

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, June 12, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/06/12

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. In our mind's eye let us see the awesome grandeur of the Rockies, the denseness of our forests, the fertility of our farmland, the splendour of our rivers, the richness of our resources, the energy of our people. Then let us rededicate ourselves as wise stewards of such bounty on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of introductions today, so if you'll bear with me. First of all, I'd like to say that as a proud parent I know the pride that all parents have in their children, and grandparents as well. So today it's a particular pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the proud mother and the proud grandparents of our head page, Jennifer Huygen. I'm sure that all members of this House will agree with me that Jennifer has done an absolutely outstanding job as a page in this Legislative Assembly, and we, too, consider ourselves as proud parents in that sense.

Jennifer is attending the University of Alberta faculty of arts program, and last year she received the University of Alberta scholastic distinction scholarship, the millennium excellence award, and the Governor General's award for highest academic average in grades 11 and 12. Jennifer also enjoys figure skating and Pilates and is a University of Alberta *Gateway* news writer and a member of the Red Cross youth group.

Mr. Speaker, seated in your gallery is Susan Huygen, mother of Jennifer and a constituent in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Susan is a research assistant with the department of medicine at the University of Alberta hospital. Accompanying Susan are Andy and Marge Bourgeault, Jennifer's grandparents, who I'm told are very much enjoying retirement. I know that they're proud of Jennifer as our head page, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two special guests. Mr. Chris Gowers is a constituent of mine and also the international service director for Rotary Club of Edmonton West. With Chris is Mariana de Leon Moreno, a 19-year-old Rotary youth exchange student from the city of Zapopan in the metropolitan area of Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco in Mexico. Mariana is here on a one-year student visa attending Ross Sheppard high school since August of 2006. I had the pleasure of meeting with Mariana today. She likes public speaking, arts and crafts, and design and hopes to pursue studies in communications and work in radio and television. While here Mariana has done hiking in the mountains near Nordegg, travelled to Yellowstone and flown over a caribou herd in the far north and built an igloo. She's also flown over the city of Edmonton, gone to an Edmonton Eskimo football game, an Oilers game, and Stars on Ice with Jamie Salé and David Pelletier, and many more activities. She's experiencing our food, our language, our culture, and is sharing with us what her country of Mexico is all about. I would ask Mariana and Chris to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I have the singular privilege today of introducing to you and through you to the Assembly 17 key stakeholders who every day make an immeasurable contribution to public health in Alberta and to the wellness of people across the province. Our guests come from many diverse backgrounds, but all have been invaluable in the advancement of a province-wide tobacco reduction strategy, and they're here today to mark the introduction of Bill 45, Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007. Albertans support and indeed demand that we as policy-makers take resolute action in protecting the health of the province.

Our guests are seated in the public and members' galleries, and I'd ask that the House hold its applause until all visitors have been introduced. Dr. Tony Fields, vice-president of medical affairs and community oncology, Alberta Cancer Board; Dr. David Johnstone, clinical director, Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute; Dr. Roger Palmer, dean of the School of Public Health, University of Alberta; Mr. Greg Eberhart, registrar of the Alberta College of Pharmacists; Dr. Darryl LaBuick, president-elect, and Mr. Mike Gormley, executive director, Alberta Medical Association; Mr. Joe Rodgers, board member, and Ms Barb Davis, vice-president, provincial services division, AADAC; Ms Ingrid Meier, board member, and Ms Gina Smith, vice-president, health initiatives, Lung Association of Alberta and the Northwest Territories; Dr. Ian Montgomerie, chair, board of directors, and Ms Angeline Webb, cancer control analyst, Canadian Cancer Society, Alberta and Northwest Territories; Ms Kay Olsen, second vice-president, and Mr. Ken Kobly, chief executive officer, Alberta Chambers of Commerce; Dr. Roger Hodgkinson, honorary chair, and Mr. Les Hagen, executive director, Action on Smoking and Health; and Mr. Ken Chapman, policy consultant with the campaign for a smoke-free Alberta. Heather Jubenvill, a teacher with Nellie McClung who won an excellence in teaching award, and 12 of her students of the BLAST team had hoped to be here, but they had to stay at school and prepare for exams. I'd like all of my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome and thanks from our Assembly.

A final introduction, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to be able to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly six students from Bosco Homes' smoking cessation and education program who are here to mark the introduction of Bill 45, Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act. Accompanying the students are Dr. Milan Njegovan, addictions clinician; Kathy Clarkes, Bosco jurisdiction vice-principal; Jarret Mymko, teacher; and Jody Zacharkiw, smoking cessation project teacher. The guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, you didn't miss anyone?

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have but one introduction to give you this afternoon. It is an honour, though, for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of grade 6 students from Greystone Centennial middle school in Spruce Grove. There are 138 visitors in total, with two groups in the members' gallery and two groups in the public gallery, a very bright group who participated in the mock Legislature this morning and had some very interesting debate, I might add. The future of Alberta is very well represented in our two galleries today. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. St. Amand, Mrs. Scanga, Mrs. Papp, and Mrs. Steigel. I would ask all of the students and their teachers and parent helpers to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we're accompanied by Muriel and Arthur McMurdo. Mr. McMurdo is an example to all of us that no matter how late in life, we all can change and improve. He spent most of his life in Saskatchewan, where he was a staunch NDP supporter, was educated by Tommy Douglas, became the province's first full-time Crown prosecutor, and in 1960 the NDP government appointed him to the provincial bench. His cousin on the other side Agnes Macphail was Canada's first female MP, elected in 1922. However, he now resides in Edmonton and at the age of 82 has purchased his first PC membership. See, there is always hope. Both of them are accompanied by my muse, Stacey Brotzel. I would ask them to rise in the public gallery and receive the warm traditional welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka it's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly five members from the Lacombe action group. Seated in the members' gallery are Sandra Abma, Bob Doherty, Nick Nibourg, Trevor Taylor, and Tracey Oliver-Forbes. I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:10

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As part of my ongoing celebration of Edmonton being named the cultural capital of Canada in 2007, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Kerry Mulholland. Kerry is the acting executive director of the Writers' Guild of Alberta. The Writers' Guild of Alberta is a provincial arts service organization that represents nearly a thousand professional and emerging writers from across the province. Their mission is to promote, encourage, and support writing and writers in the province and to safeguard the freedom to read and to write and to advocate for the well-being of writers. They offer a number of programs, including a summer camp for kids age 12 to 18 who love to write, and an annual conference. This year that will be in Grande Prairie and culminate with the 2007 Alberta literary awards. I would ask Kerry to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, I have pleasure today in introducing to you and through you to this Assembly my constituency STEP student, Mr. Rob DeSandoli. He is in his third year at the University of Lethbridge, studying political science, and is interested in international policy. Rob is from B.C. and has enjoyed comparing how democracy is practised in B.C. and Alberta. He is a marathon runner and has competed in the Vancouver marathon every year since '05, having won his age category in '05 and '06. Rob is capable of a seven-minute mile. He must enjoy speed because he drives race cars as well. Many of us have had the opportunity to introduce our STEP students and their accomplishments. If these young people are an indication of our future, we are indeed in good hands. I would ask Rob to stand and receive the traditional welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Chris Samuel. Chris has been with the NDP caucus for the past three years and is currently our director of research. Previously he worked for the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona as his constituency assistant. Chris has been

a long-time NDP activist. He and his partner, Cory, have been involved in the GLBT community for a number of years. He was also the cohost for CJSR's *Gaywire*. Chris is very dedicated and has contributed immensely to our day-to-day work in this Assembly. We appreciate his hard work and support. I would now call upon him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Margaret Siemens and Betty Welch. Margaret and Betty are constituents of mine in Edmonton-Calder, and both are members of the Calder Seniors Drop-in Centre. They are here today to add their voices to a growing number of Albertans who want the government to implement rent guidelines. Margaret grew up in Edmonton before heading to Winnipeg, but then she loved her home province so much she returned in 1976. Betty was born and raised here in Edmonton and has lived here all her life. Betty has worked for Goodwill Industries for 37 years, and she's a wonderful guitar player and musician. I would now ask them both to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'm pleased to introduce to you and to all members of the House a visitor from India, Poromesh Acharya. Poromesh Acharya is a noted scholar and highly respected public intellectual in India. He has served as a member of the Education Commission in the state of West Bengal, on the Indian Council of Historical Research, based in Delhi, the government of India Curriculum Review 2005 National Steering Committee, and the National Literacy Mission Authority. He's a retired India councillor, a historical research fellow in education, and an accomplished author in Calcutta. Poromesh has also worked with UNESCO as an education researcher. He is seated in the public gallery, and now I'll request him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction is of Wayne Moen and Henry Maisonneuve, both members of the Old Strathcona Foundation. Wayne serves as the past president of the Old Strathcona Foundation, while Henry is the current president. The Old Strathcona Foundation is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization. It was founded in 1974 to support the ongoing evolution and enrichment of the area's character. The Old Strathcona Foundation's main objective is to oversee the development of the Old Strathcona heritage conservation area while trying to balance the needs of the residents, businesses, and visitors. This year the Old Strathcona Foundation is celebrating Strathcona's centennial along with its traditional events, like the Silly Summer Parade and the art walk. I've been honoured by the foundation this year to be appointed as the lord mayor of the Old Strathcona area. I will now ask that Wayne and Henry please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Reynolds-Alberta Museum

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The preservation of our cultural heritage is critical for future generations to understand the

past. Our province's centennial celebration in 2005 reminded us of Alberta's rich history and the need to keep history in the forefront of people's minds. The Reynolds-Alberta Museum, in my constituency, is an award-winning museum which attracts thousands of tourists each year. Last year the museum presented the Life and Times of the Motorcycle, which attracted 100,000 visitors. This past weekend I had the pleasure of attending the opening of a new exhibit, Showin' Off, a unique display of 50 of the museum's rare, unusual, and one-of-a-kind vintage cars. The display runs all summer.

The elements are in place for the Reynolds-Alberta Museum to be a landmark museum in North America. The automobile, agriculture, and transportation artifacts are outstanding educational tools for future generations. It is also the home of Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame and has a collection of 86 vintage aircraft, the second-largest collection in Canada.

The Reynolds-Alberta Museum is also well served by the fact that the city of Wetaskiwin has embraced an active program of historical restoration. Notably, the city refurbished the old Wetaskiwin courthouse into a new city hall, which will be opened on September 15. The combination of Wetaskiwin's historical theme and the Reynolds-Alberta Museum presents a strong case for using tourism to boost the economic potential of that region. As a result of this potential, the Friends of Reynolds-Alberta Museum are spearheading a regional tourism study to map out the future of the museum.

Knowing our past is critical to understanding our future. The Reynolds-Alberta Museum presents a unique opportunity to this province to educate both young and old on the mechanization of Alberta. We have the means to support the preservation of our history and attract tourists to this world-class destination. Now is the time to build a lasting legacy.

Thank you.

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

Volunteer Organizations

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday I did part one of a member's statement on the status of not-for-profit agencies in Alberta. I expressed my concerns over the change in funding from core to project or contract and the resulting erosion of capacity of the agencies. I also talked about the extreme circumstances being faced by many, many organizations as their top managers are lured away. Higher costs from choices this government has made in electrical deregulation, the wide-open insurance market, and a refusal to bring in temporary rent caps have also restricted the capacity of charities, their staff, and volunteers.

I ended up speaking about the increasing competition for fundraising dollars as smaller groups go up against schools and other academic institutions and against hospitals and health foundations. Added to this is the distaste or even the ethical crisis that many organizations feel in pursuing gambling dollars in order to subsidize a service which may well be extensively used by those very same gambling clients.

Mr. Speaker, these are resilient, resourceful, determined people working and volunteering in this sector, but they are struggling with a lack of understanding by government about how they work and what they need to survive. Charities, not-for-profits, and organizations run by volunteers are not free. They are extremely cost-efficient, tight with a penny, and very well managed, but they are not free. The choices this government continues to make in under-resourcing this sector are showing their toll. This is a great part of our society. They deserve to be treated as the valued partners that

they are. Please study carefully the reports and recommendations of the Canadian volunteerism initiative and listen to your local organizations for their suggestions and advice on how to achieve better partnerships.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

1:20

Wyatt Broughton

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to honour the story of an incredibly inspiring Albertan. Wyatt Broughton, a five-year-old boy from Red Deer, represents a modern-day miracle. Just two weeks before Wyatt was due, his parents, Shelley and Todd Broughton, discovered that Wyatt would be born with some health problems, the extent of which they were unsure. Following his birth, the doctors informed his parents that Wyatt had bladder exstrophy, two holes in his heart, and a missing valve in his pulmonary artery.

Mr. Speaker, Wyatt's first surgery occurred when he was only nine months old, and he has had 16 more since. Add to that over 150 X-rays, Botox injections, tests, scopes, blood work, and numerous other scans. Wyatt has congenital heart disease, chronic lung disease, and severe reflux. He cannot swallow and is completely deaf as well as blind in one eye.

Mr. Speaker, with Wyatt meaning "little fighter," it is truly a fitting name for him. Even while presented with such tremendous adversity, Wyatt remains forever enthusiastic. He continues his intense passion for life, inspiring all those who interact with him, and persists to embody a modern-day miracle. I invite all those who think they are having a bad day or week to hear Wyatt's story. This young boy remains in good spirits through the toughest of odds every day of his life. What a pleasure it was for me to attend a fundraiser in his honour on June 2 in Warburg, where 650 people from the Drayton Valley-Calmar constituency and surrounding areas came together to help this little fighter.

Mr. Speaker, both he and his family highlight the aspects of life which we should all hold most dear. For his continued enthusiasm through adversity which he cannot control, I would like to honour this young man in this House. In fact, I ask all those present today to duly recognize Wyatt's miracle story and inspiring journey through life.

Thank you.

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

Farm Safety

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to remember the life of Kevan Chandler. Almost a year ago, June 18, 2006, Mr. Chandler was killed while working at a feedlot in southern Alberta. His death was tragic. It was unacceptable and has had lasting effects for his family.

All Albertans deserve the security of knowing that their loved ones will return home to friends and family at the end of the day no matter what they do for a living. Mr. Speaker, let us dedicate ourselves to prevention. This is perhaps the single most important thing we can do because legislation alone cannot eliminate workplace or farm injuries or fatalities. Getting good, valuable information out to producers and families and farmers about safety practices is key to eliminating injuries and fatalities. That's the goal of the government's farm safety program: to address farm safety awareness and workplace safety best practices. The more we can raise awareness of workplace and farm safety, the more people will return home unharmed.

Alberta is striving for a culture of health and safety that is commonplace regardless of where people work or what they do for a living. I encourage all members of this Legislature and all Albertans to do their part in helping to create this culture.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. At a time when Alberta is experiencing unparalleled economic growth, this government has saddled Alberta's school boards with rapidly shrinking budgets. For months school boards have been voicing their concern over budget shortfalls. Last night the Minister of Education confirmed what public education is up against. The minister stated: the budget is the budget; education in Alberta is adequately funded. It is ironic that the minister made this comment on a night when the Catholic school trustees in Edmonton approved an operating budget with a shortfall of a full \$15 million. Clearly, the minister is either out of touch with funding realities facing school boards throughout Alberta or he just doesn't care.

The Catholic school board announced last night that the funding shortfall has forced them to cut their infrastructure and maintenance budget by 55 per cent. The school board will also experience significant challenges stemming from a mere 3 per cent increase in their operating funding. This increase falls short of the 8 per cent school board funding required and will provide significant hardship in curriculum updates and special-needs education.

Beyond providing challenges to the school board, this funding shortfall also demonstrates a lack of foresight on the part of this government by failing to provide adequate funding for labour settlements. The contracts of 90 per cent of Alberta's teachers, including those in the Catholic system, are set to expire by August 31. The rising cost of living in Alberta requires 5.5 per cent pay raises for these teachers, something that is unaffordable for the Catholic board budget and other boards across the province.

This case of the Edmonton Catholic school board is just another in a long line of examples of this government's consistent failure to recognize the importance of education in the lives of Alberta's children. By failing to adequately increase the funding to school boards, this government has in essence cut education budgets, let down students, teachers, and parents, and created an adversarial situation that is bound to get worse before it gets better.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, is there an additional government member who chooses to participate today in Members' Statements? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I was just going to do a tabling, but I'll take advantage of this.

Shamsher Singh Sandhu

Mr. Shariff: On Saturday, June 9, 2007, I attended the 2007 outstanding Calgary seniors' awards. One of the award recipients was Mr. Shamsher Singh Sandhu, who is a poet having published four books and is a regular contributor to *Alberta Darpan*, *Sikh Virsa*, *Punjab Guardian*, *Desh Videsh*, *Desh Pardesh*, and *Punjabi Sahit*. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sandhu has translated the Canadian national anthem into Punjabi as well as the Alberta official centennial song. Later on today I will table those in this Assembly.

Thank you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition signed by 34 residents of southeast Alberta that petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to "introduce legislation to ban resident trapping within 5 miles of the Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park and in areas where species at risk are known to be present."

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions here. The first one is signed by 40 Albertans that are concerned with the ongoing rent affordability crisis that contributes to Alberta's worsening homeless situation, and it reads:

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.

My second one is from 178 people and reads:

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. Elsahy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm continuing with submission of signatures on the housing petition, this time 269, and the petition 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.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, I will table a petition signed by hundreds of residents of the capital region. It urges the government to introduce legislation to suspend a graduated driver's licence when the driver is involved in a serious car crash.

Thank you.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 60 signatures on a petition. The signatures were collected at a town hall meeting in Britannia-Youngstown in Edmonton urging the government 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.

Rev. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, in light of the time, I would ask the House for unanimous consent that we immediately go to Introduction of Bills.

The Speaker: No. We're right now in petitions.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to table a petition with 84 signatures on it. The petition notes the Conservatives' refusal to protect Alberta families from rent increases and urges the government to immediately introduce temporary rent guidelines.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before proceeding, we'll recognize a request from the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar to allow for Introduction of Guests. Is that okay?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Rev. Abbott: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. That was Introduction of Bills so that the people in the gallery could watch . . .

The Speaker: Sorry. We're not into Introduction of Bills yet.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

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

Education Funding

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Governing effectively and responsibly is about choices, about getting the priorities right. The Edmonton Catholic school district revealed that they need an extra \$850,000 to continue delivering full-time kindergarten for at-risk children and will have to pull funds from other programs to keep this one going. Under an Alberta Liberal government this program would be fully funded. My question is to the Premier. The Premier boosted the budget of his own office by over \$1.2 million this year. How can the Premier justify increasing the budget of his own office when Edmonton Catholic schools are struggling to maintain a critical program for at-risk children?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition was here when I defended the budget of Executive Council, and I explained that in this year's budget we have, you know, an allocation of \$1 million for a total governance review that we're doing. That's all the boards, agencies, commissions. These boards, agencies, and commissions spend about 50 per cent of the Alberta budget. We want to make sure that they are accountable and that their actions are open and transparent. That's why the review is being conducted.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that the cost of that could be found somewhere else in the budget.

Parents in the Edmonton Catholic school district will have to pay more than \$300,000 extra in transportation fees to make up a funding shortfall. Let's look at the Premier's priorities again. This increase could be easily covered by the budgetary boost the Premier gave to the Public Affairs Bureau. To the Premier: can the Premier explain why all this extra money went to the Public Affairs Bureau when parents in Edmonton are being forced to pay even more just to get their kids to school?

Mr. Stelmach: I know that I defended the budget last week, but I can answer this question the same. When he's talking about finding places in the budget, the part of it being open and transparent is a very clear answer to the questions raised by the opposition last week in terms of defending budget. So for every increase, whether it's

increases due to staff increases or increases due to the annual pay increases or specific tasks that we are undertaking as members of Executive Council, those were clearly identified in the defence of the Executive Council budget last week.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Spin doctors should not take priority over schoolchildren.

The priorities of this government are way off. The boards are doing their best to prioritize despite the confusion of this government. School boards around the province will be faced with tough choices in the coming weeks and months. In a province this wealthy delivering the basics should not be this difficult. To the Premier: can the Premier explain why his government is forcing school boards to do more with less when he's also chosen to funnel \$56 million this year alone in subsidies to the horse-racing industry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, the allegations there are totally untrue. It's the money that the horse industry can raise providing that people participate and use the slots that are available in the horse-racing facilities in Alberta. So if people participate, that's how the horse-racing industry gets its support. If they don't, well, then, they don't get the money administered.

You know, in the interests of openness and transparency I raised this issue during the defence of the budget, and I'm going to raise it again. The Liberals very secretly billed the Alberta taxpayers for their ads. They have not come forward yet to be fully public and tell this House exactly what they are billing. What budget is it coming from? Let's be open and transparent vice versa. Come on.

The Speaker: Okay. We have a point of order that will be dealt with at the end of the Routine.

Let's all recognize as well that we're continuing budget debate this afternoon with the second reading of the appropriation bill.

Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Teachers' Salary Negotiations

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last evening myself, the Minister of Education, and a number of my Liberal colleagues attended a public meeting of the Edmonton Catholic school board. Unfortunately, the minister had to leave; he had another appointment. Had he stayed, he would have received an earful, I can assure you. When Edmonton Catholic school district teachers head to the bargaining table later this month, they will likely ask for at least a 5 per cent salary increase. If you consider the size of inflation, which was about 5.5 per cent this year, MLA pay increases at 5 per cent, and the skyrocketing costs of housing, 40.5 per cent in Edmonton this last year, this number is actually quite low. My question is for the Premier. If teachers and other staff in Edmonton Catholic are able to negotiate for the same pay increases that MLAs including this Premier received, the district will need at least another \$5.1 million. Where will this money come from?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the school boards are responsible for bargaining and negotiating with teachers. We don't do it in the venue of the Assembly. Public education is very important to this province. In fact, it's part of the long-term plan to look at how we can further move to a knowledge-based economy, and that's why there is significant investment not only in postsecondary education but primary education as well. It's all part of the longer term vision

for the province of Alberta to reposition this province on the world stage, especially in a knowledge-based economy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier can try to argue that salary negotiations are just between the teachers and the school boards, but the fact is that this government has set the stage for widespread labour disruptions in the fall by failing to make adequate operating funding for school boards a priority at a time when 90 per cent – 90 per cent – of Alberta teachers will be renegotiating their salaries. Again to the Premier: who should parents and students hold responsible for lost class time this fall if fair agreements can't be negotiated?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have a tremendous amount of confidence in our teachers and also in our school boards in this province of Alberta. They have worked extremely well in terms of working out various innovative solutions to the issues that come forward to a negotiation table. They're very good at what they do. Again, I have great faith in the Alberta Teachers' Association, the teachers, and also the school boards. They'll find ways of dealing with various issues. They have in the past. Quite frankly, in the province of Alberta we have the lowest days of labour interruption, period, compared to other jurisdictions in Canada. We're very proud of that, and we'll continue to work in that positive . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In trying to explain away his fumbling efforts to divide teachers on the unfunded pension liability issue, the minister stated that he had decided new teachers would see the largest part of the new \$25 million because he was worried – he was worried – that the still unresolved pension issue would deter young people from entering the profession. My question is for the Minister of Education. How will forcing teachers to fight every few years just to maintain their standard of living and prevent salary cuts attract young people into the profession? How is this going to work?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, that's precisely one of the reasons why we put forward the initiative of the \$25 million: to remove that as a deterrent for young teachers. But I think we need to also reflect back to the fact that, as I've said in this House on numerous occasions, over the last 10 years funding for school boards – let me repeat – has gone up 86 per cent. Teachers' salaries in that same 10-year period have gone up 45 per cent. Enrolment has increased by 5.9 per cent and inflation by 28 per cent. So we can tie a particular fearmongering to whatever number we want, but I have a great deal of confidence that the school boards across the province and ATA locals will reach agreements.

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

Education Funding (continued)

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Inadequate operational funding especially impacts northern Alberta cities where growth pressures and inflation are particularly high. Last week the Grande Prairie school district released what it called, and I quote, a difficult but balanced budget, which contains plans to operate with 16 fewer

teachers. This means that the school board will not be able to meet the class size recommendations established by the Learning Commission. To the Minister of Education: given that inadequate operational funding means that school boards will not achieve the target class sizes, are you recommending that these standards be lowered, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there's been no question that over the past three years the department has funded class size initiatives to the tune of a half a billion dollars. The recommendations of the Learning Commission were that within five years we reach class size objectives. We've reached them for the most part within three years and fully funded them. There are some areas – and it's primarily due to infrastructure situations with the smaller class sizes with K to 4 – where we may be outside of the recommendations of the Learning Commission on class sizes, but for the most part we've met the objectives in three years as opposed to the recommended five years.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister has advised school boards to exhaust any and all operating reserves to make up for funding shortfalls. Grande Prairie public does not have built-up reserves to fall back on. The only solution for them is to make cuts, Mr. Minister. Asking school boards to rely on any operational reserves to make up funding shortfalls creates inequality across the province for boards that lack reserves.

An Hon. Member: What's the question?

Mr. Flaherty: Yes. Thank you very much, colleague.

Does the minister's recommendation mean that he's prepared to accept that some Alberta students will receive a better education than others in other parts of the province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, budgeting is always a tough process. School districts are going through a very diligent time right now where they are making some choices relative to the funding that's available. Contrary to what the opposition is referring to, we've had a number of settlements. We had a settlement recently by Pembina Hills school division. We've had a number of school districts, including the largest school district in the province, Calgary public, which are coming out with a balanced budget. There are always going to be anomalies in certain areas of the province where it is more difficult because of growth pressures and other issues, but I again have great confidence in our school boards.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti has suggested to constituents that their school board may receive some extra help from the province yet because Grande Prairie represents a unique situation, but the Minister of Education has told this Assembly that there will be no more money for school boards this year. To the Minister of Education: who should parents, teachers, and trustees believe, you or the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, this hon. member has frankly twisted around what people have said on so many occasions. I'm not going to verify what he's saying were comments by other

members of this Assembly, but what I will say is that it's been very clear from the outset when the Finance minister delivered his budget several months ago that this government will have a policy going forward that the budget is the budget is the budget. We will not be coming forward with additional funds unless there are some circumstances around the unallocated surplus going forward. That policy has been very clear. Operating dollars are what is in the budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's economic policies have created a perfect storm in Alberta's housing market, and it's getting worse. New home prices in Edmonton have increased by 40.5 per cent, the highest in Canada. In Calgary new home prices have increased by 27.4 per cent, the second highest in Canada. There are less apartments in the market in Edmonton and Calgary than there were last October. People are getting hosed at both ends. They can't afford to buy a new home, and they can't afford the rising rents. My question is to the Premier. As leader of the government in the province of Alberta what is your advice to the thousands of Albertans that are being crushed by rising rents and housing prices?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is a pressure that our government identified a long time ago, and this is with respect to housing. That's why we put, well, more than a quarter of a billion dollars into affordable housing. That money will be distributed through the minister of municipal affairs, that will go to various municipalities. We're also working with municipalities and the federal government, looking at how we can create more spaces and available land. We just had a good meeting with Calgary in terms of some options. I've also met with the mayor of the city of Edmonton, that has come forward with some very innovative solutions. We are moving ahead. More units are being built, but just in the last five months or so 36,000 more people moved into the province of Alberta.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the Premier can make all the excuses that he wants. The reality is that there are less apartments now than there were in October, and we have these rising rents and housing prices. The other things he's talking about are going to take three to four years.

The definition of affordable housing is that no more than 30 per cent of one's income should go into accommodation. Now thousands of Albertans are paying much more than that. My question is to the Premier. What would the Premier's definition of affordable housing be in the new Alberta? Is it 40 per cent, 50 cent, 60 per cent, 70 per cent?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have a policy in place in terms of qualifications for affordable housing, that was clearly articulated by the minister of municipal affairs. If the hon. member needs the answer again, then I can ask the minister to reiterate the answer.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When we look at rent supplements for individuals, we try to have a guideline that will help individuals so they would not spend over 30 per cent of their income on housing.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, it's not working. That's the point. There are thousands of Albertans that are paying a lot more than that, and you can't begin to take it all under the rent supplement program. The minister is well aware of that.

My question, though, is to the Premier. You've rejected rent guidelines. You've also rejected the new home ownership assistance program, that would have had an impact on young people buying their first homes. Again to the Premier, and I'd ask him to be specific rather than generalities. What short-term measure is the government proposing to deal with the rental and home ownership crisis? All the stuff he has talked about is in the future. What's he going to do now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, we're increasing supply. That's the only way of bringing down the prices. You know, they always talk about guidelines – guidelines. They try and sneak that in: guidelines. There is no such thing as guidelines. Just be very honest and say: rent controls. That's what they want. I'm supposed to tell someone in the province of Alberta: oh, please, if you want to buy a house, don't spend more than 30 per cent of your income. What if they want to spend 40 per cent of their income on buying a house? It's not the role of government to dictate to individual families in terms of how much they want to spend on their mortgage to buy their own living accommodations. We're not part of that socialist thinking from that side of the House. I can tell you that.

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

Political Party Donations

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard repeated assertions that volunteers for the Premier sought donations from a public body during his leadership campaign. Further questions have been raised in this House about other solicitations of the Beaver River waste management commission. Can the Premier tell us if he's aware of solicitations characterized by members opposite as improper?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, every day for the past two weeks the Leader of the Opposition has risen in this Legislature to attack my integrity. I want to quote from a letter dated October 3, 2006, to the Beaver regional waste management commission.

To be effective, political parties need both money and support.

That's why I'm asking you to write a cheque to the Alberta Liberals today. In fact, I hope you'll consider making the maximum annual donation of \$15,000.

That letter has been signed by the president of the Alberta Liberal Party. I have the copies to table.

The Speaker: At the appropriate time that document should be tabled.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, we'll see if the Leader of the Opposition still believes that those who mistakenly solicit donations from public bodies are guilty of heinous crimes.

To the Premier: is this an issue that this Legislature should clarify? Does this happen often?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that many, many volunteers, even very intelligent people like lawyers, didn't recognize the ethical issue at play. I have copies of a letter dated March 31, 2006, from an official of the Alberta Liberal Party asking the Beaver regional waste management commission to pay \$350 a seat, or \$2,800 for a

table of eight, for the Liberal leader's dinner. Now, that sounds familiar, Mr. Speaker. I believe they put the city of St. Albert in the very same predicament by sending them a letter, knowing very well that that was improper. I also have copies of letters to table with that as well.

1:50

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, so not once but twice.

My final question is to the Premier. What is this government going to do about this?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, to be perfectly clear, no laws were broken. That also includes the members opposite, who have gone repeatedly to the same commission for dollars. I am committed to open, transparent government. I have promised legislation on leadership campaign funds, and I'm going to ask the members opposite to work – here's an opportunity for the opposition to rise and tell Albertans how much they have billed the Alberta taxpayers for the radio ads they ran earlier this year. [interjections] As much as he wants to holler, the people of Alberta can still hear me. He can give the exact amount of how much he billed secretly the Alberta taxpayers for their radio ads, and he can do it right now.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, you rose on a point of order. We'll deal with it at the end of the Routine.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Grizzly Bear Management

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's own recent grizzly bear inventory of unit 5 between highways 1 and 3 makes for very sad reading. The number of grizzly bears in the southern half of the province is estimated at about 177 bears, and that population is in serious trouble. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Why hasn't there been any action under the grizzly bear action plan?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad it's the last week here. I don't think I could bear another grisly week with this crowd.

This government's priority has always been to ensure that grizzly bears not just survive but thrive. That's why we cut off the hunt two years ago. We have a three-year moratorium. There were no grizzly bears hunted last year, none this year, none next year. We're doing a scientific count, and when we have the numbers in, we'll make an informed decision.

Mr. Bonko: When asked about this issue a month ago, the minister responded with the following: "The hon. members on the other side always hit the panic button and want to make a decision before all the facts are in. We'll wait until the end of the three-year study and make a decision then." Well, it's clear now that waiting any longer would be completely negligent. The grizzly bears in Alberta are endangered. Does the minister expect that the situation will be any better in two years when he is ready to act?

Dr. Morton: As I said – and the hon. member is correct – they do like to hit the panic button early. We've undertaken any number of policies already. In addition to the moratorium on grizzly hunting, we've undertaken the DNA census, we've introduced the BearSmart program, we're mapping bear environment, we have the Karelian dogs, and we have the grizzly bear intercept program. There are many activities under way as we speak to protect and enhance grizzly bear habitat.

Mr. Bonko: This minister, this Tory government is casually watching over the steady extinction of Alberta's grizzly bear. This minister was appointed the task of protecting Alberta's wildlife, and he isn't doing his job. What's it going to take for the minister to do his job, or will he stand aside and let someone else do it?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had paid close attention to the news that was released this week, he would have seen that in the southern part of the province there were 12 grizzly bears for every 1,000 kilometres. That's a 36-kilometre diameter circle. So if you're standing in the middle of the forest with an 18-kilometre radius around you, there are 12 grizzly bears within that 18 kilometres. If you walk down a straight path and by chance all 12 bears are lined up, you're going to run into a grizzly bear, hon. member, every 1.5 kilometres, every 1,500 metres.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Off-highway Vehicle Use

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There seem to be growing numbers of irresponsible off-highway vehicle users in Alberta. Unmitigated OHV use can create significant damage to our public lands and could ultimately spoil this form of recreation for responsible OHV users. My questions are for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is his department doing to protect Alberta's public lands from this type of damage?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct. The number of off-highway vehicles has increased dramatically in Alberta. Sales have doubled in the past six years, and the number of registered vehicles has actually gone up by four times. There are many more users out there looking for a place for recreation. Our focus is threefold: education, regulation, and enforcement. I'd be happy to elaborate on any of those.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. I understand that you recently met with an OHV organization that promotes responsible use of our public lands. Is it true that these groups have told you about possible damage done to public land near Indian Graves after the May long weekend? If so, how can we stop this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I did go back to Indian Graves on June 2. I'm happy to report that the area was in much better order, and I observed many users enjoying the area for camping and off-highway vehicles in a responsible manner. I'd like to make it clear on the record that many Albertans who use off-highway vehicles do so in a very responsible manner and care about Alberta's public lands. These groups were just as upset as I was and many Albertans were about what happened on the May long weekend. These responsible off-highway vehicle users don't want to be tarnished by the irresponsible behaviour of others.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree wholeheartedly.

Again to the same minister: given that we want our public lands to continue to be used by both motorized and nonmotorized users,

what are these responsible OHV groups doing to demonstrate or aid stewardship?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, these groups have very active and positive programs in our schools that deal with both safety instruction and also with the respect the land message that's been developed by Sustainable Resource Development. On my June 2 tour I was in the Crowsnest Pass. I had the opportunity to work with the Crowsnest Forest Stewardship Society and also the Quad Squad. They were building a bridge as part of their Ed Gregor Memorial clean-up day. Another group put up a bridge in the Ghost-Waiparous area. Here are two great examples of good Albertans, responsible off-highway vehicle users, out there giving their volunteer time to improve recreational opportunities and protect our natural reserves.

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

School Security

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the wake of bomb threats called into Archbishop O'Leary, arson, and later a mentally ill individual forcing a lockdown at the Victoria School of Performing and Visual Arts, and incidents of attempted child abduction and assault several months ago, the issue of school security has again come to the forefront. This is in conjunction with school shootings in Toronto and the United States. To the Solicitor General. There is no doubt that this is a complex issue. Has the minister had any discussions with his colleagues from Education and Advanced Education to discuss strategies to enhance school security in Alberta?

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

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member opposite mentioned, security in our schools and education facilities is indeed very important to this government and to this province and to all those who attend those facilities. When these incidents unfortunately do come up, yes, we do discuss these with our colleagues to ensure that we have the best plans possible to ensure that we can alleviate these situations.

Mr. Elsalhy: School officials do an excellent job, Mr. Speaker, with their limited resources, but too often when it comes to deciding between security considerations and instructional spending, a school is most likely going to choose teachers, textbooks, and technology. However, the issue of school security cannot be ignored for results can be tragic. Solutions could be as simple as a school using a private security person to conduct patrols of the grounds, installing video cameras, or even utilizing available parents to walk around the school yards during recess, for example. Will the minister commit to providing a dedicated funding envelope specifically for the enhancement of school security, that schools can access if they choose, based on need? We're not asking for much, and we don't want them to have to choose between competing goals.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm not sure who's asking for what, but I can assure the hon. member that we will work with the departments of Education and Advanced Education to

put together whatever programs and procedures we believe are necessary to ensure that our students remain safe.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The safer communities task force cost taxpayers \$1.5 million, and I argued in this House that it wasn't likely going to hear anything new as it toured the province. To the Minister of Justice: if you were okay spending \$1.5 million on yet another public relations exercise, would you relinquish the same amount of money or half or even a third to the Solicitor General for his department to assist those administrators who want to enhance security in their schools and take action as compared to just talk?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, all hon. members of this House have been invited to a symposium of this task force being chaired by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek next week in Calgary on the 19th and 20th. I think the hon. member should make a point of attending. I know that many of the people on this side of the House will be there. He will find out that the nine members of the task force have felt that the 14 days that they have spent going throughout this province listening to Albertans about their concerns about public safety, about safety in their communities, is of the utmost importance and is of the utmost value to this government. It should be also to the hon. opposition in understanding what we're trying to do to make our communities safer.

Driver's Licence Photos

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, a sampling of comments I've got in my constituency office lately: an abuse of religious freedom; only 11 family surnames in all of Alberta would be provided this provision – what a joke; individual and group pictures in the newspapers are okay but not on a driver's licence; if hotel operators can deny a young person access with all forms of ID except a photo driver's licence, I hope the same privilege will be extended to members of this church. As of 2003 Alberta required that everyone obtaining or renewing a driver's licence be photographed. Now, I understand, and the reason that I mentioned these comments, people heard about a recent decision by the Alberta Court of Appeal which struck down this requirement. My question is to . . .

The Speaker: We're out of time for this. Forty-five seconds is over, hon. member.

Mr. Stevens: I have a sense of where the hon. member was going with this, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member indicated, this has been the subject of a court decision, so my comments will take that into account. The driver's licence is now the primary form of identification in our society, and new abuses such as identity theft and creation of false identities pose a serious risk. With a digital photo of every licensee and facial recognition technology we can protect Alberta operators' licences from being used for identity theft and other such purposes. The Hutterites of Wilson colony near Lethbridge challenged the regulation that the hon. member referred to.

The Speaker: I'm afraid we're going back to the hon. member now.

Mr. McFarland: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Wilson colony is but one of over 170 colonies that make up two sects of one church, not all of which object to this ruling. What is Alberta doing in response to this court decision?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. This past May the Court of Appeal upheld a Queen's Bench decision that Alberta's mandatory driver's licence photo is invalid because it impairs the Wilson colony Hutterites' freedom of religion contrary to the Charter of Rights. At this time we're advising the hon. Minister of Service Alberta about Alberta's options. We must decide whether to seek leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada or whether to amend the Traffic Safety Act. Two of the three justices found that a regulation made under the Traffic Safety Act could only be used to address traffic safety and not as a means to prevent identity theft. However, there was a dissent.

Mr. McFarland: My last question, Mr. Speaker: will Alberta use the notwithstanding clause or allow all individual Albertans to use the freedom of religion excuse not to have their pictures taken?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point in time the government has no intention of using the notwithstanding clause as indicated previously. We are considering two options. We're considering whether to seek leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada and whether the amendments are required to the Traffic Safety Act. The question of security is very important. We will take the necessary steps to maintain the integrity of the licensing system in Alberta, but at this time this government has no plans to use the notwithstanding clause.

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

Employment Standards Review

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Employment standards dealing with such basic issues as minimum wage, hours of work, overtime pay, parental leave, and statutory holidays are supposed to offer a basic level of protection for all workers, but Alberta's Employment Standards Code is about 20 years out of date. In 2005 we in the Official Opposition welcomed the employment standards review. My question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. It's been two years now, and Albertans are still waiting. When can we expect to see the results of that review?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, previously in this session in the House relative to employment standards, I did respond to the question, saying that I had asked for yet further consultation. Let's look at the situation in Alberta. We have considerably more workers, a more active economy, an expanding workforce. We have new federal regulations on a number of fronts that address employment standards. I'd remind the hon. member that we added 72 staff members to Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry to protect the workers' rights, to look after the workers, to assure that the current standards are being met, and to do their due diligence to make sure workers are safe.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister's communications staff has been on the record as saying that the review is being delayed because the Tory caucus has taken issues with some aspects of the proposed amendments. To the same minister: can you tell us

what part of your proposal was rejected or sent back for reconsideration by the Tory caucus?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, no, it would be totally inappropriate. There were areas of concern relative to the updating of the standards. I think it behooves me to be prudent and do further consultation and further work. I will be undertaking that work throughout the next few months ahead and paying very close attention to what we're learning with the new workers on-site to make sure that we're making appropriate amendments when we come forward, not bringing forward something in a half-baked form. Also, as we negotiate the annex to the co-operative agreement with Canada relative to immigration, I'll be looking at many suggestions made in this House relative to the monitoring of the foreign workers. It's another area we're examining.

Dr. B. Miller: We've heard from several sources that the results of the employment standards code review are so abysmal that the government has buried the report and has no plans to release it. When the Liberal caucus put in a request for the results of the public consultations through the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, we were told we would have to pay over \$117,000 to see it. To the same minister: is the government afraid to release the results of the employment standards review? If you have nothing to hide, will you agree to release the information immediately to the people and stakeholders who put time and effort into this review? When are we going to see it?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of the items the hon. member has referenced. We had responses from more than 5,500 Albertans, including employees, employers, industry, and labour organizations. I'm not aware of this particular request, but I can assure you of one thing: nothing is buried.

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

Designated Assisted Living Facilities

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has a long history of using Orwellian language around health care and service provision. Privatization has been called a third way, it has been called deregulation, and now it's being called aging in place. Albertans are not fooled. Privatization is privatization, and the cost of privatizing long-term care services will continue to be borne by seniors and their families. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How can the minister justify off-loading the cost of long-term care privatization onto seniors and their families?

2:10

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's premise is exactly wrong. In fact, I had the opportunity yesterday afternoon to be in Pincher Creek at the Vista Village centre where seniors in that community can age in place. What happens at the Vista Village in Pincher Creek, which is a wonderful facility, is that someone who needs assistance with their living accommodation or with their ability to live independently can move into that facility. They don't have to be institutionalized. They can go for meals whenever they wish to; they can prepare some meals in their own rooms if they wish to. As their care needs grow, they can stay in the same location and have their care needs attended to in that location. What could be more appropriate than that? What could be more appropriate than that instead of, as the hon. member would have, changing your social structure every time your care needs change?

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, totally contrary to minister's spin, seniors from across the province are finding their residences being redesignated from long-term care centres to assisted living. Their health needs don't change. Their diet and personal care needs don't change. The only thing that changes is the cost that they have to bear. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: how many seniors will be paying more out of pocket because they find themselves in assisted-living facilities rather than in long-term care facilities?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, first off, this is an issue of ensuring that the appropriate level of health care is provided to the right person. People's circumstances aren't always static. They sometimes improve, and many of them might even be able to be put assisted living. What this does allow is choice for seniors to be in facilities that would best meet their needs. That's what this is all about. It's not about trying to save the dollar by taking from a long-term care to an assisted living. It's about trying to match that they are in the right place at the right time for their needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another Orwellian spin.

We anticipate long-term care facilities in Grande Prairie, Jasper, and other communities closing and being replaced by assisted-living lodges where the same residents will simply have to pay more. Residents in Hinton have already gone through this. To the minister of seniors again: what are the estimated additional annual costs to all those seniors whose residences will be redesignated from long-term care to so-called assisted- or supportive-care facilities? How much is the Conservative government going to save on the backs of frail and ailing seniors?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to go around and tour and visit a number of different facilities, and we have such a range of descriptions. Ultimately, the seniors themselves gave feedback that they would prefer to live in their homes. They would then prefer next to have a facility that most approximated their living conditions in a home, and less of them wish to have the institutional approach. It is very much in response to the seniors' request to have the facilities and then provide the health care where they are.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Property Taxes for Condominiums

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Condominium owners in my constituency have written to me about the ability of municipalities to adopt a separate property tax class for condos. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Do municipalities have the authority to set different tax rates for condominium properties?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Municipalities do have that ability to set different tax rates for different groups or classes of residential property. Municipalities do provide different services for different classes of residential properties, and this government feels that municipalities know best how that distinction should be made and how those property taxes should be assessed.

Mr. Johnson: To the same minister. Condominium owners often have to provide for the maintenance and repair of infrastructure such as water mains, sewer lines, roads, and snow removal. Why should these owners pay the same rate as single-family properties?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, owning a portion of a condominium very much involves the sharing of the responsibility for the maintenance of the common property. It's really, considering, akin to a single-family dwelling, where an individual has the responsibility of snow removal, driveway maintenance, yard maintenance. Those condominiums have that responsibility. But I will say that there is some overlap in the condominium fees, and property taxes cover a much wider range.

Mr. Johnson: My final supplemental is to the same minister. Since many seniors live in condos and some seniors on fixed incomes are experiencing financial difficulty in paying their property taxes, is the provincial government providing any assistance to these property owners?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the provincial government does recognize that property taxes can provide a burden and especially provide a burden for seniors who are wanting to stay in their homes. Starting in 2004, the Alberta seniors education property tax rebate program began, and that provided an annual property tax rebate to assist those seniors. The program provides senior owners with a rebate for an amount equal to any education property increase from 2004. So that is some support.

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

Physician Supply

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is currently short over a thousand physicians, and that number is expected to rise to 1,500 in the next three years. This shortage of health workers is contributing to lengthy wait times in emergency rooms, to see a family physician, and for surgical procedures. Albertans in need of a family physician, especially in rural Alberta, are the hardest hit by this shortage. My first question is to the minister of health. PARA, the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta, has recommended a variety of recruitment incentives to attract residents to practise in Alberta. Will the minister take their advice and introduce a signing bonus for family physicians?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would like to say that I don't like to argue the numbers as to how many we are short of anything in the province. We do need more of a health care workforce. We need to rebalance our workforce so that we use health care professionals to the full extent of their capability and expertise. We need to implement more policies such as the primary care networks, that physicians and health authorities in the province have embraced so that there are in excess of 19 primary care networks serving more than a million Albertans now. What we know, again from my trip to southern Alberta yesterday to meet with the regional health authority, is that in certain circumstances if you empanel persons to physicians, have 1,500 people to a physician, we might have exactly the right number of primary care physicians in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. To the minister of advanced education. According to PARA, educational experience in rural medicine has a strong influence on attracting physicians to practise in rural areas. Given that the budget for the rural physician action plan did not increase this year, will the minister provide higher bursaries to encourage residents to train in rural Alberta?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, between the three departments of Employment, Immigration and Industry, the department of health, and my Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology we're looking at a number of different incentives or programs that we can put into play to increase the number of rural health care providers, not just rural physicians but health care providers across the gamut. As the hon. minister of health has said, we recognize that there are a number of professions that we need to train, that we need to recruit, that we need to repatriate, and we need to bring all those things together to meet the needs geographically wherever they are in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the minister of advanced education: given that the physician shortages also mean shortages in medical educators, what reforms is the minister making to ensure that medical educators are available and adequately compensated?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. In fact, we're in discussions right now, as we speak, with the universities on how we accommodate the growth in our enrolment that we're going to need to accommodate to meet the needs as I just mentioned in my previous answer. Part of that is the capital allocation that may or may not be required for the spaces. Part of it is the per-student payment that we're going to make to the colleges or the institutions. The other component is that, very true, we have to attract the best – we're hoping – and brightest instructors and mentors, I might add, to come to help those health care professionals get out into the rural areas but also into the urban areas because we're in need across the province.

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

2:20 Affordable Housing
(continued)

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Economic prosperity in Alberta has brought with it the imbalance between supply and demand. We don't need science to explain high price and cost when demand is higher than supply. My question today is regarding affordable housing supply. The question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. What was the funding for affordable housing development in 2006, and what is additional in 2007?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If we talk explicitly about the funding for affordable housing in 2006, it was in approximation of \$75 million. What we have done is added \$285 million, which included new funding, which included extra funding for affordable housing, homelessness, and services, and of that, \$272 million is spent explicitly for affordable housing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quite early in his leadership our Premier correctly identified a high priority for housing. My question is to the same minister, reflecting queries from my constituents. How much of the affordable housing fund is allocated to Calgary, and how can a group propose a housing project, get to that fund?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The city of Calgary got allocated \$63 million for housing. From recommendations from the task force we provided funding directly to municipalities that were in high-growth areas, and the funds were allocated specifically for affordable housing projects. I would encourage the individuals or the groups to contact the city, for they, I believe, are the best to know what their priorities are and where their challenges can be alleviated. So contact with the municipalities would be the best focus.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city is the authority to give or refuse permits for condominium conversions and any housing construction. It also owns some land and decides on zoning. Given that the province has the funds ready, what measures is the same minister taking to encourage our city of Calgary to expedite the changes so the number of affordable housing units can be increased?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have talked with municipalities. We have talked with the city of Calgary about some of the focuses and the directions that could be taken looking at the scope of having short-term solutions, such as rent supplements, looking at intermediate solutions, which could be secondary suites, also looking at long-term solutions, which would be rental housing. We have had discussions, and we will continue to have consultations as the city of Calgary is now meeting and looking at the requests and looking at the priorities for their particular city, their particular municipality, of which would work the best.

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

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

Bill 45
Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction)
Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to introduce for first reading Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, 2007.

In introducing the bill for first reading, I'd like to thank a number of people who have been strong advocates and have really made the whole issue of smoking and second-hand smoke an issue for Albertans' health. I introduced earlier to the House today members from the Alberta Cancer Board, the Mazankowski Heart Institute, the public health school at the University of Alberta, the College of Pharmacists, the Alberta Medical Association, AADAC, the Lung Association, the Cancer Society, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, Action on Smoking and Health, and I referenced the BLAST team from the Nellie McClung school, and many, many others participated.

The amendments to the Smoke-free Places Act which are being introduced will change the name of the act to the Tobacco Reduction Act; remove exemption provisions which currently permit smoking in public places and workplaces where minors are not permitted – that will ensure that public places are smoke free – prohibit smoking within a prescribed distance from a doorway, window, or fresh air intake; prohibit the retail display, advertising, or promotion of tobacco products in any place where tobacco is sold; restrict the sale of tobacco in health facilities, public postsecondary campuses, pharmacies, and retail stores; and add offence provisions.

Mr. Speaker, this is a momentous day for health in Alberta. I would ask members to give Bill 45 first reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 45 read a first time]

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

Bill 41 Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to introduce Bill 41, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

Amendments to the Health Professions Act and the Medical Profession Act will provide for greater accountability to Albertans about the consistency of health care standards of practice, require the reporting of public health issues despite any other confidentiality provisions in the respective acts, and provide for professions to be regulated under the Health Professions Act with government support in instances where professions may not have the resources to fully self-regulate.

I'd ask the House for permission for first reading of Bill 41.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a first time]

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 74.1(1)(a) I would move that Bill 41, the Health Professions Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, be referred to the Standing Committee on Community Services for its review and that the committee report the bill back to the Assembly in the first week of November 2007.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 42 Insurance Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move first reading of Bill 42, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2007.

The purpose of this bill is to update the legislative provisions for insurance contracts such as life, accident, and sickness, as well as home and business insurance. The bill will provide a modernized legislative framework for insurance contracts, strengthen consumer protection, and address legislative issues that have been identified by consumers, industry, and the Ministry of Finance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 42 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 42 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition that was from 500 Alberta residents – namely, the Calgary communities of Rocky Ridge and Royal Oak in Calgary-North West – to urge the government of Alberta to “keep up with the Calgary Board of Education’s recommended capital plans for new school construction.”

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, earlier today I had a member’s statement on Mr. Shamsheer Singh Sandhu, recipient of an outstanding Calgary seniors’ award. As I indicated, Mr. Sandhu has translated Canada’s national anthem, *O Canada*, and the Alberta centennial song into the Punjabi language. I am tabling five copies of Mr. Sandhu’s translation for the official records of the Assembly.

2:30

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first is a copy of correspondence between the administrative manager for the Alberta Liberal caucus and the director of financial management and administrative services, senior financial officer for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. At the beginning it’s asking for permission and payment okay for the radio ads, and it, in fact, is answered by the director of financial management, saying that he sees “no party references in the ads that would cause concerns regarding processing related expenditures.” So the expenditures were okayed. I’ll table that.

As well, I’ll table the appropriate number of copies from Rod McConnell, who’s expressing concern about the potential privacy violations associated with government-contracted companies having access to health records. He would like to see his personal health records removed from these contracted databases with any third party and have Alberta Health immediately terminate all contracts and return all the data to Alberta Health and Wellness.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Premier it’s my pleasure to table for the House the requisite number of copies of two letters written on behalf of the Alberta Liberal Party in which they reference that they’re asking the Beaver regional waste management commission for their maximum “annual donation of \$15,000 or exceeding your 2005 donation.”

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings this afternoon, all related to the public meeting of Edmonton Catholic schools last evening. The most important, probably, is a copy of the agenda from last night, which highlights a number of teachers who were either nominated or received provincial teaching awards.

I also have a copy of their news release from last night indicating that a balanced budget would be approved and that there are serious concerns about provincial funding.

Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of a document entitled *The Impact of the 2007/08 Budget on Students, Staff and Parents*. Again, it outlines some of the difficulties they had and the need for what they described as creative budgeting in order to reach that balanced budget.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, a copy of a document entitled *Three Year Strategic Education Plan 2007 to 2010*, published by Edmonton Catholic schools, and it has the title *United in Heart and Mind: Growing, Learning & Loving*. I would hope that not only the Education minister but all members of this Assembly read through these. They're very important documents.

Thank you.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies of a workbook now available for all Albertans to give their input on the government's proposed community spirit program. This program will encourage and celebrate Alberta's charitable giving. The workbook will be available online, through the local MLA offices, or by mail. It will also be available through public libraries by the end of June, and submissions are due by July 31.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is from Kathy, who lives in Cameron Heights, in my constituency. She finds the noise emanating from the Anthony Henday ring road becoming louder as each month passes, and it is not unusual for her to hear brakes from semis and motorcycles at all hours of the day. She hopes that the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation will do something to attenuate the noise.

The other tabling, Mr. Speaker, comes from a young constituent, Alex Bernier, who has issues with the graduated driver's licence program, especially that people are required to take an advanced road test two years after they've received their class 5 licence regardless of their driving record. The cost is usually around \$120, depending on the registry, and then you add \$64 for the new card. As a student he finds it extra expensive, and he can't afford it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from my constituent Eric Finley. He is a businessman in the nanotech sector. He would like all MLAs to read the report I am tabling five copies of, a report called *Taming the Tempest: An Alternate Development Strategy for Alberta*. The report offers several forward-thinking alternatives for economic development in Alberta.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter that I'm tabling today from Eric Musekamp, president of the Farmworkers Union of Alberta. He wishes to remind the Assembly that August 20 will be the third annual farm worker day and urges all Albertans to think about the men, women, and children who toil unprotected on farms, ranches, and feedlots.

Thanks.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It is the program for the supreme kickoff of City Farm. Now, City Farm is in Edmonton-Manning, the largest rural riding in the city of

Edmonton. City Farm is a unique place where children and youth and adults can learn about growing food, animal care, and our natural habitat. I invite all Albertans to visit City Farm and learn a little bit about farming in the city.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung on May 28, 2007, Department of Solicitor General and Public Security 2007-08 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have two members who have risen with respect to points of order. The first we'll deal with is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am referring to an exchange during the first question between the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Premier, which was actually a question on Catholic school education. During it the Premier referred a number of times to making allegations – and therefore my citation is 23(h), 23(i), and 23(j) – that somehow a series of radio ads done by the Alberta Liberal caucus is out of order.

I did table earlier copies of correspondence in which the director of finance gave our caucus the okay to proceed with these, indicating that the cost was within the guidelines allowable by the Legislative Assembly Office to make payment. The Premier seems particularly exercised about this, and I don't know why. Yesterday I tabled additional information on these radio spots, but he seems determined to somehow cast an allegation upon the Liberal caucus that this is not in order.

Under 23(h) these expenditures are clearly in order; they were okayed according to the documents that I've already tabled. Under 23(i), imputing a false motive, that somehow we were attempting to get away with something that clearly we weren't: this has all been done above board. And 23(j), using insulting language: I would say that that's certainly the case in trying to make it out that the opposition caucus has done anything but follow the rules.

As the Speaker well knows, our caucus has no ability to write its own cheques. They have to be written by the finance department from the LAO. All the payments come from the LAO, and I doubt very much that the hard-working staff there would breach any rules on our behalf whatsoever. The Official Opposition has been under intense scrutiny. All of our public documents and utterances are reviewed. Our newsletters, our ads, our truck decals, our policy documents, every one of them, Mr. Speaker, has been gone over with a fine-tooth comb to make sure that we are in order, and that is evidenced by correspondence like the tabling that I made earlier. So I'm surprised that the Premier would disparage the staff of the LAO in somehow insinuating or making an allegation that they have been improper in their service in any way, and I can tell you that they certainly have not. They hold us to account, and when we have followed the guidelines and are operating within the rules set out, our expenditures are processed.

The Premier is trying very hard to make something out of nothing. We have followed the rules, and the Premier insists on misleading this Assembly, making allegations against us, and certainly provoking a great deal of disorder in the House by using insulting language and imputing false motives upon us. So I would ask that the Premier please withdraw his comments, refrain from making them in the

future, and apologize to this caucus and to the staff of the LAO, who've done a good job.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Who should I recognize? The hon. President of the Treasury Board or the hon. Government House leader?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, if making false allegations . . .

The Speaker: On the point of order.

Mr. Snelgrove: On the point of order.

. . . is inappropriate, then I would dare say that most of the questions that the opposition leader has put to the Premier in the last two months should have been called immediately on the spot because they were far worse and based on nothing.

2:40

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Centre is far too sanctimonious on this point. In fact, the hon. Leader of the Opposition has over the last number of weeks tried to call into question the integrity of the Premier by raising issues about the Beaver regional waste management commission only to discover when pressed to review with the Beaver regional waste management commission whether anybody else has solicited political donations that the Liberal party has solicited donations from that organization. They can't have it both ways.

However, with respect to this specific point of order, as I heard the exchange, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was asking why the government would have a budget for the Public Affairs Bureau when the Catholic school board needed money. I think it's perfectly appropriate for the Premier, in response to that, to point out that the Liberal opposition uses taxpayers' money to advertise, which is – I don't know – perhaps what the Public Affairs Bureau does. The Public Affairs Bureau is advertising on behalf of government, is communicating with Albertans what government is doing, whereas the opposition is advertising – yes, perhaps, if she says so – under the rules of the House and the rules of the Legislature and scrutinized undoubtedly by the Leg. Assembly but still for their partisan caucus concerns. What is more important to the public of Alberta and the taxpayer of Alberta, spending public money communicating to the public about what government is doing on their behalf and finding out what the public needs or advertising for partisan political purposes?

So in the context of the question about the Edmonton Catholic school board and whether or not their budget should be higher or school budgets should be higher instead of money going to the Public Affairs Bureau, it's absolutely appropriate for the Premier to point out that money is spent on advertising on both sides of the House. The money they were questioning was, of course, a budget for government, which has been held to account through the long process of Committee of Supply and which we're going to be debating later on in the House, or the money spent by the Liberal caucus, Legislative Assembly appropriated funds, also voted by the House but with respect to a Liberal caucus. I fail to see the point of order.

The Speaker: Well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre certainly has the right to raise a point of order with respect to this whole matter, as it would have been an opportune time for members of the government to raise points of order over the last several weeks as well should they have chosen to do that. They made their decision with respect to how to deal with that.

Today there was a series of questions led by the Leader of the Official Opposition which included the Public Affairs Bureau, but essentially I think that the remarks that caused the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to rise had to do with the horse-racing industry and the prelude with respect to the Blues with respect to all of this. The Premier did respond to the question about slot machines and are they available in the horse-racing facilities. Then he goes on, and he says the following:

You know, in the interests of openness and transparency I raised this issue during the defence of the budget, and I'm going to raise it again. The Liberals have very secretly billed the Alberta taxpayers for their ads. They have not come forward yet to be fully public and tell this House exactly what they are billing. What budget is it coming from? Let's be open and transparent. Vice versa. Come on.

Well, in the last several weeks it would strike this chairperson that there was a whole series of questions that had a whole series of allegations and innuendo and other kinds of leading statements with respect to this whole matter. The chair also recognizes that this is something like day 42 of this particular session, and the chair also recognizes that there's a by-election going on today, and the chair also recognizes that it's coming to the end of this session. So if you take all of these sorts of things together, you come up with a kind of a fatigue factor that comes into hon. members, where basically, after 3,300 questions and answers in the question period, oftentimes it's easier to let some of these words that we wouldn't normally use in our daily living and our daily practice come into the discussion. So oftentimes you'll get things like ethical, unethical, misleading, leading, that lead to innuendo and everything else. That's been kind of more frequent in the last several weeks than it would normally have been, so the chair will recognize that all of this is part of the heat of the intensity of the battle on this particular Tuesday of June and say that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre certainly had an opportunity to clarify.

What the chair is concerned about, however, is that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta is brought into this debate.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Exactly.

The Speaker: Well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre brought it into the debate.

All members have to consider this. If members are going to table documents that come out of the Legislative Assembly Office or my office in this House as part of the debate that they want to engender and engage in, you're setting a very dangerous precedent. There are a lot of documents that are not tabled, and hon. members would not want to see them. I will not allow them to be tabled. They'll stay in the confines of the Speaker's office and the office of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. If you want the Speaker to get involved in the debate by saying, "Well, somebody in the Legislative Assembly said this, or somebody said that," you may find that some knees will be cut out from under the hon. members with respect to that.

In this case, for the openness and transparency and clarification, the Liberal caucus is afforded a budget as the government caucus is afforded a budget. The Liberal caucus used some of those funds to buy radio ads. Some members of the Members' Services Committee take great exception to that. At an upcoming meeting of the Members' Services Committee the matter will be on the agenda, but there has not been a meeting of the Members' Services Committee with respect to this particular matter. In terms of the interpretations that were provided at the time, they were an acceptable utilization of caucus dollars for these ads. The Speaker is not going to reverse anything or take any exception to that. That was the rightful exercise of those dollars at that time.

Now, secretive: it may be a question that it wasn't made public, I suppose. I don't know what press release was put out saying who paid for the ads, but it's the taxpayers of Alberta who pay for these ads.

The government caucus has, you know, a million bucks. If they want to go and spend money on ads, presumably under the current situation they would have the right to do that. I would suspect that there would be questions in this Assembly if that were to happen, but at the moment that's certainly acceptable. In the last number of 10 days, I guess, there could have been all kinds of ads in Calgary on by-elections and what have you on behalf of the government caucus. That didn't happen.

Anyway, there's clarification now with respect to this matter. A lot of this has to do with the mood of this particular House, and a lot of this has to do with the utilization of language. We'll have an opportunity now over the next number of months, I do believe, to basically study the rules of what words are acceptable, and we'll have all this new money that all caucuses have to hire researchers to pen better answers to better questions. I'm sure we'll see a tremendous improvement in the fall in the quality of the question period because of these new additional dollars that we have.

Now, hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, you have a point of order.

Point of Order Interrupting a Member

Rev. Abbott: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order with regard to the exchange between the Premier and the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. What happened is that the Standing Orders were breached during that time of questions and answers. I have several citations, but I'll start with *Beauchesne's* 333, which states that "a Member speaking shall not be interrupted except on a point of order". Then if you go down to 334, at the end it says: "If the interruptions are excessive, the Member speaking may appeal to the Speaker for help, which will be forthcoming. In extreme cases the Speaker may intervene without such request to restore order in the House."

Mr. Speaker, as you'll recall, the Premier was answering the Member for Whitecourt-Ste Anne about, again, some political donations that were being solicited by the Liberal Party, and for some reason the Leader of the Official Opposition felt that he had the floor, that he could just butt in and start talking and start intervening between that question-and-answer period. I didn't see any questions whatsoever that were directed towards the Leader of the Opposition, yet for some reason he felt that he could get into this exchange. He was talking excessively. Other members in the House were trying to admonish him to be quiet and let the two members have their exchange, but the Leader of the Opposition absolutely refused.

2:50

I want to cite from *Marleau and Montpetit*, Mr. Speaker. *Marleau and Montpetit* says, "When a Member is addressing the House, no other Member may interrupt except to raise a question of privilege which has arisen suddenly or to raise a point of order." If you go over to 503, this is a key citation in *Marleau and Montpetit*. It says:

One of the basic principles of parliamentary procedure is that proceedings in the House of Commons . . .

Or in this case the Alberta Legislature.

. . . are conducted in terms of a free and civil discourse. In order that debate on matters of public policy be held in a civil manner, the House has adopted rules of order and decorum for the conduct of Members towards each other and towards the institution as a whole. Members are to show respect for one another.

Mr. Speaker, I felt that this interruption by the Leader of the Opposition was an absolute disrespect for the Premier of this province. He did not let him answer a question from a private member when we know in this House that the private members of the opposition get to ask many questions every day and are expected to get answers. Therefore, the private members from the government side should also be allowed to ask questions and to get answers.

A final citation, Mr. Speaker, is from *Marleau and Montpetit* 513, which says: "Any Member participating in debate must address the Chair, not the House, a particular Minister or Member, the galleries, or the television audience." In fact, it goes on to say, "If a Member directs remarks towards another Member and not the Speaker, he or she will be called to order."

Mr. Speaker, I think there is a point of order here. I think that the Leader of the Official Opposition should apologize to the Premier, to yourself, and to all Albertans for interrupting a very important discourse between the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne and the hon. Premier. In fact, in our own Standing Orders if you look at Standing Order 13(4)(b), again it refers to how there should be no interruptions when we're conducting business in this House.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have studied the books, we do know the rules, and all we're asking is that they be kept in this House.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you can either choose to participate, or I can give a ruling.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I choose to participate in that I don't see that, in fact, either member engaged in this resumed their seat or stopped speaking or gave up on either the questions or the answers that they were engaged in. There's a fair amount of heckling in this House, Mr. Speaker, as you often point out to us, but I didn't see anything interrupted. The process of give-and-take between the questioner and the person giving the answers in that particular exchange continued on through three questions and three answers.

Certainly, if we're going to talk about disobedience, we could look at the number of times that the government caucus has chosen to totally drown out speakers from this side of the House by continuing to thump their desks and yell and scream, by which effectively, in fact, an opportunity to ask a question or give an answer has been cut off. I didn't see that happen today. There is no point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Peace River, do you want to get involved in this point of order?

Mr. Oberle: Actually on the last one, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, we've had the last one. Done it.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on this point of order.

Dr. Brown: Yes, sir. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. He raises a valid point respecting this point of order under Standing Order 13(4)(b) and under the citations which he gave in *Marleu and Montpetit* and in *Beauchesne's*. I would also add to that group of citations a citation from *Erskine May*, the 23rd edition, page 445, where it says:

Members must not disturb a Member who is speaking, by hissing, chanting, clapping, booing, exclamations or other interruption. On 22 January 1693, it was resolved that Mr. Speaker do call upon the Member by name, making such disturbance, and that every such person shall incur the displeasure and censure of the House.

Well, Mr. Speaker, a certain amount of interjections are certainly to be tolerated in the House, and well they should be. For the most part they are jocular in nature, and they don't detract from the ability of members to enjoy the excellent conversation which takes place in the House. But I think that with the quantity and volume of interruptions that were occurring today, particularly on the part of the Leader of the Official Opposition in response to those various questions, it was difficult if not impossible to hear what the Premier was saying on those occasions when those interjections were happening. I heard some various interjections, which I understand were in the nature of, "What are you afraid of, Ed?" and so on, which I think are completely inappropriate in the House.

In my respectful view, Mr. Speaker, the interjections by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition were excessive. They were worthy of a sanction of the House by way of, certainly, your finding that there was a valid point of order there.

The Speaker: Are there others? Peace River, are you getting up on this point of order?

Mr. Oberle: No.

The Speaker: Well, lookit, hon. members. I'm going to repeat what day this is. I'm going to repeat where we are. I'm going to repeat where we are in this session, the month and the mood and everything else. Okay?

Now, hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar and hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, you should be commended for doing outstanding research with respect to this. When you can dig back into citations coming from 1693, this is just really good. I apologize to you if, in fact, because of a lack of my interjections when all the members of this Assembly were being so enthusiastic – and I say all members of this Assembly were being so enthusiastic. I very clearly can relate to the question period when the hon. Premier cited from a certain letter, and all members on the government side erupted with glee and pounding desks and everything else. I can recall that. Then I can recall another occasion when someone else said something absolutely correct. Virtually all the members on the other side of the House erupted.

So we had a good day today in terms of thunderous applause and enthusiastic participation. Maybe that is good, hon. members. Maybe it's good to see people who are alive. They have blood flowing through their veins, and they're really taking their work to heart. They're into it.

Look. This is not a normal reflection. There were some, I guess, bullets today. Some people would say that. I think there were some bulls' eyes, maybe, today. That raised the excitement level with a little more enthusiasm.

Hon. members, if you want me to rise every time any hon. member was offside with a rule, I would be up for the whole question period. The only person anybody would ever see on television would be me – it wouldn't be anybody else – and you'd all be thundering in the background, and the public out there would be saying some wonderful things.

I have to tell you a little secret, though, that you should all know. Those mics are live in front of the hon. member. So even though all the hon. members in the Assembly are pounding their desks in an attempt to drown out the speaker, that mic is live, and that television camera is only on the person who's talking. So the hon. members in here may be drowning somebody out, but the vast television audience that we have hears it all very, very clearly. They're not missing a thing. The only people who are missing something, perhaps, in this exchange are the hon. members. Any skilled

parliamentarian in this Assembly knows that, and they will continue to speak into that mic and look enthusiastically into that television camera, and that will be the tape for eternity. *Hansard* will not report this thunderous drowning out of people in this particular Assembly.

Again, I'm not standing up here every time somebody is offside a bit. That takes away the ebb and the flow of the Legislative Assembly. But by the same token there's a responsibility on all of us to be honourable, and that's really the key.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

Adjournment of Session

28. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the spring sitting of the Third Session of the 26th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until November 5, 2007, as per Standing Order 3.1(2) or until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

[Government Motion 28 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

3:00 **Suspension of the Routine**

29. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that on Thursday, June 14, 2007, the Assembly suspend its daily Routine under Standing Order 7 for His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to attend upon the House for the purpose of Royal Assent, with the daily Routine to continue after His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor retires from the Chamber.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a bit unusual. We anticipate June 14 being the last day of the spring session. We've requested the presence of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor to give royal assent to such bills as may have been passed by that time. His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has a standing commitment that he's had for some time which precludes him from coming later on in the day while we're in session, which would be our normal procedure. So although it's unusual, I would ask the permission of the House for us to invite His Honour the Lieutenant Governor during daily Routine and that we suspend daily Routine for that period of time until he is able to attend, give royal assent, and retire.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this motion is debatable. Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 29 carried]

The Speaker: I take it that by the decision made here by the Assembly, we would have the prayer on Thursday, and then the Lieutenant Governor would be invited before we start the Routine, after the prayer.

Mr. Hancock: That's my anticipation, yes.

The Speaker: Okay.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

The Speaker: I'm going to call on the hon. President of the Treasury Board momentarily, but hon. Member for Peace River, you rose several times. Do you have a point of information that you want to rise on?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I do, and I apologize if the timing was inappropriate, and I interjected on what was a creative and thoughtful point of order from over there.

Mr. Speaker, during your ruling on your first point of order you said that the Conservative caucus could purchase radio advertising, and that would be consistent with the rules of this House as they stand today. I wish to clarify that in actual fact the Conservative caucus does not purchase radio advertising with their caucus funds nor will we do so. I don't want the taxpayers of Alberta to think anything different. We will not purchase partisan radio advertising with our caucus funds.

Thank you for the opportunity to clarify.

The Speaker: So I take it that the hon. member was rising under Standing Order 13(2), which requests, basically, a further explanation from the Speaker with respect to his statement. Okay.

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

Bill 43
Appropriation Act, 2007

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With all these numbers flying around, I guess that it's appropriate that it is my pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 43, the Appropriation Act, 2007.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The second reading of Bill 43, Appropriation Act, 2007. There's been quite a lot of debate through a number of weeks on all different parts of this bill, yet it's important also to look at it as a whole.

You know, my economics training, brief as it was, taught me to pay attention to history. History teaches us that when the economy is slow or even in a recession, it is wise for governments to spend money on capital projects so that workers have jobs and employment rises, but when there is a hot economy, as we have now, it is wise for governments to invest and save for the future.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Where's the wisdom in a \$33 billion provincial budget as we have before us here in Bill 43? This can only be a budget that will increase the overheated economy. It will do nothing to decrease inflation or slow down our overheated economy. I mean, it's obvious that we are at a special crossroads in Alberta in terms of our hot economy today. GDP increased one-third from 1991 to 2003. GDP growth in Alberta in 2006 was 6.8 per cent, more than double the national rate. Inflationary pressures grow. The consumer price index was 5.5 per cent in March. The government would prefer to refer to this growth as bringing about growth pressures, but the more we listen to ordinary Albertans, the more we realize that the growth

pressures are actually growth crises, especially when we look at people's individual lives and how they are struggling to cope with our overheated economy.

This especially is obvious, Mr. Speaker, in the area of housing. I have a special interest in this area. We removed that part of the budget of Municipal Affairs and Housing to vote separately on it because we were not happy with the response of the department to the Affordable Housing Task Force. I was a part of that task force. It was an amazing opportunity to go out on the road and to hear Albertans all across the province in all sorts of different cities.

The pressures are just amazing. The population increased by 109,000 in 2006. There has been a 10.4 per cent increase in population since 2001, so you have the pressures of increasing population. House prices in 2006 went up 31 per cent, in Edmonton 52 per cent, so you have tremendous pressures on families because of the high cost of housing. The rental vacancy rate is at .9 per cent. The overall vacancy rate in rural Alberta in 2006 was 1.4 per cent, a 10-year low.

The Affordable Housing Task Force concluded when they looked at all these statistics and listened to people throughout Alberta that this makes for a perfect storm. You have tight supply, not enough housing of any kind. There's not enough housing for people who are homeless, not enough emergency shelter space. There's not enough transitional housing. There's not enough subsidized housing and not enough affordable housing. There's not enough market housing for people coming to Alberta with high-skill jobs. There's tight supply, and there's high demand given the tremendous increase in population. Then there are labour shortages with the high cost of construction. All that amounts to a housing crisis in Alberta.

We were not happy with the Municipal Affairs and Housing response to the Affordable Housing Task Force. They proposed to support . . .

Mr. MacDonald: Were you disappointed or just not happy?

Dr. B. Miller: Well, we asked for \$480 million a year for five years to build 12,000 units of affordable housing, and the government response was half of that, \$240 million. So the numbers weren't there. Most of all, we were unhappy with the fact that the government didn't respond to our suggestions about reorganizing the government to have a more concentrated focus on housing, to have a secretariat of housing or a ministry of housing where there is a concerted effort to pull the pieces together from all the different silos within government to focus on housing because it is a huge crisis.

Mr. Speaker, the effect of this, the appropriation bill, Budget 2007, on Albertans to me raises the question: who shares in the Alberta advantage? Where is all the money from resource revenue going? Obviously, that money is not going to people with low incomes. Income support rates through Alberta Works programs have remained virtually the same for the last 15 years, but buying power has for those people dropped. The Edmonton Social Planning Council produced a document in which they state that after adjusting for inflation, the real value of monthly social assistance benefits since 1980 has dropped by over 50 per cent for families with children and, even worse, a 60 per cent drop for single adults.

People on social assistance are obviously falling further and further behind because the money that they get and the rates haven't changed considerably, appreciatively, in the last 10 or 15 years, yet they are not able to purchase as much with those meagre monies that they get. They fall further and further behind. This budget really doesn't have anything that's good news for people living in poverty, people on low incomes.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council points out that in this year's budget, which refers to, for example, people expected to work

or not expected to work or learners, that effective July 1 those clients not expected to work and those clients temporarily unable to work will receive a 5 per cent increase in their monthly benefits. Learners will receive their 5 per cent increase. This leaves the remaining Alberta Works recipients who are expected to work with no increase in their benefit levels, meaning they will keep falling further behind as living costs rise.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, the issue is really serious because if there's nothing in this budget, no appreciable increase in rates for people receiving income support, especially for the housing component, then these people are the near homeless. In the housing task force we decided to invent a new term, not just homelessness but the nearly homeless: people who are one rent increase from being homeless. That's the situation we face with people on low income.

With the huge increase in rents, monthly rents have increased close to 60 per cent in the past decade, but recently they've just gone through the roof. They're skyrocketing. So it's not surprising that in 2006 there were 8,900 people in Alberta who were waiting for subsidized housing. Alberta's homeless population is growing: 32 per cent of an increase in Calgary over the last two years, a 19 per cent increase in the homeless population in Edmonton over the last two years, a 24 per cent increase in the homeless population in Fort McMurray over the last two years. Five years ago the number of Albertans in need of core housing was 106,000. What is it now: 150,000, 200,000, 250,000? It's just incredible the number of people that can't get the kind of housing that they need for their families. We're hearing that.

I had a town hall meeting a few weeks ago in the Britannia Youngstown area of my riding, and I have another one tonight in the Inglewood area of my riding. I'm sure I'll hear the same story tonight as I heard at the first town hall meeting: that families with low income cannot cope in this hot economy. This budget doesn't help them.

This budget, an all-time high of \$33 billion, is certainly going to just exacerbate the inflationary hot economy that we have. It's not going to slow the economy down. It's not going to slow the inflation down. Those who are on the bottom end of the rich and poor scale are just in a worse and worse situation all the time. On that basis it's really a moral issue. If this government is not going to help considerably and effectively people on low income, then I raise an ethical question about this budget because every budget is a work of ethics.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to talk just about poor families and families with low incomes, but it's also an issue for families with middle incomes. I mean, with the GDP going up and up so rapidly and huge profits being made by oil companies, we have to ask the question: what about middle-class Albertans? It's obvious, I think, that the wages of middle-class Albertans are not going up as rapidly as the GDP. So we can ask the question: who benefits from this hot economy? It's not low-income Albertans. It's not even middle-income Albertans.

I think that we're going to see middle-income families squeezed more and more as time goes on, and 2007-2008 will go down in history as a time of tremendous labour unrest as more and more people – teachers, construction workers, people in all areas of life – try to catch up by asking for higher wages. Thanks to an inflationary budget like this and uncontrolled economic growth, all the costs are being driven up, and middle-income people are being squeezed as never before. People are becoming restless, and we hear about this all the time at our town hall meetings or in our constituency offices.

Mr. Speaker, one area of Alberta working life that I want to especially focus on is the people who work for not-for-profit

organizations. We're really in trouble when it comes to supporting people who are in the service sector or in the hospitality sector, people working in hotels and restaurants, people working in hospitals, the staff at universities and colleges, people involved in the helping professions, the care professions. Those people are being hit big time. There's a huge turnover of employees. People can't manage to survive on \$10 an hour or \$12 an hour or even \$15 an hour. It's especially distressing when you go to daycare centres or go to institutions that look after disabled children, and you realize that the most vulnerable children in Alberta are being affected.

A hot economy means that people working in those, even if they have a sense of calling, that what they're doing is really giving of themselves, they still have to survive. They still have to pay the rent. They still have to buy food. They can't manage on \$12 an hour or \$13 an hour. It's just impossible. Jim Gurnett of the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers says that the best of times produced by the boom results in the worst of times for many. He should know because the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers works with all kinds of people who work in the social institutions and the social agencies in the inner city. It's a shame that these people can't afford to live now in our cities in Alberta.

Now, New York City came to that point a number of years ago when they realized that their public service people, the police and those who work in the fire companies, couldn't afford to live in New York. New York had to adopt new strategies to build affordable housing. My understanding is that the mayor of Calgary and members of the staff of the city of Calgary went to New York to find out what their best practices were so that we could be in a position to be ready to take action here in Alberta because we've come to that point, Mr. Speaker. Many people working in the service sector can't afford to live in Alberta. They're making choices like: "Should we move to Saskatchewan? Maybe we should go back to Nova Scotia. Maybe we can't afford to live here at all."

It affects our own sons and daughters. I have two sons. One has moved to London, Ontario; one is moving to London, England. Part of the reason is that – they are in the arts field; one is a writer, and one is a pianist, a musician – given the rent costs here in the city, they can't afford to live here, which is a shame for me. I mean, I'll enjoy going to London, England, to visit them, but still it's a shame that they have to move away in order to make ends meet. So, Mr. Speaker, I was upset that the government's response to the Affordable Housing Task Force did not take into consideration the whole package of suggestions that the task force put forward, the variety of sticks and carrots, of incentives and also guidelines that would help to move us ahead to provide affordable housing in Alberta.

Well, those are my remarks. I want to conclude by stating that I agree with the Edmonton Social Planning Council that on reviewing the Budget for 2007, "it is clear that fighting poverty and addressing the needs of its most vulnerable citizens is not the government's top priority." Spending on capital projects is up by over one-third, and overall spending is up by 10 per cent, but there are no increases for vulnerable Albertans dependent on income support. Five per cent just for some, nothing for others. Mr. Speaker, I think that's deplorable.

3:20

I just want to conclude by mentioning, again, that it's community agencies that contract with provincial government to take care of our most vulnerable children, providing child care, child protection, family support for the developmentally disabled, continuing care, home care, all of those services: the people working in that sector are the most affected. Those institutions cannot find staff. They have trouble recruiting and retaining staff in the hot market that we have

right now. That is really unfortunate for this province. It raises the question about whether we can maintain the kind of quality of life that we've had in the past. The bottom line is that it's not just about money. It's about being able to maintain the quality of life that we all want for Albertans.

Those are my remarks about Bill 43 and about the budget in general. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to participate in debate on the appropriations bill in second reading, Bill 43. The appropriations bill, as you know, sums up the deliberations that we've had in the Assembly with respect to the Executive Council and all the ministries which fall under the provincial cabinet. Today I am hoping to state some aspects with which I was disappointed in terms of the provincial budget this year.

Now, I will start by talking a little bit about the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation. In Edmonton-McClung, my constituency, Mr. Speaker, we are waiting for three overpasses to be built on the Anthony Henday Drive. The Anthony Henday, as you know, is the Edmonton ring road. Initially, there wasn't a lot of traffic on it because it wasn't finished. It is still not finished, but there's a lot more traffic now than six months ago or a year ago because more legs of the Anthony Henday are opened. There is traffic that stretches between the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud to Edmonton-McClung to Edmonton-Meadowlark to Edmonton-Calder and St. Albert even and Edmonton-Castle Downs. It is growing. The Edmonton ring road is growing, and so is traffic that is taking it.

The government decided to use cement for sections of the Anthony Henday instead of the traditional treated rubberized asphalt. They did their research and apparently came up with the idea that cement is less expensive, and it lives longer. Now, I am not an engineer, and I don't know if that is true, but the end result is that there is a lot of noise emanating from the Edmonton ring road, Mr. Speaker. Many people who live close to the Edmonton ring road are complaining that the noise is unrelenting, the noise is intrusive.

You know, at any hour of the day you can actually hear trucks and vehicles gearing up and gearing down. You can hear them when they brake. You can hear them on the ring road. My challenge to any of my hon. colleagues who think that these people are maybe extra sensitive or maybe they're a little on the whining side is for them to go and visit. I would actually be honoured to receive any of my hon. colleagues from this House who are willing to come and tour these areas of my constituency in which the noise is unbearable.

Now, how would the overpasses help? The overpasses are going to even out, or smooth, that traffic so people don't have to brake and then accelerate again. Having traffic lights on the Anthony Henday, Mr. Speaker, is, to me, not the right thing to do. I think it is wrong to have traffic lights on a major speedway – you know, the average speed limit on the Henday is 110 kilometres per hour – and for somebody to be travelling at that speed and then slam on their brakes because 50 metres from here there is a traffic light.

The congestion is another issue, Mr. Speaker. Cars are backed up for long periods of time. We're not talking two or three minutes, as is customary and as is acceptable. We're talking 20, 25, and 30 minutes at times. Then, when you look at other sections of the Henday, for example 100th Avenue or Stony Plain Road, you're talking 45 minutes to an hour. I think this is unacceptable.

In this House I've stood up on a few occasions to table petitions from concerned citizens who have come together to sign a plea, a

plea, directed at the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation to finish those overpasses and interchanges. I don't know how far we are from completing these interchanges and overpasses, but this budget did not offer me any assurance that this was a priority. I know that the government prefers to keep opening new legs of the Anthony Henday because, quite frankly, it is a media opportunity. It's a photo op where the hon. minister and his colleagues would put on the hard hat and wave at cameras and give a speech. I think we should finish what we start.

Mr. Rogers: It's coming. It takes time.

Mr. Elsalhy: When? That's the issue. We don't know when. There's nothing in this year's budget. My hon. colleague from Leduc-Beaumont-Devon says it's coming. Well, I hope it is, because commuters and motorists are asking for it, and so are the people who live close to the Anthony Henday.

The other thing is noise attenuation, as I mentioned. Noise attenuation is not difficult, and it shouldn't be expensive. People don't have huge expectations. All they want is a berm, for example, or some trees to be planted. I know at least two of my constituents who attended every open house and every information session that was put on by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation before the Anthony Henday was constructed. They were promised: "Don't worry. Your berms are going to be in place to attenuate the noise. We don't want you to be troubled or disturbed in your own residences, and we also don't want your property values to drop."

In this market, Mr. Speaker, these people are now concerned that the promise which was made six years ago has not been kept. When they approach ministry officials, they're told that those ministry officials don't know the answer. They don't know when those berms or those noise attenuation measures are going to be brought in. Again, this budget doesn't offer that assurance. These people are starting to contemplate leaving their dream homes, the homes they bought with their hard-earned dollars or that they actually built. It shouldn't be that way.

I'm hoping that the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation will take this issue to heart. Again, if he's really interested in touring my constituency, I would be honoured to take him along and to introduce him to some of these residents, who can actually offer him a cup of tea or some coffee or whichever other beverage he prefers, and they can actually make him stand in their backyard or make him stand on their deck, and he can actually see that.

The other thing I would draw his attention to are some pictures which I tabled in this House showing how flat that landscape is and how flat that terrain is. You know, all is we're asking for is some dirt. Six or seven truckloads per location should do the trick for now, until those overpasses are built. That's one thing.

The other thing is with respect to Municipal Affairs and Housing, as echoed by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glenora. We know that the government was not prepared for the housing crisis, to their credit or in their defence, maybe because nobody could have predicted that it was going to be this big this quick. However, they had an opportunity when they were deliberating internally to come up with the figures for all the different ministries to say, "You know, housing is going to be a crisis. We should not only focus on the lowest 10 per cent of those people who are in trouble. We should expand that because 10 per cent," as my colleague from Glenora indicated, "captures only a small portion of that class of citizens that is in trouble now."

We talk about seniors. We talk about people who are on fixed income, pensioners, people on assistance, people who are having difficulty making ends meet. We talk about the definition of

affordable housing and affordability for rent or accommodations. There was the arbitrary number that 30 per cent of your income should be the maximum anybody has to pay for accommodation, be it rent, be it mortgage, and that anything over 30 per cent warrants intervention, warrants action by the government.

We know that the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing kept talking about \$285 million which were added to fix a whole bunch of problems. My argument is twofold. The first part of that argument is: throwing money at the problem after the fact can help a little bit but not a whole lot. Using band-aids and using temporary treatments does not treat or fix or take care of the underlying cause or the underlying problem.

3:30

The other component of my argument is going to say that we need a plan, and we need a plan not only for housing. We need a plan for investments. We need a plan for education. We need a plan for health care and so on and so forth. The plan has to be not one year, not two, not three. It has to be five and 10 even, Mr. Speaker. Beyond the \$285 million that the hon. minister of municipal affairs keeps talking about, what else is there?

I'm going to switch gears, and instead of just talking about people who are currently suffering, I'm going to reiterate a request which was given to me by one of my constituents who is really excited about the opportunity for him as a landlord to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. He asked me and he asked my staff what programs there are. The government keeps talking about incentives and carrots for developers and landlords to bring in affordable housing to the market, increasing supply, as we all talk about. My staff phoned three of the government ministries, Mr. Speaker, and they didn't get a satisfactory answer. Every time they asked those officials, "What are those programs that we heard about in the House, and what are those programs which were promised by your hon. minister?" oh, it's still being worked on. I think this is unacceptable if we are asking developers and landlords to be part of the solution, and we're promising them that there is some financial incentive, you know, be it tax credits, be it money up front, be it assistance with their mortgages or their bank loans or whatever. I don't know what the programs are, and apparently neither do the government officials.

I am hoping that there would be like a one-stop shop for MLAs and for constituents alike to go to and say: "Okay. We have the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation. We have the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. We have the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports. There is Finance. There is the Treasury Board." The issue is so stretched out and so diluted that we don't know who to go to. So my question today with respect to this budget and with respect to the appropriation: who should I talk to and where do I go if one of my constituents wants to build 60 units or a hundred units or however many? Where do I take him, and who should he speak to in the government? If we're serious about getting these people to partner with the government, to be part of the solution, as I mentioned, then we shouldn't give them the runaround, and honestly, MLAs should not be given the runaround as well.

Mr. Speaker, education is my third concern because, as mentioned numerous times in this House, giving school boards 3 per cent is not adequate. I was speaking to the chairperson of the Edmonton Catholic school board, and she mentioned that school bus drivers are going to receive a 9 per cent increase this year. As a layperson: how is that possible? If I give you a 3 per cent raise but I ask you to do something that would cost you 9 per cent more, how are you going to reconcile both sides of that equation? Financial charts have to be balanced, and rightly so. School boards should be accountable, and

I agree, but we should also empower them to deliver the services that we ask them to.

Given that inflation is 5 and a half per cent and given rising labour costs, transportation costs, and all these other things, I think that 3 per cent actually amounts to a budget cut. If I'm going to be asked to vote on that particular department, you know, Mr. Speaker, I'm inclined to not support that particular budget because I really think it's not fair to the school boards to be asked to do this, and then they're the ones receiving the blame and having to answer to the parents and answer to the constituents. The government of Alberta keeps its distance, and they stay behind the scenes when in fact they're the ones holding the purse strings, and they're the ones that are underfunding and undermining public education.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on about what's wrong with the budget, but I'll take an opportunity to highlight some things which are good with the budget. Take, for example, the extra funding for hiring Crown prosecutors. This is an area which I oversee in the Official Opposition, and I thought this was quite a favourable development. The Edmonton Remand is finally being constructed. Again, that's an area which members of the opposition have asked for and asked to see over many years. I'm excited that now we can finally address this seemingly chronic issue.

I'm disappointed to some extent that funding for police services did not rise by as much as I'd hoped, but I know that government agencies and departments all compete for pieces of the same cake and that we have to make concessions somewhere for other areas to be looked at more vigorously, which is fine. I'm hoping that next year my concerns with respect to police funding would be addressed and would be addressed more equitably.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I would seek unanimous consent of the House that we could work for the rest of the afternoon without jackets.

The Deputy Speaker: As I understand, the hon. Minister of Education has asked for unanimous consent for the male members to not wear jackets. Is that correct?

Mr. Liepert: That's correct.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Any others under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the comments of the member opposite he seems to have bought into this fallacy that education is underfunded. I wonder if he understands that seven-tenths of a school year is funded in the previous year's budget. For example, for the current school year seven-tenths of that was in last year's budget and three-tenths in this year's budget. So for him to constantly parrot the messages that we get from certain interested parties on this particular issue and to say that education is underfunded, I wonder if he really understands how it is funded.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, if you wish to respond.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, this is the divide that we have. Members of the opposition think that education deserves to be given more attention. We think that education is an investment in the future and that school boards should be given at least the

amount of money that basically allows them to cover their rising costs and to also pay for inflation and so on. The government doesn't factor that in. Now, whether in fact 60 per cent or 70 per cent was paid for last year versus this year, the issue is chronic because the underfunding continues.

Mr. Herard: Ten per cent, not 3.

Mr. Elsalhy: Well, they keep talking about 10 per cent and 15 per cent, and then the minister says 80 per cent since 1992 or whatever. They forget sometimes that they actually severely butchered the funding for education when they brought in their cuts in 1992. They reduced it to almost nothing, and then they increased it. It's almost like, Mr. Speaker, you drop a nuclear bomb on a city and then pretend to rebuild it. Well, what you've done is severely undermined education. [interjections] Now all of a sudden they're starting to talk. I think, you know, they had the opportunity, when we were debating those programs, to defend them.

Anyway, the question is that after you cut those budgets that severely and then you tried to give 2 per cent this year, 3 per cent next year, 4 per cent the year after and so on, there is no systematic approach for those school boards to be able to budget properly. Sometimes, depending on when the provincial budget is delivered – and, you know, Mr. Speaker, that this year the provincial budget was late – their ability to budget and their ability to forecast what's going to happen in the future is restricted. We've heard stories and situations where school boards are now laying off staff, and then they'll see what will happen in the fall. So we don't know . . .

Mr. Liepert: Where? Name them.

3:40

Mr. Elsalhy: Well, haven't you heard in question period today that the question from the hon. Member for St. Albert mentioned 15 people being laid off? Grande Prairie, Mr. Speaker: here's an example.

They choose to ignore these facts, and it's a government that's in denial, Mr. Speaker. If educators, parents, and school boards, all of them, are agreeing that education needs to be funded in a better way and that more resources should be allocated to school boards to be able to deliver those essential services that we ask them to, then 3 per cent really doesn't cut it. Three per cent doesn't match inflation, doesn't match the rising costs of labour, transportation. Books even cost more. How can the Ministry of Education expect a school board to change curriculum, for example, and buy new books when, in fact, their costs cannot be met?

Well, the reliance on parents' fundraising and the reliance on school fees and casinos should really stop, Mr. Speaker. This is a government that should really live up to its responsibility. We elect governments, and we pay them taxes to deliver those services. We don't elect them to say: "Here, dear school board, take 3 per cent. You take the blame. We'll stay behind." This is unacceptable to me.

Mr. Liepert: Campaign on a sales tax next time.

Mr. Elsalhy: Oh, the Minister of Education would like to impose a sales tax for parents to be able to afford their kids' education.

Education is public, Mr. Speaker, and should remain this way. We should not really off-load that provincial responsibility and abdicate it onto the backs of parents and onto the backs of school boards, which are undermined.

Thank you very much.

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

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I notice that the member over there that was just speaking was talking about adding more money to education. I guess I have a simple question in my last 15 seconds. How much more would he add, and where would he get the money? I heard the minister say in QP today that we've raised education spending by 86 per cent over the last 10 years. Well, inflation only went up about 29 per cent, and enrolments only went up about 5 per cent. I'm just wondering: how much is enough, and where would he get the money?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time for Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Others on the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the debate on Bill 43 this afternoon. I've been listening with a great deal of interest to the discussions so far. When we look at the budget this year and we look at the budget 10 years ago, it has certainly more than doubled. There are many reasons why we need this sort of instant infusion of cash. We are spending a lot of money. The government is certainly hoping that voters will forget that this is the same government who did very little to maintain our existing infrastructure, and now as a result of that, we have the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation digging into a big black bag over there because there are so many outstanding projects that need immediate attention.

Certainly, whenever we look at this budget and we look at this bill and we look at the current state of education, education cannot be neglected. I know public education is not respected by some members of the government caucus, but it cannot be neglected. If we need more money, hon. members, I would say that the first place we should look is Horse Racing Alberta. [interjections] Oh, yeah. I hear all these sorts of callous laughs over there.

Surely, the current minister of advanced education knows this better than anyone else. Why would an outfit like that need any government subsidies or any lottery grants? In the public accounts book it is a grant. It is listed as a grant in the blue book. Subsidy has been a little bit kind with that line item of over \$50 million. They can certainly afford to pay millions of dollars in cash, hon. minister of advanced education. You should know this from your past as the minister of agriculture. They can spend millions of dollars for land in Balzac. I think the total, Mr. Speaker, is close to \$15 million in land. They paid cash for this land.

An Hon. Member: Who?

Mr. MacDonald: Horse Racing Alberta or their corporate affiliates: that's who, hon. member.

Then whenever the department of agriculture is going to give them a grant for some waterworks, well, they can come up with another \$5 million or \$6 million of their own money for that portion of it. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation is listening to this with a great deal of interest, and I'm sure it's not the first time that he's heard this. But if they can come up with that kind of money, surely they can do without any grants or subsidies from this government, and that money could be transferred into the Department of Education.

Now, if that is not enough, I was sitting listening to the budget discussions last night at the Edmonton Catholic school board, and I was listening to the discussion of the \$15 million shortfall. I

reminded myself that in the last three fiscal years this government has granted to golf courses across the province over \$7 million. These are golf courses that, I think, can stand on their own.

Mr. Liepert: Name them.

Mr. MacDonald: I can name them if you wish, hon. member, and I can start with one in Calgary called Inglewood, which has, Mr. Speaker, a substantial fee before you can join that club as a member. Vegreville, for instance: the golf course in Vegreville got a \$200,000 grant. Now, if we can afford and if our priorities are to fund lavishly all these golf courses, why on earth can we not fund public education?

The balanced budget approved for the 2007-08 year for the Edmonton Catholic schools is close to \$300 million. It's as close to \$300 million as you can get. They state – and this is in their own press release – that “the 3% increase to the Basic Education Grant does not meet the increased costs of educating today's child, so creating a balanced budget for 2007/08 was a very difficult process filled with extremely difficult decisions.” That is a quote in the press release from the board chairperson, Debbie Engel.

Now, certainly, a shortfall of \$15 million may not mean much to a group of Progressive Conservatives who are gathering around discussing a \$33 billion budget because if there's one thing we know for certain, it's that you're quite used to spending a lot of money. Whether you spend it wisely, that's another matter, but you're used to spending a lot of money. You guys spend more money than . . . [interjection] No. The New Democratic Party in Saskatchewan would be perhaps the most fiscally prudent government in the country: balanced budget. This would be on a per capita basis the most extravagant government in this . . .

Mr. Horner: Make up your mind, Hugh. Do you want us to spend more, or do you want us to spend less?

Mr. MacDonald: No, hon. minister of advanced education, I want you to spend it wisely. There are certainly places in this \$33 billion budget where it is being spent unwisely. As chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee I see ministry after ministry come through there on a weekly basis, and I'm not convinced that all the money that you are spending is being spent wisely. I just gave you two examples of where you could improve.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this \$15 million shortfall. If we look at Edmonton Catholic schools' severe special-needs funding, in 2006-07 Alberta Education funded the district for 907 students even though the district serves 1,000 special-needs students, and this created a funding shortfall of approximately \$1.5 million.

Infrastructure maintenance renewal funding. This funding has been reduced by 55 per cent, from \$12 million to \$5.4 million.

Now, the negotiation process. I hope everything works out very well this fall for the government, for the minister, for the parents, for the students, and for the teachers. The Edmonton Catholic school district is negotiating with the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Alberta union of public employees, and those contracts expire on August 31, '07. In addition, the district has just ratified a new two-year contract with the Edmonton Catholic Support Staff Association and will give staff a 4 per cent increase a year in each year of the contract.

3:50

Transportation. Costs for providing student transportation continue to increase. The budget increases by almost 8 per cent for 2007-08. Parents through the purchase of bus passes will also need to contribute an additional 10 per cent, or over \$320,000, in 2007-08.

The curriculum. The new curriculum costs for 2007-08, Mr. Speaker, will be in the range of \$1.5 million.

So those are some of the issues that Edmonton Catholic schools have.

Now, Mr. Speaker, here are some of the examples of the funding shortfalls the Edmonton Catholic schools will experience. In instructional programs, special needs: we talked about that. I would remind all hon. members of the House that funding in this area for 2007-08 has increased by only 3 per cent. With more students being served, allocations to schools remain at the same levels as 2006-07.

Full-day kindergarten – and we all know what the Learning Commission said – is offered at 17 schools, serving approximately 300 students considered at risk for failure because of socioeconomic status, language, and social/emotional factors. Now, the program was previously funded through the Alberta initiative for school improvement; however, as a second cycle of AISI projects concluded at the end of 2005-06 school year, the district is required to fund this much-needed program through other sources. Recognizing the benefits of a full-day kindergarten program, the district – and good for them – is committed to the educational benefit of the program and continues to fund the program even without dedicated funding. Surely we would be better off spending money on a full-day kindergarten program than direct grants to golf courses. Let's get our priorities right.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there's one thing I do have to say on the record, and I don't know how much time I have left. I certainly admire the Minister of Education. It's not the first time I've seen him out and about without an entourage. He comes. He talks to the people. He talks to the officials, the public at large, the teachers that are there, and he's not like, you know, an aristocratic Conservative with an entourage. He comes alone, and he goes alone, and he does a very good job communicating with the citizens. I would urge all hon. members of the front bench there to take a page from his playbook and perhaps get out and meet the people alone without this crew of executive assistants and communications people and whatnot. You should follow his actions and speak directly one on one with the citizens.

I saw him at the Edmonton Catholic school board's meeting last night. It's not the first time I've seen him there alone, and I hope it's not the last. I admire him for that because he speaks with parents and teachers and trustees, and there's not this sort of ring of protection around him like I see with other ministers. Yes.

Mr. Rodney: What are you trying to say?

Mr. MacDonald: I'm trying to say, hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, that some of these front-benchers are out of touch with the citizens of this province, but not the Minister of Education. No way.

Infrastructure maintenance renewal funding. Now, this funding is provided to school districts to upgrade and/or replace building components that have failed or pose problems in order to meet health and safety requirements, to extend the life of a school facility, and to maintain the quality of the school environment. This funding, I would remind the hon. minister of infrastructure, has been reduced by 55 per cent, again, from \$12 million to this year's anticipated budget of \$5.4 million. Alberta Infrastructure has indicated that the infrastructure maintenance and renewal funding for school districts should be 2 per cent of the value of all buildings, or about \$12 million for this specific school district, the Edmonton Catholic school district. In 2006-07 the district received \$12 million, but in this year funding will be reduced to \$5.4 million, or a reduction of \$6 million, of 55 per cent.

Now, why is this? If this is such a great budget and we're funding public education the way it should be funded, why is this? We know what happens when there is a lack of planned infrastructure spending: the bill gets bigger later on.

With transportation and transportation fees one has to recognize that the price of gasoline is going up, and that's another issue. But costs for providing student transportation continue to rise due to the high cost of fuel and rising operator costs. That's the maintenance of the buses and the drivers' wages. Transportation grants have increased by 3 per cent, and as a result we're asking parents to pick up the tab again. Parents are required to pay the additional costs of providing transportation for their children. In 2007-08 parents will contribute 3 and a half million dollars towards getting their children to school, an increase of 10 per cent. In 2006-07 it's interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that according to the Edmonton Catholic school board this rose to approximately \$3.2 million, an increase of school bus passes of 33 per cent. In September of 2007 bus passes for elementary, junior high, and high school will increase by \$3 per month.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available again if anyone wishes to participate.

Mr. Bonko: Well, I was curious as to if the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was going to finish. He was cut off there, so I wasn't sure what he was going to say. I'd appreciate him being able to finish his little piece there.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, do you have some more comments?

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore: in September of 2007 bus passes for elementary, junior high, and high school students will increase by \$3 per month. It may seem like a very small amount of money. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora met many of these individuals when he was on the housing task force, but that amount of money may be significant for some families who have been forced to pay megabucks for rental accommodation. One of the reasons why they're forced to pay these megabucks is because there has been an absence of planning – a complete absence of planning – by this government in the last five years.

Edmonton city council, Mr. Speaker, displayed their commitment to affordable bus transportation this spring when they reduced the original bus pass increase of \$7.75 per month to only a \$1.25 increase per month. We should note the commitment from Edmonton city council.

In conclusion I would just like to say, Mr. Speaker, that by attending that budget meeting last night, I learned a great deal, and I'm more convinced than ever that we have our spending priorities wrong in this government. Public education and public health care should be our priorities.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there others that wish to participate in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I certainly appreciate having the opportunity to speak to the Appropriation Act, Bill 43. It makes one feel that we're approaching the end to be able to sum things together here to some degree. I'm sure that there's a sense of relief although

a sense as well certainly in the New Democrat caucus that there are so many things that have gone unlooked after that there's a degree of anxiety as well.

4:00

You know, we have a proper economic and social service mandate responsibility in the Legislature here. The management of the economy and the services that we provide through the provincial government have to keep pace with the rapid changes that we're experiencing here in the province of Alberta at this time. The most general sense with this budget is that while the government has boosted its expenditures to start addressing some of the difficult problems that we're all facing here in the province of Alberta, the inflation as well as labour and resource shortages ensure that the government has a difficult if not impossible task to be able to meet the needs of the growing economy.

You have a classic situation where you have rapid expansion and the inflation and shortages that accompany that rapid expansion, and as a result it limits our capacity to deal with growth pressures in the province of Alberta at this time. Although others might look from the outside and consider it an enviable position – certainly, if I look around the large economies around North America, there is none that is growing quite as fast as Alberta – looking from the inside out, we realize, of course, that there are many serious problems that accompany such rapid growth as well.

My comments here this afternoon are just going to go around those basic ideas. Let's just take a look at a quick snapshot of the problems that we do have to face here with this budget. The provincial inflation rate in the province of Alberta is at least 5.5 per cent. This is the highest that it's been in 15 years in this province, and it's certainly the highest in the country. We have a labour shortage that's grinding away the productivity capacity of the province. We have a housing and construction industry that's looking at 25 per cent increases in building costs at least. That's not counting the cost of property, which is included in the sticker price for individuals and families looking to buy places to live. We have staff shortages in such critical areas as health care and in certain professions, engineering and construction.

Rents are increasing at twice the rate of inflation, which is even more troubling considering we have this 15-year high for inflation. Contributing to that but compounding it are these galloping rent rate increases, which of course cause no end of difficulty for people in their individual monthly budgets. We have an infrastructure deficit which we as New Democrats have calculated at being at least \$20 billion and counting, and that's not accounting for that inflation that's increasing that bill by the month.

We have a K to 12 education sector that certainly is very good, but we seem to have some structural problems financing that K to 12 education budget. I'll make more specific comments on that later.

We have postsecondary institutions around the province that have limited spaces and are requiring increased standards to apply to those institutions. As a result, thousands of students are being turned away from postsecondary institutions due to shortages of space.

Finally, I would like to point out as well that we're losing quite literally millions and millions of dollars every day through a royalty structure that's not capturing the value of our resources that everyone in this province owns. As I said, every single day, I would suggest, we are losing millions and millions of dollars. If we had one of those little clocks that they have that counts off some sort of countdown to the Olympics or something like that, if we had something similar that might demonstrate the money that we're losing from an outdated royalty rate, perhaps that would turn the balance in terms of people being concerned enough to have immedi-

ate action on the royalty rates rather than waiting months and months like we have been recently.

In our estimation this budget that we've seen before us in the last month or so makes two things very, very clear. Number one, the economy, despite budgetary surpluses that we have, is clearly overheated, and number two, only now is the government and its various departments waking up to what a formidable task we have ahead of us to put things back into balance.

The \$2 billion surplus in the government's pocket does not mean necessarily, Mr. Speaker, more money into the citizens' pockets. More money is better paid with lower costs for working Albertans; however, such is not the case as we've seen the spiralling costs that Albertans have to pay. So with these circumstances together the problem with the budget was that while the government has boosted expenditures to start addressing these problems, inflation is well above the absolute. As well, the labour and resource shortage will ensure that the government will have a difficult time dealing with this whole situation.

I would like to just look specifically at some areas here, and one area that I would like to talk about just briefly is infrastructure. The budget in infrastructure is reflective of, I think, an ideological basis to use P3s at every opportunity. Certainly, you know, we have seen kind of some luck in regards to P3s working to the advantage, but the thing with the P3 is that you have a deal over a long period of time, so at some point you're going to have to pay the piper; otherwise, the business that has signed into the P3 will either have to pull out because they're losing so much money or will have to renegotiate the terms of the contract. It's a hit-and-miss situation at best.

The evidence that we've gathered from around the world and across the country and, indeed, from our own experiences such as in the courthouse in Calgary shows that P3s are problematic. We have to at the very least watch them very closely over a long period of time to see if they, indeed, work the best for public monies being spent.

Now, infrastructure in general. The minister admitted that only a third of the roads that are required to be repaired at this time are in fact scheduled to be done, yet even with an increased allocation in roads and highway maintenance of approximately \$100 million, the construction industry has publicly stated that there are not enough people to even take on these additional projects. So while we might have the best of intentions, again, the whole different tentacles of an overheated economy come to lay waste to our best laid plans that we might have.

The minister has consistently shortchanged Alberta's cities and municipalities, still claiming to give municipalities extra money for capital projects, but conveniently tied at least half of these projects to provincially mandated priorities. That makes it difficult for municipalities to execute their long-term plans for, say, rapid transit and other projects if they have the money earmarked specifically for other things.

Despite an additional expenditure of \$600 million through the budget, Mr. Speaker, Alberta faces a \$20 billion infrastructure deficit, and that's conveniently similar to the amount of money that had been cut over the preceding years from expenditures here in this Legislature, so there you go. It's not as though you can avoid those expenditures over time. Eventually it comes back like karma, as I said before, to lay waste to one's plans for the future.

4:10

In terms of education I think that we see, again, an unwillingness to look at the long-term development and growth of this province, and education is a good example of that. We have \$508 million set

aside for capital projects in the education sector. This is actually a 5.8 per cent decrease in money from last year and will continue to decrease over the years. This is something that seems to be hidden within the budget somehow. The approved projects will be a quarter of the actual number of projects requested as of December 2006 so, again, not meeting the infrastructure needs of education. Just in one city, Calgary, by my count there are at least up to 40 communities that require schools but don't have them. This is not something that you can continue on forever.

The educational need of students is paramount, and it's very time sensitive. As we said earlier this afternoon, perhaps Edmonton Catholic school board's budget is a harbinger of things to come for many other school boards finding some problems with their capital budgets. Edmonton Catholic schools is saying that they've experienced a 55 per cent decline in their capital budget.

In regard to program expenditures certainly we've used up a fair amount of energy in the last few weeks talking about the program earmarked increase at 3 per cent here in the province. You know, this is, of course, out of sync with even the rate of inflation here in the province of Alberta. I still have not had explained to me adequately how exactly we are going to divide up those fishes and loaves to pay the 2 or even 3 or 4 per cent differential between what the program expenditure needs are and what school boards are being given to work with.

As, again, we talked about earlier today and previously, negotiations are coming up with the Teachers' Association. The school boards will be in a very difficult situation indeed. We really are not in a position to require this sort of strife here at this time. I just really question the utility of it. Why are we stirring up the public education system, which we all agree is a very, very excellent public education system and deserves to be reinforced and buttressed and not shaken and turned upside down?

You know, we often dispute figures. This is something that commonly comes out, but I beg to differ that we do spend the most money on students here and from across the country. There are other jurisdictions that do indeed spend more money and with less utilities available to them. So it's a question of how you say what their spending is. I think that we deserve to do better here in the province of Alberta. The main thing is to make sure that we are meeting the cost of delivering education here in the province of Alberta, which is expensive because of the very hot economy that we are functioning under.

The unfunded liability issue. Certainly, we've expended lots of energy on that as well. It's important that we do go and sit down at the table here as soon as possible. Now is a good time to do so and not delay that decision as well.

The last short bit of comment that I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, is in regard to the environment budget. Once again, I'm just reiterating some of the things that I've said before. You know, I really believe – and I'm sure the minister would agree with me in his heart of hearts – that the environment budget in this province has been down by at least a third or a quarter from what it should be. The environment sort of underscores so much of our other economy that we participate in here in the province. If we are not investing in sustainable industry and reinforcing and using the Department of Environment to regulate and to police a sustainable unfolding of our economy, then really we're just living on borrowed time. Without an adequate environment program that is dedicated, then I think we're just living on borrowed time.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder just a few minutes ago indicated that there are other jurisdictions that spend significantly more money on education. I'm wondering which jurisdictions those would be.

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, it depends on how you define it, but certainly the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon spend more. I'll have to check on it, but in terms of per-student funding for a certain category, I think Manitoba spends more by \$500, as well, from the 2004 figures.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Yes. I'd like to ask the hon. member to clarify the amount of the infrastructure debt that he spoke about. Can you give us a little more information?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks. I appreciate that question. It's something we've been working on for a number of months, and we will continue to unfold it as the summer progresses. What it is is that we've taken an accumulation of not just education and infrastructure but also health care, building long-term care facilities, lots of projects that have been deferred over time and that we now require. What our preliminary investigations revealed is that this infrastructure deficit is in excess of \$20 billion, which happens to coincide, very interestingly enough, with the budget cuts that we've seen over the last few years on these same projects.

You know, it's like you can't hide these things over time because, of course, the province's needs have actually been expanding exponentially with upwards of 100,000 people moving here, say, last year. We're supporting all of these new people and new enterprises and an expanded economy on the same infrastructure that might have supported 2 million or even less than 2 million people here in the province.

It's a classic case that we've seen. You see it all around the world. You might see a city like Mexico City or Lagos, Nigeria, or Bangkok, Thailand, you know, where you have a city that's designed for, let's say, a million people, and suddenly you have 10 million people living there, so everything is that much more strained. It's always prudent to spend a dime wisely when later on you'll end up having to spend considerably more. I was just astounded at the symmetry of the deficit that was paid down years before and now what we have to pay the piper. It's almost exactly the same. Isn't that interesting?

The Deputy Speaker: Others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder would elaborate on which particular departments' budgets have been cut in the last 12 years. I think he made reference to that, saying that there had been a number of cuts. I personally haven't seen a single cut. All I've seen are consistent increases, but perhaps he has some information I haven't seen. If he does, I'd ask him to share it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Well, sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker and hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek. The departments that I've been following – and let's not forget to take into account inflation and increased jurisdiction. The Environment budget is a perfect example of this

because you have an increased responsibility and an increased expectation, but the numbers are almost equal or very, very similar from 2007 and 2006, even 2005. You don't have, you know, any significant, real increase. Rather, you have just sort of holding the line, so to speak.

Another area that we've now started to see some small increase, you know, is in the area of arts and culture. When you're dealing from a deficit situation, when you're dealing from an underfunded department budget for quite a number of years, you know, when you put in some dribs and drabs of money, then in my estimation that is the definition of just holding the line and not increasing.

Thanks.

[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a second time]

4:20

Bill 44

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move Bill 44, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, for second reading.

The act is very straightforward. It deals with, as miscellaneous statutes acts do, basic amendments that are not changes in policy and direction but usually corrections of statutes or changes of names. I'd ask the Assembly to approve it for second reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone wish to participate in debate?
Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a second time]

head:

**Private Bills
Second Reading**

Bill Pr. 1

**CyberPol – The Global Centre for
Securing Cyberspace Act**

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo I move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act.

This is a groundbreaking, proactive bill, and I commend the members of the Standing Committee on Private Bills, a multiparty committee, for their extensive consideration and visionary recommendation of this bill to the Legislature. In turn, I ask all my colleagues to support Bill Pr. 1.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise to respond to Bill Pr. 1, CyberPol, in second reading. I want to indicate that I'm a member of the Private Bills Committee, which met on a few occasions to discuss both Pr. 1 and Pr. 2. While Pr. 2 didn't make it onto the floor of the Assembly, Pr. 1, in fact, did. I wanted to use this opportunity to highlight why it's important to be dealing with the rising incidence of Internet crime and cybercrime.

Now, let's start by talking about the definition of cybercrime, Mr. Speaker. These are crimes which involve things like child pornography, financial fraud, threats to infrastructure and intellectual

property, identity theft, and so on. I was looking on the Internet for a more concise definition, and I actually ran across one from Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. They define cybercrime by going through an overview of situations which would be captured under that definition. They say:

Cyber crime consists of specific crimes dealing with computers and networks (such as hacking) and the facilitation of traditional crime through the use of computers (child pornography, hate crimes, telemarketing/Internet fraud). In addition to cyber crime, there is also “computer-supported crime” which covers the use of computers by criminals for communication and document or data storage. While these activities might not be illegal in and of themselves, they are often invaluable in the investigation of actual crimes. Computer technology presents many new challenges to social policy regarding issues such as privacy, as it relates to data mining and criminal investigations.

The RCMP has been dealing with this for quite a while. Provincial agencies and departments have been dealing with this for quite a while. It’s an issue that is not new, but it’s an issue that is on the rise.

In the Committee on Private Bills the petitioner who brought forward Bill Pr. 1 gave us a brief overview of cybercrime and the reasons which he listed for the province of Alberta to support the establishment of this privately run centre for securing cyberspace. The petitioner talked about the population on the Internet, you know, how many billions of people are on the Internet. Basically, he took the numbers from 2005, and then he extrapolated to 2010. He also talked about Internet usage in Canada, that 64 per cent of Canadian households had at least one member who used the Internet regularly in the year 2003, and that this number has probably grown since then. He also mentioned that 90 per cent or more of Canadian Internet users are between the ages of 18 and 24 years, and in 2005, another statistic, 67 per cent of Canadian adults used the Internet.

He also demonstrated that cybercrime seems to be on the rise, whereas, in fact, physical crime seems to be on the decline. Many reasons could be attributed to why this might be transpiring. Some of it might be explained easily, Mr. Speaker, by the fact that cybercrime is new, or at least it’s newer than physical crime. Law enforcement agencies are getting more efficient, and their intelligence and their mechanisms and their tools are getting more sophisticated to catch physical crime or to mitigate its damaging effects, whereas their efforts to curb cybercrime are still in their first steps. He also talked about hacking and denial-of-service attacks, and he talked about terrorism and child porn as some of those examples.

You know, we’ve even heard of a situation where Russia as a country has used cyberterrorism against other smaller countries, members of the former Soviet Union, for example Moldavia. It’s a small country, one of those small nations which separated from the Soviet Union. Russia, itself, brought them to their knees, brought them to a freeze, to a standstill, by targeting their government computers, and they didn’t recover till about 36 hours after the attack when they actually resorted to engaging their backup systems and stuff like that.

It could be used on a global scale as well. Are we concerned in Alberta? Yes, you bet. Should we be concerned nationally and internationally? Yes, we should be.

Many of us in this House have received some e-mails and letters from concerned parents who approached all the MLAs in the House and urged us to support Bill Pr. 1. Now, we shouldn’t really dismiss this because of the fact that these parents are under the impression that Bill Pr. 1 strengthens laws and toughens penalties for things like Internet child luring and child exploitation, for example. These parents are under the impression that Bill Pr. 1 achieves that. In responding to them, I explained: “Here is the text for the bill. You

can read it for yourselves. It only establishes a physical presence, a building where agencies, governments, and individuals even from Alberta, from Canada, from the international community are going to come together to talk about Internet crime, to study it, to research ways to curb it or to reduce it and so on and so forth, but this bill in particular, as it stands, doesn’t really toughen laws or make things harder for criminals.” They were under the impression that we’re doing something to increase penalties, for example, for child luring and child exploitation online and things like this, child pornography, but really the bill doesn’t do that.

I also argued both in committee and outside that this should have been a government initiative. I would have much rather seen this brought by the hon. Minister of Justice or the hon. Solicitor General, for example, introduced in the House as a government initiative, as part of a bigger government approach to cybercrime. Now, am I against a private citizen bringing forward an idea like this? No, not necessarily. But, you know, I think a private citizen would have had other opportunities to establish this centre, be it through the Societies Act or the charitable organizations act or whatever mechanisms exist in the statutes.

4:30

I also briefly touched on the fact that Interpol operates a high-tech, top-of-the-line centre in Ottawa which basically focuses on things that are being discussed here and that maybe Alberta could have collaborated more with Interpol and, you know, not have the need for a stand-alone, privately run centre to be established in this province.

Now, in deliberations in committee, Mr. Speaker, we also had the opportunity to ask some questions of the petitioner. For the most part we got some answers back, but I’m going to put on the record some of the other questions which I don’t feel have been adequately answered. Take, for example, a question of whether, in fact, the petitioner approached the provincial government with this idea prior to introducing it to the Private Bills Committee. The answer was that, yes, some presentations were made to high-level government officials, that the overview of the bill was introduced to them.

One of the remarks in that answer, Mr. Speaker, indicates that the private objectives of Bill Pr. 1 may in the future be combined with public objectives, which I find vague. The petitioner’s legal counsel goes on to say that this will only happen when a minister of the Crown, responsible to the Legislature, chooses to do so. Well, why don’t they choose ahead of time? Why wait for a private citizen to bring this forward and then choose or not choose to engage this centre in government work?

Another question which was given to the petitioner asked if this centre would duplicate or interfere with some of the work currently being carried on by existing government departments and agencies. Examples were given as in the policing and community safety branch of the Solicitor General and Public Security ministry or the special prosecutions branch, technology and Internet crimes division of Alberta Justice. So we do have the mechanisms and the agencies in-house to handle things like this. You know, the integrated child exploitation unit is another example and so on and so forth. Why not use our own tools and facilities?

The answer which was given back to the committee reads, and I quote: due to cross-jurisdictional issues, limited capacity, and cost it would not be feasible for such a project to be carried on by an existing government department. I think this is a little judgmental, you know, for the petitioner to indicate that, in their opinion, government would not be able to undertake such an initiative. I think that this needs to be looked at more carefully.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

Another question which was given to the petitioner was asking about the information that is gathered or stored in the centre and whether, in fact, the government of Alberta would own this information and if fees are going to be charged for access. The answer basically came back saying that information gathered through the CyberPol centre would not be shared except where required by applicable law or treaty. With all due respect to lawyers and members of the legal community this is lawyer talk, and I don't understand what it says. Information is going to be shared as required by applicable law or treaty. The questions were: are you going to charge fees for access, and who owns the information? Those two questions were not answered.

Another question is asking the centre what its reaction is going to be if it receives a subpoena or an order to release information from a court of law in a foreign country, or from a foreign government for that matter. When can the centre say yes, and when can the centre say no? What are the criteria? Again, as in the other question the answer came: information gathered at CyberPol would not be shared except where required by applicable law or treaty.

What about the PATRIOT Act? You know, we've heard about situations like the Maher Arar case where Canadian authorities regretted releasing him to Syrian authorities because of the ill treatment he was subjected to and ended up, in fact, in a lawsuit and a financial settlement to compensate him for the damages that he sustained when he was in prison overseas. So how are they going to react to a subpoena or an order under the PATRIOT Act, for example, or anything similar to it from other governments across the world?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There's another issue, but it's not really that major, Mr. Speaker, with respect to directors and governors receiving remuneration. In my limited experience as an MLA I've come to the conclusion that typically with nonprofit centres and nonprofit agencies, you know, when you have directors or governors, they would be volunteers, for the most part. So, again, it's not really a major thing.

I just find it puzzling that somebody who is hoping to establish something of this magnitude doesn't go through the other avenues but chooses instead to come before the House. What if their objectives change? What if their mandates change? They would have to come back to the House again through the Private Bills Committee and ask for an amendment or ask for changes to their constitution. It could have been much simpler for them and for this House to come through those other avenues which they have available to them.

Mr. Speaker, again, just to emphasize, I would have much rather seen this as a government initiative, part of a bigger piece that this government is serious about Internet crime rather than allowing, you know, private people to come together and do this, even with the promise that it's going to be nonprofit. I'm really interested in hearing why the former Solicitor General is so enthusiastic in his support for this particular idea.

I invite further debate, and I thank you for the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am really glad to have the opportunity to speak to Bill Pr. 1, CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act. I have had constituents contact me asking me to vote in favour of Bill Pr. 1. They express concerns about our high-tech world. They feel that it is vitally important to

increase public safety against high-tech crime. There's a lot of fear. I think some of it, perhaps, is because of ignorance about what is actually the potential of high-tech crime.

At the same time, there's evidence that there's an increase in identity theft, hacking mischief, and child sex predators are a great threat to the citizens of this province. There need to be stronger laws and stiffer penalties for these types of crimes. I am concerned about cybercrime in general. As a parent and a former teacher I am really concerned about the luring and exploitation of children in particular. We need to be clear that Bill Pr. 1 does nothing to toughen penalties or to make laws stronger. What it does is establish an independent liaison centre for intelligence gathering and information storage or sharing but without the law enforcement mandate that I believe should go along with it.

I like the direction and intent of Pr. 1 and congratulate the citizen for bringing this forward, but I really would have liked to see this as part of a cross-ministry government initiative where Justice, Solicitor General, Education, and Children's Services could work together because all areas are concerned with crime in general and certainly with cybercrime. This bill is about intelligence gathering on criminal activity. It would be about individuals who are stealing identity and exploiting children. So I see it as working in conjunction with the RCMP or CSIS or the FBI or CIA or MI6, and this is all regarding, then, the ability of the policing or the law enforcement communities to work together to combat crime throughout the world from a centre. This makes good sense.

It would provide a centre in Alberta that would provide the type of law enforcement and/or law enforcement response or working with law enforcement throughout the world. We all know that our world has gotten smaller over the years partly because of high tech, and it only makes sense that we're looking at steps to be on top by using high tech. Certainly, this is something that we should be discussing. Internet crime is on the rise. Identity theft, financial fraud, child exploitation, and luring, all online, are significant concerns.

4:40

The agency resulting from this bill, as I understand it, would have the full weight of the law behind it, but it's still just a private entity attempting to do good. I wonder, as a colleague this afternoon mentioned, if it might be duplicating some of the work that has already been done or that, perhaps, it could interfere because we do have departments and agencies of this government that work in the area.

I have a number of questions too that I haven't found the answers to. One that I don't understand is: will there be fees charged for access, for the release of information? I understand, certainly, that many nonprofit agencies and centres might need the information. I'm wondering if the charge of fees will be based on necessity and merit. Will this become a revenue-generating mechanism because it will be private?

It's important to note that this legislation will not usurp provincial legislation or the Criminal Code of Canada. Those laws are in place. It's the law for the whole country regarding criminal activity, so they can't usurp that authority. That's very important.

It will provide the partnership of law enforcement agencies throughout the world working together regarding child exploitation, identity theft, and all the other issues related to fraud over the Internet. We don't have that kind of centre in Alberta. I know that we have the ICE unit that was formed. I believe there are about 21 officers that work related to Internet child exploitation, and I understand that their backlog is incredible with the amount of investigations that they have to work on. This bill is much bigger

than that because it's working with individuals throughout the world that are setting up these sites.

As I said, cybercrime is on the rise. It presents many challenges for law enforcement because it is so new. The extent of the potential for cybercrime is frightening. We must be concerned, and we must act. I think this bill is very important, but as far as I can see, it does not do enough in terms of what the public expects. The individuals getting in touch with me are actually thinking that we're going to be toughening up the laws and that law enforcement, as a result, will better protect us against Internet crime. I'm interested in hearing what others have to say about this.

Again, I certainly do support the intent. I feel that the need is very great. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any comments or questions.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very interested to rise on this bill. It's a visionary bill, and I must commend the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for bringing this forward. The nature of cybercrime and cybercriminals is changing constantly as technology changes, and to establish a global centre for securing cyberspace would provide some very welcome ways to try and deal with a huge problem and a growing problem in our society.

I'd like to state some statistics from a study centred at the University of Alberta focusing mainly on the child pornography problem that we see in Internet usage. It looks at a lot of statistics from the U.S. Of those arrested in the U.S. for the possession of child pornography between 2000 and 2001, 83 per cent had images involving children between the ages of six and 12, 39 per cent had images involving children between the ages of three and five, and 19 per cent had images of infants and toddlers under the age of three. That was from a report in 2006 by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in Virginia entitled *Child Pornography Possessors Arrested in Internet-Related Crimes: Findings from the National Juvenile Online Victimization Study*.

Another point is that more than 20,000 images of child pornography are posted on the Internet every week. That's from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Another point is that "more babies and toddlers are appearing on the net and the abuse is getting worse. It is more torturous and sadistic than it ever was before. The typical age of children is between ages six and 12, but the profile is getting younger." That's from Professor Max Taylor, *Combating Paedophile Information Networks*.

On child sexual abuse there's a New Zealand Internal Affairs study that suggests that there's an association between viewing child pornography and committing sexual abuse. That's from New Zealand's Department of Internal Affairs, *Internet Traders of Child Pornography: Profiling Research*, by Caroline Sullivan in October of 2005 and January 10, 2006. Another point is that Internet pedophiles are increasingly adopting counterintelligence techniques to protect themselves from being traced. That's from the National Criminal Intelligence Service, and that's back in '03.

Another point is that 40 per cent of people charged with child pornography also sexually abuse children, police say, but finding the predators and identifying the victims are daunting tasks. That's from an article in Reuters in 2003. Another point is that 1 in 5 children who used computer chat rooms have been approached over the Internet by pedophiles. That's from Detective Chief Superintendent Keith Ackerman in the *Telegraph*, UK, in January of 2002.

The statistics go on and on. The quotes go on and on about this increasing and terrible crime. Another point is that 4 per cent of all

Internet users in 2005 said that online solicitors asked them for nude or sexually explicit photographs of themselves. That's from the *Online Victimization of Youth* study in 2006 from the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. Another is in a survey conducted by The Intelligence Group. *Dateline* questioned 500 teenagers across the U.S., aged 14 to 18, about their computer habits. When asked if someone they met online had wanted to meet them in person, 58 per cent said yes, and 29 per cent said they've had a scary experience online. That's from the study *Most Teens Say They've Met Strangers Online*, MSNBC interactive, April 26, 2006.

Another point: 23 per cent of youth were very or extremely upset by exposures to sexual content online. That was K.J. Mitchell, D. Finkelhor, and J. Wolack, *Victimization of Youths on the Internet*, New York, 2003. Another point is that 31 per cent of 7th to 12th graders have pretended to be older to get onto a website, which can lead to other things.

The statistics, the studies go on and on. Mr. Speaker, this is a tremendous and ongoing problem. I hope this bill can be funded as soon as possible to establish such a site in Alberta. I think it is visionary. I think it is important. I think it is something that we must and should move ahead on. You know, there are people that have been in major stories, even close to this Legislature, being charged with child porn. I think it is something that is necessary for this Legislature to look at, to deal with, and to try and eradicate as much as we can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a second time]

head: 4:50 **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading

Bill 39
Engineering, Geological and Geophysical
Professions Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Dunford: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to first say that I appreciate all of the discussion that we've had on this bill in second reading and also, of course, in committee.

I might note that we have a couple of guests in the gallery. I appreciate that the minister may have wanted to introduce them. Neil Windsor from APEGGA and Barry Cavanaugh from ASET are here to be part of this historic event, and I thank them for coming.

Just to recap very quickly, Mr. Speaker, Bill 39 will reflect a new governance model: one act, two associations to regulate professional engineer, geoscientist, and engineering technologist practice. This model was agreed upon by both of the associations, and of course the proposed changes will continue to ensure the highest standards of public safety are met both by APEGGA and ASET.

Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to move third reading of Bill 39, the *Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2007*.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to respond and thank the hon. member for introducing this bill. This has been waited upon by many, and a lot of work has gone on in the past and in coming up with a memorandum of agreement, and both associa-

tions, ASET and APEGGA, have worked together to make this possible.

I don't have anything further to add from my comments during second reading. This model of one act, two associations will indeed better protect the public interest by assuring the competence of engineering and technology professionals across the spectrum of their practices. I would like to wish them all the best in the future as they continue to work together.

This is all about professionalism. As I mentioned in second reading, it's all about moving forward, and I commend them for the focus, especially on the ethics of the professions. It's really important to have an ethics code, and it's a question of providing the discipline, the processes of accountability for the members of the profession, so they can raise their heads high. This is a good day in the life of Alberta and especially for engineers and technologists.

I would support third reading of this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a third time]

Bill 26

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to move third reading of Bill 26, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007.

The purpose of Bill 26 is to confirm the use of the minister's guidelines and to ensure the stability and integrity of the property assessment base. The minister's guidelines have been and will continue to be developed in consultation with assessors, municipalities, the taxpayers, and their associations. One important point is that Bill 26 does not take away the right to appeal assessment. There have been a number of challenges to the minister's guidelines, and these challenges are not about the content of the guidelines but merely about how they were put into place.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to express my gratitude for the work of the staff and the time and the effort that they put into this bill. I am, indeed, very grateful.

I would encourage all members of this Assembly to support the passing of Bill 26. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a third time]

Bill 29

Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2007

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

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and move third reading of Bill 29, the Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2007.

As mentioned previously, Bill 29 will provide Alberta farmers with access to more sources for leasing farm equipment for their operations. I'd just like to say that I do appreciate the support received from all hon. members and anticipate their continued support at third reading. I'd also like to thank all of those behind the scenes who helped with this bill, and I'd like to thank the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food for giving me the opportunity to carry this important bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. Certainly, Bill 29 is, I think, a step in the right direction. I would like to express my gratitude to the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar for his work on this legislation. Any questions that we did have earlier, he made every effort to provide an answer. I certainly see no reason or concern to hold up this legislation. I would hope that all farmers and farm implement dealers are satisfied with this legislative initiative.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a third time]

Bill 32

Animal Health Act

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

Mr. Melchin: Thank you. On behalf of the Minister of Agriculture and Food I'm delighted to stand up as an expert on this topic and move third reading of Bill 32, Animal Health Act.

The provisions in Bill 32 will allow Alberta to better prepare for an outbreak of highly contagious livestock disease and respond to emergency situations quicker and more effectively to protect animal and human health. During Committee of the Whole review of Bill 32 concern was expressed for the paramouncy over section 17(2)(b) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. On behalf of the ministry I can assure all hon. members that the bill is appropriately balanced to provide access to information when required to protect public health and also to provide the appropriate level of privacy protection for individual animal owners.

On behalf of the minister of agriculture I move third reading.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, when we look at this legislation, there are some very good reasons for supporting it. Unfortunately, I cannot be satisfied with the explanation as to why we need to override the view of the Privacy Commissioner regarding this legislation. The Privacy Commission was consulted. I appreciate hearing from the minister of agriculture on that. As far as I know, he does not agree with the proposed paramouncy provision in Bill 32. There is this issue of differing legal opinions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food believes one thing, and others have a different view.

When you consider this, I am disappointed to say that I cannot support this legislation at this time in third reading. There have been some discussions about changing it, but that's not going to happen. I can see right now where the majority is going to rule.

Whenever you look at the disclosure harmful to personal privacy under section 17(2) and 17(2)(b) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, we have brought this up. We have put our concerns on the table. We have asked why this is necessary. There has not been to date, in my opinion, an adequate explanation as to why we need these paramouncy provisions.

5:00

So I'm sorry. There are other parts of this act that are very worth while, but on the record I think this is going to come back to haunt us. I hope it will not come back in some sort of trade sanction with our American neighbours and give R-CALF a reason to promote

further restrictions or limitations of our cattle exports to the American market. I just hope we're not walking into something that we will regret, and I sincerely hope for all the ag producers and for this Assembly that I am over the course of time proven wrong.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to speak about Bill 32, the Animal Health Act. The Livestock Diseases Act was created in 1946, and it's therefore outdated. The purpose of Bill 32, the Animal Health Act, is to repeal and replace the Livestock Diseases Act with a more modernized piece of legislation. This act will more appropriately address the issues related to animal and human health that have been discovered in recent years. The idea of this bill is that it will facilitate a more effective and efficient process for dealing with animal health emergencies.

We know that animal health issues have gained national and international attention over the last several years, most notably for Albertans the discovery of BSE, or mad cow disease, in our cattle. The discovery of BSE in Canadian cattle has led to severe trade restrictions that have had an enormous detrimental impact on Alberta's beef industry. Other animal health issues that continue to garner national and international attention include avian flu, chronic wasting disease, et cetera. So we do require a modern piece of legislation that empowers the province to deal effectively with the animal health issues that may have human health or economic trade implications.

As I look at this bill, I'm certainly willing to support it in principle, but I have questions regarding the inclusion of the paramouncy provision over the FOIP Act, section 17(2)(b).

Agriculture and Food . . . believes the proposed paramouncy provision is required to provide an increased degree of assurance to animal owners. Release of information will occur, as required by Section 32 of FOIP, when it is clearly in the public interest to do so.

The Privacy Commissioner was consulted, and he did not agree with the proposed paramouncy provision in Bill 32 being necessary. The Privacy Commissioner does not see the need for the extra secrecy, but due to differing legal interpretations of the FOIP Act, Agriculture and Food insists on hiding information from the public. That's what it looks like to me.

The minister states in a letter dated May 14, 2007, that "Agriculture and Food . . . believes the proposed paramouncy provision is required to provide an increased degree of assurance to animal owners." So what is the effect of this? Why are we doing this? Why do animal owners need an increased degree of assurance? Is it the minister's position that animal owners would hold back information, basically lie, if this provision is not included? Which animal owners has the minister consulted with to make this determination? Has the minister spoken with animal owners who say that they will not share information even though the law requires it? Are there a lot of animal owners in Alberta, in the minister's opinion, that will break the law if they don't have increased assurance in the form of secrecy provisions? I'm wondering who the minister has spoken with specifically.

If this paramouncy provision is, in fact, about protecting animal owners, why is there, then, only a five-year limit on the release of that information? Can the minister tell us why he believes it's necessary to continue with this government's tradition of being secretive, hiding information from Albertans? Can the minister tell us why he is ignoring the Privacy Commissioner? Does the minister

believe that the Privacy Commissioner is wrong? Why does the minister need to be secretive? What does the minister hope to hide from Albertans? Can the minister explain what the point of consulting with experts is if we then ignore their advice?

In his letter dated May 14, 2007, the minister states:

The Privacy Commissioner was consulted. He does not agree with the proposed paramouncy provision in Bill 32 being necessary. Because of differing legal interpretations of the [FOIP Act] Agriculture and Food . . . believes the proposed paramouncy provision is required to provide an increased degree of assurance to animal owners.

Can the minister tell us who in the department is interpreting the FOIP Act, demanding that this statute be more secretive than is necessary according to the Privacy Commissioner?

In his letter dated May 14, 2007, the minister states: "Release of information will occur, as required by Section 32 of FOIP, when it is clearly in the public interest to do so." Can the minister tell us who determines whether or not information is clearly in the public interest? Doesn't the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner play some role in that determination? Why does the minister insist on moving backwards in terms of openness and accountability? How can we justify this decision to support a bill that increases the secrecy of this government? This hardly seems to be the idea of openness that we hear so much about.

Another concern that I have is that although this bill's intention is very, very good, I think that these concerns are not being answered. I would like to state publicly, I guess, that I think this intention is great, but because the issues are so important, not only here in Alberta but throughout the world, I think that we must address the issues. But the concerns I have prevent me from supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, are there any comments or questions under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there others that wish to participate in the debate?

Does the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports wish to close on behalf of the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food?

Mr. Melchin: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a third time]

Bill 33

Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to conclude debate on Bill 33 on behalf of the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka and to move third reading.

During Committee of the Whole I was very happy to hear that so many members of this Assembly would support this important piece of legislation. I'm also happy that all members recognize the importance of providing the village of Ferintosh a safe, secure, and long-term water supply by building a regional waterline that would transfer water from the town of Bashaw. I know that the residents of Ferintosh appreciate the support and understanding of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

5:10

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we've had quite a discussion on Bill 33 to date in this Assembly. Now, we're allowing another interbasin transfer between the South Saskatchewan River basin and the North Saskatchewan River basin. I understand that this transfer cannot exceed 55 cubic decametres annually. There has been a discussion about the surplus water and what it could or could not be used for. It seems that we are frequently passing these stand-alone bills, and it indicates to me that this is like a canary in a coal mine, that we are not using our water resources prudently. I think this is a warning to all hon. members of this House that we better take our water management seriously, and I think we should do a better job of monitoring our water supply.

You look at the purpose of this bill, and you can understand the predicament that the town of Bashaw and the village of Ferintosh are in, but we need to examine more closely the process of allocation of water. That's why I would support this bill, but we have to recognize what we're doing to our water supplies. I know that this area has seen extensive changes to groundwater. I do not know at this time if that is the result of coal-bed methane development. I suspect not, but coal-bed methane development may be one of the reasons why the aquifer has been depleted.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would urge passage of this bill, but I will be very disappointed if next year or the year after members of this Assembly are debating similar legislation because this tells me that we have a lot of water management issues, particularly in central Alberta. We have to be better stewards of our most precious resource.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. Normally I would be opposed to interbasin transfers because in a number of circumstances they're interfering with the natural process. But this situation that we're talking about in Bill 33 is not the result of any fault of the citizens of Bashaw or overuse by too much industry or pollution of existing systems, so this transfer of treated water for people I see as necessary. I have great concerns, as does my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, when people all over this province – I'm talking about Stettler, Trochu, Drayton Valley, Ma-Me-O Beach, Nanton, and Ponoka – hundreds of people, turn out to meetings and express concern about how groundwater is being used or abused. There is great concern also in the community of Rosebud because of the unnatural movement of coal-bed methane into the water systems there.

I'm concerned about the effect of clear-cutting on the watershed in the Bow and Elbow and the Bragg Creek, Ghost-Waiparous, Sibbald Flats areas and about the potential EUB approval of exploration on our southeast slopes, where fracking could very much interfere with the town of Nanton's water supply as well as the ranchers and individuals who live in the southeast slope area. The water table is a very fragile circumstance, and we need to take that into greater account.

But because of the immediate need for these people at Bashaw, knowing that it will not be used for anything but drinking water, washing, and day-to-day activities of life rather than industry or irrigation or other developments, I support this bill, and I support the need for aquifer mapping, for baseline testing, for the protection and conservation of water, our most important resource. Growth has to be sustainable, and without that sustainability limits have to be applied. We need careful planning. Any need for interbasin

transfers indicates a failure of water management and planning. The province's water strategy should be directed at eliminating the need for such transfers.

A major failure of Alberta Environment is that there's currently insufficient data in Alberta to determine how much water is actually being used each year. There are records kept by Alberta Environment of how much water is allocated to different users from the licensing process, but much less is known about how much of that water is actually being used. It is impossible to create any water conservation plan without knowing how much water we actually have, both surface and groundwater. Lack of data and information on the total supply of groundwater and surface water and the lack of data on the actual water use by all sectors makes it very difficult to make informed decisions.

Lack of information on demand and management are barriers to advancing water conservation. This government has failed to identify a vision that will state future economic development goals and the role of water conservation in achieving those goals. There must be a clear policy directive that identifies whether the goal of the water strategy is to benefit the ecosystem or to enable economic growth and expansion. The lack of a clear management plan for water resources creates this need for interbasin transfers.

Caution must be exercised to ensure that water problems in the future are not always solved by transferring water between basins. This is very poor water management. Most stakeholders agree that interbasin transfers are not a sustainable mechanism for water conservation. I recognize the need for the village of Ferintosh and support this bill, but I am concerned that the practice of interbasin transfers is becoming routine in Alberta. We have to implement better conservation measures so that in the future there is no need for interbasin transfers. We need mandatory watershed management planning for all of our seven major river basins, an inventory of water supplies in the province, and an understanding of how much is being used. We need ongoing monitoring and conservation of water use in all sectors: industrial, commercial, and domestic.

There's a great need here, but also there's a need in the village of Ferintosh. As a result of that, I support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: There are five minutes of questions and answers under Standing Order 29(2)(a) if anybody wishes to participate.

Are there others who wish to participate in the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: I might as well take the opportunity. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since this bill was introduced, Bill 33, the Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act, I had a chance to actually drive out to the area just to check it out to see exactly where it was located and what may be some of the, I guess, invisible problems that might occur for a town to be able to supply itself and its growing residents with water. I was pleasantly surprised. I think it's in a great little location. It's in a pocket of rolling hills and that in the midst of Alberta, just north of Stettler. I'm just still kind of surprised because it does look like it does have, on the surface, some adequate water within its basin right there, but I guess in the heart of it it doesn't, to be able to supply for the long term. For the short term perhaps it's able to supply its residents with water, but as with every town and municipality that's thriving and would like to expand, this is the case that's before us. They won't have enough of the supply right now to be able to expand.

I share the concerns, like my colleagues from Edmonton-Mill Woods and Edmonton-Gold Bar, about the interbasin transferring and am sympathetic towards the town's plight with regard to not

having it, and it wouldn't have it unless they are able to in fact come before the Legislature and put this bill to allow such transferring. Normally, like I said, I wouldn't support something like that as I think it's occurring far too often, but in this case I would certainly support the interbasin transferring, with this exception: that we do in fact closely monitor ongoing efforts to be able to reduce and reuse as much as possible, especially in towns where it's becoming apparent that it's becoming very much a fragile resource. We continue to say on and on that within the south water is our number one resource or, as the previous Minister of Environment used to call it, blue gold. We recognize that that's going to certainly be a commodity that may at one point be traded back and forth across the border. I know that there are talks on the south side of the border as to being able to transfer this on a large scale as they are running out in the south – that's the Americans – and this is where the abundant supply is. At least that's what we consider it to be: an abundant supply.

I would support the bill, like I said, with some concerns. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

The Deputy Speaker: Again Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there others who wish to participate in the debate?

Does the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose wish to close?

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a third time]

head:

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 30
Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 30, Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007.

The primary purpose of this bill is to facilitate the establishment of the Alberta emergency management agency. Creating the agency is a component of the government's response to the Environmental Protection Commission's recommendations following the CN Rail derailment at Lake Wabamun in 2005. We started building the framework for the agency last year, and this bill will allow us to complete the process. The agency will assume responsibility for provincial emergency management and as the senior agency will undertake a comprehensive all-hazards approach to emergency, disaster, and security issues management. This will lead to better co-ordination as well as preparation for response to and recovery from a wider array of disasters and emergencies.

The agency will include the fire commissioner's office and Emergency Management Alberta, both currently part of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The inclusion of EMA is obvious, and given the critical role that municipal fire departments have as first responders in most emergencies and disasters, we're making the fire commissioner's office and its community-focused approach to risk management one of the pillars of the new agency as well. This move will allow for closer co-ordination and an enhanced profile for fire service needs for training, support, and public education. Reflecting the importance of the agency, Mr. Speaker, the act will see the agency headed by a managing director with direct reporting channels to the minister as well as the Deputy Minister of Executive Council. This will make it easier for rapid decision-making in times of emergency.

The act will also allow for Alberta's summer villages to become full players in preparing for emergencies and disasters. Currently

summer villages are not included in the definition of a local authority. This means, for example, that they cannot declare a state of local emergency. This is vital because declaring a state of local emergency provides a local authority with specific powers necessary to resolve an emergency.

The act would further give summer villages the opportunity to enter into a memorandum of understanding with neighbouring municipalities. This would allow for co-operation and assistance if the disaster or emergency is larger than what the summer village can deal with on its own. Summer villages are also currently not eligible for grants that other municipalities receive to enhance their emergency response capabilities. This puts them at a disadvantage when compared to surrounding municipalities, Mr. Speaker, and this doesn't serve the interests and needs of their residents.

This act will also see the name of the act itself changed from the Disaster Services Act to the emergency management act. Renaming the act will bring it more in tune with current terminology and better represent our expanded focus on prevention and mitigation.

Overall, this act will help Alberta live up to its reputation of being at the forefront of emergency management, and I'd ask all members to support this very important piece of legislation. Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be supporting this. I know that there are just a couple of minor changes in this. You know what? I think it's important. I think everyone needs to make sure that they're prepared. There needs to be a larger role that the province plays in the development and co-ordination of disaster and emergency plans. Then it's the responsibility of the local authorities. We cannot leave the entire responsibility of responding to disasters exclusively, as it was pointed out, with just municipalities. That's simply not fair. It's not an excuse, but it's just not fair. The province has far, far more resources and thus should play a more central role in developing the plans. This bill would help create that position, and then it has the exclusive mandate to be able to work with the local authorities to assist in the development of the plans and also co-ordinate the overall provincial response for emergencies. These would be good steps because in the case of Wabamun it just showed that the province was not prepared. It was caught off guard, and clearly we're still trying to respond to some of the reports on that.

The authority that now resides with the managing director used to reside with the deputy minister. By transferring the authority to one person with one mandate, it would allow them to have the position to focus on that one task instead of the many tasks that the deputy minister has to do and attend to. So this is a good step. It clearly centralizes that one focus. Ultimately any move to enhance the ability of the government and a local authority to respond to disasters and emergencies is a positive move. While there's still much to do, I think this is a very good move, and I certainly applaud that one.

We just had an awakening early, early in the year with the emergency response bulletin coming over the news about the funnel clouds or the supposed funnel clouds. Now, this certainly was a concern right off the bat, early in June. It shows that, you know, not only do we need to make sure that that system is alert to warn the citizens, but we've got to be able to in fact not only be on guard as a province but provide that service to the municipalities.

When I watched that as it did come over the television, I was a little bit concerned because it looked like the individual who was giving the response was clearly, I guess, rattled. It didn't give me confidence when I was hearing and listening to this person speaking

about this. I was looking outside, and it looked like the clouds were definitely going to be bringing us something. The voice was concerned, but the message was mixed. So I think that would certainly be a spot to take on. It was like an April Fool's Day, someone was saying here. I was definitely concerned.

We have high flood warnings throughout the province in various communities that reside around some of the high rivers where the spring runoff could occur. This is certainly where this bill could help the municipalities plan short term as well as long term. We've been talking about the midst of climate change. I think we're at the beginning of it, and we're going to be seeing a series of concerns throughout the years to come with the extreme cold and the temperatures that are bringing all the snow, the spring runoffs, and the rainfalls. I think we're going to be seeing an unprecedented weather change over the next few years, absolutely, so I think that to have this position created to be able to give municipalities and the government more of an opportunity to have co-ordinated services is definitely a plus because we're looking out for the benefit and the well-being of all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and voice support for Bill 30, Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007, as introduced earlier. I listened with interest to my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore, and I agree with him with respect to that emergency announcement broadcast system that was tested last week when we had that hailstorm and the severe rain throughout the province. One listened to that announcement, and as you're listening to it, you hear the concerned voice of the broadcaster, and you think that there is something severe that is coming your way. Then at the end of the broadcast they said: by the way, there is no emergency. You know, some people had a good laugh, but it really underlined the need for a more co-ordinated and a more thorough approach to how we handle emergencies and also how we communicate emergencies to the citizens of this province. I think communication is probably 50 per cent of emergency response. You know, you need to communicate effectively and quickly with the citizens of the region or the municipality or the province that is likely going to be the most affected.

5:30

A while back we had the Wabamun incident, Mr. Speaker, and it created a lot of interest in how ready and how prepared our province is. We know that different agencies and different ministries, even, have different pieces on how to handle emergencies. We know that Infrastructure and Transportation has its own arm that does that. We have a ministry like the Ministry of Environment which also does that. The Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security has that function under his authority. Different levels of government – federal, municipal, and provincial – also have different agencies, and theoretically and ideally all of them should be talking to each other. They should be connected and, you know, on that hotline for when something happens. The municipality and the province and the federal government and, if need be, an international component should be brought in. All of them should be talking within minutes of that emergency occurring, and the plans have to be in place to handle the emergency and minimize the impact on people, livestock, wildlife, the environment, and so on and so forth.

One can argue that in terms of the Wabamun situation the province didn't appear to be as ready or as prepared as one would

have hoped. The Environmental Protection Commission was struck right after to analyze what the province and local authorities needed to do to deal effectively with disasters. One of the key recommendations was the creation of a senior agency that is responsible for an all-hazards approach to emergencies, disasters, and security. This is the role that will be fulfilled by Emergency Management Alberta, which this bill is hoping to establish. Having a dedicated managing director with the authority to drive this commitment is really critical to the success of this agency. As I indicated, this is an agency which I support being established. This is a good step, but we definitely have to ensure that more is done in terms of effectiveness and in terms of swiftness in that response. Disasters and emergencies should be dealt with as quickly as we can, and communication, as I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, is an integral component.

The commission actually issued some recommendations and findings, and they don't only pertain to the Wabamun situation. I think they're to be extrapolated and to be expanded to all other emergencies and crises in this province. One of the recommendations – and I'm reading from the commission's report – says that "the Alberta Government needs to adopt a comprehensive approach that can respond to any emergency, whether caused by nature or man." So that's one. The other one is that "the response to an incident has to be swift. It has to be the right response. It has to be there as long as it takes to deal with the disaster. And it has to be scaled to handle the worst-case scenario."

I'm hoping that this is the direction that this bill is taking, and I am hoping that this body is going to be there. I hope it's like insurance, where you pay into an insurance plan and you hope that you never use it, but in the time when you do need it, you want it to work. This is exactly the same. We hope that these people sit there and are never activated, that they're never invoked, that they're never asked to react but that in those remote and unlikely situations where they need to be activated and invoked, then they would do a good job. Only time will tell.

Other jurisdictions have similar agencies, Mr. Speaker; British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, to name a few. As I mentioned, also the federal government has an arm that is entrusted to deal with emergencies and situations which arise as such. The rationale for this type of dedicated response organization is that Alberta, due to the scope and volume of resource extraction and the subsequent transportation of toxic materials, is in a unique situation. There has to be a mechanism to continue to monitor and to react to and deal with emergencies arising from things like dangerous goods spills, for example, or fires or toxic fumes and things like that.

Mr. Bonko: This has all happened before.

Mr. Elsalhy: That has all happened before, as my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore indicated.

Provincial responsibility is paramount. Implementing plans and procedures for a co-ordinated provincial response is timely, and I commend the sponsor of the bill for introducing this.

Providing co-ordinated assistance and leadership to local authorities engaged in emergency operations. Now, whether in fact it's to deal with individual losses or remedying some of the side effects that individuals are subjected to or, dealing with the bigger picture, if it's a municipality dealing with a big toxic spill, for example, the environment, property, people, and so on are important.

Advising, assisting, and taking over, if there is need, the implementation of local authorities' emergency operations, including evacuation and re-entry. These are areas where I see this new agency being powerful or empowered enough to handle situations as they arise.

The safety and health of workers and citizens involved in emergency situations; you know, making sure that people that we send to react to a local emergency are equipped and that their gear is up to par and that we're not putting them or putting the citizens in that vicinity at any risk.

Assuming direction and control of an emergency at the direction of the responding environmental officer or health officer. If it's a health issue, the health officer is involved. If it's an environmental issue, the environmental officer is involved.

One last thing, Mr. Speaker, with respect to this is the whole issue of emergency funds. You know, we have situations where people apply for emergency assistance. I'm not sure if this agency is going to maybe look at some of those areas or adjudicate some of these requests, but I'm hoping that in the event that they don't and in the event that this agency is not going to handle requests for compensation or assistance, there should be a mechanism so that it's not left up to the minister in charge to make these decisions. People argue sometimes that they are subjective: which ones qualify, how much assistance people qualify for, and so on. We should have, really, criteria in place. I'm hoping that this agency might actually consider these requests or adjudicate these requests.

Mr. Speaker, this is timely, and I urge all my colleagues from this House to support it. I'd listen to more debate if more speakers are interested. Thank you.

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

Seeing none, anyone else? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. I rise in support of Bill 30, the Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007. It is important, I think, to bring in line the naming of this service and to bring into being the Alberta emergency management agency.

What I want to speak to specifically is the empowering of summer villages and including summer villages in this act. I have some members of the summer village executive that live in Edmonton-Manning, and I've spoken with them on a number of occasions. Sometimes they feel like they're, you know, a kid brother, a little overlooked and all the rest of it. Ensuring that this level of government has the ability to access funding for disaster services in the same sense as other municipalities, to include them in the act, is important. I applaud this move, and I think it is very important. I support this bill, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Again Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also support Bill 30, the Disaster Services Amendment Act, 2007. This is a very important act. I realize that the main outcome of this act is to rename the Disaster Services Act the emergency management act in accordance with the creation of the new department of the Alberta emergency management agency in the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

5:40

It also creates the position of the managing director, who will have the same authority to administer this act that the deputy minister used to have for the Disaster Services Act. I like the responsibilities here for the managing director, which will be to ensure that local authorities create and maintain effective emergency management plans. The director will work with local authorities to assist them in

the development of their plans and to make sure that these plans are responsive and adequate.

It's important to make sure that all of our communities are prepared to respond to disasters and emergencies. I would hope that this role would ensure co-ordination between the province and the municipalities so that disaster plans are clear and that there is the support that's needed to actually fulfill those plans. There needs to be a larger role that the province plays in the development and the co-ordination of disaster and emergency plans. We cannot just leave it to local authorities because it's just beyond their capacity. The province has far more resources and thus could play a more central role in the development of plans. I'm glad to see that consideration and that move because this is a good step, but let's ensure that more is done to ensure quick and efficient response to disasters and emergencies. We must help local authorities develop and maintain response capacity, and we must have a provincial response capacity as well. These have to be integrated.

I know that the Environmental Protection Commission had many recommendations because there has to be a provincial capacity to respond to emergencies such as Wabamun. In order to accomplish this, we must have a provincial capacity that can respond as part of an initial communication structure in an integrated approach. The province should take the lead in all communication efforts along with local authorities, the company involved, and possibly the federal government. Alberta should have 24-hours-a-day, year-round, dedicated emergency response teams, which include trained environmental officers, public health officers available around the clock. This would ensure that there will always be a trained representative of the provincial government to respond immediately to a spill or any other type of possible disaster.

I really do support this bill. I think, though, that if we are truly committed to protecting the environment and public health we must consider incorporating all the recommendations of the commission. We must show leadership and take strong action to protect the public safety, the public health, and welfare of the environment from the devastating possible effects of hazardous releases. We haven't done enough in the past. We've learned, and I think that this is a good step in the right direction.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much. I'd just like to make a couple comments to not only the member opposite who made comments but maybe to a couple of other comments. I think that the hon. member very much understands the focus and the direction of this agency. That is very much not only to encapsulate the government who will work together with different ministries but also to work with municipalities, to work with the fire commission, who will in turn work with the individual fire departments, whether they be voluntary or salaried, but most importantly also to incorporate industry. I think that when we're in a disaster, we need to be in a situation where we are co-ordinated with all of the different elements to make sure that whatever that disaster is it becomes nullified. There are some very good comments that you had made in that focus, and I appreciate them.

I want to say that this agency is under this ministry and not under Environment. I suppose it could be under any other ministry, but it's for ourselves to look at the best umbrella that we could possibly make, and that is with municipalities and with other ministries. It is a co-ordinating position as much as it is anything else as well.

Mrs. Mather: I just want to say thank you for that explanation. I think that makes this bill even better. I'm happy to support it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose to close?

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour and the good work that has been accomplished this afternoon, I move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:47 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1 p.m.]