the Public Affairs Bureau, manages the human resource, finance, and administrative needs of Executive Council, is responsible for the business plan and budget preparation, performance measurement co-ordination, annual report development, records management and FOIP administration, includes the central budget for administrative costs, Service Alberta support services, training for all Public Affairs Bureau staff, general office equipment and supplies. In that \$100,000 the reason for change is the salary and benefit increases that apply to staff. Again, it's the same raise that is applied across government.

Strategic communications, 2.0.2: \$9 million, 81 FTEs. It's an increase of \$22,000. This is communications staff seconded to departments to support two-way communications with Albertans; develops communications for government's long-term strategic plans and priority initiative to support delivery of programs and services; plans, co-ordinates, executes cross-government communication activities – for example, the *Report to Albertans* is part of their responsibility – co-ordinates government communications to and from Albertans from major government officials, like public consultations and the budget, and of course during public emergencies; plans and co-ordinates government-wide internal communications; and implements a corporate communications policy to enhance the co-ordination and consistency of communications. Again, these are just the salary increases for the 81 FTEs, an increase of \$22,000.

Vote 2.0.3, corporate communications services: \$3.6 million, 22 FTEs, an increase of \$250,000 plus 7 per cent. It manages the government of Alberta website; co-ordinates cross-government standards for all ministry websites; manages the government of Alberta corporate identity and provides consultation for cross-government implementation; provides IT support to Executive Council, Public Affairs Bureau; provides advertising consultation and support to ministries and co-ordinates corporate advertising; distributes government news releases; provides media monitoring to ministries, including electronic access to news of importance to the government of Alberta; provides technical support for major

government news conferences and announcements. So that breaks that down.

Now, the corporate services one. There has been a change there because we're also providing support for HR and finance to Executive Council as well as Public Affairs. So there's an increase there because they're doing work for two different authorities.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Premier. I appreciated some of the elaboration. It's obviously impossible to go through the Executive Council budget without really focusing on the Public Affairs Bureau, one of my favourite topics and one of my biggest concerns, frankly, with the state of democracy in this province.

My experience with the Public Affairs Bureau dating back decades is that there has been a marked shift in the way the bureau operates and, indeed, in the purpose and resources of the bureau. Through the first two Premiers of the Conservative Party the Public Affairs Bureau was always a secondary responsibility of some other minister. It wasn't connected to the Premier's office, and it had a very clear mandate to provide corporate communications for the public service, to inform the public about government programs or services or issues. It was not an agency with any political mandate at all. The political side of communications, which I openly admit every government has to do, was contained within the staff of cabinet ministers and the Premier's office.

Well, frankly, around about December 5, 1992, over the period of just a number of days right focused then, there was a dramatic shift in the role of the Public Affairs Bureau under the former Premier, Premier Ralph Klein, and his staff in which the Public Affairs Bureau was reorganized, brought straight into the Premier's office, and was much more aggressively politicized, in my view, to support the political agenda of the governing party and particularly the Premier. I believe that was a dark day for democracy in Alberta that has never been corrected. So I am of the opinion – clearly, the Premier and I will differ – that the Public Affairs Bureau needs to be dismantled, effectively, and that a strong wall needs to be built, an organization wall, between the political work of the people working in cabinet ministers' and the Premier's offices and the public service of the bureaucracy.

The Premier mentioned that there are 81 full-time equivalents under vote 2.0.2, strategic communications, seconded to departments. Perhaps the Premier could elaborate on how those secondments work. The sense I have is that they are effectively assigned to departments by the Public Affairs Bureau. In fact, in many cases these communications directors, although they work themselves for the Public Affairs Bureau, have staff of the department working for them. In other words, there is a multiplying of the effective workforce of the Public Affairs Bureau, although that workforce is concealed because the actual payroll is covered by the department. So, for example, any major department – let's pick just as a random example the Department of Health and Wellness – has Public Affairs Bureau staff assigned, in my term and in the Premier's term, seconded, to the department.

3:00

Each of those Public Affairs Bureau employees has department of health employees reporting to them, which is – what's the word I want? – a distortion of proper accounting lines in an organization. In my view, all the employees of any given department, whether it's the Department of Health and Wellness or any other, should report, ultimately, to the deputy minister, not to staff of the Public Affairs Bureau.

That's a long-winded way of getting to my question, I suppose, which would be: of the staff seconded from the Public Affairs Bureau to the various departments, how many of those staff have staff of those departments reporting to them, if I'm making myself clear? In other words, we have 81 full-time equivalents seconded to departments, but my knowledge is that, in fact, the effective workforce of the Public Affairs Bureau is much larger than that, and I'm wondering how much larger. The Premier may not be able to answer right now; if he could have his staff undertake that.

The second part of my question would be: has the Auditor General ever had a look or a review of this particular structure and this particular way of reporting and allocating resources? If not, perhaps I will request that he have a look at it to ensure that proper and accurate reporting is being followed.

I would also ask the Premier to justify his continuing of the model of the Public Affairs Bureau that was brought in under the former Premier, in which the communications functions of all the different departments were handled not by those departments but by the Premier's office. Now, it seems to me a deeply problematic structure, that I had hoped the Premier would bring an end to. Since he hasn't, how does he justify continuing with the model of the Public Affairs Bureau in which all those communications staff report to his office as opposed to the model adopted under Premier Lougheed, in particular, and Premier Getty, in which the communications functions of the various departments were managed through those departments? A justification of that would be most helpful.

The Premier also mentioned briefly vote 2.0.3. Under Corporate Communications Services there are things like advertising consultation and co-ordination. That sort of work has led to huge controversy and, indeed, scandal in some other governments. Particularly, I'm thinking of the government in Ottawa under Adscam and that sort of thing. When lines get blurred, one of the areas they can easily get blurred is under things like advertising and sponsorships and all the related work that goes with that.

I'd appreciate some details, if the Premier could provide them, on what exactly advertising consultation and co-ordination includes. How are advertising and sponsorship contracts issued? How are they managed? How are they accounted for? There was a fairly dramatic case, albeit in the final year of the last Premier, I admit, but I'd hate to see this occur again, where I believe over a million dollars was spent on developing advertising for the third-way campaign, which was never used. How do we as taxpayers and citizens have confidence that that sort of million-dollar waste won't occur under this Premier? How are those contracts managed so that they actually provide some value for the taxpayers of the province?

Perhaps my questions are a bit meandering and long-winded.

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Dr. Taft: I have people agreeing with me. Fair enough; fair enough.

I have some really serious questions about the performance of the Public Affairs Bureau: a justification of why it continues to second so many staff to other departments instead of having those departments manage their own communications, an explanation around the function of corporate communication services in advertising, consultation, and co-ordination in management. Any elaboration on that would be much appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. Maybe if I could just cover, first of all, the role of the PAB and then, of course, the advertising policy

because it is important. It's something that Albertans want to know about. I do have to disagree with the member on one point: when he was questioning the state of democracy in Alberta. First of all, we had a very successful campaign for leader and Premier of the province of Alberta. I thought it was pretty democratic.

The other is that we worked quite closely together as all parties represented here in House. It was something that was important to me, and that was to direct an all-party review, you know, our policy field committees. This is new for Alberta. It's not new to, perhaps, other provinces or the federal government, but it's certainly new to this province. With the co-operation of all, we've come a long way in improving democracy, allowing Albertans input on legislation, on regulations. I feel that we're going to build better policy and better laws for Albertans through this process. Sometimes, you know, it may take a little longer, but that's the way democracy should be done. I feel proud of our accomplishments, and that, to me, is important. It's a step, and we've got a long way to go in some areas, you know, in terms of allowing all Albertans the opportunity.

You know, many times we talk in this House about websites and communicating through the web. Unfortunately, there are many Albertans that are not connected to the web. There are many seniors that cannot really find out more about programs that are available to them without our communicating directly with them through advertising, especially in the local papers, the weekly papers so that people know whom to contact at whatever time.

The role of the Public Affairs Bureau is quite extensive. But there's no doubt about it that this accusation has existed for some time. I think the hon. member even wrote about it in one of his books. There had been accusations that it's really been like a propaganda arm of the PC Party, and I want to be clear that there is no connection between the bureau and the PC Party. The partisan political matters are the domain of elected officials and the party and not government employees. Like all members of the public service our bureau employees are guided by a code of conduct, and they also take an oath of office. They are professional communicators who work very hard, and they work every day on behalf of Albertans.

Bureau staff help plan and implement communications to Albertans on initiatives like safety campaigns. It could be, you know, safety campaigns for workers. It could be government programs for seniors. Albertans deserve very strong, clear communication from the government. The Public Affairs Bureau helps ensure that citizens of this province receive the information they need when they need it and, of course, in the best way possible.

Now, some of the comments made with respect to advertising. Examples of communication programs include – and there are many – traffic safety. You know, when you are driving down the highway, there are a number of programs in terms of the safety of our workers on the highways or speeding through construction zones, et cetera. Those are all advertised in papers. We lost a number of flag people over the last number of years, so that, to me, is a valuable investment in advertising.

3:10

Farm safety, workplace safety: we put a huge effort in this area to reduce the number of accidents and fatalities.

In other areas: information for postsecondary students, seniors, families, the Alberta child health benefit, and of course there was a fair amount of information out there in terms of how Albertans can stay healthy, eat the best foods, protect our environment. So that really brings down the cost.

The advertising policy is quite straightforward. The Public Affairs Bureau does provide consultation and support for all government advertising. The cost is covered by the ministry

responsible, so each ministry has that included in their budget. In 2005-06 – again, I'm saying 2005 because we don't have the figures for 2006-07 – spending on advertising by departments totalled \$8 million, but total advertising for the government is estimated to be about \$10.6 million.

Now, all advertising procurement has to be compliant with the agreement in internal trade and the TILMA agreements. We use a single agency of record for media buying, to purchase media space for all of its advertising. So it's print ads, radio ads, TV spots, billboards, online ads. This allows government to take advantage of special volume buying because we consolidate it through one agency. The agency of record for a media buying contract is for a three-year period, with a possibility of one additional year if performance is satisfactory. The current contract is with Highwood Communications, and it will be retendered in 2007, so this year.

There are two additional standing agency-of-record contracts for advertising. DDB Canada is the agency of record for recruitment advertising, and it's also the agency of record for legal and tender advertising.

Now, 2007-08 advertising campaigns principally inform Albertans about a range of topics from West Nile virus to family violence protection to bullying – we've done a fair amount there – to staying safe on the job to wildfire prevention. Although at the beginning of year, you know, we had a fair amount of moisture, these last few days of really hot weather have really increased, of course, the risk of forest fires in the province.

The upcoming campaigns for 2007-08 include the Alberta centennial education savings plan, informing Albertans that there's an opportunity for Albertans to contribute and build resources for their children wanting to enter postsecondary, bullying prevention education and awareness, recruitment of aboriginal foster parents and general foster parent recruitment, climate change, drinking and violence prevention, victims of crime. A lot of work is being done on the land-use framework advertising to make sure that people come to our public events, public consultation, the mountain pine beetle. Now recent and ongoing – and this has been ongoing for some time – the prevention of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, prevention of childhood sexual exploitation, education awareness of bullying. Prevention of family violence will continue, Work Safe Alberta, pandemic preparedness and tactics – again, we're working with municipalities in this case – West Nile virus, and given the amount of work that's out there on provincial highways, more advertising tied to traffic safety, and, of course, wildfire prevention.

Now, secondments from PAB to departments. Some departments have other non-PAB communications staff to meet additional communications needs, and that is up to the department to decide and resource such positions. We'll get back in terms of the number of communications staff because we'll have to ask every ministry their responsibilities, and we'll get back on that.

The Auditor General has never reviewed Public Affairs probably because he hasn't seen a need to. To my knowledge he hasn't reviewed it in the past. I think that reporting to the Executive Council, to the Premier's office, is very important to co-ordinate communications to ensure that Albertans are getting the information they need. Sometimes program information is difficult to get through the regular media. That's why we do the advertising. It's paid for by the departments. Our role there is mainly to play the coordination role.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Premier, again.

Continuing with some questions specific to the Public Affairs Bureau. The Premier provided us a considerable list of public information campaigns, which are precisely what governments need to do, whether it's, you know, traffic safety or all kinds of issues. Those are not concerns that we're going to raise at all. I'm sure that we would support the large majority of those and perhaps even extend the list. I don't know. The question I have with those is: how are the costs of those contracts allocated between the specific departments and the Public Affairs Bureau?

To pick an example: traffic safety. If \$1 million is spent on a traffic safety public awareness campaign, does that million-dollar cost turn up in the budget of the Public Affairs Bureau, or does it turn up in the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, for example? Or with the Healthy U campaign, which is quite expensive, does the cost of that campaign get assigned to the Department of Health and Wellness or to the Public Affairs Bureau? I would appreciate some explanation of how the costs for each of these contracts are allocated between the Public Affairs Bureau and the departments. I continue to ask the question for those various campaigns. Why aren't those communications initiatives handled by the particular department as opposed to the Public Affairs Bureau? So it goes back to perhaps the theme of our discussion. Fair enough. There are different views on it.

There is a history with the Public Affairs Bureau and Executive Council of some controversies around some contracts, the agency of record that handles the media buys, in particular. Highwood has a long and intimate history with the PC party – it's a simple statement of fact – has close connections to the chief of staff of the former Premier, Mr. Rod Love, and has the appearance of being a political favourite of this government. My question would be to the Premier. When this contract or when this position of being the agency of record comes up for renewal later this year, what steps will be taken by this Premier to avoid the appearance of political favouritism in awarding that very, very important contract?

The point that needs to be made here is that whoever handles that contract, whoever is the agency of record, has tremendous sway over communications agencies, public relations agencies, advertising agencies, and many, many media, who frankly depend on government advertising to help them meet their expenses. It's a very, very powerful position. It's one that needs to be handled, in my view, with the utmost of care and respect and openness and accountability and an absolute intolerance for any kind of political meddling whatsoever. So my question to the Premier would be: how is that contract going to be allocated? How is that role going to be determined, the role of agency of record, in such a way that avoids any appearance of political favoritism?

3:20

Related to that are other controversies around untendered contracts, some of which, I believe, have been handled by Executive Council in previous administrations and I hope will be brought to an end under this Premier. I'm thinking, for example, of an untendered contract to Mr. Rod Love for strategic advice, a contract of some tens of thousands of dollars for which there was no paper trail whatsoever. So we had a contract that was untendered, given clearly to an insider without any paper trail. Actually, I believe it was one of a number of contracts that raised concerns by the Auditor General. My question to the Premier: as a new Premier committed to openness and accountability and a new way of doing public business, can we be sure as MLAs and as citizens of Alberta that that kind of process of handing out untendered contracts without any paper trails will come to an end under this Premier's administration?

I am now going to shift a little bit to specifics around salaries. I'm

looking at the annual report of Executive Council last year, which itemizes the salaries of a dozen or so senior officials and executives with Executive Council. I'm on page 33 of the '05-06 Executive Council annual report. The Premier may well not have that at his fingertips. Fair enough. The question will stay.

The page I'm referring to itemizes a number of positions: deputy minister, chief of staff, director of southern Alberta office, deputy secretary to cabinet, managing director of Public Affairs. It includes the three senior positions in the Public Affairs Bureau and the positions of a number of executives in the office of the Premier: the director of communications, deputy chief of staff, chief of protocol, executive director of policy co-ordination, and chief internal auditor. Now, I believe that position has been moved to President of Treasury Board. But otherwise, some details would be very useful to be provided on how these positions have changed. What are the details on the salaries for these dozen or so positions that were itemized in the annual report? They will be itemized again in the annual report, but it would be nice to see what their estimated costs are going to be. I'm sure that was probably compiled somewhere in the construction of your budget, and since it's going to be public information at the end, we might as well make it public information at the beginning for taxpayers of Alberta to see.

That's sort of a logical moment for me to take a break, so I'll again return the floor to the Premier. Thanks.

Mr. Stelmach: There are a number of questions. One of them, I didn't get a chance to answer the last time I was up. In terms of the PAB: no, the advertising is done by departments, and they pay for it; the role of Public Affairs is to play a co-ordination role. It's a co-ordination role with hiring agencies, and of course these agencies are hired through competitions. So somebody has to do it for all departments, and we do the co-ordinating. I think Public Affairs staff have never reported to ministries, the same in that sense since Premier Lougheed in 1972. But, you know, we can have another look at that and get more information.

This one on appearance: this is a good question because the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta has been successful. We've had the privilege of serving Albertans for many years. We go back on a regular basis to earn their respect, you know, through elections and earn their trust. So there are many people that may have a membership in the Progressive Conservative Party. They may have contributed to the Progressive Conservative Party. With respect to the contract, it follows all of the rules in terms of public tender.

If the one agency that is giving us the absolute best price for what we've tendered, but there's a connection somehow to maybe one of the board members, what the hon. member is saying is that we should not accept that tender because there may be an appearance – an appearance – that there is some connection even though all of the rules are followed. I submit to this House that that is unfair. Tendering processes are fully public, and the tenders are public. Whoever wins that particular tender for advertising in this province does so by giving us the best possible price to offer the best service. That to me is the fair way of doing the process.

In terms of untendered contracts, there are rules under AIT, agreement on internal trade. Contracts that are, you know, less than \$100,000 can be sole-sourced. I'm not a fan of it. We should make it public that we need this expertise. If they are sole-sourced, there has to be information that comes to the minister, something that the taxpayers receive. I have a certain position that I've taken on it, and I expect the ministers to follow.

With respect to the list of people that are in Executive Council working for the Premier, the amounts are public because it's senior

officials' compensation. There's a range for senior officials, and our duty is that the contracts we sign are within that range. That range is public, and maybe we can get it later today and put it in as a matter of record. I think that was all that was raised in terms of questions.

Now, again, this year we will be tendering contracts. The call for tenders will be public, and any agency can apply. In fact, now any agency, really, across Canada that wants to apply and tender can do so, but it will be done under very strict criteria that we follow the agreement on internal trade and also the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement that we have with the province of B.C.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the Premier for his willingness to appear before us today and discuss the supply estimates for Executive Council.

Mr. Premier, I've only got a couple of quick questions, and I'm hopeful that your staff may be able to come up with some answers fairly quickly. The first is sort of a follow-up on the Leader of the Official Opposition and his expressed concern that there's not an awful lot of detail in the supply estimates. You had mentioned earlier the Alberta Order of Excellence, which I believe you said falls under the office of the Premier. I would be curious to know up front how much money is being allocated to that particular program as opposed to having to wait until we see the Executive Council annual report sometime down the road.

Likewise the protocol office. Again, I'm sure there was a major expense during the centennial year when we had the royal visit and a number of other activities. I'd be curious to see whether or not there's somewhat less expenditure contemplated there this year or how, you know, one year might compare to previous years. So that sort of information would be very helpful, and I would submit that perhaps in the future we could have it in the supply estimates. Certainly, this year if some of your staff might be able to provide that now, I would appreciate it.

I also wanted to ask: in the most recent annual report of Executive Council, '05-06, in the statement of financial position it references \$191,000 cash held as assets within Executive Council, and I'm curious to know why there would be that much and how much might currently be there. Again, it's not reflected in the budget documents that we have for '07-08, so perhaps you could clarify for me a little bit as to why that much cash is being held by Executive Council and how much it is currently.

3:30

Then the last one, I guess, is just a little bit of a frustration that I'm having with the policy field committees, Mr. Premier. Obviously, you're well aware of the fact that this is something that members on this side of the House have been asking for for a long time and very much looking forward to being involved in. I have to admit that I'm a little concerned that we're now very near the conclusion of the spring session, and those committees have been populated, and we've had a couple of bills at least, perhaps more, referred to policy field committees at this point. But there doesn't seem to be any action in terms of even an initial meeting to discuss with members from this side the framework for how those committees are going to work, what sort of a meeting schedule might be contemplated, whether it's sometime before summer – I'm going to guess that there won't likely be a lot of meetings held over the summer – whether or not those PFCs may be meeting in the fall in advance of the fall sitting, which, I believe, begins on the 5th of November, or if it's contemplated that they'll be meeting, you know,

during the time when the House is sitting. So I would certainly ask that you might be able to clarify for us where that is at on the government side and how soon members from this side can expect to see some activity in regard to the PFCs.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. First of all, to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, it's my duty to defend the budget estimates, not the willingness. I'm here because I take pride in not only defending the budget estimates but in having an opportunity to communicate very clearly with Albertans what our budget is all about and the purpose of it.

For the Alberta Order of Excellence the budget is \$110,000. The Alberta Order of Excellence is the highest honour that the province of Alberta can bestow on a citizen. Members of the Alberta Order of Excellence come from all walks of life. Their careers range from medicine, science, agriculture, engineering, business, law, politics, the arts. All members of the Order of Excellence have one thing in common, and that is that they made an outstanding contribution not only provincially but nationally or even an international impact. We have, certainly, many people in Alberta that have done that. Now, the Order of Excellence is about more than simply doing one's job well. It's about recognizing Albertans who made a difference, who serve Albertans with excellence and distinction, and whose contributions will stand the test of time.

The Alberta Order of Excellence Council considers the nominations of candidates to the Alberta Order of Excellence. It's made up of very prominent Albertans. They're volunteer representatives, and they're appointed by order in council from across Alberta. Presently the chair is Dr. Bob Westbury. The members are Bunny Ferguson, Jack Gorr, Harley Hotchkiss, Walter Paszkowski, and Harold Storlien. Again, I must repeat that these are volunteer positions. They meet to review the applications – you know, the nominations – for the Order of Excellence and make the appointments.

Members are inducted into the order at a special ceremony held at Government House. Of course, the Lieutenant Governor, the chancellor of the Order of Excellence, presents the new members with a medallion and a personalized, illuminated scroll. This is one way of recognizing outstanding achievement, really, on behalf of all Albertans of those that have really helped build this province in so many different ways.

The protocol budget. It's \$856,000 with six full-time equivalents. We'll get the comparisons from the previous years. The hon. member talked about 2005 and the Queen's visit. Obviously, it was very busy in 2005. We received many, many visitors during our centennial year. Given, Mr. Chairman, the kind of economic activity and, you know, the fact that Alberta is playing a much larger role on the world stage, we have so, so many visitors from other countries: ambassadors, consuls general, government leaders. We even have opposition leaders from other governments coming to Alberta, looking at our regulatory review processes, our taxation policies, wanting to learn from what we've accomplished in the province of Alberta.

I know that we can get the comparisons, but as I said, just the number of visitors I've had to greet over the last number of months – and, of course, we've been assisted by all members, you know, with respect to luncheons, tours, making them feel welcome in the province because they're representing countries that are making substantial investments in Alberta and in Canada. It's important to build that relationship because we are going to look to many countries for very specific skill sets, to attract people to Alberta to meet the growing demands of human resources but in so many

different areas. We've attracted some of the world's brightest minds to do research. We also have to attract people in various trades.

Again, I just recently met with the ambassador for the Philippines. They're very eager to work with us. I met the ambassador from the European Union, Ambassador Dorian Prince, who is very open to working further. I learned a lot in that meeting in terms of how their agreements work within the European Union and how they've managed to reduce costs, especially those barriers at borders to trade.

Now, there was a question with respect to all-party committees and when they'll be meeting. The policy field committees are really matters of the Legislature, not Executive Council. Even though, you know, it's an idea that I want to promote with the other opposition leaders – and we found common ground, and we're proceeding with policy field committees – they are really the creatures, I guess, of the Legislature, so the Legislature will dictate, of course, what they will do.

However, there are four, and they have been established to sort of end the frustration of members and the public who before this change felt that they had very little influence on the development of public policy. They will meet regularly in an open manner. Bills 1, 2, and 31 have already been sent to the committees. This is really new in the history of Alberta, but my own personal opinion – and, again, I can only offer the opinion – is that we could meet as to how the committees agree to meet over the summer and help prepare, hear evidence from Albertans, and then bring that evidence forward. Some of the bills, of course, will be carried into the fall session, and we'll be able to have more information in terms of, maybe, possible amendments and build better legislation and regulation with respect to the three bills that I talked about.

I just think that not only the policy field committees but agreeing, of course, on fixed dates for the Legislature, a fixed budget date – that is really new, but it's good. It's good for democracy in the province of Alberta, and I think that it helps for better policy development. You know, the Committee of Supply – of course, the work is in progress today – is spending more hours than we did before in this House. It's more flexible. Every member of the House has an opportunity to participate, even the independents, and we do have multiple opportunities to speak, to talk about the needs of individual constituencies in terms of the budgets that come before the House. That's what it's all about: representing the member's constituency in this House to bring forward the kinds of needs and, of course, positions and opinions of constituents.

There are, I believe, more democratic reforms to come, and we'll work on those in the future, but I think that in the first few months we have really come a long way in improving democracy in the province of Alberta.

3:40

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise and respond to the estimates for Executive Council and to respond to some of the remarks made by the hon. Premier. First of all, I would like to correct a misconception that is out there that this Third Session of the 26th Legislature would be one of the longest sittings ever and that at the end of business on Thursday, June 14, if we do adjourn as scheduled, this sitting would have been the longest and that we have been awarded ample opportunity to discuss things in this House. The first half is correct because we're going to have more linear days, more afternoons, but we are not going to have the same number of hours as we did before. While we welcome the changes that were brought forward by the Premier in terms of the

policy field committees and the revised budget sittings and all these wonderful improvements that we have seen as a result of negotiations between the House leaders, really the end result with respect to the number of hours that are available for debate has been reduced.

Now, I have certain thoughts which I would like to put on the record and invite the hon. Premier to respond to. One of the things that I wanted to talk about was, again, the Public Affairs Bureau, but I'm going to submit to you, Mr. Chairman, that my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview has covered it eloquently. I would like to capture one comment from the Premier's response to him when he indicated that the Public Affairs Bureau is there for two-way communications with Albertans, two ways meaning to and from. I would register that, in my opinion – and I've been here only two and a half years as an MLA – I have seen this flow to be mostly unidirectional. The flow is mostly from the government to Albertans and not the other way back.

I realize that there is a sales job for the Public Affairs Bureau to convince Albertans that the direction taken by government is good and that the policies are sound, but I would argue that there is an equally important need for the Public Affairs Bureau to solicit public opinion, to seek direction from Albertans. I would actually give you some examples, Mr. Chairman; for example, the housing issue, affordability of housing and escalating rents and all that big concern that this Third Session of this Legislature has been dealing with.

Today, for example, we had these guys, the guests from Marie Lake, who were concerned about seismic testing. You know, Albertans are concerned about the environment, and the government, as indicated in their Bill 3, is talking about intensity targets for emissions versus a hard cap. I would submit that these are examples of situations where this government should have been surveying Albertans and asking them what they think. My question to the Premier is: should we expect in the near future more opinion surveys or plebiscites or other mechanisms where we ask people what they think? Now, I am not asking that this government govern by referendum. This is not really what I'm advocating, but as I emphasized before, two-way communication means back and forth, to and from.

Another observation I made comparing the hon. Premier now to the former Premier is with respect to his availability with the media. I have been brought up knowing that there are four levels of authority in any society: one being the government, or the Executive Council; the other being the Legislature, the elected officials; the third being the legal system, or the judiciary; and the fourth being the media. The media is the fourth level of authority. We noticed that the hon. Premier now only has two days a week of media availability compared to five. My question to him is if this is something that would be changed in the near future again.

Third, I wanted to touch on his promise to govern with integrity and transparency, which is really a noble promise. I commend him on wanting to do this. What I am seeking from him is commitment to translate words into actions.

Take, for example, last year, Bill 20, Mr. Chairman, the amendment that we had before this House with respect to freedom of information and protection of privacy. You may remember that the government – and this hon. Premier was a minister of that government – brought in time allocation, or closure, twice on the debate on Bill 20. I was the lead critic on that bill as the shadow minister for government services back then. The Premier voted twice to bring in time allocation. When questioned by the media, because he by then had declared his candidacy for the Premier's job, he indicated that while he's not hearing a lot of concern from his constituents, this would change.

I argued in *Hansard*, in this House, that basically the longer that debate continued, the more people became aware of it, the more people would actually start phoning and e-mailing their MLAs, saying: "Why are we making things more secretive? Why are we hiding things from the public, ministerial briefing notes, findings by the Internal Audit Committee, and so on and so forth?" The hon. Premier then indicated that while he's not receiving a lot of those concerns, he anticipated that this might change. Then he also indicated that if this was in fact the case, then whoever becomes leader of this province might actually end up having to deal with this issue.

I'm quoting from an article here which was published on May 17, shortly after the debate on Bill 20 ended. The quote goes: "At the end of the day with new leadership if there's a problem, this will be changed. If it does restrict openness and transparency in some way, then so be it. I'm sure no matter who is elected as leader will find a need to change this legislation." The question now is: is there a need to change this legislation to bring in more openness and transparency?

Another question, Mr. Chairman, to the hon. Premier. Again, back in 2006 there was an Official Opposition motion, Motion 502, to end government patronage. The motion was defeated, unfortunately, in this House, and there was a division called. The hon. Premier voted against Motion 502 to end patronage, and along with him voted people who are now on the front bench, people like the hon. Minister of Recreation, Parks, and Culture, Minister of Energy, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, Finance, Infrastructure and Transportation, President of the Treasury Board, and the Minister of Justice.

I realize that there is a task force now studying all the appointments to boards and agencies and commissions, but I'm seeking a commitment from the hon. Premier to work with this House to end patronage or at least severely restrain it or restrict it. We should have those appointments and those people put on those boards and commissions based on merit and based on their expertise and their excellence.

I have a few more questions, but I'll take my seat and allow the Premier to respond, and then I'll rise again. Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to the Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Dunford: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to introduce to you and to other members here in the House this afternoon a former colleague, former MLA from Stony Plain Stan Woloshyn. Stan was elected, I believe, in 1989 and served Albertans not only in his hometown but also throughout the province in many facets with the government. I remember him most as being a very big whip, but he was kind and gentle. Anyway, let's give a warm welcome to Stan Woloshyn.

head: 3:50 **Main Estimates 2007-08**

Executive Council (*continued*)

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. I knew that sooner or later, after

answering all of the questions in terms of the budget, it would start moving away from, of course, the estimates and start going more political. But isn't it funny how these guys change their opinion? Like, remember, a couple years ago: oh, we just don't sit enough days here. They never talk about the hours we sat. Clearly, compared to any jurisdiction in Canada, we sat more hours. Don't talk about hours; just talk about days. Now we sit days; they want hours. Well, make up your mind.

Mr. Elsalhy: We want both.

Mr. Stelmach: Oh, you want both. Well, we'll have a few night sittings. We'll keep you happy if you want the hours. Geez, it's just this way, you know, that way. You can slip through a knot and still come out straight.

Obviously, on Bill 20 he didn't do a very good job as a critic. But I can assure you that in terms of transparency and those other areas, we're moving very quickly on improving government transparency. We're going to be building on what we've accomplished so far, and we're going to do more.

Now, on two-way communications. When we talk about that it's one way, you know, that's not correct. I was trying to keep abreast of the authorities. The fourth authority was, I think, the media. I didn't know when the media was elected in this province, but I guess that if you take your direction from the media, then so be it. I'm glad they said it publicly.

Obviously, they can't present good policy evaluation without going to the media. I've heard some of the questions that come up in the House. The media asks one day, and then they come up in the House the next day. I could tell you more and more stories about that, but we're not going to drill down. I'm going to try and stay in Premierland with this group.

Two-way communications. I disagree; it's not one way. We very much value Albertans' opinions and, of course, their ideas, and I do listen. It's one of the reasons, you know, that this government has been successful and continues to be successful. We flow information to Albertans, but we also hear from them as well. One way is through Alberta Connects. It's via the Internet, their phone. Albertans can ask questions. They can also submit to us their ideas. I get e-mails all the time, and so do my colleagues. We respond to them. In fact, in our office we respond to the e-mails that come, and you know how many e-mails you can get in a day. That's one of the reasons why our correspondence branch is busy. We want to get back to them, whether it's a letter or an e-mail. We do some public opinion research.

Then on public consultations. You know, we're holding a number of public consultations. They just said that they need the public consultations. That's what they support. Yet in the House the other day, or maybe a couple of days, we were criticized by the opposition for having these public consultations. So, you know, obviously you can't satisfy everyone. Our job here is to satisfy Albertans, and no matter what we do here as a government, we will be criticized because that's your job. I go to bed every night realizing that that's your job. That's part of democracy, and democracy is very strong in the province of Alberta.

With respect to media availability we do two media scrums a week in the media room here, but many others are in Calgary. We had two media scrums not only at the opening of seniors' week, but we had one following the presentation I made earlier that morning. So there were two times that the media approached me in a single day plus when we got back here to Edmonton. I do one-on-one interviews. Many times various media representatives will approach me one-on-one and say: can I do an interview on a specific topic?

Some of those interviews now are spilling out in the various papers and articles. Sometimes, Mr. Chairman, as you know, they may do a media interview at the beginning of the month, but it may not be in a paper or a magazine until the end of that month or maybe even two months later. But we're certainly doing my part and our part as government.

Everywhere I go, you know, media follows. We appeared in Tofield early Saturday morning to support their rodeo and the breakfast, had media there. I was interviewed. There was an article in the *Journal*. From there I went to St. Michael. All the churches in the county of Lamont opened up their doors. It was an event just for part of their tourism plans. The media was there. I went to the final review of Air Cadet Squadron 341 in Mundare. The media was there.

The only time the media wasn't present was at a private event on Saturday. I went to a wedding, and some found it a little different. You know, before you can go to the washroom, security walks in first and checks, and then you can walk in. I mean, life has changed, but so be it. You have to realize that you will have media everywhere. I certainly have been always open and talk to them. You know, difference of opinion, but so be it.

Public opinion research. We do conduct public opinion research, of course, especially in our Report to Albertans, our annual report. We do that. All governments – provincial, federal – do that. We use this research to get unfiltered feedback from the public. The research helps provide valuable information on the views and opinions of Albertans. Overall research shows that Albertans are very happy and that they are happy with this government. We're continuing to build the policies based on that research. Will we be doing more? We probably will because there are new ideas that have come forward from this government, and we're going to ask Albertans for their opinions.

Just getting back to the public consultations, one of the key principles this government operates by is, of course, working with Albertans. A number of task forces have been set up and are gathering input from Albertans on everything from safe communities to the royalty regime. Safe communities are very important: huge participation. The royalty review has garnered a lot of attention, the land use framework as well. The public consultation on the environment has been very successful. We've had people in all parts of the province contribute. This information that comes forward is very valuable and will be inputted into the kind of policies that we'll put forward. I just think that we're doing well on the public consultation side and will continue, irrespective of the kind of, perhaps, criticism that we may receive from some members of the opposition, saying that it's too much consultation.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and participate in the estimate on Executive Council, the Premier's office. I have a few questions, Mr. Premier. I'll start with the electoral reforms. During election 2004 I found out that there were some irregularities in the special ballots. I complained to the Ethics Commissioner, and it took about six months. After the investigation he said that I should have complained, I think, within 90 days or something. My point is, you know, I tried to. First, I talked to the Ethics Commissioner right away and the election commissioner, as well, but I didn't get any reply. Then I phoned him. Then he started the investigation. It took some time. An investigation was done, but still there was no action. Finally, I received a letter from the election officer: maybe the next time we will improve the election system.

4:00

I have seen the electoral systems in Europe, India, Pakistan, and some other countries which are not democratic countries. We have a better system here. But I was surprised. How come we don't do some, you know, thorough work on this system? Anybody can still go to the polling station and vote on behalf of somebody who's not even in this country. This is what happened during my election time. In one of the ridings in Edmonton the difference was only three votes, and that was after . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but the time allocated for the Liberal opposition has elapsed, and I will now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. The Premier can perhaps respond in writing to the questions that were asked.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's, indeed, an honour to be here opposite the Premier in his first set of estimates. I want to start off by saying that the Premier said he was at a wedding. I, hopefully, outdid him. I was at a wedding that I officiated on Saturday. I didn't have any problems with the washrooms, though, Mr. Premier.

In the limited time that I have in the give-and-take, I'm not going to worry about every budget item. I do want to talk specific in one area, a broad policy thrust. First of all, as the House leader of the New Democrats I was involved in some of the negotiations. I congratulate the Premier. I think this has been a very important first step, the changes that we've made. We'll see how they work down the way. But it would not have been made unless the Premier was behind changes. I know enough that if the Premier of a province doesn't want to do something, it's not going to happen. It's that simple. So I do congratulate the Premier for moving us along somewhat in democratic renewal and openness and transparency. I would say that we will have to see how these go.

I mean, I think it's pretty clear that the policy field committees, at least three of them, will have to meet sometime because they have to report back, in my understanding, in the first week of the session. So they are going to have to meet here in the summer sometime to be able to do that. You know, they're a work-in-progress. We'll see how they go.

I also want to congratulate the Premier – and we'll see how it goes in the policy field committees – about bills 1 and 2. I was on that committee. We've been pushing for a lobbyist registry. In fairness, the committee advocated it, and, you know, on the conflict of interest, an increase to what we thought was reasonable. I hope the policy field committees will look at what I consider some loopholes. We'll see where that goes, and we'll know in the fall. I'm going to be optimistic that they will come out even better bills as we go along.

I want to continue, Mr. Chairman, with the thrust towards more openness and transparency. I believe I heard the Premier correctly when he said that we'd be looking at some more reforms as we went along. I think I heard him saying that in terms of discussion. I want to have a discussion here today about electoral reform. I know that the Premier has already talked about looking at some reforms in terms of leadership races in the future, and I think that's good and proper, and we'll see where that goes.

I want to say that I think we can begin to catch up to some other provinces in terms of electoral reform. You know, I wouldn't be the last one in the world to say that the Progressive Conservative Party has been very successful over the years and has governed, and that's certainly their right. The people put them there, Mr. Chairman, over these number of years, and we accept that. But I think it must be

troublesome to all of us that in the 2004 election the voter turnout dipped from 53 per cent to 45 per cent of eligible voters. I suggest that that should be very concerning for all of us, regardless of whether we're in opposition or whether we're in government. Added to that, I think we're in the right direction by the reforms that we're trying to do in the Legislature and the lobbyists registry and these sorts of things because there's a great deal of cynicism out there, and again nobody wins with that cynicism. I think we even have to move beyond, certainly in electoral reform.

I might point out to the Premier – and I'm sure he's well aware – that other provinces are moving on in looking at reforms of the electoral system. There are five that I'm aware of. First of all is British Columbia. As the Premier is aware, they set up a citizens' assembly that went around the province. They had a vote on it. They didn't like that particular model, but they're coming back with a different model.

In New Brunswick in December 2003 a Commission on Legislative Democracy was established. It's my understanding that they've released a final report. They've now had an election, a new Premier. We'll see where that goes, but clearly some pressure there.

Ontario announced the creation of a Democratic Renewal Secretariat. It's scheduled now to submit its report to the Legislative Assembly. It's my understanding that it's coming forward immediately.

Prince Edward Island has gone through a process. It was defeated, actually. They had a referendum, decided to stay with a similar system, which is fair enough if that's what the people want.

In March Quebec brought out some reform of democratic institutions, and I understand that the citizens' committee rejected the draft bill and recommended a two-ballot system.

The point that I'm making is that they're feeling the same sorts of pressures, I think, with the cynicism and lower turnouts. We even see them talking federally, at least about some reforms. As you know, Prime Minister Harper has come out with fixed election dates, I think, if they last that long, some time in 2009. Highly unlikely, but at least they're moving in that direction.

I don't expect things to happen overnight when a new Premier comes in. I think that's unrealistic. I think we moved through this first stage. My question to the Premier would be: is he actively considering looking at what's happening in other provinces and looking at addressing the pressing issue of electoral reform? Along with that, if we could make those changes and if we had a citizens' coalition start to involve themselves, the bottom line, I think, is that that would encourage greater voter participation, which has to be a worry for all of us. I mean, I think we should have a similar thing as B.C. did, a citizens' coalition to look at different options without deciding: should it be proportional rep, first past the pole, fixed election dates? You know, there are a number of different things that we can do or a mixture or whatever. But if there was a citizens' coalition that went around the province, I think it would create some interest in our electoral system, and hopefully they might recommend some changes so that people would want to participate.

4:10

Now, I also understand – and this is the real dilemma, I'm sure, for any government – that the system has worked pretty well for the Progressive Conservative Party. To their credit, that's the system that was there, so it becomes harder to get people to change. It's true of an NDP government, and it's true of a Conservative government when it works well for them. It's not a matter of politics. Things are working well as long as we're the government.

If I may say so to the Premier, we've started with the all-party committees and what we're doing here in the Legislature. A great

legacy to leave would be an electoral system that had people excited, that had them involved. Regardless of the political stripe that we hold, I think that would be doing a big service to people. I'm not expecting an announcement here today, but I wonder if the Premier might comment – and I'll come back on it – on what he sees the future here in Alberta as compared to what's happening with other provinces vis-à-vis the citizens' assemblies, all of these sorts of things, if the government and the Premier as the leader would be prepared to take a look at doing something similar here. I'll come back on it after.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. Well, I do have to thank the hon. member for his very kind words. I do agree that, you know, collectively, all parties, we brought forward some steps in terms of democratic reform in the Legislature. From what I get when visiting many corners of the province, Albertans are quite happy with the changes.

Electoral reform. Of course, talking first of all with respect to the leadership race, the leadership race for the Progressive Conservative Party was hotly contested. We weren't in the position – perhaps in some parties it's like, you know, you look behind you and say: "Do you want this? Do you want this?" No. This was a long leadership campaign, and through that leadership campaign we learned a few things that we can bring forward to this House in terms of legislation, work with the other parties in terms of building the rules and the regulations, however we put that together. I mentioned to the media the other day that it may be something we can discuss and at least have a framework ready for fall and start from some place. At least it's worthwhile to proceed because these questions will keep coming up in such a way as not that there was anything done wrong but always twist and turn and give a different kind of perception that something was done without Albertans knowing about it. So we'll have those rules in place. We'll learn from other jurisdictions that have gone through similar issues.

Voter participation. How do we work with Albertans to increase voter participation? Well, first of all, by treating each other with respect. There are roles for the opposition, obviously, and they're critical roles in a good democratic system. But when you look at how Albertans look at politicians, I believe that in the last poll that was done, we were at the bottom rung of the ladder. The first, of course, were firefighters, nurses, farmers, and then politicians. I feel good because if we, you know, get the average of where a farmer is and a politician, I'm still about 50 per cent, so I'm okay there.

How do we improve our behaviour in the House? How do we improve the way we treat each other as elected officials? There used to be pride. There would be pride in serving the public. It was a responsibility given to you by the power of the vote. It's not only here but in many other jurisdictions that today the voter participation is shrinking. School board representative, the hon. member knows very well, very important, public education in this province. Look at the low voter turnout. If you do not have an election for a municipal councillor at the same time as a school trustee, very few people come out to vote for a school trustee. In fact, if I remember correctly – I stand to be corrected – in Fort Saskatchewan in the by-election 15,000 residents, so 4,500 could vote or maybe 6,000; I'm not quite sure. Eighty-eight people. Eighty-eight people.

How can we improve that? That's something that we could do collectively. But if we constantly nibble at each other's ankles on a day-to-day basis and make allegations and hope to destroy a person's integrity and not debate policy, that doesn't do any of us good.

Albertans may be looking at it and saying: you know, what's the use if that's the only thing that political parties concentrate on?

Well, I can tell you that we're not going to concentrate on that. We're going to concentrate on the future. We're going to look at how, during this period of boom, which is unprecedented – there's no library that you can go to and pull a book off the shelf and read about somebody else's experiences. This is groundbreaking. It's groundbreaking in Canada. It's groundbreaking for many jurisdictions around the world. Yes, there are some countries like China that have the same rate of growth, but they do not have a democratic system. That makes a big difference in terms of how people are treated, how decisions are made. We've got to focus on managing growth. Decision-making, of course, at this time if we start looking at the kind of reforms that maybe the hon. member alluded to: we can certainly talk about them, but right now we need stability in the decision-making process.

I believe the hon. member talked about proportional representation. Well, in the little bit of review I did – and it's just very preliminary because I know that this topic is going to come up from time to time – voter turnout necessarily doesn't improve because of proportional representation. But it does kind of create an impression that kind of brings out the extremes of the political spectrum, and they do have greater support and influence than the parties that have, you know, the larger representation in the Legislature or in Parliament. It may lead to further division rather than uniting around some very important goals.

Speaking to other provinces over the last few months, the one meeting we had in Toronto with the Premiers, many shared their experiences, the kind of consultation that they've had. It has really been polarized, but that doesn't mean that we can't look at what information they've got so far from their people and use that in our decision-making.

The other is, as I said before, in terms of fixed election dates: if our party, the Progressive Conservative Party, was to put it on the table and discuss it at a policy convention, I'm certainly open to it. If somebody in another party goes for that, fine. I don't want to mention names, but the government member that I talked to that was in opposition before but now is in power is really scratching and saying: oh, geez, why did we push for fixed election dates, because now they have a fixed election date? Here it wouldn't trouble me, but it is something that we have to move forward collectively, talk to Albertans, and bring the information forward to the House.

Voter participation is important. It has dropped, and it continues to diminish. That's something that we can collectively talk about in this House and bring about more respect in the Legislature for its members and do a better job. That in itself will get more people out there to vote.

I don't think there was a question on any of the specific budget items but just in reply to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

4:20

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. There's no doubt. I mean, politics should never be personal. It's about policy; there's no doubt about that. I think we all should remember that the best we can. But within that, there's a debate. In this country, at least, we can do it across the way here rather than, if we want to change the government, having to go out and get the guns and everything else as in most of the world. Democracy is messy; it's no doubt. I think it was Winston Churchill who said that it's the worst possible system that you can devise until you look at every other one. I think that's where we're at.

I don't disagree, you know, with the tone and the rest of it. Mind you, the school board probably has the lowest participation. When I was a school board trustee, people tended to know who I was, but they didn't know what I did because of just the lack of knowledge. The rates of return at the civic level, where we don't have as much partisan politics, are worse, far worse than federally and provincially, as the Premier is well aware, in terms of the turnout.

I do say that the democratic system has to be looked at from time to time. Can we make it better? I agree with the Premier: when you're in power, that's why it's difficult to get changes because, obviously, the system works well for you because you're in power. But that shouldn't ultimately be the sole criterion of why the system is working properly. The Premier has acknowledged that we do have a concern with the participation rate, with the cynicism, and these sorts of things that are going on.

Proportional rep: is it the way to go or not? Prince Edward Island decided not after going through a commission. They had a by-election. I tend to think that it's better to have those extremes that the Premier talked about if you get a certain level, participate in the Legislature rather than outside. I think that's probably healthier over the long run. That may be a difference of opinion, but at least you see your vote counting. Now, it has led to a cynicism of strategic voting often, you know: I don't like either one of you, but I'm going to hold my nose and vote for one party because I don't like the other one worse. It's the least of the alternatives, as we have in the United States.

I would remind the Premier that in the so-called democracies, the lowest participation rates – I'm not talking provincially; I'm talking federally now – are in the United States, the worst. Canada has the second worst, and the United Kingdom has the third worst participation rates. They don't have proportional rep.

I think we should back up from there. That's the point I was trying to make, to see if the Premier would be interested in it rather than prejudging what the citizens may say. They may definitely go out there and say: "Well, we've taken a look at it. We believe that the first past the post that we have is the best system." Great. Or they may have two or three alternatives. I guess that's what I'm saying. Rather than prejudging even fixed election dates and the other things that people are talking about, I think it would be a very encouraging step, and I think it would go some way to even dispelling some of the cynicism that people have if there was an actual citizens' assembly or coalition or whatever we want to call it that spent a little bit of time as they are doing in other provinces. They did it in P.E.I. and rejected certain things. But it would create that interest.

I guess that's all I'm suggesting, Mr. Chairman: not prejudging proportional rep or fixed election dates. It's probably too far down the way. We should allow a citizens' coalition. If we really believe in democracy and openness and transparency, as we've started to do with the all-party committees and the other things we're working on, it seems to me that this is a logical next step along the way. Again, I'm not foolish enough or naive enough to think: "Oh, what a great idea. The Premier is going to get up and say, yeah, there's going to be a citizens' assembly announced here." I'm just trying to see if there's some interest in pursuing it. Without laying out what they do, allow them as a policy field committee here, but a citizens' committee, to take a look at this and report back over a period of time, be it a year or whatever, to look at the low participation rates, to look at maybe differences that there could be in our electoral system, and maybe lay out some ideas. That's all I'm suggesting to the Premier.

You know, this idea, too, I think, of the instant sort of things that happen has led to some of the cynicism. I've served in public life

for longer than I probably should, but here I am anyhow, Mr. Chairman. I say to people that I think there's some responsibility on the public, too, to not just take the flippant answer that all people are crooks or that they're all this or that. Whatever one's political philosophy, most people run for parties because they want to do public service. I've said to people many times, you know, that politicians are only as good or as bad as the people that elect them, because they're just people. There has to be some move, too, by the public to involve themselves more.

I think if we could do something like a citizens' assembly, it could be a basis for at least taking a look at it, looking at the participation rates, looking at the cynicism. I think it couldn't hurt. I don't think we should prejudge where they would go, whether it be proportional rep or the other things. They may well come back and say, "Hey, this works well the way it is with a little tinkering here and there," but I think the process would be as important as the end. That's why I'm asking the Premier if he might be amenable sometime in the near future to looking at a citizens' assembly.

Mr. Stelmach: One of the challenges of being a Premier is listening very carefully to the questions and the way they're structured. In my response earlier, just talking about what other elected officials had mentioned, had said in the past with some of the electoral reforms – and you're right; there were these discussions in other provinces across Canada – my comments were not in prejudgment of anything. It's simply what I've heard from other Canadians – other provincial leaders, provincial elected officials – in terms of the kinds of discussions they've had.

You know, no matter what the system is, we've had good wisdom in the electorate in this country and in this province. It's without a doubt the best country and province to live in in the world. From time to time we might have some disagreements, but the system has worked well.

With respect to the comment made that perhaps he has served in public life too long, maybe the hon. member will be able to tell us if he's planning on retiring.

Mr. Martin: Well, that's a good way around the question anyhow. The answer is no.

Again, you know, we don't have a great deal of time, but as I said, I'm aware that I'm planting in here, hopefully, a seed that the government and the Premier will take a look at the citizens' coalition. I think it is a serious matter that none of us are going to win down the way if things keep going the way they are with the public. I mean, in politics there are going to be people that agree and disagree. That's the nature of democracy, right? You know, some people are going to be mad some of the time and others mad at the opposition, and that's democracy. As I say, it's messy.

I really worry, Mr. Premier, about some of the younger people not participating in the system. Some of them are even activists. They think what we do here is irrelevant and that they have to go out on the streets to have a say, and I think that's dangerous, too. I'm not saying that people shouldn't participate and rally and demonstrate. I'm not saying that. But if they think that's the end in itself – and that is true of some very bright, active young people – I think we're facing a problem. I guess I would just leave it at that, Mr. Chairman, and say that I really hope that the Premier would down the way consider setting up some form of citizens' participation to look at our democratic system.

4:30

I'm not sure how much time I have; I don't think much. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on the PAB. I guess the only thing I

would say is that part of the problem – and it's a difficult one – is what is government information and what could be seen as being partisan. Often that's in the eye of the beholder, of course, so the question I might ask about the PAB is: what mechanism is there to oversee and control the use and to determine what is partisan?

In our constituency offices, as the Premier is well aware, there are certain rules that we have to follow in terms of what is partisan and what is not partisan, what we can do with our communications budget. I'm wondering if there is something similar through the PAB that sort of monitors what might be seen as too partisan – therefore, they would pull it off – and what is government information, similar to what we have at the constituency office.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, the time for this has elapsed, and now it's time for any members. I have an extensive list, and I will read that off: Calgary-Lougheed, Edmonton-Rutherford, Airdrie-Chestermere, Edmonton-Ellerslie, Calgary-Foothills, and Edmonton-Manning. There are more speakers than the allotted time. If you're brief, we'll probably get them all in. We'll start with Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. A big day, Premier. Congratulations to you.

We're so fortunate – and you know this very well – to have many, many hundreds of boards and agencies and commissions doing great work right across the province. My questions for the Premier are on board governance review, upcoming here. Two questions. What can you tell us about the three individuals that have been appointed? And can you shed a little light on whether they will review and make recommendations on the ongoing training for board members? We're living in such an interesting time, where there are all kinds of possibilities but all kinds of responsibilities, and we want to get our people as prepared as we can. So the two questions: what can you tell us about the individuals? And what do you expect when it comes to recommendations for ongoing training?

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, and thank you to Calgary-Lougheed. The questions raised are with respect to the board governance review secretariat. As I mentioned earlier, the numerous boards and agencies do allocate about 50 per cent of government expenditure on various programs, so it's important to have not only good policies in place but good people on the boards of the agencies and commissions to make the big decisions because they are multibillion dollar decisions.

Now, the process is written/verbal consultation coming to the members. The members are: Linda Hohol, who was the president of TSX Venture Exchange in Calgary; Neil McCrank, the chair, who has spent many years not only as a deputy but was the AEUB chair, years of experience; and Allan Tupper, from UBC, someone that actually was my professor at one time. He did spend some time here at the University of Alberta. I think he was the one that wrote on the Fulton-Favreau formula – remember? – on how to amend the Canadian constitution. I memorized it, but I forgot what it was.

The board will continue the task force and consultations. They'll bring recommendations to us by September 2007, and then we'll work through implementing those recommendations so that we also look at the people that we appoint and the interview process, the open transparency, and also look at the background of people, the kinds of skill sets they bring to the appointments and, again, how to do it in an open and transparent manner.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much. I will be brief because I know that you have a lot of questioners. Mr. Premier, in 2005 a three-member panel made up of government MLAs and chaired by the current Education minister reviewed the operation of the Public Affairs Bureau, and its findings were never released. I'm wondering if in the interest of openness and accountability and transparency you would commit to releasing the findings of that panel.

Mr. Stelmach: There was a report in terms of the PAB. I don't know if it was an external review. All I know is that it was reviewed internally, and there was a discussion that was led by an MLA who is now the Education minister. It was an internal review, for internal purposes.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Premier, for this opportunity. I wanted to talk to you a little bit about the managing growth side of your mandate. The issue in my area is high growth, lots of it. For example, in the city of Airdrie we have an annual growth rate of 10 per cent, and we're on about year 5 or 6 of that kind of a growth rate. In the Chestermere-Langdon areas we're dealing with up to 20 per cent – it's between 18 and 20 per cent in both communities – and it's been like that for the last five years. So the issues in my constituency, for example, are based on this huge growth rate, whether or not we can build schools fast enough, supply any type of health care, deal with high traffic-density issues, the underpass/overpass situation at the south end of Airdrie, where if you happen to be driving out of Calgary on any evening during about a two-hour block when it's rush hour, you would discover that there's traffic lined up on highway 2 trying to exit for sometimes up to three or four kilometres.

Mr. Goudreau: Go in the ditches.

Ms Haley: Yeah, go in the ditches. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The truth is that it's supposed to be a freeway system on highway 2, and this is clearly not a freeway when you run into that kind of traffic volume or the problem with getting people off the road. I raise this not to try and lobby – although, I could do that – but, rather, to ask this kind of a question in this framework, Mr. Premier. When you're looking at managing growth – we all know that a lot of this growth has captured everybody's attention – is there a role through your Executive Council leadership on setting up, perhaps inside municipal affairs, for example, a high-growth commission or committee? I don't know what the proper terminology is, but a focus of that department that would anticipate some of the growth issues. I believe there are 28 communities in Alberta that are dealing with over 5 per cent annualized growth. For me and for all of them coming back and asking for more schools, please, and “Could you fix my overpass?” and “When are you going to build me a clinic?” you know, is frustrating because it's always like it's a surprise. It isn't a surprise because we've got a track record now that shows that this massive growth is occurring.

So it seems to me that rather than just dealing with a granting basis from a municipal affairs point of view, perhaps there's an opportunity here to set up some expertise inside the department of municipal affairs that could help municipalities in their planning for the kinds of growth that they're dealing with. Maybe there's an opportunity there for your leadership to help us in the Airdrie, Rocky View, Chestermere, Langdon areas on planning for where we are

going to get our water. How do we deal with the traffic issues that are evolving and getting worse every day? So that's one spot.

4:40

The other spot, of course, is that in my area the whole area is dealing with water issues, whether it's the Kneehill water commission coming down from the current Red Deer River pipeline into Irricana and Beiseker, which it already does, but now we're dealing with water quality issues because there's not enough flow right in that pipeline.

These are not in your portfolio, Mr. Premier. I recognize that. But these are real issues that we're dealing with in some of these higher growth areas. I would love to have your views on how you see government reacting to that kind of growth pressure and maybe a more concerted effort on looking at how we deal with these problems in an anticipatory way rather than sort of a reactionary way.

The other comment would be, I guess, on the Water for Life strategy. Under managing growth do you see the Water for Life strategy taking on a much greater importance in making sure that we have reservoirs set aside that can capture some of the runoff waters that are going through now on some of the high-stream flow advisories? Is there an opportunity here for us to try to even work with irrigation districts or other partners to try to develop a more sustainable water reservoir system that could help us deal with that? I'm sure that by the time summer comes around, in August we'll be having water restrictions for everybody trying to water their lawns or their gardens at that point. So is there part of your managing growth where you're looking at that type of an issue?

I'd just appreciate your input, sir.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. Managing growth pressures is one of the five government priorities. This is one area that is very important no matter what we talk about. An issue was raised with respect to roads and water, and we do have so many communities that are facing unbelievable increases in population and are putting pressures on the existing infrastructure.

The first thing, of course, is to move on the review that was done in Fort McMurray because that is something that we have to address immediately. The next step, again, is through Executive Council in terms of reviewing policy, looking at all of the ideas that are coming forward and starting to draft those policies for consideration. One of them is Water for Life, definitely. You know, will we be able to move to water storage? It is critical. It will do a number of good things, of course, not only provide water. It will improve some of the issues tied to flooding in some cases in terms of having water reservoirs and also will improve the quality of water considerably.

With respect to the roads it was visionary on behalf of the government very early, more than 30 years ago, to buy property for the transportation and utility corridor. So we're very fortunate that we have that property purchased, and we're building the ring roads. The question is: where is the next outer ring road for some of these communities? We have to do that planning now. That's looking at the future, and that's why it's imperative that we have the kind of planning with respect to the greater capital area and Calgary and area. What will the city of Calgary look like with two million people? Where will those borders be? Will they incorporate the city of Airdrie? How do you get from Airdrie, then, to downtown Calgary? Given the traffic volumes, at a million, know that if you double that, you won't be able to do it by car unless you want to take the whole day. Again, the transportation systems.

Then we look at something else and, again, not necessarily Calgary and the communities around but the capital area, you know, LRT, public transit. How do we look at: can we do something with waste management together rather than in each municipality? Can we pool the resources, again with water and then planning of roads? There is a lot of attention paid on the upgraders that are coming. Of course, Leduc has a number of advantages of having a container port. Again, improvements to highway 2.

But the population has doubled. In the first part of this year, in the first three months, another 11,000 people migrated to Alberta just from other provinces, not including other countries. Those pressures will continue because there are job opportunities. As more people come to this province, how do we encourage more housing development? Even though we're building many single dwellings and building a considerable number of spaces for seniors, it's low-income, affordable housing, low-income rentals that we have to encourage.

Part of that planning will be to work with the federal government, maybe through tax incentives, and the other is to look at perhaps even some zoning bylaws, that municipalities have to encourage this development. But I'm sure – in fact, I'm positive – with the additional money going into housing, \$285 million, into affordable housing, that will spawn some new ideas and new spaces.

If you look at the projections and the type of investment that's coming into the province, if it's going to be \$40 billion just on the Industrial Heartland, on the petrochemical side and upgrading side – we look at the number of new people that will be in the province, and that's where planning is critical. This is part of the reason that, you know, with the planning and the policy evaluation we need help to evaluate all the information that's coming forward because, as I said before in the opening remarks, there is no library you can go to and learn from someone else's experience. This is groundbreaking, and it will continue. I know that we're going through a number of policy reviews, but the one most important is that we've got to plan for more people, housing, roads, and water.

If we plan it well, even for recycling of water, we could probably, you know, if things work out, use some communities' lagoon water in the settling ponds for the petrochemical industry. Rather than drawing water from the river, use it from a source that's already there and then just ensure that it has been processed before it finds its way back to the river. There are a whole bunch of possibilities to use the same litre of water many more times.

The Water for Life strategy. The only comment that I can make, though, is that we can do a lot individually, you know: a shorter shower, less heating of water. Different jurisdictions have applied different rules. We're not in as critical a position as some other countries are, but we don't want to get there. If we triple our population, which could possibly happen, then the policies that we implement today will ensure that we have enough water for future generations. Storage is a critical component of that, and it has been in the Water for Life strategy.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for giving me the opportunity once again to ask a few questions to the hon. Premier. Mr. Premier, one of your priorities is honest, transparent, accountable government. The Member for Edmonton-McClung mentioned the FOIP bill, Bill 20, which this government passed last year. According to that bill, we can't have ministerial briefing notes for five years and internal audit reports for 15 years. You know, if you don't get all the details of what the government is doing for 15 years, how can we find out some things which are not done accord-

ing to the rules and regulations? By the way, I'm going to table a bill in which I'm urging this government to reverse this motion, so will you help me to pass that bill, which is maybe coming in this session, maybe in the next session?

4:50

My next question is about the big blue book for the general revenue fund. I tried to find a few things from that book, but we don't find the full details about the \$30 million or so that the government spent on that. If the government is serious about transparency, how can we improve? How can all the members find out if, you know, the money, the total budget of the general revenue fund is prudently or wisely – I mean, the full details on that. Also, how can the government improve the website on all the lottery funds? On the website it's not clear how the tonnes of money have been awarded. Every time we have to go through the FOIP, it takes lots of time and we don't find lots of details. It's very difficult for the opposition to play the right role in the democratic government. If you still really believe in a democratic, transparent, honest, accountable government, I'm sure you will look into that.

My next question is about the committee and task force recommendations, as somebody else mentioned. I know that the government has spent tonnes of money on wages and time, but if the government is not implementing most of the recommendations made by the task forces and committees, first of all, how much extra burden is that on the taxpayers? If you don't implement those recommendations, why do we have those task forces and committees? I know that it's very important in the democratic process, as you said, but still I want you to assess whether it's worth spending that much money. Now we have 18 ministries instead of 24. Work it out. Because we have so many chairpersons, deputy ministers, is that worth spending that much money? I know that your intention was really good because that's the reason you reduced the number of ministers. The same money you saved in the small ministries, I want to make sure that money is worth while.

Another question is: do you believe the leader should be decisive? When the time came for the affordable home issue, you said that you will talk to the PC caucus and PC membership during your annual general meeting. Do you prefer to take decisions made by the party or decisions made by Albertans? That's my question.

My last question, Mr. Premier, is about political favouritism. How can we improve on that issue? Maybe some members don't agree with me, but I have heard lots of stories about favouritism. They are saying that this party's in power for a long time, 36 years or so. If the MLAs from the government side interfere, if they approach the right department, they get the grants. If the opposition members are involved, they try to, you know – I shouldn't say that they are trying to stop that, but it's hard for them to help those communities. So I just want you to answer, if you can, some questions. I'm sure that your intention is good and that you will try to address those issues in the future.

Thank you.

The Chair: Before I recognize the Premier, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's indeed a

great pleasure to rise and introduce someone who would be well known to several members here in the Assembly and perhaps might be a new face to others. She distinguished herself with many years of dedicated service to Albertans. I had the pleasure of being a bureaucrat in the system, as they say, when she was an MLA. It's my pleasure to introduce on behalf of our Premier, who's asked me to make this special introduction, Shirley Cripps, a former MLA from the Drayton Valley area. Welcome and thank you for being here.

head: **Main Estimates 2007-08**
Executive Council (*continued*)

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you. This gives me an opportunity to answer a question from the previous opportunity the hon. member had to rise, and that is with respect to election irregularities. Obviously, it must have been successful because you're here. What you're asking about is with respect to officers of the Legislature, and that's within the authority of the Legislature and not the Premier's office. Certainly, dealing with irregularities is important so that we do improve the confidence of Albertans in the electoral process.

There was a question with respect to task forces. The purpose of a task force is to provide options. After hearing evidence, ideas, opinions coming from people, the task force collates those ideas into options and may make recommendations to this House. It's really the elected people that are responsible to sort out all those options and recommendations that come forward and then make the decision. Yes, the task forces are important in gathering information. It certainly reduces, you know, the workload for us here while we're in session. They come out, hear the evidence, collate it, bring it here with recommendations, and we then debate them here in the Legislature.

With respect to the website I can speak to the website for the government. The website was redeveloped, and it's working quite well from what I hear. The approval rating is extremely high. I think it's 85 per cent or 86 per cent or something like that. So the government website has been accepted extremely well. A lot of people rely on the website. It was redesigned this year, 2007, after extensive research and looking at websites across Canada. It does focus on government services, which is the purpose of it. It flows the information out in terms of all programs. They like the clean layout, from what the feedback has been. The next step is to have a sort of consistent look to the websites of all ministries so that we, you know, deliver the messages of the government of Alberta.

5:00

There was a question with respect to the blue book. Under transparency and openness, of course, we brought about a lot of changes, Mr. Chairman, first of all, making public the manifests on government-owned airplanes and the people that travelled on them. It's now a matter of public record. You don't have to go to the library, don't have to go through FOIP or whatever to receive them. It's there, and I think that has helped a lot. You know, the media has it; the opposition has it. Usually the questions opened up: Well, through documents recently obtained by the opposition. Well, the documents are there.

The other is, of course, making public ministerial expenses, executive assistant expenses. Those are on the web. We just did those, I believe, this week. They are on the web. That's a giant step forward. Again, it will bring down a lot of the costs for the taxpayer because many times the opposition is FOIPing them. Rather than

paying for all of that, all we're saying is: "Here. It's available. We're not hiding anything." That, to me, has gone a long way in openness and transparency.

With respect to the blue book, that blue book is an interesting piece of information. I remember after the nomination when I was running for office as a nominated candidate for the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta, I saw a lot of this blue book in many coffee shops. Remember, Mr. Chairman, in those days we used to have the Crow benefit offset, you know, the fuel rebate program, and all those things. They used to trudge that book around and take it to the coffee shop and say: "Look, there's Stelmach. He's running for the PC government, and look, he got some money from the Crow offset benefit program." We had a lot of hogs. We were feeding them. We qualified for the program. It was a real focus, and they'd say: it's patronage because you're a PC member, you're running for office, and look, you're getting paid by the taxpayer.

But, you know, it was interesting: you flip a little further and pick out other names. They happen to be very good Liberals, and – guess what? – they were in the book because they also received a Crow benefit offset and some, you know, fuel rebates. I remember that there was a 40-some dollar a ton fertilizer rebate. All of those were in the book, so it was very open and transparent, and information worked both ways.

But the opposition just raised a good question. Very secretly, the opposition has billed the Alberta taxpayers for an expense, and that was the expense of running radio ads earlier this year. I'm wondering if that's going to show up in the blue book. Will it be part of the blue book and identified as an expense for that purpose, or will it be in a bigger budget in the blue book, a bigger item?

You know, we have an opportunity to improve the blue book. I'd like to hear today, you know, in terms of openness and transparency, what the amount was that was billed so that all Albertans know. We're talking about perception. We're talking about appearance. We heard a lot of that today earlier from the opposition. Here's a very good opportunity to remove some of that perception and appearance, and give us exactly how much has been billed to the Alberta taxpayer for the radio ads that ran earlier this year.

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

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You caught me off guard. It was indicated to me that I wouldn't have an opportunity to speak.

Mr. Rodney: You do now.

Mr. Webber: I do now. So thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour to stand and ask the Premier a couple questions. Mr. Premier, first of all, I just want to say that it's an honour to be able to sit so close to you, behind you every day, and learn from you.

Anyway, I just want to talk a little bit about a report that I got in the mail the other day, a Report to Albertans. It was a report that had a message from you, Mr. Premier, in there, and it also had some details on the budget along with an update on the government's five-priority plan and also information on access to programs and services. It was an excellent, excellent piece of work, I thought, because what it also indicated in here was what Calgarians will be receiving with regard to investment in this year's provincial budget.

Nearly \$5.5 billion will be invested in delivering services to Calgarians. I think that it is very important to indicate to my constituents and others in Calgary the amount of money that is invested: \$22.6 million will help with policing, crime prevention, and victim services; \$684 million in funding for research and postsecondary institutions; \$2.2 billion to provide health services

through the Calgary health region; and also \$1.3 billion for kindergarten to grade 12 education. This was in your report, Mr. Premier, and I thought it was excellent that we share this information with Calgarians.

Included in this document also were more grants: \$514 million in grants will be sent to the city of Calgary, including \$126 million for affordable housing and other grant programs, \$95 million for the 5 cents per litre gas tax, and also \$293 million for municipal infrastructure programs. Further, \$2.7 billion is being injected into Calgary infrastructure over the next three years. I don't know if this was clearly communicated in the past, but it certainly did with this document. I applaud your staff, Mr. Premier, for getting this out to my constituents and all Calgarians.

One thing that I would like to ask you, Mr. Premier, is that I hope you continue to send out this type of information to Albertans because it is so informative. I hope you do, and if you can indicate to me that you will, that would be wonderful. But also I'd like to know if you can advise us of the cost of this, the cost per household of the production of this document and the distribution of this document.

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

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, and thanks for the support of our staff, the people that work very hard not only, of course, in Executive Council but in all ministries and all different roles and responsibilities throughout the province of Alberta. I've always taken huge pride in the quality of our civil service. They're outstanding. Compared to others, I know that in terms of policy formulation, ideas, bringing forward options in terms of policy, they're simply outstanding. They have served the public of Alberta very well and continue to work at encouraging more people to join the Alberta civil service. Just like in any other public or private sector we have to renew. We have many that will be looking towards retirement soon, so it's another task that we have assigned to ourselves as government to ensure that we interest young people in serving the public of Alberta. It is a responsibility, and it's also one that all those working in the Alberta civil service should do with pride.

With respect to the report, earlier this year we said that we'd do the Report to Albertans on a quarterly basis. It's to get information out on various government programs, information in terms of what's available to a particular, you know, group of Albertans, whether they be seniors, our youth, some of the programs available, let's say, under AADAC or Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, all of the government programs.

This time we have three reports. There'll be one designed to deliver the information to Edmontonians in terms of what's available here, what's going to Edmonton in terms of infrastructure grants and programs available; one for the city of Calgary, which will itemize the investments; and also a general one for all of the province of Alberta. Within the Alberta report there will be, of course, information with regard to infrastructure and programs available but general infrastructure on provincial highways and, of course, improvements to some infrastructure in many of the municipalities.

The cost is \$200,000. It's about 16 cents a copy, and that's going out to all Albertans. It's a very effective, very efficient way of getting information out to Albertans, and we'll continue to do that because as in our business plan we're going to do it four times a year.

Thank you for the question.

5:10

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased, indeed very honoured, to be able to rise here today on the very first occasion of our new Premier answering questions from the Assembly on supply. I'm sure that when we reach the year 2027, on the 20th time in a row when you're up facing this Assembly on supply, Mr. Premier, we will be facing a much more vibrant and strong Alberta. I'm sure that we won't be seeing the same Leader of the Official Opposition. Maybe – maybe – he'll be working on his radio program that he's picked up. I do welcome the dedicated, experienced, and qualified public servants with you today. I'm pleased to see the reforms that have allowed them to sit here and advise in this process.

This is supply, Mr. Chair, and Executive Council is one of the most crucial arms of government and in our province of Alberta. The priorities set out by the Premier for our Alberta government are correct and focused to the priorities of our times. Communicating these priorities and, indeed, all of the functions of government is a key responsibility of Executive Council and, in particular, the Public Affairs Bureau.

On page 161, performance measure 2.a of the Executive Council business plan 2007-10 states that public satisfaction with government communications sits at 62 per cent. I really do wonder if that is good enough. The Executive Council annual report 2005-06 states that this figure of public satisfaction with government communications in priority areas has never risen above 65 per cent, but the target in every one of these years has been 75 per cent and has never been met. My question on this is: how does Public Affairs aim to improve its score on this performance measure so it does not fall short again?

Mr. Chairman, I also think that credit should be given where credit is due. The fact that Alberta Connects e-mail questions have had a target response time of 72 hours with the goal to reach 95 per cent in that target in '05-06 and reached 98 per cent, which is a near perfect score, is amazing for government. This is not one that one usually hears about in terms of response time from government and must be commended highly. Mr. Premier, I ask that you pass that along to the Alberta Connects people.

A couple of specific questions to the Premier on board governance review. I've had the question asked of me when we will see the reports come forward in a comprehensive manner on board governance review and if the form of these reports will be consistent and comparable. I've been asked specifically also on one of those: when will we see the report on the Alberta Labour Relations Board, and what consultations have been made or are planned with stakeholder groups to improve the transparency, accountability, and governance of this particular board?

In a wider view of government, which, of course, is the Premier's responsibility, I am concerned that there seems to be a clear push in some quarters, from the Official Opposition really, to create an artificial rural/urban split in Alberta. Now, I often wonder: what is rural and what is urban in our province in this modern day and age? I have trouble thinking that Grande Prairie or Red Deer are rural, but I have heard them described as such.

My riding of Edmonton-Manning is the largest rural riding in the city of Edmonton. Market gardens, seed potato production, and all manner of agricultural pursuits actually form the greatest percentage of the area of my riding. Much of it is, indeed, rural, but it's defined as urban. You know, this is one of the problems we see. Again, agriculturally speaking, Edmonton-Manning, my riding, has a lot of people employed in the equine industry. There is a huge number of people in northeast Edmonton, indeed in all of Edmonton who work

in horse racing, rodeo, jumping, training, recreational riding, in all manner of jobs associated with the horse industry. Other agricultural pursuits and support functions for agriculture are crucial for our Edmonton city economy and for local jobs. I'm very surprised that the Official Opposition has had such an attack on the horse industry, on the equine industry. They have in this House laughed at agricultural issues and generally don't seem to understand their importance to our city and the economy of our province as a whole.

I would ask the Premier to comment on how we can communicate to Albertans that there is not really a rural/urban split in our province right now, that in fact we are one province, that we are working to ensure the benefit of all areas, and that agriculture benefits the cities, too, and indeed creates a lot of jobs.

Again I commend the Premier for the many new changes and initiatives he has brought forward. I thank him for being here today, and I look forward to his answers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the Member for Edmonton-Manning, thank you for the very kind words with respect to our staff, and I will extend those congratulations to them all.

I'm, of course, no guru when it comes to the business of communications and how you score success or no success or little success or lack of success in communications, but I'm told that a goal of 75 per cent in communications is like 100 per cent because they say that about 25 per cent of the public on average will disapprove of whatever government policy there is. We're at 62 per cent. We want to work towards 75 per cent. I think that we could increase that support with the Report to Albertans because it will be focused, and Albertans then will have that information in their own home in a very, I believe, cost-effective manner.

The hon. member brings up a very important point on this issue about rural/urban. You know, Mr. Chair, there are 3.4 million Albertans. We're competing against economies that are much larger than Alberta's, obviously. We're competing against economies and populations that are 10 times, 20 times, 40 times, 100 times larger than the province of Alberta's, and when we start tearing at the fabric of this province, trying to split, build divisions between urban and rural and north and south and east and west, that's not good. It takes away from the effort and the focus that we need in global competition.

If we can't co-operate locally, how can we compete globally? Here we are within the province. Some are trying to drive these wedges, you know, on a regular basis. Yet as a government we've made great steps in the last five years working with the Liberal government of B.C., a very visionary government led by Gordon Campbell. We're removing a whole bunch of trade barriers. We've moved on the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement. We're going to work further, like with the MOUs that we signed on working together on disaster services. We worked on, of course, wait-time guarantees. How can both provinces work together? Perhaps it might be in the area of oncology. I mean, that is groundbreaking. Nobody has been able to accomplish it before, but here this government, working with the government of B.C., has been able to do it.

I'll give you one example. In one of the first meetings, you know, the two Premiers of the day said: okay; give us some quick ones. Well, one of them, of course, was in transportation. On the highway today we have one vehicle inspection station. You know, it's on the B.C. side – it's towards Golden – but so what? It's an imaginary line as a truck travels. I'm sure that that kilogram is still the same

on this side of that imaginary line or on that side. It was jointly constructed, Alberta and B.C. Now it's jointly staffed, and it's saving us millions of dollars in operations. Most importantly, it reduces the cost of shipping our goods and services to the coast. And that's just one example.

5:20

Rural/urban. Many Edmontonians, many Calgarians have rural backgrounds. They still remember the communities, and many of them could have been brought up in a rural community not even in Alberta. It could have been in the Maritimes. It could have been in Ontario. It could have been in any other province. It could have been in any other country.

Again, as a government I'm committed together with all our caucus members to make sure that we work as a unit, work with municipalities, work with Albertans so that we don't create these shifts. We don't need division in the province. We need co-operation, whether it's intermunicipal planning, whether it's interjurisdictional, interprovincial. I can tell you that just with intermunicipal, the kind of growth that we see is in the billions of dollars in investment attracted to this province if we can deal with many of the intermunicipal issues. If we don't, we will lose some of that investment because then the investment climate will be unpredictable, and it won't be stable. Clearly, it's in the best interests of all Albertans that we work together. I can assure you that we're going to pursue co-operation, collaboration in all areas and are not going to allow anybody to drive these wedges between and amongst Albertans. I make that promise in the House.

The other is also working together in terms of broadening our tax base because, yes, the rural has so many strengths. If we look at the contribution to our economy from rural Alberta, it's outstanding because it's not only agriculture based, of course, like raw production. It's value-added, and you'll find that some of the companies that work in the oil and gas industry are rural based. They contribute to small communities immensely. That's of great help to Albertans. As we grow, with more population, we know that we'll have to of course deliver more government programs like health and education. That is the balance between our responsibility

of ensuring that there are enough people in the province to deliver those programs, that we have the housing for them, that we have the infrastructure and, most importantly, build on the co-operation.

The private sector will continue to invest, create jobs, and that's what really pays for the government programs but also secures the future for our children and their children. It's just the direction we're taking as a government. We'll continue to take that direction no matter how hard some may want to throw us off the rail.

The Chair: Are there others? Seeing none, I'll now invite the officials to leave the Assembly so that the committee can rise and report.

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

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The committee has had under consideration certain resolutions for the Department of Executive Council relating to the 2007-08 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour, I would move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:25 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1 p.m.]

