



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, April 24, 2008

Issue 8a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta

## The 27th Legislature

First Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker  
Cao, Wayne C.N., Calgary-Fort, Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees  
Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

Ady, Hon. Cindy, Calgary-Shaw (PC),  
Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation  
Allred, Ken, St. Albert (PC)  
Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)  
Anderson, Rob, Airdrie-Chestermere (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Solicitor General and Public Security  
Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)  
Berger, Evan, Livingstone-Macleod (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Sustainable Resource Development  
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)  
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Montrose (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Advanced Education  
and Technology  
Blackett, Hon. Lindsay, Calgary-North West (PC),  
Minister of Culture and Community Spirit  
Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (L),  
Official Opposition House Leader  
Boutilier, Guy C., Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (PC)  
Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Nose Hill (PC)  
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)  
Campbell, Robin, West Yellowhead (PC),  
Deputy Government Whip  
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (L),  
Official Opposition Whip  
Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)  
Danyluk, Hon. Ray, Lac La Biche-St. Paul (PC),  
Minister of Municipal Affairs  
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)  
Denis, Jonathan, Calgary-Egmont (PC)  
Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC)  
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)  
Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)  
Evans, Hon. Iris, Sherwood Park (PC),  
Minister of Finance and Enterprise  
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)  
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)  
Fritz, Hon. Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC),  
Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs  
Goudreau, Hon. Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace (PC),  
Minister of Employment and Immigration  
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Agriculture and Rural Development  
Groeneveld, Hon. George, Highwood (PC),  
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),  
Minister of Education, Government House Leader  
Hayden, Hon. Jack, Drumheller-Stettler (PC),  
Minister of Infrastructure  
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (L)  
Horne, Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)  
Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert (PC),  
Minister of Advanced Education and Technology  
Jablonski, Hon. Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC),  
Minister of Seniors and Community Supports  
Jacobs, Broyce, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC)  
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)  
Johnston, Art, Calgary-Hays (PC)  
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (L)  
Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC),  
Minister of Service Alberta  
Knight, Hon. Mel, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC),  
Minister of Energy  
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)  
Liepert, Hon. Ron, Calgary-West (PC),  
Minister of Health and Wellness  
Lindsay, Hon. Fred, Stony Plain (PC),  
Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security  
Lukaszk, Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Municipal Affairs  
Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC)  
MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (L)  
Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)  
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),  
Leader of the NDP Opposition  
McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)  
McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Environment  
Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC),  
Minister of Sustainable Resource Development  
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),  
Deputy Leader of the NDP Opposition,  
NDP Opposition House Leader  
Oberle, Frank, Peace River (PC),  
Government Whip  
Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)  
Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC),  
Minister of Transportation  
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (L),  
Deputy Official Opposition Whip  
Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)  
Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)  
Redford, Hon. Alison M., Calgary-Elbow (PC),  
Minister of Justice and Attorney General  
Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),  
Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader  
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)  
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)  
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)  
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Education  
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness  
Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),  
President of the Treasury Board  
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),  
Premier, President of Executive Council  
Stevens, Hon. Ron, QC, Calgary-Glenmore (PC),  
Deputy Premier, Minister of International and  
Intergovernmental Relations  
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (L)  
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (L)  
Leader of the Official Opposition  
Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC),  
Minister of Children and Youth Services  
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (L),  
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition  
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)  
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)  
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)  
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Energy  
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)  
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration  
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),  
Minister of Aboriginal Relations,  
Deputy Government House Leader

### Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Clerk	W.J. David McNeil	Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Shannon Dean
Clerk Assistant/ Director of House Services	Louise J. Kamuchik	Sergeant-at-Arms	Brian G. Hodgson
Clerk of <i>Journals</i> /Table Research	Micheline S. Gravel	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	J. Ed Richard
Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	William C. Semple
		Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Liz Sim

[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 24, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our energies with thanks so that we may continue our work with the people in the constituencies we represent. Amen.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

**Mr. Drysdale:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a group of 36 enthusiastic and promising young Albertans from the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency. Today we are honoured to have the grade 6 class from Holy Cross Catholic school observe the proceedings along with their teacher, Anita Kilpatrick; parent volunteers Joe Brausen, Mrs. Agnes Nykolaychuk, Mrs. June Punjabi, Mr. Mark Michalysen, Mrs. Kim Hartman, Ms Rose Bohler, and Mrs. Tanya Ironside. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly seven students from the Montessori school of Calgary in my riding of Calgary-Currie today. It is a great pleasure to have them here along with their teacher, Mrs. Stamatina Wlock, and parent helpers Ms Chris Divine and Mr. Franc Cioffi. If they would rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce through you to all members of the House a very highly respected veteran of Alberta's oil patch and the newly appointed chair of the Alberta Carbon Capture and Storage Development Council. Mr. Jim Carter brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to that position. From his experience with Syncrude Canada Mr. Carter understands the great challenges that face an undertaking of this scope, and he also appreciates the enormous opportunity that it affords. Alberta is the right place to develop carbon capture and storage technology on a grand scale, and this is the right time. With the leadership of Mr. Carter we have the right team in place to move us forward. I would ask Mr. Carter to please stand so that he can receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and privilege today to introduce to you and through you my godson and nephew, Anthony Michael Boyko. Anthony is in Edmonton this week to participate in the Cantando music festival. He's in grade 10,

the lead and first trumpet player with the Bishop James Mahoney high school band from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Anthony is also a talented piano player and honour roll student. He was designated his school's most outstanding grade 10 junior football player, and if that wasn't enough, two years ago he represented his province and became the junior boys singles bronze medalist at the Youth Bowling Council national five-pin championships.

Perhaps of most interest to this Assembly, however, is the fact that young Mr. Boyko is quite interested in politics. He was a scrutineer in the last Saskatchewan provincial election, and with any luck at all it won't be too long before we see him with a desk on our side of the House in the not-too-distant future. Appropriately, Anthony is seated in the members' gallery here today, and I would ask him to rise now to accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Webber:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like introduce to you and through you today to all members of the Assembly three gentlemen from TransAlta who came up here today from Calgary to meet with me to talk about carbon capture and storage right here in Alberta. TransAlta is spearheading a carbon capture and storage project at one of its coal-fired power plants in northern Alberta, just west of Edmonton at the Keephills plant. They are hoping that by 2012 the project will be built to capture and permanently store underground one million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions annually. Visiting today with me, Mr. Speaker, up in the gallery are Mr. Jeff Gaulin, director of government affairs at TransAlta; Mr. Don Wharton, VP of sustainable development at TransAlta; and Mr. Mark Mackay, the VP of energy technology at TransAlta. I would ask that these gentlemen please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly community leaders from the oil sands capital of the world, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. In the Assembly today are Vaughn Jessome, Iris Kirschner, Dave Kirschner, and Rick Davey. I'd like to ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

### Members' Statements

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

#### Carbon Capture and Storage Development Council

**Mr. Webber:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again Alberta is leading the way. The announcement this morning of a government-industry council to develop a plan for immediate implementation of carbon capture and storage is another example of: where others talk, Albertans take action. The council's job is to develop a plan for Alberta to capture and store 139 megatonnes of carbon dioxide from industrial sources by 2050 while allowing for continued economic growth and development.

Top scientists, environmental groups, economists, industry, government, and the United Nations all agree that carbon capture and storage is an effective method of reducing emissions. What's more, it is ideally suited for Alberta because our emissions sources are located close to good storage sites. Indeed, there are a number of pilot projects already under way.

But carbon capture and storage is not just about environmental

benefits, Mr. Speaker. Reducing emissions through carbon capture and storage will help secure Alberta's economic future. Increased environmental protection and responsibility is part of doing business in the world today, and carbon capture and storage will help industry remain competitive and confident to make long-term investments in our province while at the same time reducing emissions. It will also provide a secure path to develop Alberta's resources. It will support Alberta's industries in responding to increasing international expectations for environmentally sustainable exports, and it will send a strong signal that Alberta continues to be a safe and reliable energy supplier.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans don't accept the word "can't." They have shown the drive and ingenuity to overcome so many obstacles to make Alberta the dynamic and growing place that it is. I would like to thank the council chair, Mr. Jim Carter, and all the government and industry members for their dedication to this initiative and for their belief in our goal of environmentally sustainable development of Alberta's energy resources. As the parliamentary assistant for Energy I feel honoured to be working with them on this important project.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Memorial for Private Walter Strang

**Mr. Elinski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ten members of the Regimental Association of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment went to Hoewelaken, Holland, last week, one of the many towns the Canadian army liberated at the end of the Second World War. They were there to participate in the unveiling ceremony of a memorial in honour of Private Walter Strang, killed in action on 19 April, 1945. He died nine days before the end of the war and became a symbol to the local population of the sacrifices made by the young men of our country. The members were very touched to see that the people there today still recognize what Private Strang and so many others did for them at the close of the Second World War. According to Lieutenant Colonel Hans Brink the entire weekend was very moving and emotional.

I am especially honoured today to be the representative of the Griesbach community, where the Loyal Eddies still find a home, and should note that the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology is a former member of the regiment that recently celebrated its 100th anniversary.

Thank you.

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

#### Calgary Homeless Foundation

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Wednesday marked the official retirement of Wayne Stewart as president and CEO of the Calgary Homeless Foundation. Wayne came out of retirement to take the helm of the foundation in October 2006. His mandate was a critical and a laudable one, to provide transitional leadership during the creation of Calgary's 10-year plan to end homelessness.

1:40

This was no easy undertaking, Mr. Speaker, and certainly not one that Wayne entered into lightly. During his tenure the Calgary Homeless Foundation was forced to contend with a dramatic increase in the number of people living on Calgary's streets. Fellow members may be surprised to learn that Calgary's homeless population now exceeds that of Vancouver, a city two times its size,

with some estimates suggesting the number of homeless in the city is now as high as 4,500.

Under Wayne's astute leadership and vision, the Calgary Homeless Foundation effectively balanced the challenge of managing the city's burgeoning homeless population while starting to lay the groundwork to eliminate homelessness in its entirety, a goal that the Alberta Liberal caucus is deeply committed to and which I have every reason to believe the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs is very committed to as well. Wayne understood that homelessness is about people and that irrespective of our circumstance we all deserve a home that is safe and secure. Succeeding Wayne as president and CEO is Tim Richter, who is well known to Calgaryans for his work as project manager for the 10-year plan.

On behalf of my colleagues in the Alberta Liberal caucus and as shadow Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, I wish to recognize Wayne Stewart for his pivotal role in helping to position Calgary to end homelessness and congratulate him on his well-deserved retirement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### International Day of Mourning

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Monday is the International Day of Mourning, a day observed in more than 80 countries around the world to remember workers killed and injured while on the job. Last year 154 Albertans were killed at work, the highest number of workplace fatalities in 25 years. An accident occurs at an Alberta work site every three minutes. With this overheated economy employers should be beefing up their safety procedures, and government should allocate resources to make sure our safety laws are strong and that they are enforced properly, but not enough of that is happening.

The minister of employment has acknowledged that 154 fatalities are far too many. He has said that more needs to be done. I agree with the minister. Something is not working in our health and safety legislation. Not enough is being done to protect the lives of working men and women. In Tuesday's budget workplace health and safety funding increased by 1.9 per cent, far below inflation and not addressing population growth. There was no funding to hire more enforcement officers, no resources to update and revamp the occupational health and safety code, and no funding for education campaigns to inform workers of their safety rights.

I am certain that the minister will join with workers and their unions across the province on Monday to commemorate the day of mourning. He is scheduled to make a ministerial statement. If he wants that statement to be more than empty words, I encourage him to use it to announce new measures and new funding to beef up enforcement, strengthen the legislation, and make a real effort to make our workplaces safer. That would be an honourable way to mark a sad day.

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

#### Centennial of Kiwanis Music Festival

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Ludwig van Beethoven said, "Music can change the world." In 1908 Lieutenant Governor George Bulyea did just that. He, Vernon Barford, and Howard Stutchbury struck a committee, and the first music festival across Canada became a reality in Edmonton, Alberta.

Two thousand and eight is a year of significant importance. From

April 21 to May 7 the Edmonton Kiwanis Music Festival is celebrating its 100th anniversary. Since the festival's inception literally thousands of children from Edmonton and across the province have been given the wonderful opportunity to showcase their talents. This year alone nearly 13,000 entrants will take part. The festival represents all forms of music and instruments, and participants perform in front of an audience and receive professional adjudication.

I know that artists, and especially those in Alberta, are dedicated to excellence. That's why I'm so proud to be part of this government, a government that has furthered its support for the arts and the culture of this province in many ways, especially over recent months.

Today I want to salute the 100th anniversary of the Edmonton Kiwanis Music Festival. I would invite all members to offer their congratulations to the participants and a sincere thanks to organizers, volunteers, teachers, and sponsors. They've played a major role in one of the most successful music festivals in Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Yellowhead Rotary Arts Festival

**Mr. Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure I rise today to talk to you about the beginning of the Yellowhead Rotary Arts Festival, which is a multifaceted festival featuring displays and adjudicated performances in 13 artistic categories. It began in the year 2000 as a millennium project initiated by members of the Hinton Rotary Club to build a multidisciplinary arts festival on the platform of the 15-year-old piano festival, which annually involved 300 participants. In the inaugural year the new event attracted 800 participants in seven areas. The festival is now supported by the Hinton, Edson, and Jasper Rotary clubs.

Since 2000 the festival has expanded to include a variety of visual arts categories as well as creative writing. This festival is unique in that it caters to both visual and performance arts and is one of the largest combined arts festivals for a rural region in this province. The festival formed a society in 2005 to better manage both the festival and workshops in arts-related topics which were and are growing out of the festival.

The festival takes place over a 10-day period in late April and early May in the towns of Hinton and Edson, with hopes to host a venue in Jasper for 2009. All entries in the festival receive a thoughtful evaluation from professional adjudicators qualified for each category. A grand concert featuring the most entertaining performances of the festival is held in early May. Each year a visual art piece is chosen for the next year's poster.

The festival averages 900 participants per year, with an audience of over 2,700 people attending events. On April 24, 2008, the visual arts venue will transform the Hinton Centre into an art gallery featuring the 250 pieces of fine art entered this year. Supporters of arts and cultural groups from across the Yellowhead region have been personally invited to a reception to view the artwork, enjoy the opening day celebration, and share ideas about a regional coalition arts group. The Yellowhead Rotary Arts Festival provides the opportunity for participants of all ages and abilities to share their talents and receive adjudication in an encouraging atmosphere.

Thank you.

### Presenting Petitions

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

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one petition I would like to present to you this afternoon. The petition is requesting the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund.

This petition is signed by 20 concerned Alberta citizens.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one petition to present to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon, and it 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 cost.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 20 Albertans who are asking the government of Alberta to commission an independent and public inquiry into . . . the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My petition is similarly related, with 20 public residents calling on the government of Alberta to

commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund.

Thank you.

### Introduction of Bills

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

#### Bill 2

#### Travel Alberta Act

**Mrs. Ady:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce Bill 2, the Travel Alberta Act, for first reading.

Bill 2 will establish Travel Alberta as a legislated tourism marketing corporation. Travel Alberta's mandate to promote our province as a world-class tourism destination will not change. This is an organizational change that will address issues identified by an independent review and allow Travel Alberta to be more competitive in domestic and international markets.

Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 2.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

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

**Bill 3**  
**Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2008**

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 3, the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, a priority of this government is to provide public infrastructure to meet the needs of a growing economy and population. This bill addresses that priority by allowing the Alberta government to enter into alternative financing arrangements for certain P3 projects to build schools, health facilities, and postsecondary institutions for Albertans.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

**1:50 Oral Question Period**

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

**Farm Safety**

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several days ago a worker at a feedlot fell 30 metres to his death. He wasn't wearing a safety harness at the time, which would have been required under normal worker safety regulations. Yesterday the minister of agriculture, when asked about establishing worker safety standards for corporate farms, dismissed the suggestion by saying, "We make seatbelt rules, but look what happens." My first question is to the Minister of Transportation. Does this government accept the overwhelming evidence that seatbelt laws reduce deaths on highways?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, we fully understand that we have had seatbelt laws here for quite a time now, and it has reduced our injuries and deaths on our highways.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of agriculture: given that this Premier told this Assembly in March 2007 that this minister of agriculture would, quote, bring forward to our caucus some recommendations on farm safety laws, will the minister confirm to this Assembly that in fact he did not do his job and this never happened?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think probably that the member has come up with something that I'm not quite so sure was the statement I made.

But I would like to qualify the seatbelt issue. Of course I believe in seatbelts. The point I was making: as a person goes through the windshield, if he hasn't done up his seatbelt, what have we gained?

**Dr. Taft:** To the same minister: given that he did not do what this Premier indicated he would do and that more people have died in the absence of farm safety laws, will this minister bring forward farm worker safety laws, or will he do the honourable thing and resign?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** That was good. I enjoyed that. Which question should I answer, Mr. Speaker? I'm quite willing to sit down with the Minister of Employment and Immigration and discuss some of the issues that have arisen. In quick answer to the question: no, I'm not quite ready to resign yet.

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

**Nuclear Power**

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our concerns on nuclear power have been made very clear to this House and to Albertans. Yesterday the government announced a panel to study nuclear power in Alberta with the apparent goal of providing an "objective report." One of the panel members, Dr. John Luxat, has already stated that he's pro-nuclear. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Will the minister just acknowledge that this is yet more evidence that this government has the fix in for nuclear power in Alberta?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I most certainly will acknowledge is that Albertans want answers to some very serious questions with respect to the nuclear issue. I want answers to some very serious questions with respect to the nuclear issue. These four gentlemen that have been put in place will get these answers for myself and for Albertans in due course.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given Dr. Luxat's acknowledged and open support for nuclear power, in the interests of an objective report will the minister commit to putting an appropriately skeptical and environmental voice onto the panel to provide necessary balance and fairness?

**Mr. Knight:** It might be very interesting for the member opposite to understand that one of the kind of major forces working with respect to environmental concerns globally, the Sierra Club, runs ads in Europe in favour of nuclear energy, Mr. Speaker – in favour of nuclear energy.\* This is not – not – a consultation process. We're going out to answer some questions for Albertans.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since this minister is such a fan of the Sierra Club, will he put a member or a representative from the Sierra Club on this panel?

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, I think it's quite clear. I made an announcement yesterday. There was a press release yesterday. There are four qualified individuals to go out and receive answers for questions that we have for Albertans with respect to the nuclear issue. The questions will be answered. Consultation will take place in due course.

**The Speaker:** Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

**Renter Assistance**

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government assured us and Albertans that their affordable housing plan would work, but the reality is that rents are still skyrocketing. A recent report by a real estate company has concluded that rents will increase by 14.6 per cent this year in Edmonton, the 13th year in a row that rents have gone up. Once again this government's refusal to take necessary action has put thousands of Albertans at risk of losing their homes. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: will the minister

\*See p. 296, right col., para. 3

admit that the government's plan for affordable housing has failed to make rental housing more affordable?

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

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, I won't admit to that. But what I will tell you is this. It is through the leadership of our Premier that this is the very first time we have ever had a ministry dedicated to housing, and we've had a substantial increase in this budget for housing. What the opposition member is discussing is very much in the area, the continuum of housing, whether it's shelters, whether it's transitional housing, our rent supplement program. Our rent supplement program has increased by . . .

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know I will check out to see if any past Alberta government has ever had a ministry of housing.

Will this government take off its ideological blinders and its blind faith in the market, which clearly is not responding the way they think it should, and bring in a temporary rent cap? Will you help Albertans?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, there won't be rent caps. We already know that. That's a whole separate issue. The decision has been made. As I said to you, Mr. Speaker, the rent supplement program has increased by 40 per cent in this year's budget. That program went from \$37 million to \$58 million. I can tell you that it is working and that it is helping people stay in their homes and not be out on the street.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd love to talk about rent supplements. Will this minister admit that – what is it now? – \$101 million total in allocated rent supplements so far has not only subsidized landlords but just encourages them to keep on jacking up the rents?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, rent supplement programs help people. They help families, individuals to stay in their homes if there has been an increase in their rent and they qualify for the program at rent geared to income, which is 30 per cent of the income that they have. But just as importantly, we now have a new program, the homeless eviction and prevention fund, which, as you know, is about prevention of people being homeless. It is over \$100 million that's dedicated to this program. We've had an increase of 40 per cent in the rent supplement program.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

#### Bitumen Royalties

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, stop me if you've heard this one before. Suncor's quarterly earnings are in, and they're up 40 per cent from the same quarter last year. Suncor's net earnings were \$788 million this quarter. During the same period Alberta's royalty take from Suncor operations was only \$282 million, or about a third. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Why are the producers of the resource getting so much more than the owners of the resource?

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, I can tell the member opposite in an unqualified answer to this particular question that I don't know the exact amount of money that Suncor made with respect to its work inside of the province of Alberta last year, so consequently it's not qualified. But what I will say is that we have received all of the royalty that this government was to get from their operations under the policy in place.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, getting everything you're entitled to under a bad deal is still a bad thing.

Given that in the new deal the minister has just negotiated with Suncor Albertans will receive almost 50 per cent less in royalties than we collect right now, I'd like to know from the minister why he agreed to a deal that will cost Albertans nearly half a billion dollars a year.

2:00

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, this is a very misleading question. As the member opposite very well knows, the framework that was in place and the generic royalty regime will allow a transfer, an option to the Crown agreement holders to move from synthetic crude to a bitumen option with respect to their royalties. Therein lies the decrease.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister has given a very misleading answer to that very clear question. Why doesn't the minister admit that Suncor under this new deal will still be paying 50 per cent less in royalties to the people of Alberta than they were before?

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you and all Albertans is that under the new royalty framework Suncor will pay 20 per cent or whatever is collected under the new royalty framework more than they would have paid under the old system irrespective of what other gobbledygook is being passed around by individuals that are not trying to tell Albertans the true story with respect to this development. We will collect our 20 per cent additional royalty.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer.

#### Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his mandate letter to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports the Premier asked the minister to "support persons with disabilities' independence and self-reliance by providing increased employability incentives." My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. How is the minister helping AISH clients to achieve their independence and increase their self-reliance?

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

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Persons with disabilities are looking for opportunities to become employed but face a range of challenges. Many clients have told us that they want to contribute, and more importantly they view employment as a means to developing skills, confidence, and independence. We will be working with employers and the community to develop new strategies to help remove barriers and allow clients to participate in the workforce.

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. The mandate also mentions an increase to the employment earning exemptions. What will the increase look like, and how will it help AISH clients?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the Premier for his leadership in identifying this as a very important priority in my ministry.

To provide additional employability incentives, we will be increasing the employment income exemption by \$500 to \$1,500 for singles and \$2,500 for couples. This means that AISH clients can earn more money each month while continuing to receive financial and health benefits. We'll be implementing these changes in the next two to three months.

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. Besides the increased employment exemptions how are you helping remove barriers to employment for AISH clients?

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, in addition to what I've previously mentioned, clients who are working receive comprehensive health benefits. AISH is one of the best programs of its kind in Canada. Clients can also receive assistance with transportation, assistive devices, child care expenses, and work-related items such as tools and specialty clothing.

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

#### Firearms Regulation

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Solicitor General declined to commit additional police officers as a way to assist Hobbema residents in curbing gang violence. Instead, he called upon residents and community leaders to get involved as a means to guarantee the safety of that community. When can Albertans expect the Solicitor General to at least commit to giving police officers the ability to battle gun crime by amending the Traffic Safety Act to enable the impounding of vehicles carrying firearms not registered to the operator to protect besieged communities like Hobbema?

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

**Mr. Lindsay:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, in certain situations it's not illegal for somebody to be carrying a gun that's registered to another person or vehicle. If they have the certification to carry a gun and they also have with them the registration certificate of the person who owns the weapon, there's nothing illegal about that. So in that particular instance the law is being followed.

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, there are some instances that probably could be used.

Although safe communities are allegedly a priority of our government, recently the Solicitor General seems content to avoid this topic. Mr. Speaker, does the Solicitor General really believe that the residents of these affected communities should expect their community watch to protect them from gang activity?

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

**Mr. Lindsay:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In regard to the comments about Hobbema the community came to me, and they did indicate that they wanted to take back their community by actually forming a community watch, and we certainly encouraged them to do that. As I indicated before, it's not just a matter of more police put on the street. The community also has to be engaged.

**Mr. Hehr:** As I noted previously, Mr. Speaker, private member's Motion 503 allows police officers to impound vehicles used in drag racing, a remedy similar to what I am seeking to address the proliferation of gun crime. Why not make the same changes now to the act, allowing police officers to get guns off our streets and protect Alberta's citizens?

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

**Mr. Lindsay:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are numerous pieces of legislation under the Criminal Code of Canada which allow police officers to do just that, so we have to be very careful that we don't put legislation in here provincially that can be challenged by the Charter of Rights. Again, guns are a concern to this ministry, they're a concern to this government, and we will do everything that we can to take them off the street.

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

#### Calgary Ring Road

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We heard previously this week about the 2015 completion date for the Anthony Henday and the Calgary ring road, and we know that the Stoney Trail portion is well under way, but my constituents want to know when the government is going to build the southeast portion of the road. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Where are we in this process?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that we completed the functional planning for the southeast section in 2006. That means we've chosen alignment, we've chosen access points, and we've identified the geotechnical and the environmental issues. We're also doing an additional engineering study right now that looks at how the ring roads will affect adjacent city roads and local road accesses, and what we have in hand allows us to go to the design phase when the time is right. I will say that yesterday I was in Calgary on some business, and I had to go check on the ring roads that were there. They're coming along just fine.

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

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Now, these projects obviously don't happen overnight, but it would help us to know what the department's time frame is for this section of the ring road. Can the minister tell us when he expects to proceed, to move forward with this project?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I don't have a specific date for the construction of that portion today, but I can tell the hon. member that our goal is to complete all of the Calgary and Edmonton ring roads by 2015, and I'm very confident that we'll reach that goal. As far as the southeast section goes, we still have a lot of preliminary work to



do and a lot of decisions that we yet have to make. For example, we need to determine if this project is a good candidate for a P3. We've had tremendous success with P3s on other road projects and it's . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Alignment of this road and access across the new ring road are important issues to the people of my constituency. How can they have some input on the planning of this road?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we held at least four open houses during the '04, '05 years as part of the main functional planning study that I mentioned in my first answer, so there's been a lot of public consultation done already. There will also be opportunities for input with the follow-up study we're doing on the effects on the adjacent city roads, and we'll certainly consult with adjacent landowners or anyone else who could be affected by the ring road. Public input is always an important part of our planning studies, and we value the input of the public very highly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

#### 2:10 Federal Infrastructure Funding

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are to the Minister of Infrastructure. When will the government of Alberta sign the \$1.8 billion deal with the federal government so we can get our share of the building Canada fund?

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

**Mr. Hayden:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to have to get back to the member on it. I don't have the information with me, but I will get you the information.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That surprises me because it's on page 110 of the fiscal plan of the budget of his own department.

Now, Edmonton and Calgary need and want this \$1.8 billion so that they can build their light rail transit systems and expand the ones they've got. Why has this government failed to date when eight other jurisdictions in this country have signed the deal and are getting their money? Why is this government not getting our fair share?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, the staff in the department of Treasury have been working 24/7 to feel their way through the federal government bureaucracy to get that agreement signed, but what this government won't do that some other governments might is sign a deal that is not in the best interests of Alberta. However, we have the deal done, and it is simply a case now of mailing the document back and forth. As soon as it's here, it will be signed, and the projects can proceed.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Mr. Speaker, perhaps this time to the President of the Treasury Board. When this government complains about so much money going from Alberta to Ottawa, why are you so slow in signing this deal and getting some of that money back so the cities

of Edmonton and Calgary can construct some light rail transit and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and get cars and trucks off the road?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, this government spends or has planned to spend over \$8 billion on infrastructure this year. The building Canada fund of \$1.8 billion over seven years is about enough to do a wing on a Calgary hospital. We have a long-term plan that is better than any other plan presented by any province in this country, and we are using that well-thought-out plan to guide our decisions as we build Alberta.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

#### Water Management

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fresh water is a critical resource to Canadians and to Albertans. Canada possesses 20 per cent of the world's fresh water, of which Alberta has only 2.2 per cent. Two weeks ago two University of Toronto law professors hypothesized that the governments of Alberta and Canada could be forced to shell out hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation to foreign-owned oil sands companies under NAFTA if the drought forced the province to ration water. My question is to the Minister of Environment. What are you doing to safeguard Alberta's water resources?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, let me make one thing very clear. Alberta's water belongs to Albertans, and it's not for sale. The water licences that industry and others have in this province are conditional upon the availability of water, and both NAFTA and Alberta's Water Act make it very clear that Alberta has the legal right to respond to environmental concerns and emergencies by restricting the use of water.

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

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Given that there's always a concern among Albertans that their water could be exported in bulk to water-hungry areas in the southwestern United States, what is this government doing to ensure that this water is not exported in bulk south of our border?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, as I've said, Alberta's water belongs to Albertans. The prohibition on exporting bulk water is enshrined in law. As a matter of fact, it's expressly prohibited under Alberta's Water Act.

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

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the same minister. Given that we all know in southern Alberta that the South Saskatchewan River basin is overallocated and the government no longer accepts new water licence applications, and at the same time some large water licences in southern Alberta are either not being used or large portions aren't, does the minister not see these unused licences as an opportunity to address the situation of the South Saskatchewan River basin to help ensure a healthy river and water system for southern Albertans?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the Water for Life strategy is very

clear that there is going to have to be a very hard and long look at how we govern the allocation of water not only in the South Saskatchewan River basin but throughout Alberta. Issues such as the member has raised are very legitimate and very real issues that all Albertans are going to be having a good discussion on over the next short period.

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

### Environmental Protection

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I first want to begin by congratulating the Environment minister and his department for their useful two-day conference on the environment this week and for the department's recognition of the courageous contributions of Martha Kostuch to the well-being of our province. Truly one of Alberta's heroes.

Mr. Speaker, our existing legislation, environmental resources, and political will in relation to the environment in Alberta is totally inadequate. Clear evidence of that, surely, is in the recent budget, where this department now has even less as a proportion of the current budget – less – than 0.5 per cent. To the minister: how does this reduced proportion of budget reflect your commitment to Alberta?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, it never ceases to amaze me how this member is able to manipulate statistics to his own advantage and ignore the facts. The facts are – and they're indisputable – that our budget has had a substantial increase this year.

**Dr. Swann:** Mr. Speaker, given that under Bill 29, passed last year, companies like Hub Oil in Alberta, in Calgary, can now cap and monitor forever their contaminated site rather clean it up completely and then pass it on as a gift to municipalities, how does this serve the public interest?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not quite as simple as the member would lead us to believe. The issue of reclamation of contaminated land is one that goes through a very rigorous process, and the result of that process is to ensure that the public safety is uppermost in the decision-making process and in the final documentation that accompanies that reclamation.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Energy minister: why is it that under EUB directive 006 permission is given to companies to transfer abandoned wells, facilities, and pipelines without remediation? Does the polluter really pay in this province?

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, unless I misunderstood the question, the question has to do with the EUB. The EUB is not a continuing entity at this point, so I'm not exactly sure what the question is.

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

### School Closures

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Education. Edmonton parents and students are tired of hearing about the closure of schools in older neighbourhoods and the

provincial government's refusal to take responsibility. Apparently, electing 13 Conservative MLAs was bad luck for the city as it didn't prevent the closure of Woodcroft elementary and Ritchie junior high, both of which are in ridings held by Tories. Meanwhile, school boards are telling us that their hands are tied by government funding rules. The strategic business plan tabled with the budget talks about ensuring that schools are available where students live and . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has the floor.

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon, of course, we'll be in estimates for the Department of Education, and we'll have a good opportunity to explore all of the issues around funding with respect to schools.

With respect to the policy it's very important to recognize that local school boards are elected for a reason, and that reason is to put the local priority with respect to the allocation of resources, so it's very important. I mean, if you're going to suggest that the provincial government or the Minister of Education should take all of those decisions off the local school boards, then it raises the question of why we have them.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, if the minister could just advise us, though, how it is that the development where we have Ritchie students now taking several buses to get to their nearest school aligns with the minister's budget plan.

**The Speaker:** Well, this afternoon we'll be dealing with budgets. On policy, fair.

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, clearly, we don't want as a matter of policy nor as a matter of operation school boards developing the concept that we build new schools and just reverse the direction the buses go. Clearly, school boards, when they're looking at school closure policy, have to look at where the students that are there are going, assuming that if they're closing a school, it's because they don't have enough students to have a viable educational operation there for those students. I would point to the Edmonton public schools' city centre school project, which was a clear example of how you can provide a better educational opportunity for the students that are there.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the minister's own department has projections that Ritchie and neighbouring areas will in fact be increasing in size as far as their students go, why is the minister allowing these closures to go ahead when the schools will be needed even more just a few years down the road?

2:20

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, again, Mr. Speaker, why have local elected school boards responsible for making sure that the resources they're provided provide the best possible educational opportunities for the schools within their jurisdiction if we're going to make those decisions for them? Why have school boards if you're not going to pay attention to their view of the information that's available to them and their view of what's best for the education of the students in their jurisdiction?

### Open Spaces Pilot Project

**Dr. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, a number of hunters in my constituency have expressed concerns about aspects of Sustainable Resource

Development's open spaces pilot project. They fear that this project will lead to putting a price tag on the heads of big-game animals, and they're also concerned that hunters or guides who buy tags from landowners will get preferential access to hunting. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. How will the minister assure Alberta hunters that they will enjoy fair and equal access to land in the pilot project?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like the hon. member to know that the purpose of open spaces is not just to ensure fair and equal access but to increase public access to private lands. However, we have heard and appreciate the concerns that he has raised and that others have raised about one component of it, the hunting for habitat branch. As your question reflects, there is a perception that the self-funding character of that particular program, hunting for habitat, violates the policy against paid hunting in Alberta. As a result I have put that component on hold pending further consultation with hunting groups and landowners.

**Dr. Brown:** To the same minister: can the minister assure Alberta hunters that the open spaces program will not increase the time for ordinary hunters to get drawn for their big-game tags?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I can. The other branch of the open spaces program, the recreational access management program, or RAMP, did not receive the same criticism, because it is publicly funded, so we will be proceeding with that. We'll be doing that in consultation with hunting groups in the two WMUs in southern Alberta, where it will proceed as a pilot project.

Thank you.

**Dr. Brown:** To the same minister: who is developing the details of the pilot project, and when will we know what the details will be?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, officials from SRD, as I said, will be meeting with landowners and hunting and fishing groups in southern Alberta to organize the RAMP program, which is a walk-on access program onto private lands, broader public consultation. The debate over open spaces, I think, showed that there is a consensus that the public needs to do more to conserve wildlife habitat. In fact, I had the opportunity last night to be at the Pheasants Forever banquet in Calgary, a very difficult assignment. I'm happy to report that last night, on their 15th anniversary, they raised over \$325,000 for habitat in Alberta, so I'm optimistic about the future of these programs.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

#### Suffield National Wildlife Area

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Suffield wildlife refuge fate will be decided this year by the federal Environment minister. The disturbing part is that Alberta's ministries of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development have declined to participate in the hearings scheduled for October into the proposal to drill over a thousand shallow gas wells in the Suffield natural reserve. As well, we see a pristine ecological reserve having this designation removed

by an order in council. The message seems to be that Alberta's protected areas are open to everyone for drilling. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: can the minister tell us why he has declined to participate in these hearings as . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has the floor.

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we recognize the value of the national wildlife area, but as the hon. member opposite well knows, this is on federal land, and the provincial government has no jurisdiction over what happens on federal lands.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. Instead, the government passes on the EUB to the hearings. So let's get it straight: where is the responsibility?

To the Minister of Environment. Seeing that the Sustainable Resource Development minister is doing the sidestep, I'll try you. Despite your comments in this House before that it is not your job to advocate for the environment, will this minister show leadership and participate in these hearings in order to protect this pristine area even if your colleague isn't interested?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development gave an appropriate answer, and I don't have a different answer to give to the member. The fact of the matter is that this is federal jurisdiction, and the province does not play an appropriate role there.

**Mr. Chase:** How interesting. It's only our federal forces that are keeping the drillers out. This government has no interest.

Let's try a third individual, then, in terms of protection. It's been strike 1, strike 2. Hopefully, this isn't third and out. This is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Given that your department has issued an order in council removing the status of ecological reserve from Upper Bob Creek, can the minister tell us if it is the policy of her department in collaboration with the ministries of Environment, Sustainable Resource Development, and Energy to open up Alberta's parks and protected areas to resource extraction?

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

**Mrs. Ady:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say, "Strike 3," but obviously I do have an answer for the member. As you know, we do have within parks special agreements that happen prior to them becoming parks, so we're honouring those agreements. I think there are only about 10 in the 81 new special places that we took over. We are, of course, honouring those that predate the park, but beyond that, we're not having new ones.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

#### Carbon Capture and Storage Development Council

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Slowing the onset of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions is a very important global issue, but it's also very important for Alberta. Today saw the announcement of the Alberta Carbon Capture and Storage Development Council. With planned upgraders and pilot carbon capture projects in my constituency, in the Industrial

Heartland, I'm keenly interested in the timely advancement of this technology. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Can he advise the House exactly what his expectations are of this council?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly, as the member correctly points out, the Industrial Heartland will indeed provide an excellent opportunity for carbon capture. The nearby Redwater conventional field will likewise present an excellent permanent destination for storage. My expectation is that by this fall the council will develop a clear work plan for implementing carbon capture and storage, complete with expectations around timing. It's also important to note that we're looking for a work plan that extends beyond . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. member might take the floor again.

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Environment. Since developing viable carbon capture and storage is not going to be cheap or quick, is this our best strategy? Will it have a big enough impact to justify the efforts and the investment?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, in the development of our climate change strategy we identified through our process and reinforced by experts that carbon capture and storage has huge potential for the province of Alberta. Approximately 70 per cent of potential for reduction of carbon emissions in this province is through carbon capture and storage. I have to be honest with the member: the cost of this capture and storage is enormous, but the cost of inaction is probably even more.

**Mr. Johnson:** Mr. Speaker, my last question, to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: are we relying solely on carbon capture, or are we still looking for other solutions to greenhouse gases?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are using technology in our research institutes, our postsecondaries to generate wins for both the economy and the environment and for all Albertans. In fact, just this morning in Quebec the Alberta Research Council announced their joint venture as part of a national announcement on speeding up Mother Nature's process for CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration: injecting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions into ponds and having the algae actually capture even more CO<sub>2</sub> and perhaps producing biofuels in the process. That's one example of the type of proactive things this government is sponsoring not only in Alberta but across Canada.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

#### Vehicle Emissions

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently Alberta produces the bulk of Canada's fossil fuel emissions. Meanwhile, technology has been deployed in the provincial service fleets in British Columbia and Ontario to minimize air pollution but not in this province. Will the Minister of Service Alberta commit to make the provincial fleet vehicles energy efficient? If so, when?

2:30

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

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Mr. Speaker, could I just have that question repeated, please?

**The Speaker:** No. Unfortunately, we can't do that.

**Mr. Kang:** Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Service Alberta commit to make the provincial vehicle fleet energy efficient? If so, when?

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

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta is currently looking at the vehicles and ensuring that any future vehicles are moving towards the green vehicle initiative and making sure that we move in that direction, so that's certainly a direction that this department will be taking.

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

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has adopted LEED standards to reduce emissions in public buildings. Can the minister explain to Albertans why similar standards have not been made to reduce vehicle emissions in this province?

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Mr. Speaker, with respect to the LEED standards in buildings that certainly is a direction of this department as well. There are a number of businesses in the community and developers that are in that direction, and we most certainly will be moving in that direction as well towards LEED standards.

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

#### Grizzly Bear Protection

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Constituents have shared with me their concerns about grizzly bear populations in Alberta, and they want to be assured that our government is responding in an appropriate manner to the situation because some say that it's in crisis. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is this department actively doing to avert what some fear might be the obliteration of an amazing species?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to reply to the Member for Calgary-Lougheed that this government has been very active on the grizzly bear file for the last six years. In 2002 a Grizzly Bear Recovery Team was appointed. They've been working on a number of projects in terms of identifying the cause of grizzly bear mortality, human and nonhuman, and also undertaken a DNA census, a very highly scientific and technical census that will give us accurate information on the number of bears and where they are. We also imposed a three-year moratorium on the grizzly bear hunt to minimize . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to

the same minister. Since provincial threatened species legislation states that recovery plans are to be completed within a reasonable amount of time, perhaps 24 months, why did it take so long to complete a recovery plan?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was just finishing saying before, I'm happy to report that the grizzly bear recovery plan has been posted on the SRD website just in the past two weeks, and it is available there for the public to look at. It did take several years to complete. There was a peer review process in which the draft report was looked at by some other biological scientists and some back and forth there, but the key findings are very simple and clear. There are certain areas of the province that constitute core grizzly bear habitat, and the most serious problem is unregulated motorized public access into those core grizzly bear habitats. That's a problem we intend to address.

**Mr. Rodney:** My final supplemental. It's all fine and well that we do have this information. That is great news, but once a species is gone, it's gone forever. My constituents need some assurance. How will this recovery plan ensure that our prized grizzly bear populations will not disappear in the future?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm optimistic that the intersection of the Grizzly Bear Recovery Team report with the land-use framework, which will designate priority land uses for the different areas of the province, will get us on the track to ensuring that the grizzly bear is on Alberta territory forever. As I said before, the key area is separating the core grizzly habitat areas from unregulated public motorized access. Eighty-nine per cent of human-caused mortality of grizzly bears is caused within only 500 metres of motorized access and Crown lands. That's the problem, and we're going to solve it.

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

#### Energy Efficiency in New Buildings

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Contrary to what our friends opposite would have the public believe, our government is committed to ensuring we are a progressive government with respect to the environment. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Sir, yesterday the Assembly heard what we are doing to encourage environmentally friendly practices in existing buildings. Can you tell me what we are doing to encourage environmentally friendly practices in new buildings we are funding?

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

**Mr. Hayden:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the government adopted the LEED silver standard a couple of years ago for all new government buildings and also supported buildings. LEED, of course, stands for leadership in energy and environmental design. It's a voluntary, point-based system that we've put in place for all of these projects, and it's overseen by the Canada Green Building Council. In fact, it covers water efficiency, energy efficiency, material selection, indoor air quality, design innovation, and it also . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. member, please.

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the B.C. government adopting LEED gold as their environment design standard for new buildings and the city of Calgary adopting LEED gold for large projects, how are we going to step up and adopt a higher standard for new buildings?

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

**Mr. Hayden:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was the first step, of course, that we took, and we were the first jurisdiction to move to the LEED standard in Canada. LEED silver has shown results where we are saving 40 to 45 per cent in energy costs because of this proactive measure that we've taken. We are also meeting the gold standard in certain cases, and it's part of my department's business plan to examine taking it to that next step, the gold standard.

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

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. My understanding is that the LEED standards do not recognize all the wood certification systems used by Alberta's wood industry. Sir, does that mean made-in-Alberta wood products cannot be used in projects using LEED standards?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. The LEED system does not preclude the use of Alberta wood products. In fact, LEED standards award points for utilizing locally or regionally produced materials, including wood, obviously, because it looks at the life cycle and the transportation involved. I'd like the record to show that, in fact, wood frame buildings are more energy efficient, more carbon efficient than those built with plastic and steel. This has been confirmed by a number of different studies, so we're encouraging the use of Alberta lumber products. Our message is simple: wood is good.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

#### Anthony Henday Drive Interchanges

**Mr. Xiao:** Mr. Speaker, the top priority for my constituents in west Edmonton is getting rid of the traffic lights on the western Anthony Henday Drive. I realize the province did not design or build this road, but the traffic volumes and the noise on this route are a major problem. Stony Plain Road, Lessard Road, Callingwood Road, and Cameron Heights need four intersections. Not only is it annoying for residents; really, it's not safe for drivers. To the Minister of Transportation: what are you doing to address the traffic problems in west Edmonton?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank that hon. member for that question because building interchanges on the west Anthony Henday Drive is a very high priority for this province. For the Stony Plain Road interchange we're finishing the necessary functional planning work, and for the Callingwood Road and the Lessard Road interchanges we're working hard to complete the design of the interchanges. All of the interchanges on west Anthony Henday Drive – I hate to have to tell you this – are subject to budget availability. I can assure you that once the funding is in place, my department will be ready to start construction as quickly . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member.

**Mr. Xiao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: I understand there's a planning process on the way, but how far along in the process are these important interchanges?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we're progressing very well on all of the projects. Of course, we would like them to go faster if possible. The Stony Plain Road functional work should be completed by the end of July, and the design work for the Callingwood Road and Lessard Road interchanges is scheduled also to be wrapped by the end of July. All of this behind-the-scenes planning and design work means that my department will be ready to start construction as quickly as we possibly can once we have . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member.  
2:40

**Mr. Xiao:** My final question to the same minister: what options are you exploring to get these projects done faster?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, my department is looking at a number of options so that we can speed up the process in building these interchanges as quickly as possible. One of the ways we are getting the projects done faster is moving ahead on all of the necessary functional planning work and design work prior to having any of the funding in place. That's going to save us a lot of time once we do get the funding. I've been very clear with my department officials that these are projects that need to be done very quickly. They've been tasked with finding new and innovative solutions that get these projects done faster while meeting the high standards of roadway and design construction . . .

**The Speaker:** That's a wrap. [interjection] That's a wrap.

### Introduction of Bills (continued)

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we'll revert now to where we were in the Routine. The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

#### Bill 4 Alberta Enterprise Corporation Act

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce and move Bill 4, the Alberta Enterprise Corporation Act.

The establishment of the Alberta Enterprise Corporation is a key component in our plan to promote diversification in our knowledge-based economic sectors. The corporation will establish the Alberta enterprise fund to co-invest in a number of early-stage venture capital funds focused on areas of strategic importance to Alberta and lead the development of the venture capital industry serving tech sectors in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for St. Albert.

#### Bill 203 Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008

**Mr. Allred:** Good afternoon, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request

leave to introduce Bill 203, the Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008.

The purpose of Bill 203 is twofold: firstly, to amend the Election Act to require fixed provincial election dates every four years commencing on October 15, 2012, and secondly, to amend the Local Authorities Election Act to require fixed municipal elections every four years commencing October 18, 2010. Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 will encourage debate regarding fixed election dates and other possible democratic reforms within Alberta's parliamentary system.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

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

#### Bill 204 Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008.

Bill 204 is intended to generate a safer environment for all users of Alberta's highways and roads and to reduce accidents caused by drivers using hand-held communication devices.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

#### Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Ms. Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of today's news release from Suncor Energy. Suncor's first-quarter results show net earnings of \$788 million, a 40 per cent jump over last year's quarter.

Thank you.

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

**Ms. Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and Leader of the Official Opposition I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Cecily Mills, who would like to bring the attention of the Premier to her extreme disappointment that the government has postponed acting to preserve 11,400 square kilometres of forest in the Wood Buffalo region. Given that so much of it has already been leased to industry, she feels that we need to act quickly to preserve it.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a document entitled Alberta Royalty Review: Results & Competitiveness Assessment. This was a document that was part of the late Martha Kostuch's fight when she was demanding more information on behalf of Albertans from the Department of Energy regarding the royalty reviews that had been conducted.

My second tabling this afternoon is five letters from constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar who are concerned and want changes to

Alberta's labour laws. These letters are from John Allard, Paul Lam, Bill Ulrich, Adelard Beaver, and Michael Forest.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I am tabling the five requisite copies of the program for the Gaining Ground conference, sustainable urban development conference, which will be held May 1 and 2, 2008, at the Westin in Calgary. Gaining Ground will focus on city and regional opportunities in the Calgary area to shift to sustainable choices and practices.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### Tablings to the Clerk

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Tarchuk, Minister of Children and Youth Services, pursuant to the Social Care Facilities Review Committee Act the Social Care Facilities Review Committee annual report 2006-2007.

On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Ady, Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, the Travel Alberta strategic tourism marketing plan 2008 to 2011.

### Projected Government Business

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much. Under Standing Order 7(6) could I please ask the Government House Leader to share with us the projected government House business for the week of April 28 to May 1.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As members will know from the tabling yesterday, essentially the business of next week is in Committee of Supply. To be specific, on Monday, April 28, under Government Bills and Orders the estimates of the Department of Aboriginal Relations from 8:30 to 10:30 and, time permitting, third reading of Bill 5 or second reading of bills 6 and 1 or address and reply to the Speech from the Throne.

In the afternoon of Tuesday, April 29, under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply the estimates of Seniors and Community Supports and in the evening at 7:30 in Committee of Supply the estimates of Energy. We do anticipate that there will be a response and reply to the Speech from the Throne that evening after estimates. Time permitting, there would be a possibility of bills 5, 6, or 1 if they haven't been addressed earlier.

Wednesday, April 30, 2008, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply, the estimates of the Department of Employment and Immigration and in the evening at 7:30 in Committee of Supply the estimates of the Department of Environment. Again, if we haven't dealt with it, Bill 5 in third reading, second or third reading of Bill 6, and potentially Bill 1. In the event that there are any other responses to the Speech from the Throne, they would need to be considered then, and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, May 1, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders in the Committee of Supply the estimates of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the Assembly will for almost, I guess, a month now concern itself with the primary course of business in the Assembly. When the Assembly elected a Speaker on the 14th of April, it also elected a Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees, and it also elected a Deputy Chairman of Committees. These two gentlemen will now be convening the committee stage of the process for nearly a month, and I thank you very much.

2:50

### Orders of the Day

#### Committee of Supply

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

**The Deputy Chair:** I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

The hon. Minister of Education.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First and foremost it's my privilege under Standing Order 59.02(4) to move the estimates of the office of the Legislative Assembly and the government estimates for the general revenue fund and the lottery fund for consideration by the Committee of Supply over the next number of days.

### Main Estimates 2008-09

#### Education

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to start by sharing with you details of the Alberta Education budget for the 2008-09 fiscal year, which is part of Budget 2008, presented by the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise on Tuesday.

Our mission at Alberta Education is to show leadership and to work with our stakeholders to make sure that students can find their passions and develop the knowledge, skills, and attributes that they need for lifelong learning, work, and citizenship. We have an excellent team at the department. In the short period of time I've come to know them, they've been educating me well, I hope. This, perhaps, is the test today, the assessment for learning.

The direction and leadership of our deputy minister, Keray Henke, has been very important. Unfortunately, Keray is unable to join us today as he is in Paris leading the Canadian delegation to the OECD's education policy committee, Alberta providing leadership abroad.

I am joined on the floor this afternoon by Jim Dueck, acting deputy minister as well as assistant deputy minister for accountability and reporting; Nancy Stewart, acting assistant deputy minister, strategic services; Gene Williams, executive director, strategic financial services; Kathy Telfer, communications director; and George Lee, acting director of budget and fiscal analysis. We also have other members of our team with us in the gallery today: Wilma Haas, assistant deputy minister of learning supports; Debby Johnston, acting assistant deputy minister, program development and standards; Carol McLean, executive director of people resources; and Michael Walter, executive director of field services. Also joining us on the floor is my executive assistant, Sean Yam. A very good team of people.

Of course, Mr. Chairman, colleagues in the Legislature will know that this team of people represents through them a very strong organization in the Department of Education who work with stakeholders across the province, with school boards and teachers, to make sure that we can provide that world-class education that we aspire to.

Alberta's kindergarten to grade 12 education system is grounded

in a set of principles which are identified in the 2008-11 business plan. The principles are student centred. The highest priority of the education system is the success of each student.

**Leadership:** Alberta is a leader in academic excellence so that all students can find their passions and achieve their potential. **Accessible:** every student in Alberta has the right of access to quality basic education consistent with the student's needs and abilities. **It's responsive:** the education system is flexible, anticipates student needs, and provides opportunities for parent and student choice. **It's innovative:** the education system demonstrates leading-edge innovation in supporting improved student learning outcomes. **It's collaborative:** the foundation for lifelong learning best occurs when partners and stakeholders work together to provide a holistic approach and a supportive environment. **It is equitable:** all students have equitable access to quality learning opportunities. **And it is accountable:** all those involved in the education system are accountable to Albertans for quality results, system sustainability, and fiscal responsibility.

Mr. Chairman, Albertans have high expectations of the education system. Everyone has attended school in one manner or another, and that experience shaped our own opinions about education. As a society we expect the education system to prepare our students to succeed in a future of unlimited possibilities. In order to serve our students well, we need to be focused on the strategic priorities as identified in our business plan.

In addition to the ministry's core activities, we have the following strategies in place to address seven areas of concern. **Participation and completion rates:** growing the technology and science sectors will require increasing student participation and completion rates in health, math, science, and career and technology studies courses. We want success for all students. We want to ensure that the education system continues to expand its capacity to remain adaptable, innovative, and responsive to the current and emerging needs of students for today and tomorrow. **First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students' success is important, and we're focusing on improving the educational attainment of those students in provincially funded schools.**

We're strengthening the education sector workforce. This means taking a proactive approach to emerging pressures in the education workforce to ensure that we have a child- and youth-centred workforce with the best people in the right places at the right times with the right skills to meet learner needs.

**Enhancing relationships.** Continual improvement of our education system requires developing new opportunities and approaches to engage stakeholders and communities across the province. It also ensures that our education system is responsive to the changing needs of Albertans.

Schools where students live and learn. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona was asking me about this afternoon, and it is an essential part of where we're going with the future in education. We're working in partnership with Infrastructure and Treasury Board to assess financing strategies for school construction to ensure that schools are available where students live. Of course, we need to work with school boards with respect to how they use their physical resources and assets to make sure that they have the best learning opportunities available for students where those students are.

**3:00**

Access to learning opportunities and intervention for at-risk students. As the learning that occurs in a child's first few years has a profound influence on his or her success in school and future quality of life, the ministry is enhancing its collaborative approach

to early learning and care. As well, the ministry will increase broad-based supports and early intervention initiatives for at-risk children to improve their learning outcomes.

With these principles and strategies in mind, Mr. Chairman, I'm both pleased and honoured to present the ministry's budget estimates and business plans. In the budget estimates we note that there are six programs that will be referenced in the budget this year. Our voted estimates begin on page 129 of the estimates book.

We have two primary funding streams that are important to note. The first stream is what we call voted government and lottery fund estimates, which total \$4.2 billion, or about 70 per cent of the budget, which we'll be voting on later in the session. Today education property taxes, which total about \$1.7 billion, comprise the second funding stream, accounting for 27.5 per cent of our budget. About \$1.5 billion of that \$1.7 billion resides in the Alberta school foundation fund, which is governed by statute. The remainder of about \$187 million goes to local separate school boards that choose to collect their education property taxes directly from their municipalities. In addition, \$150 million has been allocated to statutory expense for the initial payments towards the ASAP program, the Alberta school alternative procurement. The \$4.2 billion in voted estimates, the \$1.7 billion in education property taxes, and the \$150 million in statutory expenses for ASAP bring the support for K to 12 to just over \$6 billion.

The first program is ministry support services, the corporate function of the department, and that, Mr. Chairman, is self-explanatory. Program 2, operating support for public and separate schools, will increase by \$212 million, or 4.4 per cent, to \$5.1 billion. This money will go almost entirely towards increased grant funding for 62 school jurisdictions and 12 chartered schools. One hundred and nine million dollars of this increase is the general revenue fund portion of support to school boards. Another \$103 million in support comes from the education property taxes.

Operating support for public and separate schools includes grant dollars for the funding framework. This framework provides boards with operating funds, giving them the necessary flexibility to meet local priorities, and provides the differential or additional funding to address cost differences that are beyond the control of an individual school board. On average school jurisdictions will receive a 4.7 per cent increase in funding for the 2008-2009 year, which reflects an operational grant increase of 4.53 per cent, and higher funding percentage increases to provincial initiatives such as the small class size initiative at 9 per cent and student health at 6 per cent. In comparison the cost-of-living increase is expected to be 3.4 per cent.

Some of the specifics. English as a Second Language support increases by \$12 million, to \$70.6 million. This funding will allow school authorities to provide ESL programs for children as young as three and a half years of age through to grade 12. It includes the grant increase of 4.53 per cent as well as addressing an increasing number of students requiring these programs. Over the last five years, it should be noted, ESL program support has increased by 138 per cent, from \$29.6 million in 2004-05 to \$70.6 million in 2008-09, perhaps a reflection, Mr. Chairman, of the nature of change that's happening in our province.

Transportation funding increases by 6.7 per cent, or \$16.6 million, from \$246 million to \$263.3 million, which will provide boards with a 4.53 per cent increase in transportation grant rates, as well as \$19.5 million in fuel price contingency funding, a \$4 million increase, to address the high cost of fuel. School boards receive additional funding to cover every cent increase that the price of fuel is above 60 cents per litre. That's diesel fuel, I believe.

Special-needs support for early childhood to grade 12 students with special needs increases by \$30 million, to \$451 million. It's



funding which recognizes the additional costs of providing specialized programs. The budget will also provide support to important provincial initiatives such as the small class size initiative, the Alberta initiative for school improvement, or AISI, and the student health initiative partnerships.

Under small class size we'll continue to provide targeted funding to assist boards in reaching class size averages. Funding for this initiative increases by 9 per cent, or \$17.5 million, to \$212 million in Budget 2008. Since the start of this initiative boards have made significant progress. However, class-size averages in kindergarten to grade 3 present the largest challenges for school boards, and we're encouraging school boards to focus on ensuring that our youngest students benefit from the smaller class sizes.

Support for AISI increases by 4.7 per cent, or \$3.5 million, to \$77 million. It's money which supports great innovation in local projects that help improve student learning and performance. Our emphasis is going to be on the importance of sharing the learning experiences and the research from AISI among educators in the province. There is an annual AISI conference in February and a clearing house on the department website, which are just two ways in which teachers share their knowledge and help to improve learning for students.

The student health initiative support increases by 6 per cent, or \$2.7 million, to \$47 million, to provide students with special health needs increased access to integrated specialized support services.

We also have specific initiatives which will be funded to the tune of more than \$80 million in strategic priority areas such as improving high school completion rates, providing learning and teaching through increased access to classroom technologies, and providing an education system that's adaptable to meet the current and emerging needs of students. Over the next three years more than \$260 million will be invested in specific initiatives to improve the learning outcomes for children at risk and expand the education opportunities for all students. We're finalizing details now on new funding supports for integration of technology in Alberta classrooms, CTS equipment upgrading and curriculum development, additional supports to assist students who are visually impaired, distributed learning courseware, and strategies for early intervention for our youngest students.

We're making great progress in meeting the facility needs for students, with over 7,000 new student spaces opening in the 2008-2009 school year. The ministry will provide \$624 million for school infrastructure in 2008-2009 and more than \$1.6 billion over the next three years. I can still remember when a former colleague from Innisfail, Gary Severtson, led the new century school program and proposed that we needed to invest \$1.5 billion. We've done that, and we've done significantly more than that, but there's still a high need. In the budget documents presented, the program line indicates \$473,513,000. That does not include the statutory component of \$150 million for the ASAP procurement initiative.

The 2008-11 capital plan also includes 32 new schools to be built through public-private partnerships. Phase 1 provides 18 schools in Edmonton and Calgary, expected to open as early as September 2010, and phase 2 will provide 14 new schools in the communities of Calgary, Edmonton, Okotoks, Langdon, Spruce Grove, and Sherwood Park. Budget 2008 also includes \$96 million for infrastructure maintenance and renewal funding to improve and prolong the life of our school buildings.

Sixty-three million dollars for program delivery support services includes curriculum development, student assessment, and other stakeholder supports such as capital planning, field services, and French language services.

Basic education programs: \$104 million for basic education includes the Learning Resources Centre, high-speed network, French

language programs, and technologies such as video conferencing. A \$5 million increase is mainly for high-speed network to bring SuperNet into the schools and to cover operating costs.

Private schools, Mr. Chairman, are an important part of the education system and will receive the same 4.53 per cent increase that the public schools have received. But it's important for me to acknowledge that there has been significant pressure and input from the operators of private schools, and they are certainly looking for more assistance in the funding area, particularly in operations and maintenance but also in the overall funding, which is now at 60 per cent of the public school funding. That will be a part of the larger discussion as we go forward with respect to education in the province.

Every day, Mr. Chairman, teachers connect with students in classrooms, online via video conferencing, or by some other means, and we need to continue to support our teachers on the front lines, recognize the great work that they do and the impact that they're having on our students' lives.

Education, I think people can see from this budget, continues to be a priority for this government. People from around the world look at Alberta for what's happening here and the leadership that this province is providing in the area of excellence in education. But there's a lot more that we can do, and we will continue to find ways to make sure that every student in Alberta – each student in Alberta – can find their passion, can meet their potential, and can be successful.

3:10

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. I very much appreciate this opportunity to speak. Education has been the primary motivating factor for the majority of my life. I was a teacher with the Calgary board of education for 34 years. During those 34 years I was a member of the Alberta Teachers' Association local 38 Economic Policy Committee from 1988 to 1998. I was a member of the Council of School Representatives for numerous years. I also had the good fortune or misfortune to be a member of the negotiating subcommittee in 1993 and 1994 when we were forced to bring back to our membership a 5 per cent cutback, that was supposed to be temporary but, unfortunately, continued for years afterwards.

My family has been involved in education. My wife, Heather, taught for 17 years, and our daughter, Christina, followed in our teaching footsteps prior to the birth of our two grandsons, Kiran and Rohan. With their birth my enthusiasm and dedication to education increased severalfold.

I'd like to begin by discussing operational funding. Operational grants to school boards will increase by 4.3 per cent, to \$5.2 billion. Clearly, in the unique situation of Alberta and its overheated economy this increase in funding may very well not be enough. Several school boards face serious financial strains and have had to make cuts to important programs and supports and in some cases even close schools. I'll be referring to some of those schools that have been forced to close a little later on.

The Minister of Education likes to emphasize that Alberta spends more money on education than any other province. While this may be true, it is important to remember that Alberta is not like every other province. In fact, when total education spending is seen as a percentage of total wealth or GDP, which is the more comparable measure used by economists, Alberta actually ranks at the bottom. How does this last-place ranking fit with the ministry's overall vision of having the best education system in the world? Given inflation and the increased cost of delivery of education each year,

how is the 4.3 per cent increase enough to address the current issues in education and work towards the ministry's own goal of having the best K to 12 system in the world?

The ATA put out a press release saying that the status quo budget makes the grade but room remains for improvement. The small increase is enough to keep things going the way they are. However, there are significant concerns about lack of funding for early childhood learning wrapped around support for students with special needs, hiring of teacher librarians and counsellors, and other improvements in classroom learning conditions. How does the minister expect to make improvements in these areas and others without more support for education?

In terms of the best utilization of the money that we do have, I would hope that the minister would consider the possibility of returning a degree of autonomy to local school boards that was taken away in 1993; that is, the authority to collect and use what accounted for 50 per cent of their budget, and that's the education portion of the property tax.

Something else I would like to think of in terms of using money better rather than asking for more money is the notion of the best bang for your buck and the reality of students in Calgary spending over a hundred thousand kilometres on a daily basis on buses, the cost of transportation, and the cost of fuel. I believe that money could be better spent in establishing local schools. [The timer sounded]

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Yes?

**The Deputy Chair:** Your 20 minutes is up on this one.

**Ms Blakeman:** No, it isn't. The 20 minutes started with him.

**Mr. Hancock:** The 20 minutes started with him.

**The Deputy Chair:** Okay. Fine.  
Sorry. Proceed, hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you.

**An Hon. Member:** Start again.

**Mr. Chase:** I won't put you through that pain.

In terms of school districts that have experienced deficits, this figure comes from school jurisdiction deficits for the year ended August 31, 2006, and the figures come from the Ministry of Education audited financial statements released at the end of 2007.

Public school boards. Buffalo Trail regional division No. 28, its deficit was \$48,644. Canadian Rockies regional division No. 12 had an operational deficit of \$85,931. The Grande Yellowhead regional division No. 35 deficit was \$320,215. Lethbridge school district No. 51 ran a deficit of \$95,768. Sturgeon school division No. 24 had a deficit of \$242,708.

With regard to Catholic school boards Christ the Redeemer in the Calgary separate regional division ran a deficit of \$516,225. For East Central Alberta school regional division No. 16 the deficit was \$310,467. Greater St. Albert Catholic regional division No. 29 had a deficit of \$950,045. Holy Spirit regional division No. 4, \$352,996. Lakeland No. 150, \$47,743. St. Thomas Aquinas regional division No. 38, \$433,174.

With regard to charter school authorities Westmount Charter School Society had a deficit of \$81,444.

The total of these school board deficits was \$3,485,360, and these figures do not include deferred infrastructure deficits, a concern which I'll raise later in the debate.

I appreciate the opportunity for the minister to respond to this section.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member started by first of all acknowledging that Alberta was spending more per capita than any other jurisdiction and then sort of turned that into a negative by saying: but as a percentage of GDP we're not making the grade.

Well, the reality is that it's not whether you're spending more money at all that's important; it's whether you're getting the results you need to get and whether you're providing the educational opportunities the students in Alberta need. That's why the world is pointing to Alberta: because Alberta and school boards in Alberta do a good job at making sure that students have the educational opportunities they need so that they can have the knowledge, skills, and attributes to be successful in the 21st century. That's what it's about, not how many dollars we're paying, whether it's measured per capita or on the GDP.

The question about 4.3 per cent being enough of an increase. School boards are getting a 4.53 per cent school year increase. They know what their numbers were for this year, for next year, the 4.53 percentage increase right across their operating budget. So not only does that meet the increase in teachers' salaries, which is a significant portion of their funding, but it also provides them with the resources that they need to do the increases in salaries for other employees and the increase that they need on their other operating costs.

I think I mentioned in my opening remarks that we estimate the inflationary costs to be about 3.4 per cent, so the 4.53 per cent – I would disagree with those that say it was a status quo budget. It actually provides them with resources to move forward, particularly when you look, Mr. Chairman, at the fact that overall school boards are getting about a 4.7 per cent increase when the other factors such as the funding, particularly important, for class size initiative are factored in.

In terms of the specific issues that were raised by the ATA, I think they're very important. The early childhood, the wraparound services, the teacher-librarians: those are areas that I think we need to be working collaboratively on as we go forward. Very important. My favourite area is – well, actually, all three of those are my favourite areas. Early childhood is absolutely essential, particularly that at-risk students get a good start, that we focus on that. Wrap-around services: it's essential as students come to school and bring their societal issues with them that we have the supports in place, working with Health, working with Children and Youth Services, and working with nongovernmental organizations in the community to make sure that the supports are there so that the issues, the societal issues the children bring with them and the health issues that they bring with them, can be dealt with so that, importantly, when they're in the classroom, they're able and ready to learn. That's essential, Mr. Chairman. We're going to be working on those issues, and there is room in this budget to work in those areas.

The beauty of the unfunded liability resolution that my predecessor was able to achieve is that it gives us the time and the flexibility and the opportunity to work with stakeholders in the community to work on those particular issues. We also need to deal and work on the issues with respect to what's the appropriate resourcing in the school, whether it's counsellors or teacher-librarians. I think we need to be working in those areas.

3:20

Autonomy. The hon. member raises the question of education property taxes and the autonomy of school boards. I can't say this is government policy, but on a personal level I agree that school boards ought to have some of their taxing authority back. When the provincial education property tax issue was moved to a provincial area, the original concept was to take the industrial tax base and equalize it across the province so that one school district didn't get rich because they had lots of heavy industry and a neighbouring school division has to rely on a residential property tax base. But, Mr. Chairman, that's a much bigger policy discussion that we'd need to have happen before any changes were made there. That's not something that the Minister of Education by him- or herself would be able to do in the context of a budget plan.

Should we be talking about the overarching policy framework with respect to education in this province over the next year or two? Absolutely. Should part of that be a question of what the role of the school boards is? Absolutely. Should we be willing and ready to embrace different forms of financing? Absolutely. Is one of those kinds of financing property tax? Certainly, it is. Having said that, of course, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association I think is very clearly on record as wanting us to abolish the education property tax, and others would have that same viewpoint. So it's not an easy discussion but, certainly, one that at some point we should be embracing.

With respect to the children on buses I think it's very clear that this government's policy is to have schools where students live. It's also very important from my perspective as minister and as an MLA that schools are the core of the community. They need to be the core of the community. Schools are where students go. Most of the time our children are in schools. They build important long-term relationships in those schools. Most of us as adults can remember that one teacher who's made an important connection with us, who's inspired us. It is very important that we make sure that we have the schools in the right places. My parliamentary assistant, the Member for Edmonton-Decore, will be working very hard on the capital side of things to have a capital project going forward to make sure that we can find the methodology to appropriately deal with both the issue of underutilized schools and how we make sure that in areas that are in decline in terms of student enrolment, we can still ensure that there's a very strong learning opportunity for students and as well make sure that we have schools built where schools are needed in growing areas.

The hon. member mentioned deficits. What he should be looking at is the fact that the cumulative operating surplus for the province's school divisions has grown from \$220.6 million to \$323.8 million from 2005-06 to 2006-07. School boards can run an operating deficit one year if they have a surplus to apply it against, and many of them do. There's only one school board to my understanding in the province that has an operating deficit that didn't have a surplus to apply it against. I would say that the policy, Mr. Chairman, is – and we will certainly be working again on the financial side of things to make sure that school boards follow the policies or implement appropriate policies – that there should be about 2.5 per cent of their expenses set aside as an accumulated operating surplus to help them move from year to year to flatten out those curves. The deficit list that the hon. member read out sounds like a very negative thing, but he should look at the full picture, and that full picture shows that our school boards are fairly financially sound in this province.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. One more comment and question with regard to the operational funding and then I'll move on to maintenance and construction.

When we talk about education, we have to remember that it's not just another expense; it's an integral part of building a strong future for our children, province, country, and world. Every effort should be made in a province as rich as Alberta to build the best education system in the world. However, it seems as though this government likes to say a lot but do little more than just squeak by. They have had more than enough time over the past years to put the necessary support into education, but for them, unfortunately, the status quo seems to be acceptable. In this year's budget we see another increase to horse racing. Why does horse racing need more money and support while the status quo for education is acceptable? Even though funding for education will increase slightly in this budget, it won't be enough to maintain anything else other than the status quo.

Maintenance and construction. School facility operations and maintenance support will increase to \$436 million, a 4.7 per cent increase in 2008-09. This comes from estimates page 132, line 2.0.6. However, school facilities infrastructure will receive \$473.5 million this year, which is actually a decrease of 23 per cent since last year's estimates, page 132, line 3.0.1. This is partly due to the funds dedicated towards P3 projects totalling \$150 million. One hundred and fifty million dollars will go towards Alberta schools alternative procurement, which is a nice way of saying P3s.

Why is this department decreasing its school facilities infrastructure budget by over 23 per cent when need is severe and construction costs are only rising? Why is \$150 million going to P3 schools instead of fully funded public schools? We received leaked Treasury Board documents showing that P3 schools will cost hundreds of millions of dollars more than originally anticipated in the capital plan, and it seems very irresponsible to not build publicly funded schools. Is now really the right time to cut the school infrastructure budget for public projects and put us into a 30-year debt, which our children and grandchildren will end up paying?

Including the P3 projects, approximately \$624 million will be spent on school infrastructure capital support in 2008-09. This is only \$9 million more than the 2007-2008 forecast. With the rapid growth occurring in this province, is this really going to be enough? The building of new schools through P3s raises some serious concern. Can we have a commitment from the minister that the \$473 million budgeted for school facilities, estimates page 132, line 3.0.1, will not be used for any additional P3 projects? Incidentally, not a single stake has been driven into the ground where a future P3 project will occur. So the promises that P3s were going to be faster has not been realized.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, and thank you to my colleague from Calgary-Varsity for allowing me to participate in this debate with the Minister of Education. Welcome to the staff that are on the floor.

I have four areas that I would like to participate in in a back and forth with the minister. The areas are Braille funding materials for visually impaired people that are inside of our system, educational property tax reductions for seniors, school utilization rates, and taxation requisition powers to school boards.

I actually have received, as I'm sure the minister did, a letter from the CNIB that notes that Canada is not publicly supporting library services for people with print disabilities, and I thought: hmm, I've heard about this somewhere else recently. In fact, it was quite an extensive bit of media that was done around students with visual

impairments who are unable to get educational materials in a reasonable period of time to complete their coursework. Seeing as this took place recently, which would put it sometime in let's say late March or April, I'm assuming that these students have gone through a good part of the year without the materials that they requested. My question to the minister is about what plans, hopefully, the ministry has in place to address this problem prior to the beginning of the next school year.

I'll let the minister answer that, and then I'll continue.

3:30

**Mr. Hancock:** My understanding, Mr. Chairman, is that we have a very solid resource process for assistive technology and for supports for persons with disabilities and particularly relative to persons who are blind. It's not perfect, and sometimes situations can occur where the right resources aren't available at the right time, and I think that was probably the circumstance that's been reported recently. I'm given to understand that when students enrol for courses of studies and if done on a timely basis and the school boards make our Learning Resources Centre aware of the student that's enrolled and the circumstance, the Braille resources can be provided on a timely basis in most circumstances. There is sometimes a delay in providing resources, and I think one of the circumstances that was referred to in the recent article was getting a chapter of the book at a time, so to speak.

I'm given to understand – and I'm making some further inquiries into this – that we can provide resources on a timely basis as long as the Learning Resources Centre is alerted to the registration of a student in an area. Of course, there's some lead time in making sure that the resources are in place, but if enrolment takes place in April or May, as it normally would do, and the information is made available, the resources will be available for the student at the start of the school year. If there is something else, a student moving in that we are not aware of or if there hasn't been timely communication of the need, then there can be a delay in the provision of resources. We will be looking at that more thoroughly, and we have been working very closely with the CNIB, as I understand it, and they're working with us in terms of making sure that we have timely provision of resources and that we're providing the right resources.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. I'm glad to hear that that is being looked at because I think we want to welcome and embrace a diversity of people in our school system, and I think that people with visual impairments would like to participate at the same time as the rest of their colleagues. So I appreciate your looking into that.

My second issue is around education property tax for seniors. As the minister knows, I have a fairly large percentage of seniors in my community, not as large as the 15 per cent that gets hit in some places like Lethbridge and Camrose, but I think I'm in the 12 or 13 range, so I'm pretty high. This continues to be an area of resentment and gets brought up every single election. When seniors have paid their educational property tax all the way along, why when they become a senior do they still have to pay this? I give the argument about: well, you know, it's to all of our benefit that we have a strong public education system, that we all benefit by having educated children, that when I'm older, I want to have well-educated young people looking after me. You can give all of those arguments to people, but they still say: why am I having to continue to pay and pay and pay?

Actually, two elections ago I can remember that the Liberals had a policy on reducing the educational property tax for seniors. I believe we had the same policy this time out. I'd be interested in hearing from the minister on whether that is at all being considered

or, I was going to say, if there was anything else that could be done. But it's pretty straightforward: either you're going to charge seniors or you're not.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Yes, Mr. Chairman. In fact, actually that's not an Education policy; that's a tax policy. We get the honour and privilege of spending the money once it's raised, but education property tax is really a question of taxation. So I would invite the hon. member to either address that question to the minister of the Treasury Board or the Minister of Finance and Enterprise or, in fact, as a seniors' program to the minister of seniors.

There is, in fact, a seniors' program which freezes the property tax so that a senior will not have had to face any increase in their education property tax since, I think, 2004. Now, I'm constantly amazed that there are people who are not aware of that, so I try and make a point of publicizing that to my constituents through my newsletter and other ways, and I would certainly encourage the hon. member to do so as well and all hon. members to do so because I'm surprised at the number of seniors in their own homes who don't have knowledge of that. That's a rebate program, and I understand that that was due to technology not being able to identify for some reason who seniors are and just apply it to the tax bill at the front end.

The property tax for seniors was frozen in 2004: no increase to property tax based on increase in value of the homes or those sorts of issues. So that's a very important start. As I say, I'm really talking about somebody else's area of jurisdiction because although it's called education property tax, we just are concerned about the amount that gets into the foundation. We get to deal with that from that end, but the rest of it really happens through Municipal Affairs, Treasury Board, and Seniors.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. I appreciate the explanation, but frankly my seniors would say right back to you that they're still paying an educational property tax even though it was frozen in 2004. So a fine distinction from the minister but not one, I think, that the . . .

**Mr. Hancock:** Oh, I didn't say that it shouldn't be discussed. I just said: discuss it with the right ministries.

**Ms Blakeman:** I will, and I'll be interested to see if they then refer me back to you because I bet you they will.

Okay. My fourth area is one that I have raised before, and it continues to cause me great concern. What we have here is a policy that is at odds with what another government department, that being Municipal Affairs, and more specifically the municipalities that fall under Municipal Affairs are trying to do. What causes this is that utilization rate. The effect of that, when implemented, is that it puts the school boards in the position of having to close smaller enrolment schools in the core part of the city, not just the inner city. Let me call it the core because that rolls out a little bit further. They're put in the position of having to close those core schools at the very same time as the municipalities are trying to rejuvenate those very same areas.

The minister will agree with me when I say that schools are the heart of our communities, and even if we don't have children in schools, they are a gathering point. They are a place of activity. Everybody in the community is invited to come to the school Christmas concert. They see the kids walking by. They come to know who's in their community. They see the parents walking kids to school. Neighbours talk to each other. It helps generate a sense

of community and security. If we want to talk about community safety, that's one of the ways that we can build it. So when we have a government policy that in essence results in or where the consequences of it are closure of schools tending to be in the core of cities, it absolutely fights against what the municipalities are trying to do in revitalizing those communities.

I have one of those schools that was closed because of the utilization rate. It was closed in about 1998 or 1999, and we now see what it did to our community of Queen Mary Park. In essence, that closed school has become a huge black hole and at night literally a black hole because the schoolyard, of course, is not used. The kids can't use the playground that was built there now because it's being used by a criminal element, and now there's danger. There have been needles found in the sand and things like that, so people won't even let their kids go there. There's no community activity around that school at all, and it's literally a black hole. Plus, we're missing all the activity that that school generated on a daily basis.

I'm looking at the condominiums that have been built around that community, and guess what? They're not condominiums that anticipate families because who with a family would move into that community now? There's no school. So when the developers go to build condominiums, they look around and say: "Well, no school, no kids. Okay. Well, all right. Then we're going to build . . ." I think most of the ones I looked at were in the kind of 600 to 900 square foot range. Those are not condominium sizes that would encourage a family.

Now this becomes self-perpetuating. Even if you did have a family that wanted to move in, they're going to have a harder time finding a place to live because the condominiums have been built in a much smaller size. What we've done, then, is start to hollow out once again our municipalities, the centre part of our cities. We all should have learned that lesson, not to do this stuff.

I will continue to raise the dilemma that is created by this department's choices: the position they then put the school boards in, the decisions the school boards make based on that utilization rate, and the effect that it has on the municipalities that are trying to revitalize the communities. This is, if you would work with me here, a cross-ministry issue, but it continues to really affect our communities, and if you want to talk about safety issues and community safety, boy, have we seen the results of this around Queen Mary Park because of the closure of that school.

Would the minister like to respond to that, or should I keep going?

3:40

**Mr. Hancock:** First of all, I think it's probably overstating the case to say that the closure of the school brought the criminal element, who are there in the evenings, into the playgrounds, but I would accept the hon. member's point that a school is very important to a community and, in fact, can be the core of the community, can be the core of how you build other community services and programming and other things and creates a great deal of the life of a community. That's why it's very important that we do build schools as we change our demographics, as we grow, that we continue to keep up with the schools.

But there's also a reality, and that is that they have to be viable. They have to be viable not only in terms of the operation, in terms of the building and the lights. They have to be viable in terms of the educational opportunities for the children, which is much, much more important.

I point again to the city centre school project in Edmonton, where I thought they did a very good job in partnership with the province. In fact, I would give kudos to the now Premier, who was then the

minister of infrastructure and transportation, who was willing to sit down with us and say: well, notwithstanding the so-called utilization formula we understand that there has to be an opportunity to rationalize school use but to make sure that there's an opportunity for every child to get a good education. It's not enough just to say: "Well, we've got a school here, and it's important to the community. We've got 50 children, and we should keep it open." Those 50 children have to have access to very good learning opportunities, and you can't provide the breadth of programming in that kind of an operation.

It's not really always about the building; it's got to be first and foremost about the children. Now, that doesn't mean putting them on a bus and making them ride for two hours either. It's a balance, and it's a balance that needs to be worked in partnership between the school boards, the community, and the province coming together and saying: what's the rational way to deal with this?

You do have to have formulas for certain things, but you can't allow formulas to drive your life. That's why I go back to the city centre school project, where the then minister of infrastructure and transportation, now the Premier, was willing to come to the table and say: if you're prepared to put together a plan which shows how these city centre schools can work together, can provide a better educational opportunity for the students, notwithstanding any formulas we'll provide the money to help renovate the receiving schools and make sure that they have the best possible place. The school board got together to make sure that they had the best possible programming. That's the type of success we can have if we're prepared to all get together and work for a common outcome, and that common outcome is the best educational opportunity for the children so that they can succeed.

Yes, we need to be looking at the corollary issues around the utilization of land in the city and the life cycles of neighbourhoods and how you keep neighbourhoods alive and how important the school is to the neighbourhood. I agree with all that, but first and foremost we have to talk about how we educate our children and how we make sure that there is the best educational opportunity available for our children.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, as the daughter of two teachers I couldn't agree more, but as the MLA for Edmonton-Centre and MLA for a community that has lost a school – now we're coming up on 10 years, I think – we can really see the effect that it had on our community.

Yes, it's about the kids, and I look to you as the leader of that particular ministry and the fine people that you have working with you to make sure that from the policies and regulations that you put into play, you're aware of the consequences that come further down the road. Even where we have a school, as the minister said, that isn't viable for the number of students and where the quality of education would not be up to what it should be, again, because of choices that the ministry makes and the instructions or parameters that are given to the school boards that they have to then put into effect, the school boards in many cases are not even able to bring other groups into the school, a daycare centre, for example, or other not-for-profit agencies, because the requirement that the school be self-sufficient or whatever such wording is used then often precludes other not-for-profits getting into the school and sharing the space because they can't afford it. So where we could have kept a school open and viable in a community using some creativity, the choices that this government department makes often preclude or remove that flexibility from the school boards and, correspondingly, from the community. So that's what I'm looking for here.

We have to stop doing this, or we're going to end up with huge

scorched-earth centres of our cities and then this sort of doughnut of suburbs who all now have schools. What are you going to do with those schools when those people leave? They're not going to come downtown because we don't have a downtown left. Anyway, we'll work on that.

As I heard the discussion, I also wanted to underline how important I think the requisitioning powers of the local school boards are. I mean, the government was very clever in the way things were written, giving I think it's a 5 per cent window to the local school boards to be able to requisition for 5 per cent of their funds. Am I straight on this one?

**Mr. Hancock:** Three per cent.

**Ms Blakeman:** Three per cent. There we go. Very clever. But it's such a small amount of money that they're not really going to be able to do much with it. They'd have to go back to the voters for a very small amount of money that isn't going to achieve what they need to do and incur the wrath of the voters in doing that requisitioning.

This government makes me very uneasy with the willingness they've certainly shown in the past to completely wipe out duly elected bodies. I'm thinking of the firing of the Calgary school board and I think at least one other one here. But, you know, the position that the school boards and the trustees are put in when they don't have requisitioning powers but they take the wrath of all of the parents and the local communities for what is the education in their communities is uneven and, in my opinion, unfair.

I would add that I think what the government did was – I hope it wasn't deliberately dishonest, but I think that has been the outcome of it. Saying that the government was going to collect the education property tax and pool it so that it could redistribute it on an equitable basis – those are the words I remember from that time; I think I'm pretty close – well, nonsense. It goes into general revenue, and then the department comes up with whatever budget they want, you know, to accomplish their mandate. That money does not go into a special fund marked education and then go back out again. It goes into general revenue. So don't – well, I'm sure the minister will get time to tell me about it.

That's the other point I want to make, I think, that I go back to believing that that's an important part of our elected officials as trustees, that they have requisitioning powers, and 3 per cent ain't it.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A number of interesting things come to mind as a result of all this discussion. I think first and foremost is the interesting juxtaposition of the autonomy of the school boards to raise money through a tax levy or requisition and then take away the autonomy of the school boards with respect to their decisions with respect to how they deploy their physical assets and tell them what to do with that. I mean, the two don't really go together. We need to respect the school autonomy, but – and I would agree with this – we ought not to put artificiality around that in terms of formulas which are absolutely strict in terms of how we allocate. I mean, we have school boards that are elected. They're elected to allocate the education resources in an appropriate way for the education of the students within that jurisdiction. And I fully respect that autonomy.

Now, I answered a question earlier about . . . [Mr. Hancock's speaking time expired]

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. Just another, well, three concerns with regard to P3s. There is a double jeopardy faced by P3 schools. One that I cannot understand – and possibly the minister can explain it to me – is when Alberta has the best financial rating why we would go to a private lender to borrow the money to build the schools. Our sustainability fund was supposed to cover those types of costs. The last figure I recall for the sustainability fund was somewhere in the area of \$8 billion, so the notion of borrowing for school construction, which in terms of projects are some of the least expensive outlays for the elementary schools, especially the K to 3s: I'm not sure why we would borrow. Then the concern is that this expenditure is paced over a 30-year period. We have no idea 30 years from now if we'll be able to pay our bills because the reality is that our renewable resources with the exception of bitumen – and water may determine how much longer we can harvest the bitumen. How can we pay those bills in 30 years?

3:50

One of the interesting things I found out at one of the P3 explanations in Calgary last summer was the notion that the company that builds the P3s can actually sue the local school board if they do not believe that the maintenance that has been carried out on the building they constructed is sufficient. I would suggest that that creates that double liability. I was not completely joking with one of the members from Infrastructure, a lawyer who was attending, when I said: you're going to spend more time trying to make sure there aren't any loopholes and that the liabilities and the responsibilities are clearly delineated so that school boards and taxpayers, who are ultimately responsible, don't face a libelous suit for the maintenance. This is a concern.

Schools throughout the province are in bad need of repairs to infrastructure. What support from this year's budget will be directed towards addressing such infrastructure issues? What is being done to make sure the infrastructure situation doesn't get worse? Are there plans in place to finance infrastructure maintenance at new schools? Because we certainly wouldn't want them to get to the state so many of our schools are currently in. Yesterday in my member's statement I referenced the fact that the average age of schools in Calgary is 40 years, and I'm sure in Edmonton it's a similar circumstance.

Now, back in 2005 according to Alberta infrastructure and transportation the deferred maintenance on schools was approximately \$1.4 billion. In 2008, three years later, I'm sure that amount is growing. If the minister can correct me, I would estimate that it's probably one and three-quarter billion dollars to potentially \$2 billion because the grants that have been given to school boards have not begun to address the needs. For example, together the Calgary public and separate school boards' deferred deficit is over \$700 million itself.

Again, I'm not as familiar and I'll have to become familiar with the Edmonton situation, but I would think that they must have similar large amounts. I know that I visited a number of inner-city Edmonton schools. In one school the only washroom they had for a three-storey elementary school was in the basement, and it became an elementary/junior high. The trick was: may I go to the washroom? Then the child disappeared until the next day. Obviously, we have to upgrade our older schools and maintain them.

Last year in Calgary there were over 60 schools that experienced leaks in their roofs, and the money has not been provided. We have Western Canada high school, where the front facing, large chunks of limestone, came off the window ledges. Previous to that actual windows blew out because of the wood rotting around them. The cost of the replacement of Western Canada is now more than \$50

million in itself. Other schools like Bowness, while not quite as old, are facing similar demands.

Moving on to school closures. Strategic priority 6 of the education business plan states that the Ministry of Education will work in partnership with Infrastructure and Treasury Board to “ensure schools are available where students live and learn.” That makes absolute sense. We’ve talked about: why put kids on a bus and pay the cost of leasing the bus and the cost of gas and the cost to children of the time lost on the bus as opposed to being able to walk to their local school?

This is just a sampling of the list of schools that were closed, threatened, or set to close going back to 2005: North Edmonton, Wellington, Strathearn. Now, Strathearn is in Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I had an opportunity to attend a very heated discussion at Strathearn school with the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Parents, former students, were absolutely passionate about the programs in this old school, and they were very reluctant to move to another school. Even though there would be a choice of more options, it was the general consensus of parents that they would much rather stay and have their students attend schools that in some cases their grandparents had attended.

In Calgary in 2005 Ogden school was closed, and in 2006 I was very sorry to see the school where I started in 1971, Jerry Potts, close. After a fashion it’s had a little bit of a rebirth in that it’s now being leased to a francophone school board, so it is still serving as the education building it was intended for. In 2007 High Park elementary. In Calgary Greenview elementary school. We come to 2008 and concerns over St. Clement school in Calgary. This year schools that are potentially on the chopping block: in Edmonton Woodcroft; back to Calgary, Windsor Park; back to Edmonton, Ritchie junior high school. The Valhalla school near Grande Prairie, that I mentioned, and in Westlock county Meadowview school and also Vimy school.

While it’s extremely difficult when schools close in the central communities of large urban centres like Calgary and Edmonton, it’s even more traumatic in rural areas, and it puts kids on buses for an even greater length of time. Part of the reason for these closures is what I would consider to be a flawed space utilization formula that doesn’t take into account the Learning Commission’s recommendations for lower class sizes. Schools aren’t being built to a new formula. They are being built to the old formula that works against inner-city schools, where hallway spaces and even spaces in staff rooms and libraries are counted as teachable space and add to the closure. I believe that if the space utilization formula truly reflected the Learning Commission’s reports and the two were dealt with in tandem, then there would be fewer schools closed.

Earlier this week in question period I asked the minister about school closures and the need to ensure that students are getting the best possible education in their own communities. To do this does not entail government telling school boards what to do but, rather, giving them the necessary and adequate supports to make sure that Alberta students are getting the best quality education they can. Overall support for public and separate schools has only increased by about 4.3 per cent. Does the minister agree that additional dollars are needed for school boards to keep schools open? How will this very small increase in operating support help to keep the schools open?

My fear is that despite the idea that when we close an inner city school we then open a suburban school that it’s not happening. School closures are happening considerably more rapidly than school openings. How does the government justify closing schools in communities where they are desperately needed when new schools are waiting to be built, which takes both time and money?

In other words, strategically let’s keep the schools open. Let’s look at it in terms of saving money, community school aspects. Let’s talk about sharing with Montessoris, sharing with Spanish programs. Let’s do everything we can do to keep a school open and allow school boards a bit more flexibility and monetary support.

There are a number of schools, particularly in rural Alberta, that face serious pressures. They need the support of school boards and government. One such school, as I mentioned in question period earlier this week, is Valhalla school near Grande Prairie. While there are hopes that this school will be able to stay open this fall, potentially as a charter, it nonetheless illustrates the need for more support for schools and school boards to prevent unnecessary school closures, which greatly affect students, teachers, and parents throughout the province. The budget does not have anything on what the government will do to prevent unnecessary school closures. If the minister could share how the government plans to keep schools open, that would be appreciated. Please don’t pass it on to the local school boards because unless they have the funding to keep them open, they’re forced to make draconian decisions.

**4:00**

Does anything in this budget directed towards ministry resources and functions go towards review of school utilization and the implementation of a new method for determining school closures which will prevent schools from unnecessarily closing? What is happening now is another space utilization problem in that we have old portables that cannot possibly be moved, yet they’re counted in the space formula.

We have another problem. I’m all for modular schools. I see modular schools as an answer because of the flexibility of adding and subtracting. This is a great concept, but right now we have a sole-source contractor, who I believe works out of the Carstairs area, that can’t keep up with the provincial demands for the modular schools.

I’ll sit, and look for your comments and suggestions. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have to admit to being constantly amazed. I thought we were going to be talking about educating our children, and we’re going to spend all of our time talking about buildings and financing of buildings. But if that’s the desire, let’s talk about the financing of buildings.

First of all, I wish I had a dollar for every time somebody said: in a province as rich as Alberta we ought to be able to. The allocation of scarce resources is the toughest job in government, and when you’re in government, resources are always scarce. There’s always more ask than answer. There are always more things to do than you can afford to do. So the trick is: how do you take the resources and lever them to get the best possible result, the most that you can get for the least amount of money? And that doesn’t mean giving up quality.

I want to go back, actually, to earlier questions that were raised about the amount of money that we’re investing and the focus in a province as rich as Alberta, where we ought to be able to be investing. I would point out that from 1998-99 to 2008-2009 there has been a 2.5 per cent increase in the school population. In that same time period there has been a 96.5 per cent increase in funding. So to suggest that we’re not utilizing the resources of the province, that we’re very fortunate to have through the good fortune of living in the right place and having the right kind of government, and putting a very, very high emphasis, I would suggest, on education over that time frame given the small amount of increase in student

population – now, we know that the student population is going to start to increase dramatically. I had the experience as minister of health in the past year, and I know that our maternity wards were full. We know the demographics are coming, so we have to be prepared for it, but let's not suggest for a moment that we're not using the resources of this province to educate our children. We are.

You asked the question about how we're going to pay for things when the oil runs out. We're going to pay for things when the oil runs out by having a well-educated population that is working in other areas in the knowledge economy: in energy, in biosciences and life sciences, in those areas. Alberta will be a destination because we have safe communities, we have a good education system, we have a strong health system, we have a quality of life including culture and a very good environment which makes this a place that people want to live. But it will be that place where people want to live and can live because we have the best education system in the world and we are competitive internationally. That's why we're doing this. It's not about the buildings. It's about making sure those kids have the knowledge skills and attributes that they need to be competitive in a global marketplace and a global economy. That's what it's all about.

In terms of the P3s, and why P3s? P3s are not magic. They're just another way of stretching your resources and taking a look at your resources. In the private sector people all the time put the cost of their capital out over its usable life, so this is not a new way of doing things, particularly. It's just a smart way of doing things. You take a look and say: what can we get for the money that we have available to make sure we have the physical resources in place so that our students can get a good education? In terms of the contracts, the quality, and who controls the school, those are all things that can be managed with appropriate processes. The critical piece is: can we get the schools in the right places? Can we keep the schools where we have them, where we need them?

You talk about unnecessary closures. I would hope that there hasn't been one unnecessary closure of a school in this province. I would hope that if a school is needed to provide appropriate education for a student, the school board would keep it open, and if they needed some assistance to keep it open through the small schools by necessity program or in some other way, they would be having that dialogue with us. I would hope that a school board is not closing a school until they've looked at all the alternatives in terms of what kinds of programs could be offered in that school, what kinds of opportunities the students can have to learn in that school. I would hope that a school board would not even consider closing a school until they've looked at the alternatives, at whether that school has the opportunity to provide a good educational opportunity for students in that area.

I have trust and faith in our school boards, elected by the people of Alberta, that they put that kind of time and effort into that kind of a decision because it's not an easy decision. I, for one, feel that that's one of the most difficult decisions that a school trustee can make, sitting in front of their community and saying that this facility is no longer viable in the context of educating our children even though we know the impact that it's going to have on our community. That's got to be one of the toughest decisions for a school board to make, and I would hope that before they made that decision, they would be examining. I know from the ones that I'm familiar with that they examine the alternatives, what types of programming they can put in place to keep that school alive.

In fact, you talk about students in Calgary travelling 100,000 kilometres a day. One of the reasons they do that, I assume – I know it's true in Edmonton – is that they're travelling to some of those alternative programs. Students from Mill Woods bus all the way up

to Ottewell, I believe it is, for a Mandarin program. The schools in those areas that would be otherwise underutilized have brought in specialized programs. As a high school that was underpopulated, the old Bonnie Doon high school now has Vimy Ridge and Edmonton ballet, I believe it is, a ballet school. Interesting juxtaposition, but nonetheless it works. Now they're working with a local junior high school to provide a hockey school as well in that area. I think it's Donnan.

School boards are not as callous as you would have us believe nor is the provincial government. They are looking at what's the best educational opportunity and how can we use the school resources that we have to provide those educational opportunities. I commend them for the time and effort they've put into that, and I certainly don't envy them the job of dealing with people in the communities who obviously have some concerns.

Quite frankly, the fact that your grandfather went to the school and it's got a very strong history is not a reason to keep a school open. Because it can provide a good educational opportunity for our kids today and tomorrow, because it has the opportunity to be there to revitalize a community going forward as the life cycle of a community comes around again: those might be good reasons to keep a school around. But not because our grandparents went there. We have to be alive to the change that's happening in our community.

We talk about flexibility. There is no more flexibility in any school jurisdiction that I'm aware of than there is in Alberta in terms of choice that people have. The first choice is in the public system. You can't open a charter school until the public system has said that they won't provide that alternative.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, according to the new Standing Order 61(3), after the first hour the floor is open to any member.

I would recognize the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Mason:** Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

#### **Point of Order Committee of Supply Procedure**

**Mr. Mason:** The tradition of the House is that the third party gets the first period of time following the questions of the Official Opposition, Mr. Chairman. That is how it's done.

**An Hon. Member:** It's tradition, but is it the law?

**Mr. Mason:** In this place there's not much difference, is there?

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Mr. Chairman, I'd gladly give up my spot now to be next on the speaking list.

**The Deputy Chair:** I recognize that the point of order is well taken. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

#### **Debate Continued**

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to go through some of the information that we have in the budget today. I observed with some admiration the exchange between the House leader for the Official Opposition and the minister, and at some point we might want to engage in that in the future. However, I've never done this before, and I have a bunch of questions I want to ask. I think I'm just going to try and go through them and ask



them as I go and then hope that you can respond and get a sense of how much time it takes.

4:10

**Ms Blakeman:** Are you doing the 10 minutes, then?

**Ms Notley:** Yeah. I'll just do the 10 minutes if that's okay.

There are about six areas that I'd like to ask you some questions about, and I'll probably just start in the area that we were just talking about, which, of course, is the issue of the school closures. I take some issue with your statement that we're talking about buildings not education because, although I've heard the statement that it's all about, you know, what the school offers, the reality is that there is a measure in the quality of education that arises from attendance at a small community school and that that in itself is a function of the quality of education. For every study that tells you that a child benefits from going to a school with a thousand children that has excellent band programs, there'll be another study that will tell you that a child benefits from going to a school with 150 students, where they know each other and they have those many community contacts. So it is actually an important issue. It's actually, I think, even a more important issue as it relates to the issue of inclusion of special-needs kids. I think most studies will show you that when you're talking about inclusion, it is most successful in the smaller community setting.

Anyway, going back from that point to the issue of the school closures. We've already talked quite a bit about utilization rates, so I don't think there's any need to go over it. I agree with many of the comments by the previous opposition speakers.

I'd like to talk just a little bit about the way the maintenance money has been allocated and inquire into that. It appears as though the money for maintenance has essentially been given an inflationary increase, but it has been noted, I believe, that there's deferred maintenance that has been growing year after year. I would suggest that perhaps when a school has been allowed to deteriorate for 20 years, the rate of deterioration is probably greater than the rate of inflation. So my question is simply: is there a mechanism within the maintenance budgeting process to take into account the greater maintenance costs that occur with older schools, which tend to be in core areas of the city? Of course, those will be greater, and the longer they're deferred, the greater they will be.

Also related to maintenance, I understand that it's calculated on a per student basis. So, of course, it seems to me that you then get into a cycle, a self-defeating cycle, in that if you've got ebbs and flows in the population in a particular community, when the population goes down, the maintenance money goes down, and then stuff that may need to be done can't be done. Then you end up having a more expensive cost down the road to do the maintenance that should have been done, and it discourages the numbers from going up. So it seems to me that it's a self-defeating prophecy to use that measure, especially when it comes to dealing with older schools.

Again, with respect to maintenance and school closures it seems to me that the funding should take into account ebbs and flows in student population. You mentioned, Mr. Minister, that you didn't want to ever see schools close that shouldn't have closed. I think that we know demographically and you have stated that the numbers of students are going up in the next five or six years, generally speaking, notwithstanding that they haven't in the past.

Of course, I use Ritchie as an example. That is an area which is prime infill, you know, prime in terms of urban development, in terms of environmental development, in terms of smart transportation development, in terms of all those things, that is going to increase in size and increase with respect to the number of students

attending. It seems to me to be very, very shortsighted to take these snapshot pictures in terms of what the future of that school is.

Again, I ask what kinds of considerations are there to consider demographic trends over longer than a three-year cycle? The school board itself, when those trustees met with the community members to tell them they were closing the school, specifically referred to a three-year demographic or a three-year cycle of expected attendance. To me that's remarkably short-sighted to do that when we know that five or six years down the road we could end up with the population going right back up again.

You referred to a city centre school and some of the creativity that went on there to keep an education centre in the downtown core. I would just like to make a note, as an aside, that to the extent that there is a willingness to look at those kinds of creative solutions, I think that in the future, if you're dealing with a P3 school, everybody's hands will be tied in terms of those kinds of creative solutions. That was just another point I wanted to make there.

The only other thing that I just wanted to point out, more because I didn't do a very good job of getting it out during question period, is simply that with the closure of Ritchie school we are truly looking at two bus rides to get to the next closest school. So while that school may be bigger and it may have band and it may have all these programs, the kids won't get to enjoy them because they need to get on the bus to take their two buses to get back to their homes.

I also wanted to ask some questions around special-needs funding. I am hoping that it's still the position of the ministry that integration is a critical piece, but my understanding is that when children are coded, more often than not the funding they get for their coding does not cover the overall cost of having that child properly integrated with the required support into the school system. My question is: what kinds of considerations and criteria are used to come up with the funding for that coding, and how can we get that to increase to actually cover the cost?

When I talk about cost, the other thing that needs to be considered is that we're in, you know, a labour shortage, like everything else. Right now these aides are being paid \$13, \$14 an hour, sometimes \$16, \$17 if they're actually crazy enough to stay until they get to the top of the wage grid. Has there been any consideration to significantly increase the funding with respect to inclusion and providing services to special-needs kids to allow for the proper staffing in that area? It's a crisis right now. They can't find people to provide that service within the school system because they can't pay them enough. That was my question with respect to special needs.

Just an impromptu question. My colleague from Edmonton-Centre raised the question around the CNIB and access to services for special-needs children requiring Braille. I'd just ask whether the initiatives and the consultation that you referred to also includes coming up with services with respect to what's required for visually impaired children, not Braille but large print, because that is also a huge problem that's not covered right now.

Finally – or not quite finally; almost finally – with respect to the English as a Second Language funding, I appreciate that the funding in that area has gone up. That's good, but my understanding is that that funding has gone up because, of course, the number of students requiring that assistance has gone up. I also understand that of the demographic of the population requiring ESL services, a significant portion are from refugee populations. As a result they don't simply need ESL funding; they also need other cultural and social supports within the school setting to properly integrate them and provide them with support for a proper learning experience. I'm wondering if that has been addressed.

Finally, more of a point. With respect to the private school funding I'd just point out that, of course, we are opposed to that. My

reason for that is this. If you get to the point that we are absolutely meeting every possible need in the public system, then maybe you can look at funding private, but funding private when we don't have everything met is not a good way to go.

4:20

**Mr. Hancock:** Maybe I'll just start on that last point. While I am a very, very strong supporter of public education, there are also the issues of choice and other people's alternatives. The question is: who pays for the choice?

There's also the question – and we're seeing it happen – that we have to pay for the education of those students, and if they all came into the public system, we'd be paying 100 per cent of the operational funding and 100 per cent of the operation and maintenance funding and the capital. So to a certain extent we are getting, quote, a good deal. When you say, "Until you're fully funding the public system, don't fund any of the private system," the reality is that as they shift into the public system, we end up paying more, which I don't have any problem with, quite frankly, but that is a reality. It's not an either/or situation.

The issue is that we have a system in place where we fund 60 per cent of the operational funding of private schools now. We don't pay for their capital, and we don't pay their operation and maintenance. Many of them are looking at alternatives to join the public system, particularly in the Edmonton public, which has embraced choice significantly, so Christian schools are part of the public system now. So we'll have to see what happens on that. I think that's a discussion that needs to be part of a broader discussion about how we do education in the province, and we'll do that as we go forward.

Inclusion of special needs I think is a very, very important area. I think every child needs to be able to have the opportunity to maximize their potential, and we need to have a system which encourages that. That does not mean that every child can be in any classroom, because you cannot staff every classroom to provide for any need, but it does mean that to the extent possible we need to make sure that students can be included in regular schools and regular classrooms where that's possible. It means that we need to provide the funding in a way that ensures that school boards and schools and teachers can deal with the special needs the students bring into their classrooms.

We've done a lot of work over the past year in having a good, strong look at the special-needs area. Very important that we do that. There's been a lot of gathering of information. I'm anticipating a report. I guess "report" would be the right word, but I don't want to use the word report because then you'll say, well, make the report public. I'm really just talking about information to the minister with respect to the findings so that we can start looking at how we do a renewed policy framework in the area of special needs. That discussion will have to be a discussion with stakeholders, a discussion with school boards. It has to involve everybody in how we fund special needs appropriately.

I'm very conscious of the fact that in some of our areas the severe special-needs funding doesn't go far enough to fund if a child needs a full-time aide to be in school. There are lots of issues around that. School boards have raised those issues. They've raised issues with respect to the profile funding that's happening. That's all on the table. That's all been part of our very comprehensive review, a gathering of information first, which you've probably heard about over the course of the fall. Some people in the field call it an audit. It was not intended to be an audit. It's intended to be a gathering of information so that we can know what the environment is, and then we can build the appropriate policy framework around that environ-

ment. That's a very important piece of discussion for this year going forward.

Demographic trends are absolutely important. I think we have good demographic information. I think that school boards have the flexibility to plan based on that demographic information, and they certainly have access to that information. But, again, you can't have it both ways. You can't be saying that we need to have autonomous school boards and recognize their autonomy and recognize that they have a role and function in their community, and then take it all away and make the decision yourself. It doesn't work that way. So I'm not going to be drawn into a discussion of Ritchie school. I mean, tempting though it might be, that is not my area. That's the school board's area. My area is the policy framework in which the school board operates, and I'm very interested in talking, as we go forward, about what the policy framework around school closures ought to be. The process we have in place and the funding we have in place which allow schools to meet the needs of the students in their communities, how we can make schools the centre of the community again: those sorts of issues are very important to me as we go forward and talk about the policy frameworks. But if you get into a specific school, then you have to start talking about what the cost is to renovate it, what the cost is to keep it current, whether that particular school can be viable, and those are all locally driven discussions which need to be part of the overall framework.

For example, when you talk about a community school and the per capita funding for operations and maintenance, a school board gets that pot of money. They get to determine how to allocate it between the schools that they have. So as it comes down to a specific community, that's not a per capita student based on how many students are in that school. That's a per capita student based in terms of how many students are in that whole jurisdiction.

However, I'm glad you raised it because I didn't get a chance to mention in an earlier question that we've put a considerable amount of money, \$511 million over the 2008-2011 budget process, for capital maintenance and modernization. But what we need to talk about is the fact that \$290 million, I believe, if I've got my numbers right, over the last year or so has been announced. There's \$100 million for school modernizations in Edmonton and Calgary; for example, \$35 million in Edmonton public, \$15 million in Edmonton Catholic. That includes schools like Strathcona composite, which is near and dear to my heart because that's where my children went, and it's badly in need of renovation.

I had the opportunity to sit beside one of the teachers at the recent excellence in teaching semifinalists' dinner. He was one of the teachers that was heading up the program in terms of redesigning the school. He was excited about it. These are very important investments. I don't think we should lightly look at the amount of resources that have been going into school modernizations and the deferred maintenance.

The surplus policy is very important, as well. I think your seatmate has pointed out over and over again that we should be using an assumption of the price of oil significantly higher than what we have. If he's right, then there will be an unanticipated surplus, and two-thirds of that will go into capital. Half of that two-thirds, or one-third, of the unanticipated surplus goes into the deferred maintenance. That's a very important piece of catching up and keeping up. It's important that we do that.

The Braille and the large print I think I dealt with later. I would only say: stay tuned next week for some announcements in that area. I think it's very important. Assistive technology is, sort of, where I would dump all of that. It's not all technology; it's having appropriate resources available. That's very important. I mean, I am passionate about the idea that every student, each student, should

have the opportunity to maximize their potential, and that means making sure that if a student has a disability, that disability can be overcome, any barrier they may have to success, whether it's health, whether it's physical, whether it's emotional or mental, or whether it comes from a socioeconomic status or community issues. We need to be supportive in those areas.

ESL fits right into that. You talked about immigrants coming into the community and needing other supports for both the students and their families in order to make it possible for them to be ready to learn and contribute. I was just fascinated over the past week as we hear some of the members of this House, some of our colleagues talk about their experiences coming to this country and coming to this province and the success they've been able to make. That's the type of thing that we want to be able to hear from every student that we have, and that means that we need to be able to provide those resources so that when those families do come to Alberta, they are supported in the ways that are necessary so their children can learn. Historically, that's why people came to this country. They came to a very hard existence so that their children could have the opportunities to excel, and that typically put a very high priority on education.

I think I've touched on most of the subjects, but if you had one that I missed, you can yell at me.

P3s I don't think need to tie anybody's hands. P3s can be flexible. People get excited about P3s, but P3 is just a method of saying that we're prepared to look outside the traditional. If we have cash in our hands and we're prepared to build something publicly, to say: you need to look at how you do innovative financing, innovative construction, and how you take a look at making sure that you can have that. Just as an example, deferred maintenance. There's not going to be any deferred maintenance on the Calgary courthouse. How do we know that? Because we had a contract in place that built it to the highest standard and ensured that the builder had an incentive to ensure that they built it to the highest quality because they were responsible for making sure that 30 years later it was still at the highest quality, and possibly they would have to take it back if it wasn't. We can do those sorts of things. We don't have to be scared about a P3. It's simply a question of saying that it's not all about the government taking money from the people and spending it themselves. It's about how you get the right amount of resources.

4:30

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just two short issues I'd like to raise with the minister, one involving capital expense items and the other one involving health care premiums.

In Whitecourt-Ste. Anne there was recently a school announced in Whitecourt, the Hilltop high school, for a modernization. There's an allotment of about \$15 million that has been assigned to the school, and I thank you and the department and the Infrastructure folks for that support. But it seems like as soon as the contractors have a look at the project – remember that this is the school that I went to and graduated from, so it's a little aged facility – they're finding that the money might – might – do the mechanical upgrades, nothing to do with classroom upgrades or expansions to gymnasiums. I'm just wondering if there's a flexibility within the minister's budget to help out when those types of projects come along in the system that on the surface look like a \$15 million fix but may be a \$20 million fix or a \$25 million fix.

The second comment I wanted to make. Minister, remember that I have the Northern Gateway school division, Grande Yellowhead school division, and Living Waters school division. They've all received a 4.7 increase in their budget, and I thank you and the department for that.

On the health care premium side. I don't know the exact numbers, but I'm going to guess you have 40,000 staff that you flow-through cash for with all the teachers – 36,000 teachers – the support staff, your staff in the department. If you average a thousand dollars apiece per family for health care premiums, that's \$40 million. I mean, that's not a lot in your budget, but in the budget for Northern Gateway, in the budget for Grande Yellowhead, in the budget for Living Waters it's substantial costs that they have as an employer that they pay for their staff. In turn, their staff have a taxable benefit when their employer pays the health care premium.

Is there anywhere in your budget a reflection of the decrease in the cost to those school boards, or in fact will the 4.7 increase really be topped up by the savings from the health care premiums? I don't know if that's convoluted or if you can get the drift of where I'm going there. By looking at your budget on the surface, my school boards will get a higher increase than 4.7. It might not be 4.8, but in real dollars there should be some dollars left over for the classroom out of the savings for health care premiums. I'd just like some clarity on that.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With respect to the first question, on flexibility, that's an interesting one and a very difficult one. Of course, we try and use the resources we have and allocate the capital resources that we have as they come along. You approve projects based on the estimates that were given, and sometimes those estimates are a little out of date and sometimes, as with any renovation project, when you take the skin off, you find that the whole wall is rotten and that you've got a bigger problem, so the costs go up.

All I can say at this point is that I'll take a look at the processes we use. Sometimes there are cost escalation factors that can go in, but cost escalation is not really intended to deal with what you're talking about. The short answer is that it's very difficult to go back and add more resources to a funded project. Typically what you might do is say: "Can the project be broken into one or two or three projects? Does that make sense?" If that is cost-ineffective in terms of having to remobilize crews and things like that, if you can't break it down, then I think we seriously have to take a look and say, "Is there another way that we can finance it?" if it's an essential modernization project. Not an easy answer but, I think, the only one that I can really give you.

With respect to health care insurance premiums. This should be good news for school boards. School boards, I think, spend a considerable amount of their budget – I wouldn't know the overarching number, but I wouldn't be surprised if it was in excess of 70 per cent of their budget – on staff and probably 70 per cent of that, at least, on teaching staff. I can't give you the global number, but I can say that there are 34,500 teachers, more or less, in the province. If you extrapolated that out, that would probably be about \$31 million, \$32 million over the course of a school year. If you add in the other staff, of course, that's going to be higher, so I think your number – if I heard you correctly, I think you said around \$40 million – is probably a good ballpark guess at what amount of money will be in school boards' hands as a result of the health care insurance premium being taken off. Now, that's not to say that there won't be pressures on that, but it is an increase to their budget that was unanticipated by them and I think will be welcomed by them.

Now, the other thing that's important about that is that even though that benefit goes to the school boards, if they're paying a health care premium, it's a taxable benefit. Therefore, there's a taxable benefit that their employees would have to report tax on, so they get a benefit as well. That's good news all around.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Just a follow-up, Mr. Chairman. I'm expecting some political pressure with regard to the capital project from the local school board. Would the minister and his staff be willing to meet with them directly to discuss the matter?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, we're always as a department, I would say, willing to meet with a school board's project team. That's essential. I can't personally promise as minister to meet with them because, as you might appreciate, I think there are 134 ongoing new and modernization projects in the province as we speak, and I would hazard a guess that a few of them have cost pressures associated with them, so that might be a full-time job. Maybe my parliamentary assistant would want – but I don't want to make light of it. It's a very important topic, and the department and Infrastructure will be working with school boards' project teams to make sure that we have a balanced approach with respect to the scope and the budget, that we take into account what is absolutely necessary to do but that we also take into account that there's only so much money and that we have to do as many projects as we can with it.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. For the record I would like to note that only two hours have been allotted to discuss almost \$6 billion worth of taxpayer investment dollars. I will not call the minister on being evasive if he should wish to reply to my questions in written form, so you have that as an option. Please consider using it.

Just a couple of comments that go back to the minister's former remarks. The space utilization formula places undue external pressure on school boards. It forces them to make decisions that they might otherwise not have to make if the formula was a little bit more open, but it isn't at this point. With regard to alternative school programs I'm very much in favour of alternative programs. We have some great programs in Calgary as well that do require busing. But busing to alternative programs is a very small proportion of the busing that results from 40 communities not having schools and, therefore, the kids having to be bused out to other schools.

With regard to school fees groups like Parents for Public Education, that Dennis Locking brought into being back in 2000, have been pushing both school boards and governments to remove the need for school fees. Dennis, as do a number of educators and parents, believes that education should be accessible to all children and fees create a great deal of stress, especially when school boards hire collection agencies out of desperation to collect these fees. If we could do without school fees and without that confrontational aspect, that would be great.

4:40

With regard to parent fundraising I find it very objectionable that schools, in order to raise funds for basic education, feel compelled to go out to casinos and fund raise through slots, VLTs, and gambling. What it does is it creates an unlevel playing field – Bishop Henry has recognized this in the Calgary Catholic board – because the lower socioeconomic areas are so busy doing two or three jobs to just keep the family fed that even if they wanted to spend time in a casino fund raising for their local school, it wouldn't be available to them. Again, if we eliminated school fees and if we eliminated the need to fund raise for essentials, which is currently going on, then education would be more accessible.

I'm pleased, as I noted yesterday, that the government has undertaken the unfunded liability because of all the benefits associated with that, both education and financial. I am pleased that there was the one-time payment of \$52 million through sup supply. However, the reality is that if we do not increase the paydown of the pension liability, it will have increased to \$46 billion by 2060. That's money that's taken out of the education program. It's a financial obligation, but the faster we can pay that down the better because that money could be then going to the school systems.

With regard to ESL and special needs ESL students have a failure rate to complete high school in five years that is still at the 75 per cent mark, so questions would be such as this: how much of this money will go towards current ESL initiatives, and how much will go towards new projects? If new projects are planned, will it be enough to get the necessary infrastructure in place? While an increase in funding for ESL is appreciated, why has this area increased but not other areas which are in need of additional support such as early childhood learning and support for students with special needs? Did stakeholders outline ESL as a priority over those other areas?

We have special-needs students. The reality is that Alberta has the lowest high school completion rate on a per capita basis in Canada, and that doesn't match with our per capita wealth. Currently almost a third of high school students do not complete their senior matric within five years of entry, and that's a horrible loss. That loss is felt all along the chain because 40 per cent of Alberta's adults are functionally illiterate. We need to hold on to kids as much as we possibly can, and the way to hold on to them is having balanced education, an emphasis not only on academics but on sports and options.

This carries over to postsecondary. I know this is an area that the minister has formerly been involved in and can appreciate. If we don't have spaces for those kids who achieve the 85 per cent averages and have the money to go to school, then there is less motivation, especially if they have to face the expenses of going outside the province. That is also a concern.

Again, this is more towards postsecondary. A major point of the urban campus in Calgary was to have one-stop shopping where you'd have Bow Valley, you'd have the U of C, where ACAD and SAIT would be in the vicinity, of course, and students could move from program to program in a convenient, centrally located place. The beauty of it was that you didn't have to have that 85 per cent average. This was going to be a place where students who had a 70 per cent plus could potentially qualify for postsecondary programming, so I would really encourage you to talk with the minister about that.

With regard to special needs does this department not have any funding measure in place to address the needs of students that fall between the mild category and the severe-need category? If that is the case, will it take action to address this critical issue? There aren't enough psychologists or psychometrists within the school system, first, to identify the students. Therefore, parents have to go to places like the Children's hospital to have their child analyzed in terms of: do they meet the coding standards? So this would be an area to consider.

With regard to special-needs areas will the government commit to extending program unit funding, the PUF, until at least the third grade? What's happening, again, whether it's special-needs or ESL children, is that the grounding they need to have is not sufficient, and therefore the funding needs to be extended.

When it comes to other special consideration groups, what funds will be directed towards strategic goal 3, aimed at First Nations,

Métis, and Inuit student success? What new initiatives and funding are part of this in the budget?

The Department of Education undertook a one-year pilot project where it lowered class size in inner-city schools in Edmonton. The program had terrific success. Children's self-esteem rose, there were nutrition programs associated, and the result was absolutely fantastic in terms of the academic increase in grades, all stemming from a feeling of self-worth. While it demonstrated the extra support and the results of the extra support for inner-city schools in low socio-economic areas, the program, although proven to be fantastic, was abandoned. I would hope that future considerations will review programs such as this.

With completion rates in Alberta among the lowest in the country, what new initiatives is the ministry taking to work towards increasing participation and completion rates? What is the total amount of funding which will go towards this initiative, which is the ministry's strategic priority 1?

In terms of expenditures – and the minister can correct me either in writing or in participation – my understanding is that the budget for testing is still three times as much as the budget for curriculum development. Hopefully, that balance gets changed.

I'll look forward to answers, as I say, written or oral.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will take advantage of the opportunity, and I should have said this at the beginning. If I haven't answered some questions as we go through, because there have been a lot, I may answer them in writing or supplement answers in writing as necessary.

There are a couple of areas there that should be addressed. First of all, school fees. School fees are entirely the purview of a school board and a school. They cannot charge fees for essential education purposes. They can charge fees for textbook rental, for example, and for supplementary programing, but for basic education they're not supposed to be charging fees or fundraising. I would hope that that policy would be maintained throughout the system, that fundraising is a decision that's made by parents and local schools if they want to supplement the resourcing. I'm entirely familiar with that. I come from a family of teachers, and I'm aware of what's happening in and around our schools. Some of it is very good actually, some of it perhaps not so good, and we certainly have to be very cognizant of it and very aware of what's going on.

On the whole question of accessibility I'm very aware that in schools – and I would hope it's in all schools – there's a sensitivity analysis placed on it so that where families cannot afford to pay fees, the kids aren't kicked out because their fees aren't paid. The schools absorb those costs, and they don't send the collection agencies after them. In some cases collection agencies, I'm aware, do go after unpaid school fees, but that would be in the same circumstance as you would have with any other unpaid debt. If the person who owed the money approaches the person that they owe it to, usually things can be worked out. If they just ignore it, usually they get chased. That would be the same circumstance with respect to school fees. But I am aware that schools do have sensitivity analysis, and they don't pursue families that can't afford fees.

4:50

In terms of the unfunded liability, that was a very important step forward with respect not only to recruitment of new, young teachers and getting the best and brightest to be teachers and taking off their plate something that they were not responsible for. I think that was a very important step forward. The responsibility for the unfunded

liability portion has now been transferred back to the Ministry of Finance and Enterprise. That's where it actually was historically. It had been transferred into the Education budget, at least with the ongoing line that we pay for current liability for teachers' pension contributions, but that's now back in Finance. I was happy to work with the Minister of Finance and Enterprise on how you pay that off, but I'm sorry to say that I think the way that works is that once it gets paid off, it won't necessarily mean that the – what was it? – \$120 million or so, \$160 million a year won't necessarily land back in the Education budget. But it will make some more flexibility in terms of the overall fiscal strategy, obviously.

The lowest completion rate in the country is a very misleading statement. Essentially, I think you're probably quoting a StatsCan number, and StatsCan measures the people who are here, not the people who went to school here, and there's a difference. A lot of people coming here may not have finished high school within the three years, four years, or five years that are measured. So it's more important to look at our high school completion rates. Our high school completion rates, according to the numbers that I have, are now that 78 per cent of students have completed high school within the five years of entering grade 10. That number – that was in 2006 – is up from about 73 per cent in 2000, so it's trending in the right direction. Some of the programming that was aimed at that is working. There's a lot more to be done.

That would put us in about the middle of the pack in Canada, not at the bottom. Middle of the pack isn't good enough. We need to do a lot more, and we're focusing on issues coming out of some of the good work that was done by my colleague who is now the Minister of Aboriginal Relations with a conference on high school completion, looking at what the causes are for people dropping out. Not good enough just to blame it on an overheated economy, although that's part of it, but look at some of the issues around transition. If you take a look at the students that are successful, they're the ones who've made a connection. There's been an important teacher in their lives. The ones that aren't successful perhaps haven't made those sorts of connections. There are lots of things that we can learn, and there are some things that we're doing in that area. The picture isn't as bleak as you've painted it, and I think, with respect, that's because you were looking in the wrong columns.

Mild and moderate disabilities are recognized and funded, but they're funded as part of the per capita grant that we give. It's recognized there. But the other important piece that you talked about is how students get coded and how the assessments are done. That's very important. I think schools that understand this understand that it's worth their while to invest in the assessment process so that they can get students coded who should be coded because when they do, then they get the funding for them. I think most schools understand that process, that it's worth their while to invest in that assessment process as part of this process. But there are issues around that. There are issues with respect to the provision of health care professionals, the ability to get it done on a timely basis. We need to be working on that with other colleagues in terms of making sure that those people are available.

The whole issue of PUF funding has been a difficult one. I think that that needs to be part of the discussion around our whole special-needs funding process. We're doing a lot better on it now than we were before. As an MLA I used to have to advocate strongly for families because there was a difference. The PUF funding was provided before you got to school, and then when you got to school it sort of dropped off, and there was no recognition that it was the same child. There's a lot of work to be done in that area. I think there is good work being done, and I think the special-needs review will engage, at least in part, in that area.

The question of First Nations and Métis students is very important. When I was minister of aboriginal affairs, I had the responsibility to work on not only helping to develop the aboriginal policy framework, getting that project started, but also getting a cross-government goal that aboriginal people should have the same socioeconomic status as all other Albertans. We're not there, and the answer from my perspective is education. It's very important to have the right kind of programming.

The Learning Commission, now five years old, put a lot of emphasis on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit programming. I think it's time to take a look at what we've accomplished in that area. There's been a lot of good work in the area. School boards have embraced it. There's been a funding model that's encouraged it. There are a lot of good things that have happened, but we need to continually audit our success and see if we're achieving what we can, learn from our real successes, and be prepared to change in those areas where it's a lower success.

Under the new funding formula that was put in place, we're funding 30,500 students to the tune of very close to \$35 million, so it's not an insignificant issue. Of course, the funding for that is going to increase by the 4.53 per cent operational grant funding. It's an area of emphasis, an area that has a specific strategy line in the business plan, and an area that we need to focus on.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to comment on a few different things. I need to preface this in that until this recent municipal election I was a member of the Calgary public school board, and I'm quite proud of my time there and what that board had accomplished.

I'm glad that we have this Education minister in place because I think that we would be in tremendous trouble without the fiscal responsibility piece within the education system. I think that a key component is providing a system where we can effectively and efficiently use our resources to maximize the student outcomes and results for our future generations, and that's what it should be all about. It shouldn't be about the amount that's spent. It should be about putting young Albertans in a position to be successful, contributing members of our society. Yes, that does take resources, but it takes the efficient use of resources to do that.

I'll provide one example, and it was alluded to earlier. In 1999 the Calgary board of trustees was fired – I don't even know what the technical term is – by the Minister of Education. This was a board that was running up a huge deficit. The education system there was very dysfunctional. I would know because for the most part of that I was in the education system when they were there. I think what happened was that the new board that came in was very committed to student learning and to strong fiscal management. This is a board that undertook a plan to pay off the accumulated deficit that the previous board had racked up. Not only did they do that, as I indicated in my member's statement yesterday, but they have improved student outcome results for six consecutive years. That's the thing that we should be focusing on, not the amount of money, as the opposition would like to say.

One of my issues that I would like the minister to address is the issue of school fees. I'm glad that the Member for Calgary-Varsity brought that up because when I was on the public school board, we actually cut a school fee, and that was the general school fee. I will tell you where the biggest opposition came from: that was from a school in his riding. The school council actually wrote a letter to the parents in that school saying: we need you to contribute that \$50 to be able to deliver some of the services that we continue to deliver in

that school. I would suggest that not all parents want to see school fees abolished. I would suggest that probably a majority of them wouldn't mind paying a nominal fee. My issue is: would we look at potentially making it simpler for school boards to charge a minimal school fee that is more transparent and more accountable? The reason that fee was cut was more for legalities. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity said, there are some groups out there that are looking for any sort of legal loophole to be able to get out of this for ideological reasons. So that would be my issue, just something small, whether it's .5 per cent on the basic instructional grant, or if they so choose, school boards can make the decision not to charge a school fee.

5:00

I wanted to address the issue of school closure. Again, I sat through many of these meetings, and as much as people want to say that school closures are about the community and that, a big part of it is about good fiscal management. It doesn't make sense to have a school open that's being underutilized. Now, yes, there are issues about: what is the right utilization rate? I think that we should review those from time to time. There are issues, you know, about whether the students in that particular school are getting all of the opportunities afforded to students that are in more efficiently used schools.

I find it interesting that the arguments being made by the opposition parties are very similar to the arguments that I heard at the school closure meetings, and I find it very funny, particularly – again I want to use Calgary-Varsity as an example. Here is a group that, as the hon. member alluded to, had a school, Jerry Potts, that was closed. The argument was: we're working to increase density within our communities. Yet this is the same community that was vehemently opposed to increasing density along the LRT station there. How can we, on one hand, go to these public meetings and have that argument come forward and then that same group, those same communities making an argument against the argument that they were trying to use in keeping those schools open? So what it is is that these are very tough decisions.

This brings me to an issue that I would like the minister to address, and that's utilizing our resources more efficiently. Are there ways where we can plan better between the opening of schools in newer communities and the closure of schools in older communities? Again, it was alluded to that we're closing schools faster than we're opening them. I would say that that's a false statement. I say that we're closing schools in areas when new schools are opening because all those students that are being bused to that school, once they have a school in a new community for them to attend, that they can walk to – that leaves an unfilled school in the older communities, and that's when we have to look at closing them. Is there a better way to look at it, a better way to plan?

Of course, this is all linked to what happens in municipalities, how municipalities develop subdivisions, how they revitalize the inner city. This is very much linked. If I could find one fault with the capital planning mechanism within this province and particularly on schools: it's very disconnected from the municipal planning, and they're very much interlinked. So you do have school closure meetings where people are coming and talking about one side of the issue, and then they're saying a different thing in meetings around municipal planning in their community.

One final thing. I want to commend this government and this minister on creating a new funding framework in education, a renewed funding framework that does a good job of not targeting funds. Again, as a member of the Alberta School Boards Association one thing I found very frustrating was that there was a policy

statement saying that we would like nontargeted funds and then several policy statements saying: but we want funding for this, we want funding for that, we want funding for this, and we want funding for that. I think that what we need to do, as the hon. minister indicated, is make sure that we provide our locally elected school boards with the most flexibility possible with the appropriate accountability mechanisms. Again, maybe if the minister could comment on what the ministry is doing to ensure that we're providing greater flexibility for school boards to allocate their resources but also ensuring that both on the student outcome side and the financial management side at the school jurisdiction there is appropriate accountability to this House and to communities.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A number of good comments, interesting comments in that member's talk. First of all, I want to just come back to an issue that's been operating through the afternoon in terms of the whole question of utilization. I think it's fair to say – and I stand to be corrected – that if you adhered to the utilization formula, there wouldn't have been an announcement for 18 new schools under the P3 announcement. There's no way you would have had 18 new schools – six in Edmonton public, three in Edmonton Catholic, six in Calgary public, three in Calgary Catholic – if you were adhering to the utilization formula. I don't think people have really appreciated that the guideline is there, but we have moved past that in terms of the policy of making sure that they build schools where the children are.

It's not to say that it isn't important for school boards to take a look at their resources and how they stretch them because you cannot just continue to open schools and stretch the dollar to manage more school buildings if you've got the same school population. You need to be able to operate effectively and efficiently while keeping in mind that the first outcome, the most important thing you're doing, is educating children and making sure that you have the educational programming and the educational opportunities and the school experience that will make it possible and probable that a child will complete and be ready to go to postsecondary because 80 per cent of the new jobs are going to require postsecondary education.

I'm glad that you raised the whole question of school closure again. It allowed me the opportunity to add in that we have to have, in my view, the right kind of focus on this. It's not about keeping the building open for the building's sake. It's not about keeping the building open primarily for the community's sake although the community is very important in it. It's about having the right educational opportunity for our children and making sure that they have the right programming and the right opportunities and, where possible, close to home.

Having grown up, however, in a small northern town, I can tell you that I got on the bus everyday and went a long way to get to high school because there weren't enough students on our side of the river to have a high school in every location. I mean, I graduated with a class of six students. Three of us came from the Fort Vermilion area. Actually, one of them came from half an hour on the other side of Fort Vermilion. We were all on the bus because you cannot . . .

**Mrs. Ady:** Were you first or sixth in your class?

**Mr. Hancock:** First or sixth? Let's just say that I have a watch that

gave me the Governor General's gold medal. At least, I think I still have that watch somewhere.

The effective use of resources is what the hon. member was really talking about, and I think that's pretty critical.

The whole question of school fees that the hon. member raised again: I'm very concerned that there needs to be a balance. We need to make sure that education is available for every student, that it's accessible and on an equitable basis for every student, and we cannot be pricing that out of a family's ability to pay. If there are school fees – and I think there probably will always be school fees because there are things that you charge for, whether it's textbook rental or whether it's equipment rental or whether it's the band trip, the extra things, whether it's the yearbook. Those fees get assessed. Some of them are voluntary, and some of them are involuntary. But that's always going to be there. The critical piece is to make sure that we're not charging fees for basic education and that there's a sensitivity so that any family that can't afford to pay the fees is dealt with either at the school level or, quite frankly, by the other income supports that are available in the community from the government.

I think that I addressed most of them, but if I missed some of them, I'll come back to them in writing.

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

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, education is not an expense; it's an investment for the future of Alberta. I don't think we should be viewing this as an expense. As far as building schools in suburban areas, we've been talking lots about school closures, and I think we should start planning so that wherever we put up the schools, you know, those school locations should be decided in such a way that we don't have to close those schools for years to come. I think that maybe that should be taken into consideration.

5:10

The education portion of the property tax for seniors. I heard a lot about that at the doors. "Why should we be paying the education portion of the property taxes?" seniors said. I think that that has to go.

Another thing is that parents shouldn't have to raise money, you know, for the school activities of the children. We have the richest jurisdiction, and parents shouldn't have to pay any fees for education up to grade 12. That's what I think. Our province, I think, should be picking up the tab on that.

I'm glad to hear, you know, that you're a strong proponent of the public education system. I see some funding here for private schools. If you keep encouraging the private system, then maybe the public school system will start to erode. I think we should be pushing more for the public system. The public system of education certainly should be on par, if not more, with the private system so that more people want to go to the public system than to the private schools.

I come from India, and we had a very, very strong public education system when I went to school there. Then there was, you know, a push for a private system, and all of sudden the public school system had gone by the wayside. So I think the government should be encouraging the public school system.

Another thing is that in Calgary-McCall we just started getting new schools in the community. You've been talking about P3s. I'm not at all for P3s. If P3s are the way to go, then let's vote for P3s and get those schools up as soon as we can so the kids – small kids, you know, are now bused to other areas – don't have to wait years and years to get schools in their communities.

What was the reason for the increase in the funding for the private schools? Is it this government's plan to increase the public funding for private schools so that slowly, slowly, slowly the government encourages the private schools and then the public school system goes by the wayside? Another thing. Why has the government increased funding for the private schools and for the public P3 schools instead of dedicating more funds for fully funded public initiatives?

School nutrition. Nothing in this budget is designated as going towards school nutrition programs. In Alberta, the richest province in Canada, one of the wealthiest places on Earth, tens of thousands of children are going to school hungry. Right now several thousand Albertans, including teachers, parents, even students, are volunteering their time to end child hunger in our schools. But the service that students receive depends entirely upon the level of community support for any particular school. According to the Canadian Research Institute for Social Policy 19 published studies connect participation in school nutrition programs with increased achievement as measured by the standardized tests, scores, and grades. Can the minister clarify if there's any line item in the budget which will go towards the implementation of school nutrition programs, and if not, will he consider adopting this idea, present it in the House through a motion in 2006? This would be in line with the ministry's strategic priority 2, success for all students, which states that the ministry is also committed to developing "a comprehensive and collaborative approach to health, social and learning programs and services for children and youth to ensure that all students are well cared for, safe, healthy, and successful at learning."

I come from a very diverse riding, and lots of students have English as their second language. I think there should be more funding going into the ESL program to bring all the students with a second language up to par with the mainstream so that they don't lose out on their opportunities in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With respect to ESL funding, of course, there was a substantial increase on that this year: the 4.53 per cent operational funding increase that happened across the board but also an 18 per cent increase primarily as a result of increased numbers. So I think that that has clearly been met.

With respect to the school nutrition programs there are all sorts of school nutrition programs. I, quite frankly, am very supportive of the idea that students need to have some of their basic needs met if they're going to be ready to learn. But that doesn't necessarily mean that the best way to do that is to create a government program. In fact, some would argue that that's probably the least effective way to do it. There are excellent examples of school nutrition programs, school meal programs that work. I'm happy to work with any organization that wants to engage in that area. I think it's very important.

One of my inspirational experiences as a minister of the Crown was when I had the opportunity to be in Red Deer, again, early in my elected time. I was minister of intergovernmental and aboriginal affairs, and I met a young lady in Red Deer who worked with the Native Friendship Centre there. She was telling me about going to a school that had a number of First Nations and Métis students and basically saying: what can I do to ensure that the students from an aboriginal background can be successful? One of the things that they suggested was attendance, so she said: "Well, whatever it takes. If these students don't show up, call me, and I'll go and find out why

and help them. If it's a matter of boots or clothing, great. If it's something else, we'll help them get to school."

Then the next question was: what's the next big issue? Well, it's students who have forgotten their lunch. So she said: "Well, it doesn't matter whether they're aboriginal background or nonaboriginal background. Call me by 11 o'clock every day and tell me how many students have forgotten their lunch." She made an arrangement with Loaves and Fishes, a local Christian soup kitchen, to have lunches made, and that was very successful. The next thing they decided would be useful was: Monday morning attendance was down, so they arranged with a group to get together and have a hot breakfast, and kids showed up for breakfast.

So some very important things have happened. Now, if we had established all of that, I remember thinking at the time, with a government committee, we'd still be trying to figure out how to get around the FOIP regulations. It's important to engage in the right way to resolve some of these issues. I'm not saying there isn't a role for government. I think there is a very important role for government in encouraging and co-ordinating and sometimes even in resourcing. But we have to be careful that we don't take the very important initiative out of the community in some of these areas where it can be more successful and instead engage in ways that we can support it.

You started off by talking about: this is not about spending; it's about investment. I couldn't agree with you more. I don't believe that any money that we allocate to education is an expense. I believe that it's an allocation and an investment in the future of the province. It's the best way, if we look at how you use the royalty revenues and the nonrenewable resource revenues that this province has – and you used a phrase that I just hate. I think you used it a couple of times, and that's "in a province as wealthy as Alberta" or "a province as rich as Alberta." Those resources belong to future Albertans as much as to present Albertans, and they're finite, and they're going to run out some time. By the time they run out or are no longer of value, we should have a society that's well educated, with the fundamentals and the infrastructure that's necessary to be competitive in a knowledge-based economy. The fundamental is education, and the money that we invest in education is just that: it's an investment in the future of the province, and it's a very, very important investment.

Education property taxes for seniors, you raised. I think I'll just refer you to the answer I gave in *Hansard* a little bit earlier. I'm a big believer and always have been a big believer that we have to find ways to make it affordable for seniors to stay in their own homes, but that's not the context of the discussion this afternoon, so we'll have to wait for that discussion in another area. There is a program to freeze education property taxes for seniors. If there are seniors in your constituency that are not aware of that, I would encourage you to make sure that that's included in your newsletters, et cetera, because it's very important. Property taxes not going up. The increase in the economy is not hurting our seniors from that side anymore because we froze the education property taxes four years ago, but they do have to apply because of the vagaries of the system.

5:20

We talked about fundraising, and that's where you used the concept about the richest. If we had to fund everything that everybody wants us to fund because we're the richest province in the country, I can tell you that over the eight or nine years I've had the privilege of serving on Treasury Board, there's always been at least a few billion – I'd say eight, but I might be wrong on that – of more ask than answer. No matter how much you have, there will always be more ways that you could use it. I would argue that most of them



are good ways that you could use it, but you can't. We cannot, as members from your own caucus have said over the past week, be using our nonrenewable resource revenues in a way that will cause us a problem when those revenues, which are very volatile, go down, unless – and I think it's a very important unless – we're using them in a way which will expand our opportunities for the future.

Education does that. Education is the one area that is the fail-safe force going forward because the only way to make sure that our society and our province can pay for the services that Albertans want is if we have more people earning at a higher level and paying the taxes necessary to support it. The only way to do that is through education.

You mentioned a lot about public and private schools. I would argue that the system that we have in this province has proved to be very effective. We have a very strong public system. It's very strongly supported by the public dollar, and it's accountable to the school boards and to us for those dollars. It needs to be.

We then have a system whereby those people who do not believe that the public system provides them the learning opportunities that they think they need for their children can approach the public system and ask the public system to make those learning opportunities available. If they don't, then they can proceed through a charter school process if they can demonstrate its viability. That's an important pressure, I think, on the public system. It keeps the public system on its toes to say that it should be offering those choices that are necessary for a wide and robust public education system.

There are still others who will say that for whatever reason, whether it's because they need a special type of learning for their child or because of religious reasons or for whatever other reason, they believe a private school option is appropriate. As long as they're educating their children to Alberta's standards, they are also putting pressure on the public system to be the best that it can be. So I think there's a role for private schools. Again, I say that I'm a strong supporter of the public school system, but I'm also a very strong supporter of the concept of choice, and people should have that choice.

Now, if they want full public funding, they have to be accountable to the public. We have a formula that was put in place, and that formula, I think, was developed out of a report that was done by the now Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. He then, after election in 1997, was tasked with doing a process around the province, and they came to a figure of 60 per cent of the operational funding. That's what private schools get now, 60 per cent of the operational grant. Yes, they got an increase this year because they're going to get 60 per cent of the operational grant. That 4.53 per cent increase applies to them.

We also have to have this other discussion because it's always on the table, and it's on the table very intensely now because private schools are feeling the pinch. They don't get operational and maintenance funding, and they don't get capital funding. So they're bringing that issue forward, and it will be a public discussion at some point as to whether 60 per cent is still the right number, whether they should have operational or maintenance funding.

That's not an attack on the public system at all. The public system will get the resources that we can allocate to the public system. That's our primary function. That's what we do. But we also have to recognize that every child in Alberta should have equitable access to a quality education, and choice helps to make that possible.

Building schools. This comes back to what the Member for Calgary-North Hill raised about having schools built on a timely basis and the transition in terms of new schools and old schools and also that factor because a lot of students are going from growth areas to populate schools in other parts that were underutilized. Some of that is quite appropriate if the schools are providing alternative funding. If you're having a Nellie McClung school, for example, in Edmonton, you're only going to have one of them, or you might have two, but you're not going to have dozens of them. Students that choose that option will continue to go there. Or the Mandarin program that's located in a number of schools. That is appropriate, but it's also appropriate to make sure that we do our demographic planning appropriately and have the plans in place so that we can open schools on a timely basis.

**The Deputy Chair:** I hate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Education, but pursuant to Standing Order 63, which requires that committees of the whole Assembly rise and report, prior to the time of adjournment I'd like to invite the officials to leave the Assembly so the committee can rise and report progress.

The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report progress and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

**Mr. Olson:** Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the Department of Education relating to the 2008-2009 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009. Sir, the committee reports progress and requests leave to sit again.

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

**Hon. Members:** Concur.

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

The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday the 28th.

[Motion carried; at 5:28 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]



## **Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 1st Session (2008)**

**Activity to April 24, 2008**

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

\* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

**1 Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2008 (Stelmach)**

First Reading -- 9 (Apr. 15 aft.)  
Second Reading -- 47-48 (Apr. 16 eve.), (Apr. 23 eve., adjourned)

**2 Travel Alberta Act (Ady)**

First Reading -- 215 (Apr. 24 aft.)

**3 Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2008 (Snelgrove)**

First Reading -- 216 (Apr. 24 aft.)

**4 Alberta Enterprise Corporation Act (Horner)**

First Reading -- 224 (Apr. 24 aft.)

**5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2008 (\$) (Snelgrove)**

First Reading -- 125 (Apr. 21 eve.)  
Second Reading -- 143 (Apr. 22 eve.), 158-60 (Apr. 22 eve., passed)  
Committee of the Whole -- (Apr. 23 eve., passed)

**6 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2008 (\$) (Snelgrove)**

First Reading -- 165-66 (Apr. 23 aft.)

**201 Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Heritage Act (Mitzel)**

First Reading -- 59 (Apr. 17 aft.)  
Second Reading -- 89-102 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)

**202 Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act (Cao)**

First Reading -- 59 (Apr. 17 aft.)  
Second Reading -- 102-07 (Apr. 21 aft., adjourned)

**203 Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008 (Allred)**

First Reading -- 224 (Apr. 24 aft.)

**204 Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008 (Johnston)**

First Reading -- 224 (Apr. 24 aft.)





## Table of Contents

Thursday, April 24, 2008

Introduction of Guests .....	213
Members' Statements	
Carbon Capture and Storage Development Council .....	213
Memorial for Private Walter Strang .....	214
Calgary Homeless Foundation .....	214
International Day of Mourning .....	214
Centennial of Kiwanis Music Festival .....	214
Yellowhead Rotary Arts Festival .....	215
Presenting Petitions .....	215
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 2    Travel Alberta Act Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2008 .....	215
Bill 3    Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2008 .....	216
Bill 4    Alberta Enterprise Corporation Act .....	224
Bill 203  Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008 .....	224
Bill 204  Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008 .....	224
Oral Question Period	
Farm Safety .....	216
Nuclear Power .....	216
Renter Assistance .....	216
Bitumen Royalties .....	217
Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped .....	217
Firearms Regulation .....	218
Calgary Ring Road .....	218
Federal Infrastructure Funding .....	219
Water Management .....	219
Environmental Protection .....	220
School Closures .....	220
Open Spaces Pilot Project .....	220
Suffield National Wildlife Area .....	221
Carbon Capture and Storage Development Council .....	221
Vehicle Emissions .....	222
Grizzly Bear Protection .....	222
Energy Efficiency in New Buildings .....	223
Anthony Henday Drive Interchanges .....	223
Tabling Returns and Reports .....	224
Tablings to the Clerk .....	225
Projected Government Business .....	225
Committee of Supply	
Main Estimates 2008-09	
Education .....	225

## STANDING COMMITTEES

### Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rogers

Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski

Amery  
Blakeman

DeLong  
Kang

McFarland  
McQueen

Olson

### Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Prins

Deputy Chair: Mr. McFarland

Blakeman  
Campbell  
Horne

Lund  
MacDonald

Marz  
Mitzel

Notley  
Webber

### Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Kowalski

Deputy Chair: Mr. Oberle

Elniski  
Hehr  
Leskiw

Mason  
Rodney

Snelgrove  
Taylor

VanderBurg  
Weadick

### Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Dr. Brown

Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw

Allred  
Amery  
Anderson  
Benito  
Boutilier

Calahasen  
Campbell  
Doerksen  
Elniski  
Fawcett

Forsyth  
Jacobs  
MacDonald  
McQueen  
Olson

Quest  
Sandhu  
Sarich  
Swann

### Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Prins

Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock

Bhardwaj  
Boutilier  
Calahasen  
Doerksen  
Griffiths

Johnson  
Leskiw  
Liepert  
Marz  
Mitzel

Notley  
Oberle  
Pastoor  
Rogers  
Stevens

Taylor  
Vandermeer  
Weadick  
Zwozdesky

### Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. MacDonald

Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund

Benito  
Bhardwaj  
Chase  
Dallas

Denis  
Drysdale  
Fawcett  
Griffiths

Jacobs  
Johnson  
Kang  
Mason

Quest  
Vandermeer  
Woo-Paw

If your address is incorrect, please clip on the dotted line, make any changes, and return to the address listed below. To facilitate the update, please attach the last mailing label along with your account number.

Subscriptions  
Legislative Assembly Office  
1001 Legislature Annex  
9718 - 107 Street  
EDMONTON AB T5K 1E4

.....

Last mailing label:

Account # \_\_\_\_\_

New information:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

.....

Subscription information:

Annual subscriptions to the paper copy of *Alberta Hansard* (including annual index) are \$127.50 including GST if mailed once a week or \$94.92 including GST if picked up at the subscription address below or if mailed through the provincial government interdepartmental mail system. Bound volumes are \$121.70 including GST if mailed. Cheques should be made payable to the Minister of Finance.

Price per issue is \$0.75 including GST.

On-line access to *Alberta Hansard* is available through the Internet at [www.assembly.ab.ca](http://www.assembly.ab.ca)

Address subscription inquiries to Subscriptions, Legislative Assembly Office, 1001 Legislature Annex, 9718 - 107 St., EDMONTON AB T5K 1E4, telephone 427-1302.

Address other inquiries to Managing Editor, *Alberta Hansard*, 1001 Legislature Annex, 9718 - 107 St., EDMONTON AB T5K 1E4, telephone 427-1875.

