



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta

## The 27th Legislature

First Session

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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 8, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon and welcome.

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

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Visitors

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

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police is holding its annual spring meeting here in Edmonton. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly six board members of the AACP, whose commitment to reducing and fighting crime is instrumental in keeping Albertans safe. With us today is Al Sauve, chief sheriff, sheriffs' branch, Solicitor General and Public Security; Inspector Wade Blake, officer in charge of the Stony Plain/Spruce Grove RCMP detachment; Chief Alf Rudd, Louis Bull Police Service; Chief Bob Byers of the Blood Tribe Police Service; Deputy Commissioner Rod Knecht, northwest region and K Division RCMP; and Chief Michael Boyd, Edmonton Police Service and president of the AACP. Mr. Speaker, they are seated in your gallery, and with your permission I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

### Introduction of Guests

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

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While many on both sides of the House would agree there's not much hope for me, there certainly is tremendous hope for this wonderful class of students we have here today who receive their instruction from the School of Hope, centred in Vermilion. These students are here looking at the Legislature Building in all its splendour and to excitedly watch us participate today. They're here with their group leader and teacher, Carla Hanf, and Teri Tupper, Nancy Perozok, and Leslie Sloboda. I would ask that they all rise and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment. The Minister of Environment?

**Mr. Renner:** I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker; I was otherwise engaged.

It's my pleasure this afternoon to welcome to the Legislature a group of young people who are probably among the most loyal of visitors that we have. Crestwood school in my constituency of Medicine Hat has had their grade 6 classes up to the Legislature each and every year since I have been their MLA and I understand even for a time preceding my membership in this body. It's with great pleasure that I introduce to you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly 80 members of grade 6 classes at Crestwood elementary school. They're accompanied by teachers Mr. Wade Lawson, Mrs. Karen Irwin, Mr. Gary Ziel, Ms

Wendy Smid, Mrs. Maria Thompson as well as parent helpers Mrs. Tammy Koi, Mr. Scott Coburn, and Mrs. Monica Andres. They're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask all of them to rise and receive the recognition of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Speaker. The Deputy Speaker?

**Mr. Cao:** Oh, sorry.

Well, Mr. Speaker, hon. members, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize a group of individuals in the galleries today who play a key role in the democratic process in the province of Alberta. These are the men and women who work for the members of this Assembly in their constituency offices. Our democratic process starts in the constituencies, and as the front line in the constituencies I can say that these individuals proudly represent all Albertans. These employees are here today participating in the 2008 spring constituency employee information seminar, which provides an opportunity for them to work with other LAO staff and obtain an overview of the numerous programs and services available through the LAO. I would now like to ask the constituency assistants who are here today from all corners of the province to please rise and receive the warmest recognition from the members of this House.

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

**Mr. Lindsay:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As usual you have my undivided attention.

It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through to all members of this Assembly two people among many throughout Alberta whose work helps victims of crime. With us today is Sergeant Roland Burandt and Steve Marissink. Sergeant Burandt is with the Edmonton Police Service and is in charge of its victim services unit. This unit has been operating in Edmonton since 1979 and helps at least 30,000 victims each year. Please also welcome Mr. Steve Marissink. He is the director of victims programs in my ministry. Mr. Speaker, with your permission I would ask Sergeant Burandt and Mr. Marissink to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 45 delegates from the Alberta College and Technical Institute Student Executive Council. I'm very, very pleased at the great relationship that our department and our government has with this group. They're great advocates for their student membership. They're presently holding their leadership conference and are here at the Legislature today. They represent over 120,000 college and technical institute students right across Alberta. They are seated in both the public and members' galleries this afternoon, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special guest from the Ronald McDonald House foundation. This organization has been in operation in northern Alberta for over 20 years now, and I'm sure all members will agree that words

cannot describe the phenomenal and very critical work that they do in supporting and caring for sick children and their families. Today we have with us Mr. Larry Mathieson, executive director of the Calgary Ronald McDonald House, who has driven up today to be part of a member's statement highlighting some of the work the foundation is doing in northern Alberta. I'd ask him to please rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

**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 members of this Assembly Miss Karolina Urbaniak from Poznań, Poland. Karolina has a bachelor's degree in Russian theology and has been working in the United Kingdom during the past year. She is presently visiting friends in Grande Prairie and Edmonton and is touring and experiencing all Alberta has to offer visitors. Karolina is seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to introduce to you and through you two great Albertans with a fascinating family history: past, present, and future. The first is Scott Redman, who is a successful businessman and a great father. Now, Scott's grandfather Daniel Lee Redman was a member of Borden's government during the First World War. And I need to get this right; Scott's father's godfather was R.B. Bennett, who worked with Scott's grandfather in the Bennett Lougheed Redman McLaws law firm and was also the commanding officer of the Calgary Highlanders.

1:40

Scott is joined by a brilliant young man, his son Joey, who recently completed his first year at the U of C. We're overjoyed to have him as our summer STEP student at the Calgary-Lougheed constituency office. Joey is a very witty, very kind, very intelligent young man who I expect, in all sincerity, may indeed one day be Premier or Prime Minister in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Speaker, Scott and Joey serve on the Calgary-Lougheed advisory board, are very active during elections, and I believe that Alberta is a better province because of these gentlemen.

One final family note. Joey's maternal great-grandfather, Jack Cawsey, trained Dale of Cawsalta, the first dog used by a police force, for the RCMP, and he has an RCMP building named after him at the dog training school in Innisfail.

Now, Mr. Speaker, both gentlemen are seated in the members' gallery, appropriately, and I ask them to rise now to accept the warm wishes of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great honour today to introduce a dear friend of mine, Bill Khaira, who's up in the members' gallery. Bill is one of those individuals, one of those young people that after doing some searching unlocked his potential and has returned to pursue a postsecondary education. I am so proud to call him my friend, I'm so proud to have him as my supporter, and I'm so proud that he is here today. Sir, I am sure that he will make a valuable contribution to our province and our nation in the future. I'd ask Bill to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

## Members' Statements

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

### Health Care System

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's health care system is not broken, but it is badly damaged, and it is only the heroic efforts of the people who work in it that keep it going. Fifteen years ago Alberta had one of the best health care systems in the world. Despite myths to the contrary the hard evidence shows that spending was stable, waiting lists were short, and services were widely available. The department of health had a system of hospital performance indicators that allowed the minister to directly assess hospital performance.

Then from 1993 to 1996 a series of precipitous decisions shattered that system, and Albertans have struggled with rolling health care crises ever since. Regionalization was rammed through, forcing complex organizations together without preparation. The staff for the department of hospitals was chopped in half, with such core functions as hospital operations, long-term care standards, and infection control wiped out. Over 10,000 health care professionals had their jobs terminated or downgraded. Training programs for doctors, nurses, and others were reduced.

As if that weren't enough, there was a revolving door at the top. From 1992 to 2004 there were 10 different deputy ministers of health. There have been revolving doors of reports and consultants, too, from Mazankowski to Hutton to Graydon to Ohlhauser to Broda and on and on. Regional boundaries have changed. Regional boards were appointed and then elected, and then the elections were cancelled and reappointments were made. Hospitals were closed, sold, demolished, and mothballed. Labour relations swung between angry confrontations and expensive contract settlements.

Through all this most people have received the care they need, but far too many have suffered, and far too much has been wasted. We could be doing so much better. For these problems to be properly addressed, we need the right diagnosis. The core issue is not that we have a public system; the core issue is that we have a badly run public system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Cassie Campbell Street Hockey Festival

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was honoured to play in the Cassie Campbell street hockey game last year and delighted to be back for the event two Saturdays ago. The celebrity charity game featured Olympians, NHL and CFL stars, media personalities, aldermen, and, yes, one MLA. But the game was just one component of the Cassie Campbell Street Hockey Festival. It also included a carnival-themed family event, a street hockey tournament for four dozen teams of adults and four dozen teams of youth, and all sorts of social activities. But the unique experience would not be possible without double Olympic gold medallist and Calgary resident Cassie Campbell along with all of the enthusiastic participants and the countless individuals and organizations in the community who supported it, and of course they supported it because of the Ronald McDonald House Southern Alberta. I amongst other MLA colleagues have witnessed this facility ourselves first-hand, sir. It is truly world class, a wonderfully supportive home away from home for sick children and their families at times of incredible need.

Cassie has donated countless hours volunteering at the house, and

under her leadership in the past five years a million dollars has been collected for the organization. Cassie said:

I have seen with my own eyes how important it is for sick children and their families to be together while the child is being treated. I've worked with parents and children facing some of life's toughest challenges and frankly, their courage has been a source of inspiration for me in my own life and athletic career.

Cassie Campbell is not only the longest serving captain in Canadian hockey history and the first female colour commentator for *Hockey Night in Canada*; she's also an incredible mentor for people of all ages around the world.

Mr. Speaker, we salute Cassie and all of her assistants. Our government joined in her effort, even before the current building was constructed, with a grant matching that million dollars. This is just another fine example of the amazing things that can happen when individuals, corporations, organizations, and governments work together for a common cause.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Ronald McDonald House Northern Alberta

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to share with the Assembly the good work being done by Ronald McDonald House Northern Alberta, a very highly valued partner, I might add, in the excellent health care system we enjoy in Alberta today.

Ronald McDonald House works closely with the Stollery children's hospital and provides accommodation and support for children undergoing serious medical treatment and their families. Our facility in northern Alberta has been fundraising to expand its capacity to house and help more people and has made major strides in reaching its goal of \$11 million. To date Ronald McDonald House has raised over \$7 million from many generous and community-minded citizens, and I'm proud to say that the government of Alberta through the community facilities enhancement program and the major community facilities enhancement program has contributed a total of \$2 million to the expansion fund.

Mr. Speaker, the money raised will greatly expand the capacity of this facility. It will construct new bedrooms, build a games room so that kids can enjoy being kids even while sick, and add a school and computer room for students to continue their education while they're receiving treatment. Greater accessibility, a communal kitchen, a breastfeeding room for mothers, a volunteer centre, and a bereavement room for grieving families are among the many other enhancements that will benefit children and their families.

Ronald McDonald House is truly a home away from home. It is a place full of compassion and hope and a place where no one in need is turned away. It is a critical part of the continuum of care in supporting sick children and their families.

I would like to recognize, Mr. Speaker, the efforts and humanitarianism of Dr. Bill Sharun, chair of the capital campaign; Gordon Deeks, past president of the northern Alberta Ronald McDonald House; Barb Blokzyl, president of the northern Alberta Ronald McDonald House; and the many staff and volunteers with whom they work. On behalf of all Albertans thank you so very much.

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

#### Alberta Environment Support and Emergency Response Team

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In honour of Emergency Preparedness Week I'd like to acknowledge the work and dedication of the Alberta environment support and emergency response team. This afternoon right here on the Legislature Grounds

I had the pleasure of meeting members of this exceptional team. I saw first-hand the state-of-the-art equipment they use in responding to environmental emergencies.

This emergency response team is a full-time group of responders to environmental emergencies 24 hours per day, seven days a week, Mr. Speaker. The team members respond to environmental incidents in a timely fashion. They provide on-site support and expertise, helping local first responders and involved parties mitigate any impact on the environment. The team helps ensure effective emergency response based on sound science, public safety, and environmental protection.

The team is part of how our government responds to calls made to the environmental hotline, and in case you need to call, Mr. Speaker, the number is 1-800-222-6514. I encourage all members to acknowledge this exceptional team dedicated to ensuring that individuals, companies, and Albertans practise due diligence in addressing impacts on our environment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, before we move on, just several very brief announcements.

Saturday will be a birthday anniversary for the hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services and the hon. Member for Red Deer-South. Sunday will be yet another 50th birthday for the Premier of the province of Alberta.

I know that all Members of the Alberta Legislative Assembly will be joining with me in extending to all of the mothers of Alberta a happy Mother's Day.

1:50

#### Oral Question Period

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

#### Minable Oil Sands Strategy Presentation

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minable oil sands strategy is the broad policy framework that will direct plans and actions within the minable oil sands area. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. What is the status of the minable oil sands strategy?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this particular strategy is a cross-ministry initiative that is under the direction of the Minister of Energy primarily. The Minister of Environment has a supportive role, but I would suggest that that question be directed to the Minister of Energy.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that documents obtained through FOIP by the late Martha Kostuch show that senior provincial officials in the Department of Environment withheld important PowerPoint slides from federal officials on oil sands issues, what is this government's policy for sharing oil sands information with the federal government?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we work very closely with the federal government, particularly with respect to our climate change initiative and others. The federal Environment minister, Mr. Baird, and I have frequent interactions, and we're committed to work together to deal with issues of common concern. At the same time, we're also committed to ensure that Alberta has control over and manages our resources, our constitutionally mandated resources, in an appropriate manner.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, to the same minister: given that decisions such as those relating to the Kearl Lake mine show the importance of effective provincial-federal interaction, is the Minister of Environment satisfied that officials in his department are working effectively with federal officials?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly am. As a matter of fact, I know that at the officials level a lot of good work continues to be done. Let's be frank and honest: there are from time to time differences of opinion, differences in dealing with provincial legislation versus federal legislation. I wouldn't think that it should be any other way. We work together as much as we possibly can. There may be times when we agree to disagree.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. The FOIP for Martha Kostuch showed that the PowerPoint slides that were removed very deliberately from the provincial presentation to senior federal officials focus on issues and problems with oil sands development. For example, one of the issues that was withheld from the presentation to federal officials was, and I quote from the slide: meaningful reclamation. To the Minister of Environment: given that just yesterday the minister confirmed that in over 30 years of oil sands mining there has been just one reclamation certificate issued, is that why the issue of meaningful reclamation was withheld from federal officials in this presentation?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with the specific instance that the member is referring to, but I do want to make it clear that there are areas that are clearly provincial responsibility, and the management and the development of the resources of this province are among those. There are issues that have joint responsibility. I would suggest to the hon. member that issues with respect to reclamation are primarily and perhaps even exclusively within provincial jurisdiction.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the withheld slide also mentions, quote, conflicts with existing legislation, end quote, will the Minister of Environment explain to Albertans what the conflicts with legislation are when it comes to oil sands development?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I'm not familiar with the specific instance, but there are some examples of where provincial legislation and federal legislation are not exactly the same. I use as an example CEPA, the federal environmental legislation. The ability for that legislation to deal with equivalency and outcome-based kinds of regulatory regime such as we're doing in Alberta is very, very limited. I would offer that that's a very good example. We are based upon outcomes, and the federal government is still left in the old guard of inputs.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, given that the withheld slides also say, quote, environmental standards, a compromise? end quote, will the minister explain what environmental standards may have been compromised?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I'm not aware of the specific instances that the member brings forward. He constantly

uses the word "withheld." Has he never been involved in making presentations where in one particular audience there are issues that have a priority and need to be dealt with as opposed to another audience? I don't think it's unusual in the least for PowerPoint presentations to be customized depending upon who the audience is.

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

### Smokeless Tobacco

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness following his appreciated confession yesterday to attending the Stampede as a guest of the smokeless tobacco lobby: two years ago when he was at this event, was he partnered with the then Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, who was working that tobacco crowd, fundraising for his leadership bid?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I could anticipate this coming in a line of questioning. I know that I was at many events over the years at the Calgary Stampede, invited to events just like any other individual. Very diligent in ensuring that if it does approach anywhere near the \$200 limit, we do advise the Ethics Commissioner, and I've done that, I believe, dutifully. What I'll also do is I'll check the records, see what's in the records, and find out because, you know, it'll go on and on and on, and we have really important issues to deal with in this province.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of health. Given the minister's flippant response yesterday that he didn't chew, there is still an unresolved issue, and it is not the mysterious spot on the blue dress. Can the minister explain this government's new policy on smokeless tobacco? Or maybe he just doesn't chew and think at the same time.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, you know, we all want to be open and transparent. This opposition spent hard-earned taxpayer money last year on radio ads. The leader said: "Oh, yes. We told all Albertans how much we spent. It was in our news release." We checked every news release. We can't find one anywhere with any suggestion as to how much they spent. He's going to say: well, it was approved. Well, if it was approved by the taxpayers, by this House, tell us how much it is. Now is the time. Come on. Reciprocate.

**Mr. Taylor:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that was a nice bait-and-switch tactic, but what I want to know is simply this. Are there any specific health policies anywhere within this government addressing smokeless tobacco addiction among young people, or does your relationship with the smokeless tobacco lobby preclude or prevent that?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, this hon. member, well, this member knows very well that on July 1 of this year smokeless tobacco comes under the same rules as other tobacco. I would just ask this member to ask his leader how he can justify coming into this House, being critical of the horse-racing industry, when he appeared at the same event that we all appeared at: the horse-racing industry.

**The Speaker:** We'll deal with the point of order at the conclusion of the Routine.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

### Donations to Political Parties

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That, of course, is a horse of a different colour.

Large-scale political donations from special interests corrupt the political process, and they're rarely given without an agenda. They take influence away from individual voters and place it in the hands of the rich and well-connected. Quebec, Manitoba, and the federal government have all made changes to their election finance rules to ban corporate and union donations to political parties, replacing them with a publicly financed electoral system. My questions are to the Premier. Will the government consider changes to Alberta's election laws to eliminate corporate and union donations to political parties?

2:00

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, if the \$2.2 million that the unions spent against me personally, I believe, and against this party in the last election is of real issue to him, then I'm sure that he'd bring forward any ideas, and we'll debate it in the House and pass the kind of legislation that's necessary.

I just met with the Premier of British Columbia, and they are going to be passing legislation that's going to limit third-party advertising. I can tell you that \$2.2 million is a lot of money, so I can see why he would be concerned, especially if they were supposed to be buddies of his.

**Mr. Mason:** It's too bad, Mr. Speaker. That was a straight-up question, and I was coming to the third-party issue as well.

Given that the Premier has already answered my question about regulating or prohibiting third-party political campaigns, I will reask the first question, which is: will the government consider changes to Alberta's election laws to eliminate corporate and union donations to political parties?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Other than looking at disclosure rules during the leadership – and we didn't have any for the leadership that I was involved in and some of my colleagues, but I expect there may be one in the offering perhaps across the way. It may be something that we should really expedite through this House and put the rules in order so that everybody plays by the same rules.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier has now answered my third question, which was limiting donations for leadership campaigns and nomination contests, I will reask my first question, which is: will the government consider changes to Alberta's election laws to eliminate corporate and union donations to political parties? I would appreciate an answer to that question.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Actually, the hon. member does make a very good point, and I say honourable because at least you know where he stands on various issues. I will say that our caucus will give consideration to all the opinions expressed by not only our party members but by Albertans, to see how we can look at various legislation. But you're right. We've got to think this through.

He's talking about political donations to the party, and I believe he may be talking about third-party involvement in campaigns. Quite frankly, the amount of money spent by all the unions or some of the unions, \$2.2 million, I believe, far exceeded the budget of the NDs, although I can't speak for them. I'll tell you that it's one heck of a lot of money to be invested in the election campaign.

### Fuel Tax

**Mr. McFarland:** Mr. Speaker, our truckers, our agricultural producers, and the general public are facing higher and higher gasoline and fuel prices virtually every day. I don't believe a lot of our constituents throughout Alberta totally understand how much money the province is actually taking out of a litre. My question is to the Premier. Could he please, once and for all, explain just how much the province takes on a litre of gasoline or diesel fuel?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the fuel tax, both gas and diesel, is 9 cents a litre. It's an amount that has not changed, has not increased in the last 16 years, and it's a tax that does not change with the rise in the cost of fuel. Once again, this is money that goes into general revenue. It's 9 cents a litre.

**Mr. McFarland:** Second question, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier as well: although 9 cents may not seem like very much at all on a litre, has the government considered reducing or eliminating that 9 cents a litre on gasoline or diesel fuel?

**Mr. Stelmach:** We haven't, Mr. Speaker. All the money that's generated from the fuel tax, as I said, goes into general revenue. What we do with the money, of course, is top it up substantially because we ensure that all the money we receive from fuel tax goes into highways. Now, actually, we exceed that considerably. I think we collect about 700-and-some million dollars, and the budget for highways is about \$1.9 billion, so we far exceed whatever we collect in fuel tax.

The other thing, very quickly, is that the cities also benefit because they get 5 cents of the 9 cents to spend on their local needs.

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

**Mr. McFarland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third and final supplemental would be to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Could you elaborate on the amount of money that we've actually collected and how it's spent when it comes to the fuel taxes?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, as our Premier indicated, the anticipated revenue is some 775 million dollars for the fuel tax revenues this year, about 97 per cent of which is collected from gasoline and diesel. The 5-cent rebate back to the cities has netted and is anticipated to net considerable dollars to Edmonton and Calgary again this year: to Edmonton this past year about \$80 million and to Calgary \$95 million towards projects and infrastructure.

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

### Federal Infrastructure Funding

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If Alberta's funding under the building Canada fund was allocated directly to municipalities on a per capita basis, the city of Edmonton would be eligible to receive about \$185 million because it has 22 per cent of the population of the province. My first question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Who sits on the cabinet subcommittee that oversees Alberta's participation in the building Canada fund?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** The Deputy Premier and I sit on that.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you. Edmonton is left out once again by this government.

Now, given that Alberta municipalities have not been included in the negotiation process nor have they been consulted regarding the building Canada fund, what is the reason they have been excluded and not consulted?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, probably nothing could be further from the truth when we talk about consulting with municipalities with regard to projects they have that are important to them. We spend as a province around \$8 billion on infrastructure, and the greatest majority of that goes into the municipalities that we all use. We have not yet been able to get the federal government to sign the agreement. So it's a little premature to speak of the spot on the dress, to talk about where the money's going to go until the government signs the deal.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Mr. Speaker, eight other jurisdictions, provinces, or territories have signed the deal. I don't understand why this hon. minister cannot get the deal done when it means so much money to the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary. My question is: where does the province plan to spend Edmonton's \$185 million share of the building Canada fund? If you're not going to give it to the city of Edmonton, where do you plan on spending it?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta is the one that really broke the mould a number of years ago to ensure that municipalities had direct input into federal infrastructure dollars. We're the ones that did it. Right across Canada other provinces now are following. As a result, by breaking that ground, breaking that mould, we have a system in place that other provinces have adopted that municipalities have a say in terms of where their priorities are, and that is how the money is allocated across this great province.

#### Victims' Assistance Programs

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Mr. Speaker, no one ever expects or asks to be a victim of crime, yet every day there are Albertans who experience the pain and anguish caused by crime and tragedy. That trauma is often compounded when these victims have to contend with an unfamiliar and at times intimidating justice system. My questions are all to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What is this government doing to support victims of crime?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Mr. Speaker, this government leads our country in providing innovative programs and services that ensure victims of crime are treated with compassion and respect. This year our budget provides \$25 million for victims of crime, an increase of \$7.5 million over the previous year. This funds a number of front-line programs and services that help victims through the criminal justice system. It also provides one-time lump-sum financial payment to eligible victims to help them return their lives to normal.

2:10

**Ms Woo-Paw:** My first supplemental: how are these services for victims funded?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Mr. Speaker, both victims' services and financial benefits for victims are funded through the victims of crime fund. This fund relies entirely on a 15 per cent surcharge on provincial and federal fines. Since the fund was established, in 1997, we have paid out almost \$57 million in financial benefits to victims of crime. Tomorrow we'll be announcing a new funding formula for grants

provided to victims' services units to ensure that these organizations can continue their great work.

**Ms Woo-Paw:** My final supplemental: what is being done to make sure that all Albertans are aware of these services for victims?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Mr. Speaker, we are currently in the third year of a multimedia campaign that increases the awareness of Albertans of our network of victims' assistance programs. This campaign has been very successful in letting Albertans know how and where to access the programs they need. It includes advertising on radio, buses, newspapers, and magazines. We also recently developed the victims of crime protocol, Canada's first step-by-step guide to help victims through the criminal justice system.

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

#### Oil Sands Tailings Pond Leaks

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans and the world are learning that the over 30 years largest man-made water containment in the world, the tar sands tailings ponds, are also the most hazardous to the environment and to people, yet they grow daily by hundreds of millions of litres. We are unaware of any reported leaks into the Athabasca River. My questions are for the Environment minister. How many tailings ponds leaks into the Athabasca River have existed over the last 30 years?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the reason that the member is unaware of unreported leaks is because there have been no unreported leaks. There have been no leaks at all.

**Dr. Swann:** Can the minister confirm or deny . . . [interjections]

**The Speaker:** The hon. member has the floor.

**Dr. Swann:** Can the minister confirm or deny that in July 2007 a million litres of toxic hydrocarbons from a Suncor tailings pond was pumped directly into the Athabasca River?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I can completely deny that such is the case. There was an incident at Suncor that resulted in a release that was on-site, that was on a pipe that was between the plant operation and the tailings pond itself. It was completely contained on-site, it was dealt with appropriately, and none of the release had any contact with the water supply.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister provide and table the documentation related to that spill?

**Mr. Renner:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

#### Crime Reduction and Safe Communities

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If we really want to address the root causes of crime, we do need to look at building stronger communities. A stronger community has the people and the



means to create a safe and healthy place to live and to work. In Calgary-Bow we're proud to have supported with lottery funds community sports and social services facilities but also Simon House, that successfully rebuilds men's lives that have been destroyed by alcohol. My first question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. As the minister responsible for the lottery-funded granting programs, will you commit to funding projects that encourage safe communities?

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

**Mr. Blackett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Building safe communities is a priority for me and for this government. The Premier in our mandate letter has suggested that we work together with our cabinet colleagues for strong and safer communities. The community investment programs through Alberta lotteries benefit all Albertans. I'll give you a couple of examples. The Grande Prairie and Area Safe Communities committee received \$125,000 from the community facility enhancement program to oversee the construction of their organization's facility, and secondly, the Safe Harbour society for addictions and poverty in Alberta, located in Red Deer, received \$140,000 from the community facility enhancement program to develop a Safe Harbour shelter and nonmedical detox facility.

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

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Although I'm encouraged to hear that some projects are already receiving funding, of course lottery funding only goes so far. What other ideas do you have to reduce conflict, especially violent conflict?

**Mr. Blackett:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we have several other programs that can assist with this. First of all, we have the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund, which supports the Alberta government's efforts to foster equality, promote fairness, and encourage the creation of inclusive workplaces and communities. In addition, we have the community spirit program, both the donation and the enhanced tax credit, a hundred million dollars of new money that goes towards 19,000 different voluntary organizations that help to assist in building strong and safe communities in Alberta.

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

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much. My final question to the same minister. Communities across Alberta have been tasked with developing their own crime prevention strategies. We have some good ones in Bowness. As the minister responsible for building communities, will your ministry be providing support, financial or otherwise, to make this happen?

**Mr. Blackett:** Mr. Speaker, we're already working with communities in this area. Over the past year alone community service staff have worked with several communities, including Leduc, Grande Prairie, St. Paul, Edmonton, Parkland county, and Buffalo Lake, on a series of projects. These projects cover a wide range of community needs from working with safer communities and crime prevention committees to working with community drug coalitions. We're giving communities a hand up so they can develop local, workable solutions with their community needs in mind, and we will continue to make these services available to all communities.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

### Capital Region Municipal Planning

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Capital Region Board has just begun to meet, and already there are concerns about how this board will function. Specifically, some member municipalities are concerned that this process will delay approvals for major developments. It's important to the region that this process succeeds. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: if the new board structure results in delays in approvals, does the minister have any processes in place to expedite the process for the municipalities?

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to let this House know that the first meeting of the Capital Region Board took place yesterday. I want to say to you that municipalities working together does not lengthen the process; it shortens the process. Working together, making sure there is no duplication, having planning for the future very much shortens the process.

**Ms Pastoor:** Could the minister tell us if he's prepared to provide extra support to the capital region municipalities, who will continue to examine development plans from all the municipalities in the context of the overall? The smaller communities only have so much capacity in their planning and development departments. Would he provide them with extra funding if they're going to be able to go under the big picture?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the Capital Region Board is exactly that. It is the municipalities getting together, working together on projects with the support of the provincial government, with the support of administration where needed. We do have a chairman, Mr. Chris Sheard, who is chairing that board. He also has access to individuals or to expertise as necessary.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you. To the Minister of Environment: given the new cumulative effects framework for the capital region, will the minister be providing technical support to the board in order that planning and development decisions proceed within the confines of the framework to protect air quality, land, and water quality and quantity? The environmental impacts must be considered in the initial development of the regional plan.

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, of course, we'll be working in conjunction with this board and any other organizations that are involved in planning. But I have to point out that the primary focus of Alberta Environment will be to deal with the licensing and permitting that would be applied to the various projects that are approved. Our primary function in all of this will be to ensure that we protect the environmental integrity.

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

2:20

### Child Care Spaces in Schools

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Summer is coming, and what should be a relaxing time for Albertans is a stressful time for parents without child care in a province short tens of thousands of spaces. One part of the solution would be to ensure that each of the 134 school construction projects includes space for daycare and after

school programs. The province of Manitoba has recently invested money to ensure schools are built with space for daycare centres. With the unadvised absence of the Minister of Education, my questions are to the Deputy Premier. Can the Deputy Premier advise whether his government will commit to set aside spaces for non-profit child care centres in new schools?

**Mr. Stevens:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll pass that matter on to the appropriate minister.

**Ms Notley:** Well, my question then goes to the minister responsible for Infrastructure. Can the minister commit that P3 arrangements won't prevent schools from leasing space to child care centres or force them to lease them at a rate that would prevent a child care centre from being opened?

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

**Mr. Hayden:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We, in fact, design the schools that we provide based on the input that we get from the people in Education, that inform us as to what type of a facility they need and what sort of criteria it needs to meet, and that's what we build.

**Ms Notley:** Maybe I'll try asking my question again, then. Could the Minister of Infrastructure commit here today that the P3 arrangements for those schools will not in any way interfere with the ability to open nonprofit child care centres in those buildings?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I am the Acting Minister of Education today. One of the things that the member has to realize – and it's something that they fought for – is the fact that these schools will be owned, when completed, by the school boards, so it isn't the government who's going to deny child care space in those facilities. If the school boards want to work it out, then they're clear to do so.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona committed a faux pas on her first question, and I'm sure her colleague will draw it to her attention.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

#### Education Property Taxes

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton-Meadowlark is home to more seniors than any constituency in Edmonton. Many of those seniors live independently in their own homes on their own fixed income, and their sentiments or feelings are like many other seniors in this province. They feel that they should not bear the burden of paying education property tax given Alberta's current economic prosperity. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Why are seniors and other Albertans with no children in the school system required to pay these taxes?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, education taxes are an investment in society. They are to help support education from K to 12, and all of the benefits are collectively funded for public education. It is to groom our future firefighters, teachers, engineers, nurses, and doctors.

**Dr. Sherman:** My first supplemental is to the same minister. These seniors have invested in not only one generation of engineers,

firefighters, nurses, and doctors or a second but some a third and a fourth generation. Since seniors are already exempt from paying health care premiums, what tax relief can they expect from this government?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Speaker, there is a tax relief program in place, and we've capped the increases at the 2004 levels. The question is essentially how we balance the interests and concerns of seniors with those of younger Albertans, and I believe that the current way of taxation strikes a very balanced approach.

**Dr. Sherman:** A second supplementary, my last question, is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What assistance is available to help seniors with their education property taxes, especially those who cannot afford to pay their taxes because of high property values?

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

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although seniors are still responsible for paying education taxes, we offer the education property tax assistance program. Through this program last year we helped more than 60,000 seniors' households by providing a rebate for increases in the education portion of their property taxes. As well, some municipalities, including Edmonton, Calgary, and Strathcona county, have their own property tax assistance programs to help low-income seniors with the municipal portion of the property tax.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

#### Asset-backed Commercial Paper

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The asset-backed commercial paper crisis is about risk management and regulatory bodies providing consumer protection, but in real-life terms this is about individuals' life savings being put in peril because they trusted the provincial regulators to protect them, and they trusted their financial institutions to provide them with sound advice. My questions are to the minister of finance. Why was the Alberta Securities Commission not able to protect retail investors against the risks associated with these investments?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, this asset-backed paper has been very big for investors. There's no question that for those investors that made that kind of investment, no doubt they felt it was rather a secure opportunity because, in fact, it had a triple-A credit rating. We've seen Purdy Crawford on behalf of the group travel to talk to investors across the country. They have in fact struck an arrangement that seems to be to the satisfaction of most of the small investors, who will receive and recoup a hundred per cent of their investment. I think that currently we're just waiting to find out whether or not any of the corporations that have challenged this particular arrangement go further, pursue further any legal action through the courts.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. To the same minister: why were the retail investors not provided with the proper information regarding the risk of these investments?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, I can't anticipate or reflect on what they were provided. I think it would be unique, depending upon the investor and where, in fact, they placed their investment dollars. It might have been through a banking institution or making some other particular arrangement, but to the best of my knowledge they were given the opportunity to scrutinize that themselves. When one invests their money, they have an obligation to do that due diligence themselves. No doubt those investment opportunities were made through the best information available.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Again to the same minister: well, what mechanisms or changes have been made by this government under this minister to protect these investors in the future?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. If you look to the future, if you look at what's happening in America, the issues where the federal government has become involved to look at whether or not there should be more regulation, Canada for the most part during this period where America has been under some scrutiny because of a perceived recession has been much better positioned. Whether or not our federal government or securities commissions across the country look at a different set of regulatory framework or whether governments, in fact, anticipate, that will depend a great deal on how we resolve and continue to untangle this particular situation.

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

#### Local Authorities Pension Plan

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Labour Coalition on Pensions has challenged a recent Local Authorities Pension Plan Board decision regarding voting and quorum rules. The coalition is expressing discontent, through advertising and mail-outs, with the board's decision and is linking the rule change to the overall security and stability of this pension plan. Lethbridge has a large number of retirees depending on this pension plan, and a number of my constituents have become concerned about their pensions. My questions are to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Why did the Local Authorities Pension Plan Board change its voting and quorum rules?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, last fall the LAPP Board found that its rules on the voting procedures and quorum were in contravention of Alberta's Interpretation Act. They sought independent counsel, not government counsel but independent counsel, to determine what was appropriate to do, and that independent counsel advised to make changes on both their procedures for voting and quorum. It was as simple as that.

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

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Many of my constituents are concerned that their pensions are at risk. Is that true?

**Ms Evans:** No, Mr. Speaker. The simple, straight answer is no. In fact, any changes that have been made do not change any portion of the plan. The cornerstone of that plan is the same. It contains the same elements it always has, the cost-of-living adjustments or the 85 factor that has been referenced. These changes do not affect one part

of the security of that plan. Nobody's investments, nobody's pension is at risk.

2:30

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

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. What is the government doing to assure retirees and current members who rely on their pensions that their plans will continue to be there and that they can rely on them?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, as a result of all of this we're exploring some options to maintain a constant dialogue with the stakeholders, those people that, in fact, have an interest in this plan. We realize that dialogue would be helpful with the stakeholders because they do ask questions, and we're responding to them as well as possible. Any changes, any communication vehicles, or anything we do with that plan will be in the best interests of the plan holders. There's \$15 billion worth of secure assets to protect that plan. We will continue to do so. I would like retirees and current members of the LAPP to know that their dollars are secure in that plan.

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

#### Highway Maintenance

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government clings to a privatized road maintenance system despite clear evidence that it doesn't work. All over the province Albertans know how poorly maintained our highways are. The Minister of Transportation is increasing funding to private maintenance companies by \$20 million this year, but Albertans are not seeing any improvement. My questions are to the Minister of Transportation. Why won't the minister accept that privatization of highway road maintenance has been a failure?

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

**Mr. Ouellette:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I absolutely don't know where this hon. member gets his information from. Our highways, by all the reports I've been getting, are maintained every bit as well as they were before they were privatized. Yes, we have more traffic on our roads today. We have heavier traffic on our roads today than we had before. We want to make sure maintenance is right, and we're increasing the maintenance to make sure that it's looked after.

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

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our highways were the envy of the country, but I think they are going down the tubes. Why is the minister continuing to hand millions of dollars over to unaccountable private maintenance companies in a system that just doesn't work?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about roads, and he's talking about tubes, and I'm not sure he knows the difference.

I will say that we plan on maintaining the highways and plan to keep being the envy of the rest of the country. That's why we added maintenance dollars: to make sure that we can fix potholes in places like Mr. Speaker's riding and other places.

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

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think Mr. Speaker was right when he mentioned the potholes, and I'm asking questions around the same lines. What public performance measures does the government have so that Albertans can see just what value they are getting out of these private maintenance contracts?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, we have people that work for the government of Alberta within our department that go out and inspect the roads and inspect that the contracts are followed the way we've put out the specifications. If they're not, they penalize the private contractor. They make sure that the private contractor adheres to the contracts the way that we've specified them to be done.

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

#### Chief Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Calgary-North Hill and right across Alberta we have some of the most diverse and tolerant communities anywhere in this country. However, there are instances when racism and discrimination appear and the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission needs to step in and investigate and mediate these issues. After 14 years of dedicated service Alberta's chief commissioner retired in April. I understand that the search for his replacement began last December; however, it has recently come to my attention that we are still looking. My first question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Why has a new chief commissioner not been chosen as of yet?

**Mr. Blackett:** Mr. Speaker, the role of chief commissioner of the Alberta human rights commission is a very important one and one that we don't take lightly. It's not a hiring decision that is to be made in haste. As such, we need to ensure that we find the best person for the job, and we're following a rigorous selection process right now to provide the widest range of qualified candidates to choose from.

Brenda Scragg, one of the six part-time commissioners appointed through order in council, was designated an acting chief commissioner in September 2006 to fill in for the chief commissioner during any absences. To ensure that the important work of the commissioner continues without interruption, Ms Scragg has agreed to be acting chief commissioner on a full-time basis until the new chief is selected.

**Mr. Fawcett:** Mr. Speaker, I agree that there is a particular skill set that is required for this position that's important, but I want to know why this search has been under way for some time now and how close you are to announcing a new chief commissioner.

**Mr. Blackett:** For the Member for Calgary-North Hill, I'd like to begin my response by providing insight into the chief commissioner's role. The chief commissioner is responsible for keeping the minister informed on human rights issues, setting the overall goals of the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, providing the commissioners and director with guidance regarding these issues, and selecting those commissioners. This is a big job and one that requires the most qualified candidates we can find. Until we find that candidate, as I noted earlier, we will take our time and do what we need to do in a prudent fashion on behalf of all Albertans. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. As the hiring process has been under way for some time, it can create an impression that no qualified candidates were interested in the job last December. Is that why the hiring process is taking so long?

**Mr. Blackett:** Absolutely not. One of the first things I did when I took this position is that I did a review of the candidates and the qualifications, the terms of reference that we had established back in December of 2007, and I felt that those were inadequate. We needed to have the best possible person. So we actually changed the terms of reference. We asked those other candidates to reapply for the position. But we're hoping to cast a larger net.

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

#### Edmonton Remand Centre

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night during the estimates debate the Minister of Justice advised that bail hearings will now be conducted, where possible, with Crown prosecutors. In relation to that, I have some questions for the Solicitor General regarding the Edmonton Remand Centre. Has his department considered that this measure may lead to an increase in the number of detainees in the Edmonton Remand Centre?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Mr. Speaker, we have noticed over the last few years that there has been an increase in the number of inmates we're holding in the Remand Centre, and the design of the facility that we're working on anticipates that that number will likely increase.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Given the number of new Crown prosecutors that are going to be involved, does the Solicitor General have a number for new employees that would be deployed to that particular centre?

**Mr. Lindsay:** No, Mr. Speaker, we haven't got that kind of detail yet. But with the open supervision concept we're using, we anticipate that we may have fewer members working in the remand centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** All right. To the Solicitor General: given that we don't seem to have a set opening date for the new remand centre and no staffing, possibly, or lower staffing, is the Minister of Justice able to advise, given those conditions, whether inmates could be expected to receive 3 to 1 credit again or possibly even more than 3 to 1 credit for being sentenced in the remand centre?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

**Ms Redford:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll refer to the discussion that we had last night. We discussed the fact that prosecutors would be undertaking bail applications. One of the very useful discussions that we had was about how we weren't sure if this would actually lead to an increase in the population in remand centres and that, in fact, it may very well lead to a reduction in the population in remand centres. So I'd question the fundamental premise for the question. I'd be prepared to have that discussion at another time. But just to clarify the situation, I don't think we can make that presumption today.

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

### Noise Attenuation on Stoney Trail

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The communities of Applewood and Abbeydale are concerned about noise levels from the new Stoney Trail ring road being built there. Can the Minister of Transportation please tell us what his department will do to deal with noise levels that the new freeway will create?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this road hasn't even been built yet, so it's a little premature to talk about how noisy it might be. When we design a road like this, we use international standards on things like noise, setback distances, buffer zones, and other things. [interjections]

Do you think this hon. member over there has a little ring on his finger to tell us what noise should be now or not?

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, we have done initial sound modelling during planning stages of Stoney Trail northeast, and it shows that noise mitigation is not called for yet.

2:40

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

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the members opposite for showing the minister what noise is.

Will the minister consider putting up a noise barrier or berm to keep the noise from the road down?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, as I started to say in my first answer, I'm not going to commit to a berm or a barrier until we know if one is actually needed or not. When we design these roads, we make the corridor wide enough that sound barriers and berms should not be required. I also need to point out that the transportation corridor for the Stoney Trail has been identified for 30 years now, long before development occurred there. We actually started planning this road and acquiring the land in 1978. Since then there have been a number of residential developments that have encroached on the edges of the corridor, so it should not be a surprise to anyone that there would eventually be a road built there.

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

**Mr. Bhullar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Why would we start such a big project without setting aside sufficient resources to cover the cost of noise barriers or other necessary additions? [interjections]

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I think we need a sound barrier again for the chirper here.

When we plan out the budgets for big projects like this, Mr. Speaker, we do make sure that we have enough money in the budget to do the job, and that includes noise barriers if they're necessary. In this case they're not necessary yet. I have to go by the people that have the engineering degree. It's pretty hard for me to argue with that science. I can assure the hon. member that my department does extensive planning on these projects, but if there's something that needs to be addressed later on for safety reasons or to make sure we keep our public safe, we will always look at that.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, in a few seconds from now we'll return to the Routine and Members' Statements. In the interim our constituency office assistants have now arrived. We can ask them all to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

In a few seconds we'll proceed.

### Members' Statements

(continued)

#### Anniversary of VE Day

**Dr. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, today marks the 63rd anniversary of Victory in Europe Day, or VE Day, the celebration of the end of World War II hostilities in Europe. War is mankind's most dreadful endeavour, but the conduct of war is sometimes both necessary and morally imperative, and World War II was certainly one of those times. It was fought by the Allies against a fascist regime which had launched unprovoked attacks on the peace-loving states of Czechoslovakia and Poland and which committed unspeakable atrocities against humanity.

Canada answered the call of that just war from the outset. From our declaration of war on September 10, 1939, until its conclusion Canada played a leading role. Our nation was there in the dark months and years when the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth stood virtually alone against the might of an evil enemy, a time which Churchill called our "finest hour." Between 1939 and 1945 more than a million Canadian men and women, or 1 adult in 12, served in the military, including, I'm proud to say, both of my parents, Irene Shaw and Allan Brown. An astounding 41 per cent of men aged 18 to 45 served in the Canadian armed forces. Those that served paid a heavy price in the defence of freedom and democracy. Included in the Canadian casualties were 55,000 wounded and maimed and 45,000 who made the supreme sacrifice in the service of their country.

Today, 63 years after the end of this conflict, the ranks of our Canadian heroes who waged this war against tyranny and evil are thinning, but today may we pause on the anniversary of VE Day to remember the deeds of our surviving veterans and those who are no longer with us. Mr. Speaker, we in this House salute them. We are truly grateful for what they have done for Canada, for freedom, and for the cause of humanity. We shall never forget.

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

#### Environmentally Sustainable Energy Production

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The death of 500 ducks has cast the eye of the world onto Alberta and our province's terrible environmental record. Every single day in this province 1.8 billion litres are added to the tailings ponds in the tar sands, and every single day the government doesn't move a finger to clean them up.

Now, as far back as 1974 the NDP has been warning the government in this Assembly about the impact of the tailings ponds on wildlife, but for 34 years this government has chosen to ignore these warnings, with devastating consequences. There is no plan in place to clean up the tailings ponds. They are held in place by a dam that could be breached by accident or design and spill entire lakes full of toxic materials into the Athabasca River, with devastating consequences.

Alternatives exist, Mr. Speaker. The technology for dry tailings is in place and can be used, but this government's sluggishness on environmental matters knows no bounds even if it means the risk of disaster. Not only are they unwilling to clean up the tailings ponds; they also put negligible efforts into policing the maintenance of those toxic deposits. Only four investigators are assigned the task of monitoring a project with the largest environmental impact of any industrial site in Canada.

Alberta's poor record on the environment isn't limited to the tailings ponds. Nearly 50 per cent of our electricity comes from coal even though there are enough wind initiatives waiting to come online to reduce that number to 15 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, there is an alternative. We can use our wealth to promote green energy. We can preserve wilderness areas and wildlife. We can make sure industry cleans up its mess and the tar sands starting now and uses technology to stop polluting any further. For that to happen, however, it's time for the members across the way to wake up and smell the sludge.

### Presenting Petitions

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition today signed by 20 residents of Edmonton and area that reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition 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.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Did Edmonton-Gold Bar have one? Proceed.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions today to present to the Legislative Assembly. The first one reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to:

1. Ensure that the remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized across the sector, regardless of whether these workers are employed by government or by community-based or private providers;
2. Ensure these employees are fairly compensated and that their wages remain competitive with other sectors to reflect the valuable and crucial service they provide;
3. Improve employees' access to professional development opportunities (training and upgrading); and
4. Introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards.

The second petition I have to present to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation that will require schools to eliminate any fees that are charged to parents or guardians for textbooks, locker rentals, field trips, physical fitness programs, music classes.

Thank you.

2:50

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition in this case signed by 41 individuals from constituencies including Little Bow, the city of Lethbridge, various constituencies in Calgary, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and Airdrie-Chestermere. A total of 41 people signed the petition. It says:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition 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.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by 20 concerned citizens of Calgary and area. It states:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition 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.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have 20 more signatures on a petition that has thousands of signatures calling upon the Assembly 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.

These signatures are primarily from Edmonton residents and from mainly the city of Calgary.

From the citizens of Calgary I have 36 more signatures calling upon the Legislative Assembly to "pass legislation that will prohibit emotional bullying and psychological harassment in the workplace."

Thank you.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 60 signatures and on behalf of the Member for Lethbridge-East another 20 signatures on a petition urging

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.

**Dr. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I beg leave to present the following petition that has been received for a private bill under Standing Order 98(2): the petition of the Young Men's Christian Association of Edmonton for the Young Men's Christian Association of Edmonton Statutes Amendment Act, 2008.

### Notices of Motions

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 34(3) I wish to advise the House that we will be accepting written questions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 and Motion for a Return 2.

I'd further give notice that on Monday, May 12, 2008, Written Question 1 and motions for returns 1, 3, and 4 will be dealt with.

### Introduction of Bills

#### Bill 10

#### Security Services and Investigators Act

**Mr. Anderson:** Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 10, the Security Services and Investigators Act.

This bill is designed to strengthen Alberta's security and investigator industry through providing for enhanced professionalism, consistent training to help ensure the safety of those employed in the industry, the creation of safeguards for the public who access or come in contact with security or investigative services, ensuring that the public's civil rights and liberties are protected, and deterring

those whose backgrounds make them unsuitable for the security and investigator industry.

Specifically, these changes will modernize the regulatory and legislative framework for this industry by clarifying the roles and responsibilities in the security industry, improving the quality of service by addressing safety issues through training, strengthening screening and qualifications, improving accountability through a rigorous audit and inspection process to ensure legislative compliance, streamlining the regulatory system by increasing portability of licences and renewals, and increasing communication between industry and the Alberta Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 10, the Security Services and Investigators Act, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

#### Bill 206

#### Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed I request leave to introduce Bill 206, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008.

The objective of this bill is to increase participation in physical activity among Alberta's children, youth, and adults in accordance with the government's objective of promoting healthy living. The legislation would recognize that increased physical activity can act as a preventative measure against health complications and lessen the impact on Alberta's health care industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a first time]

#### Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter that I sent today to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View in response to a commitment that I made in question period to provide him with the exact dollars held by the government for securities and guarantees for oil sands mining reclamation. For the record it is \$645,428,069.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter from a constituent, Brenda Stayko. I do so with permission. Brenda is very concerned about the continuing care crisis in the province, particularly labour shortages in the sector, and she writes among other things:

Staff working in these facilities are very caring, loving and devoted people. The workers that choose this profession are in my opinion

the salt of the earth and should be treated as such. However, they are constantly required to work extra shifts because of the staff shortages.

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 five copies of the report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts covering the committee's 2007 activities.

My second tabling today is from constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar named Sonia Tattrie, LeeAnn Billard, J. Kempert, Laurie Sturby, Edward Spink, Douglas Hoy, H. Gerry Liedtke, F. Wilson, Mr. John Michael Morash, and Mike Cherkewick. These individuals all would like to see Alberta's labour laws changed to encourage fairness for all working people in this province.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and table the appropriate number of copies of a news release issued by the Alberta Medical Association on Thursday, February 28, of this year giving the Alberta Liberal Party's health policy top marks, also a copy of the marks given by topic.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a booklet explaining the Manitoba government's plan for child care, which includes funding for school divisions to use surplus school space for child care.

The second is the appropriate number of copies of five letters from parents calling on the province to make a substantial long-term commitment to funding affordable quality child care programs for children up to 12 years of age.

#### Projected Government Business

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Opposition House Leader I ask the Deputy Government House Leader to give us the projected government business for the week of May 12 to 15.

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, May 12, the House will be engaged in private members' business in the afternoon. As well, the first hour in the evening will be devoted to the debate of motions other than government motions. Then we'll be in Committee of Supply on Monday evening, International and Intergovernmental Relations, for two hours.

On the afternoon of May 13 we'll be in Committee of Supply for Executive Council for two and a half hours, in the evening in Committee of Supply to discuss the estimates for Health and

3:00

On Wednesday afternoon Committee of Supply, Transportation, two and a half hours. In the evening on Wednesday Committee of Supply to discuss the estimates for Children and Youth Services, three hours.

On Thursday afternoon Committee of Supply to discuss the estimates of Sustainable Resource Development for two and a half hours.

I wish, also, to advise the members of the House that it's the intention of the government that we will give notice that on each of the evenings we intend to bring forward legislation, specifically Bill 1, Bill 2, Bill 3, Bill 4, Bill 12, and as per the Order Paper.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie on a point of order.

#### Point of Order

##### Allegations against a Member

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order under Standing Order 23(h) and possibly (i) but not (j). Subsection (j) refers to "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I'll leave it to others to judge whether that happened or not, but in this case I don't feel that it did. However, I believe that allegations were made against another member. I believe the allegations were made by the hon. minister of health against myself, and I think it follows from that that "false or unavowed motives to another Member" were imputed. Specifically, I believe the minister of health said that I was in attendance at a horse-racing function of some description that was attended by members of the Progressive Conservative caucus.

Now, I may have misinterpreted. In any event, I certainly would like a further explanation of that. You know, Mr. Speaker, I have my moments where my memory fails me, there's no question about that, but the last time I remember going to the track must have been 10 years ago, and it was to help raise money for a neighbour's adult U35 soccer team. I certainly was not a member of this House at that point. I was a member of the media and attending there as a private citizen. I don't remember the minister of health or any other Conservative at that particular function on that particular night. So I think an explanation is in order from the minister of health in any event.

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the saddest point of order I think I've ever heard in this House in the three years that I've sat in here. First of all, we had questions for three days running from this member regarding an event that I attended. I made it very clear that I attended the event, and that was done before I was minister of health. What I said was that I was open about what particular function I attended, not like his leader, who attended a function at Northlands and a function at the Calgary Stampede and then stands in this House and criticizes the agreement that the government has with these two organizations to support the horse-racing industry.

This is not a point of order. It is simply another case of hypocrisy on the part of this particular party, and that's one of the reasons that I would suspect, Mr. Speaker, some of their members are openly in the media musing about forming a new party.

**The Speaker:** I have commented before on the fact that on Thursdays there tends to be a different approach than what we might often find on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. And this is a Thursday. Standing Order 23(h), "makes allegations against another Member" and (i) "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." So what really did transpire?

Essentially, the Minister of Health and Wellness:

Mr. Speaker, this hon. member – well, this member – knows very well that on July 1 of this year smokeless tobacco comes under the same rules as other tobacco. I would just ask this member to ask his leader how he can justify coming into this House, being critical of

the horse-racing industry, when he appeared at the same event that we all appeared at: the horse-racing industry.

To the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, you were not mentioned in this one. It was a reference to your leader.

But listen, please. The purpose of question period is to ask questions of the government about the government. Every time we go into questions about personality and such things, we get away from the standard. Every time that happens, when a statement is made about one person, about "Well, did you attend this? Did you attend that? Why did you do this? Why did you do that?" you know you're going to get it back in kind. This is exactly what happens.

There is no point of order on this point, but I'm telling the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness that you came very, very close to being cited on a point of order by the chair when you used the word "hypocrisy." If you would have said hypocrisy about another member, that would have been a definite point of order that the chair would have interjected on. You said it about a group, so you're clean on that one. Slid again.

Okay. I think I've made my point. We'll now go on.

Oh, just a second. One other thing. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona: did you get the lesson?

**Ms Notley:** Yes.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Thank you very much.

### Orders of the Day Committee of Supply

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

**The Chair:** I would like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

### Main Estimates 2008-09

#### Advanced Education and Technology

**The Chair:** Hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, please give an opening comment.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon, all. I am very, very proud to present to this Assembly the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology's business plan for '08-11 and budget estimates for '08-09.

Before I begin, I would ask the indulgence of the House to introduce some of the department staff who not only have played a key role in the development of this business plan but who are with us here today. On the floor of the Assembly with me is Dr. Annette Trimbee, who is our deputy minister; Mr. Gerry Waisman, acting assistant deputy minister for the adult learning division; Blake Bartlett, who is executive director, finance and administration division and our SFO. As well, in the gallery, Mr. Chairman, we have Dr. Ron Dyck, ADM, research; Mr. Ray Bassett, ADM, policy and planning; Mr. Mel Wong, ADM, tech commercialization; Ms Shirley Dul, ADM, apprenticeship and industry training; Rachel Bouska, communications branch; and John Koehn, adult learning division. I don't believe I've missed anyone. That is the staff that I have with me, and I'd ask the Assembly to welcome them to our humble abode here.

Mr. Chairman, in my nearly 18 months as the minister I am pleased and very, very impressed by the progress that this ministry has made. Advanced Education and Technology's vision is that Alberta will prosper through innovation and lifelong learning. The business plan for 2008-11 focuses on just that: the development of



a next generation economy by building and strengthening our province's advanced learning and innovation systems.

At the end of March the Premier gave me a clear mandate to lead Advanced Education and Technology to enhance value-added activity, increase innovation, and build a skilled workforce to improve the long-run sustainability of Alberta's economy. Part of that mandate was to encourage technology commercialization and increase the Canadian venture capital invested in Alberta, in part, Mr. Chairman, by establishing the Alberta enterprise fund, for which, of course, the legislation is in front of this House as we speak; to increase the postsecondary spaces available to high demand areas like health and trades over the next two years; to reduce the interest rate on student loans from prime plus two and a half points to prime; to develop and implement a framework that defines the roles and mandates for publicly funded organizations that support world-class research and innovation for Alberta; and to increase the number of physician, registered nurse, and licensed practical nurse graduates.

3:10

My department will also work closely with Alberta Health and Wellness to increase access to quality health care and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of health care service delivery. We will ensure that Alberta has the health care professionals we need to meet future demand.

Our business plan reflects our new mandate and follows up on initiatives from last year's mandate. The performance measures in the business plan will help to achieve our goals and will guide the ministry's future initiatives. This will ensure continued collaboration with our institutions and industry partners as we work to meet the priorities as set out by the Premier.

Our goal is to have all Albertans participate in advanced learning opportunities. Community education around Alberta plays a vital role in reaching underrepresented groups to encourage all Albertans to achieve their learning goals and dreams. In the middle of April around 600 people gathered in Edmonton to participate in the Pan-Canadian Interactive Literacy Forum for a cross-Canada discussion around literacy development. My parliamentary assistant, the MLA for Calgary-Montrose, has been asked to examine the ministry's role in adult literacy and to act as a liaison with literacy and adult education stakeholders to develop a cross-ministry literacy framework for the Alberta government.

Community education groups and postsecondary institutions can work together so that all Albertans can realize their full learning potential. We are moving our advanced education system towards a Campus Alberta concept, intended to ensure that all Albertans have the opportunity to participate in their lifelong learning goals while meeting the needs of students, taxpayers, and society. From basic literacy development to trades to masters' programs, realizing a true Campus Alberta model requires a postsecondary environment that is supportive, collaborative, and responsive and that provides quality and innovation for our students.

We can achieve this through the roles and mandates policy framework, which enhances our postsecondary system to better meet the needs of students and the demands of the labour market. One of the main features of the framework is the establishment of six institutional categories based on programs offered, type of research conducted, and the region served. Categorizing postsecondary institutions ensures institutions focus on their areas of expertise and geographic area while encouraging collaboration and transferability among institutions and community education providers.

The roles and mandates framework also identifies the Alberta access planning framework as a key planning instrument for the advanced education system. Provincial and institutional access plans

will address expansion, new programs, reallocations, and other access-related strategies based on information provided by the institutions. Each institution's access plan will be discussed with the department annually and will become an integral part of the institution's business plan submission.

With Budget 2008 we are continuing to make the advanced ed system more learner focused, accessible, and affordable by continuing to put into practice the strategies identified in the affordability framework. This year critical investments will provide direct financial assistance for adult learners as they plan for postsecondary. The ministry is providing a 2 and a half per cent interest rate reduction on all student loans – variable loans have been reduced to the prime lending rate, and fixed-rate loans have been cut to prime plus 2 per cent – increasing student loan limits and living allowances, and increasing exemptions for part-time earnings, to name a few things that we're doing, Mr. Chairman.

On Tuesday, May 6, this week, we announced that we are expanding our scholarship program to allow for high school students with averages between 75 and 79.9 per cent to receive the Rutherford scholarships. I think that was great news and received very well by our student body.

We continually support the education and training of highly skilled, knowledgeable people in our postsecondary system as they are the future workforce. In our ongoing work to address labour market pressures, we will also continue to work with Alberta Employment and Immigration to implement the Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce strategy. We will accomplish this through initiatives such as the 2007 health workforce action plan and access planning.

In terms of health care numbers, we will increase the number of physician graduates from 227 to 295 by 2012, increase the number of registered nurse graduates from 1,375 to 2,000 by 2012, and increase the number of licensed practical nurse graduates from 559 to 1,000 by 2012. Wellness, three hours. If we can do better, Mr. Chairman, we will.

Alberta is developing a new-generation economy, which will build lasting momentum through the generation of new ideas, new knowledge, and new technologies that can be adapted, adopted, and commercialized through the development as well as growth of companies. In order to support current and future growth, a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce is required, and Alberta's innovation culture and environment needs to be enhanced. It is for these reasons that my department supports the research and development efforts in our postsecondary institutions and in other research-performing organizations such as the Alberta Research Council, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, and Alberta Ingenuity. It's also why we collaborate with many of our partners to create an environment that supports the growth and the development of companies that utilize and commercialize these new ideas and technologies.

On the tech side the 2008 to 2011 business plan clearly shows that we are moving our science and innovation agenda ahead very quickly. Just as we have defined roles and mandates to help set the course of our postsecondary system, so too will we do it for the research and innovation sectors. This solidifies that research, value-added tech, and knowledge-based workers are more than just partners in the long-term sustainability and diversity of our economy.

In April we introduced Bill 4, as I mentioned, the Alberta Enterprise Corporation Act, which outlines our plans for a \$100 million investment in venture capital. The creation of a venture capital sector in Alberta is a key initiative in Alberta's tech commercialization action plan. But it does not stand alone, Mr. Chairman. Growth and diversification will also be supported by an innovation,

science, and research tax credit as well as targeted new entrepreneurial supports and awareness programs that benefit value-added and tech-based businesses. We aim to make Alberta a magnet for high-tech companies and to generate that next-generation economy in a province of lifelong learners.

I have a number of specifics of numbers. I understand that my time is getting short, Mr. Chairman, so perhaps I'll end there and let the opposition go through their questions so that we can answer those one by one.

**The Chair:** I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

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

**The Chair:** Before you go on, do you want to use the 20 minutes?

**Mr. Taylor:** What I would like to do if it's okay with the minister is to do it in 20-minute chunks, back-and-forth conversations between the two of us if that's okay.

**The Chair:** Okay. Proceed.

**Mr. Taylor:** Excellent. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a pleasure to be able to rise and begin the debate on the estimates for the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology. I want to thank my researcher, Derek Volker, who could not be here to join us on the floor today. He has much other work to do, a stack like that, but he's been very helpful in preparing for today's debate. I want to thank my leader as well for giving me back the advanced education portfolio. It was the first shadow ministry I had, the first critic portfolio that I had when I was elected in 2004. I enjoyed it very much. I enjoyed working with all the stakeholders and with the minister and the ministry, a different minister at the time but nevertheless. It's a topic of great interest to me, and I think I'm going to enjoy it again.

The minister and I have already had one meeting about Bill 4, and I look forward to that piece of legislation coming forward for debate on the floor of the House. We may have some minor detail differences about it, but I think that in principle we're going to be pretty supportive of Bill 4 on this side. I like the looks of it.

Many things to talk about today, and I'm not, of course, the only person who wants to talk to the minister about these. I'll try and break it down into sections if we can and sort of deal with a topic area at a time.

I'd like to start with student finances if I could. First of all, a word of congratulation to the minister for keeping a promise that was made by the Conservatives on the campaign trail to reduce interest rates on student loans. That is much appreciated among the student communities in the province of Alberta and overdue, I think, and a very wise move.

3:20

I do have some other questions around student finances. Let's start with bursaries and grants. If you go to page 38 of the estimates – and we're looking at line 3.0.3 – you will see that the amount budgeted for bursaries and grants this year is almost \$3 million less than was budgeted in fiscal '07-08. I'm curious as to why the amount being budgeted is less than last year. I'm curious as to why the forecasted amount was about \$7.9 million less than the '07-08 budget. I wonder if the minister can offer some clarification as to why the full amount was not distributed.

The reason why I'm asking these questions is because from our perspective these are the most necessary monies. These represent

the student assistance that does not put students into debt. Although the cost of carrying that debt has dropped with the reduction in student loan interest rates, students are still graduating, those students who have debt, with very large amounts of debt on average so that it rather puts them into the work world with the equivalent of at least a small mortgage and no property to show for it.

These bursaries, these grants help the most needy, the most deserving, so the obvious question is: why would you not spend all that was budgeted? Is it perhaps that not enough students know about these resources? Was there perhaps an administrative problem in distributing the money? Or are we seeing as a result of a booming economy that there's less demand for student assistance? I'd like the minister to answer those questions or as many as he can right off the bat.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess, to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, the short answer is that it's a projection of the number of students that we believe will take advantage of those bursaries and scholarships. We can't accurately, to the exact student, predict how many will take us up on the bursaries or scholarships. A lot of those bursaries are based on student need as well. When you look at the achievement scholarships, maybe that's a little easier for us to predict because you can actually see where the scholastic achievement is going to go. But in terms of the bursaries and the grants that we provide, many, many of those are based on student need and the criteria around that, and it's based on the student applications which we receive.

To the hon. member's comment with regard to information to the students. We do spend a significant amount of resource or effort and time with students not only in the high school side of things but also our adult learners, trying to ensure that they understand that there is assistance out there, that they can apply for it, that there's a parameter around which that assistance is available. But any suggestions that the hon. member might have in terms of helping us get the message out are always appreciated because it's important that Albertans and, certainly, potential lifelong learners do understand the amount of resource that the province has put in play for those students.

Short answer, hon. member, is that it's a projection of what we think the demand will be. If the demand is higher, we'll have to make adjustments within our numbers through the year just as we have done in past years.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you to the minister for that. There are, of course, other aspects to student finances and the cost of going to college or university or a polytechnical institute in the province of Alberta. One is tuition, and even with the government's new tuition policy our tuition rates are still among the highest in the nation. Now, in 2005 the government made a promise, the then Premier made a promise to make Alberta have the most affordable tuition policy in the country. I don't think we're there yet. I don't know if we're even making a really committed effort to get there. Does the government plan to honour its promise and make Alberta's tuition the most affordable in the country? Has the minister, has the government looked at possibly freezing tuition rates to prevent ballooning costs for students? Is there any other funding which will be going to making tuition more affordable that'll help the government live up to its 2005 promise?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the intent of this government is coming from the affordability framework document, which we worked on in consultation with all of the student bodies, all of the

postsecondaries and public stakeholders, community adult learning groups. That was what came about in the affordability framework, which I know the hon. member is very familiar with. I think he would also agree that we are making great strides in achieving that affordability framework. When you start to look at things like freezing tuition, what it necessitates at some point in time in the future is a huge jump, and we've seen some of that in Canada recently and in other jurisdictions around the world that had done that in the past. I think it's important that students have the security of knowing that we have essentially frozen the increases to tuition in the province of Alberta to the consumer price index maximums, and indeed we've seen where that has saved students a considerable amount in terms of increases that they potentially would have had to have if they'd have been in a different jurisdiction.

As to where we are in relation to other jurisdictions and tuition, I think it's only one aspect to compare tuition. We are not the highest, and we're not probably in the top third. We're probably very close to the median in terms of tuition because you have to take into consideration all of the aspects of tuition and the various different levels. But I would suggest to the hon. member that quality of instruction and quality of the institution is as important as being either the highest or the lowest in the country, and I think on that measure, Mr. Chairman, that our institutions and our community learning groups and our Campus Alberta as a whole probably rank among the top.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The minister will get no argument from me that tuition is but one part of the picture; however, three years ago this government made a commitment to make Alberta have the most affordable tuition policy in the country. So I'll put the question back to the minister, and I'll even give him some wiggle room. Is there perhaps a way of defining affordability that the minister or the ministry knows of that does not necessarily require the absolute lowest tuition fees in the country in order to make tuition policy the most affordable in the country? I'm curious as to how the government interprets and the minister interprets the government's promise of three years ago, whether that promise is still on the table or has been withdrawn and what progress is being made towards fulfilling that promise.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess if you're looking for an absolute definition, I don't think any jurisdiction on the globe has what it costs to go to school absolutely with all of the various costs that might be involved. I am a parent of students in the postsecondary system in Alberta – I know the hon. member has also had some experience in that – and certainly different circumstances create different costs, create different affordability contexts.

I think it's important that we go back to the affordability framework that was done in the consultation and say: "That's where we want to be. That's what we want to have." I think part of that is tuition, and I would say to the hon. member that I'm not aware of another jurisdiction that has frozen increases to a consumer price index type of limit, and by doing that – the hon. member is very well aware by, I know, his due diligence on our business plan – we have added to the base grant of all of our postsecondaries. So as not to reduce the quality and so as to ensure that the institutions are not looking at other ways to raise funds, we've provided the 6 per cent grant to those institutions. We also, of course, have the rebate on the student loans, and we have the student finance program. We have other student finance abilities there, the raising of the cost.

I think the other part of affordability within the context of Alberta is the Campus Alberta ability to transfer, which allows students to

take their courses of study closer to home in many instances and then be able to transfer to any one of our 28 institutions within the province. I know the hon. member would agree with me that we lead the nation in transferability, perhaps even in other jurisdictions outside of Canada.

**Mr. Taylor:** I will agree with the minister that we lead the nation. I'm not sure that I'll agree that we lead all other jurisdictions outside the country. Of course, leading the nation is good enough, and good enough, in my books, is never good enough if we can do a better job. That said, we've done a good job so far on the transferability issue.

That does lead into another point. It's not directly, maybe, something that falls under the category of student finance, at least not yet, but it's certainly an issue for students once they do have to transfer to a postsecondary institution outside their hometown, and that's the shortage of affordable housing for students, which is a massively big issue, especially at the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta. It continues to be a burden, with skyrocketing rents. The cost of living along with high tuition and expensive supplies is making pursuing postsecondary education difficult for some students, impossible for a few, and it's increasing the debt load for many, many others every year.

3:30

We need major renovations on residence buildings at the University of Calgary. There are proposed projects for new residences across the province, including the U of A, but this government doesn't seem to be doing very much about this. I would really like to hear from the minister what the plans are going forward. How much of the capital budget will be going towards student housing projects? Does he have a long-term plan for increasing the number of student housing spaces available throughout the province, especially in areas of high demand? Does the ministry consult with and take the advice of colleges and universities regarding needed housing facilities?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. All very good points and points that we agree with. We agree that expansion of the residences on campus will not only help the students, but it'll also help the demand and supply situation outside of residences and help us with our affordable housing program that we have. We are in discussions with the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs as well as the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I've had several meetings with the University of Alberta, both the Graduate Students' Association as well as the executive of the university, about several very interesting opportunities that we might be able to pursue with residences on campus.

Very similar with the Calgary situation. We've chatted with the president there and the vice-president of their infrastructure, or capital projects, if you will. The financing and the innovative ways that we should be able to get residences built in this province: we are encouraging our partners in the postsecondary institutions to look at every possible opportunity given the assets that they have and also the projection of student demand that they're going to have.

Again, as the hon. member well knows, sometimes students don't want to stay on campus. Sometimes they want to stay somewhere else. I think part of the reason for that is that we didn't really build the type of residences that some students were looking for, and therefore they went and found it somewhere else. I think there's an opportunity for us to create partnerships that will protect the university's capital while at the same time being attractive to the

students that want to live there from a quality-of-life perspective but also from an affordability perspective.

So we're looking at a number of different ideas. We're talking to the Minister of Municipal Affairs about the municipal tax situation. There are very few institutions in our province, in fact I think only four, that are currently paying the educational portion of the property tax. So that's an added benefit to building on campus. We will continue to encourage any ideas, financing thoughts that the institutions might want to play with.

I have one caution for the hon. member. Five years ago one of our colleges – and I won't name it – was very, very nervous about building additional residences because for many years prior to that they had empty residences. That's a direct drain on the postsecondary system, which doesn't provide student space, student instruction, student anything else. So we want to be careful that we have the right balance to the demand and, potentially, partnerships that will offset that risk. That's the kind of route that I've encouraged all of our postsecondaries to look at when they're building residences. If they have firm demand, if they know they're going to have firm demand in the future, great; let's go. Let's build it now. If there's some discussion as to whether or not that demand is going to stay steady or firm, as we've had – and we've had, you know, ups and downs in the cycle – we want to be careful that we have some way to mitigate that risk.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you. Of course, Mr. Speaker, if the minister is talking about the college that I think he's talking about – and I won't name it either – those residences are now full to overflowing.

The University of Victoria guarantees a place in residence to all first-year students who come to it directly out of high school. The University of British Columbia in Vancouver guarantees a place in residence to all first-year students regardless of whether they come right out of high school or take a gap year. I wonder if the minister has contemplated that kind of scenario in the province of Alberta and if he can give me an estimate of how many years it might be before we get to that point. That would seem to be a competitive advantage that British Columbia has right now.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Chairman, about 15 per cent – and my number is plus or minus on that one – of our current student population live in residences on campus. If the hon. member is suggesting that we go out and build capacity to cover off the other 85 per cent, I don't think that would be very prudent, number one, because you're not going to get that 85 per cent. In order to give the guarantee, you'd have to build. I think that what UBC is doing is a little bit of a different situation from an historical perspective than what we have followed in the province.

I think that we want to make sure that we have the right supply for the right demand. That's a matter of working with the institutions. Do we need more residences? Definitely. You'll get no argument from this minister on that. In fact, we are encouraging a fairly significant construction program, that's ongoing right now. The number escapes me. Perhaps the department might have that number of residency spaces that are currently under construction within the province. It is a considerable number. We also have a number of projects that are being discussed right now that I think even the hon. member will find very, very interesting.

But to provide a guarantee of a space coming out of high school for the roughly 130,000, 140,000 high school students that we've got graduating every year, I don't think that we're in a position to do that, and I don't think the postsecondaries would go there.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you. I'd like to move on to another area now, one that we haven't really touched on yet, I think, at all. This goes back to the access to the future fund, which was the centrepiece of Bill 1 three years ago. At that time it was announced, promoted, trumpeted as a \$3 billion fund. The last time any money was put into the fund I believe was in August 2006, a \$250 million addition that brought the endowment up to \$1 billion.

Again and again we on this side of the House have pushed for this endowment fund to be fully funded, but the government doesn't seem to want to achieve sustainable funding for postsecondary education. It seems to me that this is an eminently sensible way to go because an endowment fund produces a relatively steady stream of income with which you can do things above and beyond what you can do with the Advanced Education budget year over year.

We were promised on its conception that the fund would reach \$3 billion, the cap. By the way, we disagree with the notion of a cap as well. We would continue to put funds into the access to the future fund on an annual basis. But we were promised that the fund would reach a \$3 billion cap within three years. Clearly, we're at year 3, and we're about \$2 billion short. Why is this fund not being increased to the \$3 billion target?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Chairman, we haven't said that we're not going to increase it to the \$3 billion target. We have, as the Premier has said on numerous occasions, a policy in place in this government that one-third of the unbudgeted surplus is going to go to savings. Some of it may go to the access to the future fund. Some of it may go to the heritage savings trust fund. Some of it may go to the scholarship fund, which I think is also a very worthy fund and very helpful to our students on the affordability framework.

I would suggest to the hon. member that the objective of the fund – and this is the key – isn't the \$3 billion. It isn't \$1 billion. It isn't any of that. The objective of the fund was to match donations by private donors, by the public and others. It is not intended to provide sustainable operational funding to postsecondaries, and it should never be viewed that way because it's a matching grant program. We have a formula, and in '07-08 there was a grant allocation from the fund of some 43 million dollars, more or less, to all of our postsecondaries. The interesting thing in that is that we've even had some carry-over year over year from some postsecondary institutions that were not able to match or for whatever reason did not match their allocation in the previous year.

I think it's important to understand what the fund was set up for in the first place. That was not to provide ongoing, operational, sustainable funding. It was to match the generous donations of Albertans who have a passion for postsecondary education. We will continue to do that, Mr. Chairman, and we'll continue to look for ways to meet the objective of the fund.

3:40

**Mr. Taylor:** Well, I hope, Mr. Chairman, that I'm not supposed to take from that that the offers of donations from generous donors have dried up.

If you look at page 49 of the estimates, you know, there's nothing in this year's budget adding to the fund. Page 49 shows that \$47.4 million is going into the fund and that \$47.6 million is going out. They show a forecasted net operating loss of \$9.3 million for '07-08 and a loss of \$1.4 million in 2006-07. How long is this trend going to continue?

What is the actual value of the fund? What money have you paid out? What projects have they gone to? What are the conditions and the criteria established regarding the paying out of the funds? I

mean, the minister says that there's a plan in place. I don't doubt that there is, but can he speak to it a little bit?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member may have misheard or whatever, but I in no way indicated that donors or offers are drying up in any way. Quite to the contrary, we have a number of Albertans who are looking for ways and means to help our postsecondary institutions in the areas of their passion.

I think it's important to understand that the access to the future fund was not set up nor was it ever intended to be set up that you would have bulk matching. It was to be matched over time because the fund was going to stay there. Indeed, the fund currently is worth just a tad over \$1 billion. The organization which manages that is the access to the future fund committee.

In 2006-07, the fiscal year, 100 per cent of the access to the future fund's income, which is the 4 and a half per cent, was allocated to our renaissance fund matching program. Eligible organizations for this program are public postsecondary institutions; private, not-for-profit institutions authorized to offer degrees; aboriginal colleges; and the apprenticeship and industry training family of scholarships. Each eligible organization was allocated a portion of the total available funding and was provided the flexibility and the autonomy to identify its priority donations for matching. Of the \$45 million that was available through this program, 42 and a half million dollars was disbursed to eligible recipients following a review of that submitted documentation. The remaining funds represent allocations to eligible organizations which did not meet their funding targets by the date of their submissions. In other words, they carry over; they don't lose that funding.

A goal of the access to the future fund is to encourage incremental donations to the postsecondary institutions in areas where the donor – you know, I go back to the passion that they have. So to this end all of the eligible recipients were given three years to meet their '06-07 fundraising targets. In cases where the institutions did not meet those targets, the remaining funds have been carried forward, as I mentioned.

In addition, minor changes to the Access to the Future Act were introduced in the spring sitting of the Legislature to facilitate matching payments for the Alberta apprenticeship and industry training family of scholarships. To that end the amounts that were remitted to postsecondary institutions in the '07-08 year: roughly three-quarters of a million dollars went out in the AIT scholarships, which I think is a wonderful addition to the access to the future fund.

The use of the funds. There's a report, I believe, that we tabled, of the access to the future fund committee, and I would encourage the hon. member to review that.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the minister for those answers. The fact remains that there is nothing in the budget this year in the way of a contribution to the access to the future fund, so we await the possibility without any guarantee that part of the unbudgeted surplus might go into the fund this year. I would strongly urge the minister – and I suspect that there's nothing that he can do about it this year – to start bending the ear of the finance minister, the President of the Treasury Board, and anybody else it takes and see if he can persuade them to move to a model whereby there would be budgeted contributions to the access to the future fund year after year. It will grow the fund. The more money in the endowment, the more income it produces, the more projects that reflect the passion of the donors. I'm very glad to hear that the

interest has not waned. We can get moving on it. It contributes to excellence in advanced education and the fostering of a knowledge economy in the province of Alberta.

Let's change topic a little bit. Your officials know that I at least attempted in Public Accounts Committee yesterday – I'm going to try again – to marry two issues that may or may not go together but to me appear to be opposite sides of the same coin in some respect. That's space or access and participation rate in the province of Alberta. The educational participation rate of Albertans is lower than the Canadian average. It has been lower than the Canadian average for a number of years now. The Canadian average ain't all that hot, to put it rather colloquially, relative to many of the other member nations of the OECD. Well, go back a generation, roughly speaking, and we were number 2 on the list behind the United States. Now, I'm going from memory here, but I believe we're number 18 out of 37 member states of OECD as a nation, and Alberta lags the national average a little bit.

Certainly, this was discussed in Public Accounts yesterday. The '06-07 annual report of the advanced education department reflected this: our booming economy is causing some pretty fierce competition with you guys for the hearts and minds of young Albertans. I was gratified to hear that the ministry is very concerned about this, I believe, and is making real efforts to rejig the system so as to make it easier for adult learners to come back into the system after they've spent X number of years on the rigs making big money and discover that there's more to life than spending X number of years on the rigs making big money and having nothing but fancy trucks to spend it on. That's very important. I joke a little bit, but it's very important that in a province like ours we make getting back into the educational system as easy and as painless as we can because we all know that those folks who leave after high school or leave during high school to go make what appears to be, perhaps, the easy money or, at least, the big money are going to need to come back someday. We're going to need to be able to integrate them back into the system as seamlessly and painlessly as possible.

Can the minister speak, first of all, in any detail about any other plans that the ministry has to try and capture more of our students either coming out of high school or within the first five years of leaving high school and keeping them in the education system, you know, in addition to the efforts that are being made to bring them back in when they want to come back in?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Obviously, this is a key component of what we're doing in the department in terms of ensuring that not only do we have the spaces but that we have the desire in terms of the population to achieve that postsecondary.

Just going back to the endowments, I did mention the scholarship fund, but the hon. member should also recognize that \$227 million was added to our scholarship fund last year. Frankly, I like the scholarship fund because that's a direct relationship to the students, and it's a direct assistance in the affordability framework which we were talking about before. It's a matter of weighing, you know, what dollars are available and where they go.

The participation rates and how we are working on that. There are a number of strategies that are referenced in the business plan, but I agree with many of the comments of the hon. member that it is very, very important for us to recognize the changing demographics that we have in our student population. It's very important that we recognize that there's a tremendous pull coming out of high school for students to not only go into the workforce because the dollars are there, but also there are so many choices for our young people today.

There are so many choices in postsecondary. I know from our discussions before that we have both experienced the, "So what are you going to do when you graduate?" question with our kids, and the answer is, "I don't know."

It's very difficult for young people today to decide what their lifelong career is going to be, and that's why we're encouraging lifelong learning. We're encouraging the ability within Campus Alberta to move seamlessly through our institutions and also to have access to those institutions at times and places that are right for them so that, indeed, they might even be able to continue to work and go to school at the same time.

3:50

I think we're seeing that in a lot of our postsecondaries now, that they're going to have to start changing some of the ways that they deliver. Certainly, e-learning and the virtual campuses that we have within the province are going to be extremely important for this. It isn't so much, you know, that we want to have everything in the institution. Our main goal is to ensure that Albertans have access to postsecondary education in whatever way suits them best and in an affordable framework. Certainly, I probably needn't go through all of the strategies which are listed in our business plan. The hon. member I'm sure has looked at that.

We also have a number of plans and programs like Learning Clicks and the RAP program, and these programs are addressed more to the high school side of things. We're working very closely with the Minister of Education on how we do at least the information projection to the students about what's available and how they can get there. I believe that our APAS system is going to be a critical component to that because it will not only provide ease of access to the system; it will provide ties and information to the system for the students to search out that career choice and then search the path that they need to take based on the transcripts or marks that they've done in other places.

Again, going back to the Campus Alberta system, I believe we're second to none in the nation in terms of having all of those pieces tied together with the credit and transfer system we have through ACAT, with the transferability within Campus Alberta. It's a tremendous asset that we have that's very, very strong, and we want to build upon that asset, hon. member.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Space is, I think, a component. Access or lack of space or lack of entrance points is a component. I don't know if the minister knows the extent to which that's the fact or the issue behind our low participation rate, but we know, at least intuitively and I think statistically as well, that it is a factor.

Two specific questions on that. One has to do with the Calgary urban campus and whether any of the \$125 million being spent on creating new seats in health care, apprenticeship, engineering technology programs will be going to the Calgary urban campus. Calgary urban campus was first announced in 2004, and it just kind of seems to be sitting in limbo right now. The minister may have insight into this that I do not have, but as an outsider looking in, it doesn't seem like very much is happening on the Calgary urban campus front.

The other question, of course, again specific to Calgary, has to do with Mount Royal College. Calgary is the biggest city in the nation with only one university. By comparison the city of Halifax, which is about one-third the size of Calgary, has seven. Some might argue that Halifax has more universities than any city of 380,000 needs. I believe the minister would make that point. Nevertheless, there is

a happy medium in there somewhere. As the minister well knows, I have a strong belief that one way of accomplishing that and I think a very cost-effective, cost-efficient way of establishing that and an easy way to do it is to allow Mount Royal College to become a university in name as well as in practice. Under the roles and mandates framework it will be a baccalaureate institution, which in many respects gives Mount Royal College the ability to do what it wants to do, which is to be primarily an undergraduate degree granting institution.

Nevertheless, no matter whether it has elitist connotations or not, the word "university" means something out there in the broader world. It means something to other institutions that are primarily medical doctoral research facilities to which the graduates of Mount Royal university would go for graduate studies. It means something in the world of work. It means something to employers. So two questions around that. Will the minister commit to allowing Mount Royal to rename itself Mount Royal University? And what in this budget has been dedicated towards Mount Royal to help it achieve its degree-granting status and be internationally recognized as a university or, if he's not prepared to go that far, which he should be in my opinion, at least equivalent to a university?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Chairman, I'm not exactly sure where the hon. member is coming from because Mount Royal College is a baccalaureate degree granting institution today as we speak. I believe that close to 50 per cent of its student body is now in a degree program, if I'm not mistaken. In fact, we just announced a number of new degrees there. They have achieved their vision of being a teacher-orientated, scholastic, degree-granting institution while at the same time maintaining diploma and certificate because it isn't about the institution; it's about the student.

It isn't about whether or not you have three, four, five, as the hon. member mentioned, universities in a jurisdiction. There is no accreditation body for a university in the country. The name of the university or the college or the institute does not denote the quality; the reputation does. I lived in Omaha, Nebraska, for a number of years, and the university in Council Bluffs was right beside me. Does that mean that it was a higher quality than, say, Mount Royal College? I'm sure the hon. member and I would have an interesting debate over that one.

But, you know, we're digressing from my estimates because that's a policy decision. I think that when you talk about things . . .

**Mr. Taylor:** My second question brings us back to the estimates.

**Mr. Horner:** Yeah, it does.

You mentioned the \$125 million. Is it being spent on urban campus? No, because I'm not exactly sure what urban campus will comprise. As I mentioned in this House before, we're still working on what the programming is that we're going to do. What is urban campus? What about SAIT?

As the hon. member mentioned, when we talk about space and participation rates and those sorts of things, we do track what the actual turnaways are; in other words, the nets, not the ones that have had five students apply and four didn't take up an offer. Therefore, are they a turnaway? No, they're not. They went somewhere else in the system.

There's no question in my mind that we have a space capacity issue in Calgary, which is why the Bow Valley phase 2 construction is very important. It's a fairly significant number of spaces there, which is why in the phase 2 construction that we're doing, we'll initially increase access for some 2,100 FLEs.

**The Chair:** Continue on your third 20 minutes.

**Mr. Horner:** Okay. Bow Valley will actually increase space for 2,100 FLEs in the Calgary area in business, health, academic preparation, and English as a Second Language. Bow Valley College is very, very important to us. It also provides shelled-in space for the college's needs beyond 2020. We've already got some 50-odd million dollars into the project now. We're looking at a number of other projects within the Calgary area. In fact, Mr. Chairman, not only do we track the turnaways and the numbers of student applicants, but we also track demand for program.

One of the things that I mentioned in my opening comments was that we have the access planning that we're doing with the institutions throughout Campus Alberta. Really, it's just starting to kick off this year, having the draft plan of that and the work that we've done that looks at the demographics, that looks at the demand, that looks at the turnaways, that looks at all of those things, looking at it from not only a Campus Alberta perspective but from a regional perspective as well. That information has been gathered. We're going to be putting that together with the institutions' individual plans and looking at that.

I can tell the hon. member that, you know, there are no surprises in the sense that Calgary needs spaces. But what is nice is that I think we're starting to zero in on what those spaces should be, and we're starting to zero in on it with agreement from the institutions. Everybody likes to grow bigger; there's no question about that. But the reality is that we have limited resources, and we have to respond to student and society demands.

As it relates to the urban campus and what's happening there, we have assigned a senior member from our department that is working with the group. We've brought into the discussions the Alberta College of Art and Design because I know the hon. member is well aware of their desire to move to an independent location. They're currently on the SAIT campus.

4:00

We have also asked that there be a more co-ordinated approach to the programming so that we're not duplicating things like English as a Second Language, things like preparation for degree programming. We want to ensure that what we're putting together there makes sense and makes sense in light of the institutions within Calgary's number one priorities. Only one of those institutions, urban campus, is the number one priority. Other institutions have different priorities, Mount Royal being one.

We have to take that into balance and then say to ourselves, "Okay. If you build everything, what happens? And if you build the ones that you need to build and maybe a bit more, what does that look like?" That process, hon. member, is ongoing, and we're continuing to work with all of the institutions in the area.

The current legislation that we have in front of this House for the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, which is being brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Montrose, certainly, when you talk about the access plans and the whole Campus Alberta framework, I think it's important that we get that in so that everybody knows that that's the consistency of direction that we're going to go in.

Further to some of the other questions that the hon. member has, certainly that answers some of them, I think, in the framework.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you. Answers some of them. The only one that I didn't hear any kind of an answer for was my question about what in this budget has been dedicated towards Mount Royal to help it achieve its degree-granting status and be internationally recognized. I think the minister knows that there are two key issues there.

Now, my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, when he gets a chance to speak, has some questions about your health workforce education initiatives. I don't want to steal his thunder, but Mount Royal has proposed a fairly significant expansion to its RN degree program, but that is contingent upon \$80 million, \$90 million for a new library and learning centre on campus that would allow the opening up of the space where the library is currently as a health sciences facility. I wonder if any of the money in the budget has been committed towards that initiative.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, the hon. member is probably quite aware of the enrolment planning envelope funding and the calculations that we use as to how we do the funding within the system. Certainly, Mount Royal is going to be a very large player in our nursing program, graduating 2,000 RNs and a thousand LPNs by 2012. They have a number of degree programs that have gone through the Campus Alberta Quality Council, a number that are coming through right now. As the hon. member well knows, we were just down there and announced some nursing programs at Mount Royal for degree-granting status, so they have that. That's not an issue, whether or not Mount Royal has degree-granting status. They do have degree-granting status.

In terms of the health workforce action plan we have, of course, a fairly significant plan for expansion not only in Calgary but across the province in order to meet our targets. The additional funding that you see in our budget targets, a good portion of that is going towards the health workforce action plan, HWAP. We're going to continue to pursue all of those various spaces across the province, and if we come to a point in time where capital is required for wherever in the province, then we're going to have to address that as we come to it.

**Mr. Taylor:** That sounded like: a definite maybe; stay tuned.

A few other questions on the space and access issue. How many seats does the minister anticipate creating with the \$125 million that's going to be spent on creating new seats this year? How many of those seats are seats? How many of those seats are virtual seats or are like seats or equivalent to seats? Where does this put the government in terms of achieving the target that was set out in A Learning Alberta to create 20,000 additional spaces by 2020? Are you still using those target numbers, or have you replaced them with new target numbers?

Is there a plan in place that the minister can share as to the government's increasing the number of spaces in the province? Do you have a breakdown yet as to which parts of the province these spaces will be created in? What institutions? Are we getting too detailed here at too early a stage? I don't know. Do the new spaces – I suspect they do given the province-wide access system that the minister has talked about – address the needs of the areas where they will be built? Do they reflect the needs outlined by the institutions? Are the institutions going to have to engage in a little bit of give-and-take here with one another and with the ministry so that the programs go where they're needed and where there is the demand? That sort of thing.

I want to throw one more question in, if I can, for the minister. It's about the expansion to the Rutherford scholarship to provide up to \$1,500 from grades 10 to 12 for students who've maintained an average between 75 per cent and 79.9 per cent. Are the spaces going to increase at a fast enough rate to accommodate all these new scholarship recipients. We know that the University of Calgary, for instance – and it's not alone in this – now has an average entrance grade of 85 per cent. If they're turning away everybody from 80 per cent to 84.9, they've hardly got the ability to accommodate anybody else with an average in the 70s. So will you be creating new spaces

fast enough to keep up with the increase in Rutherford scholarship recipients?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, there's a lot in that last bit of questions, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, when you start talking about the RNs, the LPNs, the allied health, with the amount of enrolment planning and the spaces that we currently have that we can really put out there right now, we're probably looking at somewhere close to 1,700 FLE spaces in the health care graduate technology programming. It isn't just LPNs that we're looking for. We're looking for MRI techs. We're looking for all of those technicians that the health workforce strategy also identified. So we're in that area.

The hon. member mentioned, you know, some targets that were thrown out years back, some specific numbers that are tossed around. I'll bring him back to the roles and responsibilities framework document, which talks about the independent access plans building up to the Campus Alberta plan. We're not doing that this year for the next 10 years; we're doing that every year. Every institution will be part of that discussion so that we can monitor, adjust, change to what the demand is of the three clients, which are the students, the taxpayer, and society as a whole.

I think it's important that we have a system that's flexible, and any new spaces that we build, we have to kind of build them with an eye to, you know: yeah, we might be looking at nurses for the next 10 years, but after 10 years maybe there's another priority we need to adjust to, and we may need to make that space somewhat flexible. So we're keeping that in mind, and we're going to do it on an annualized basis.

The capital plan that we have in Advanced Education right now is a total of 1 and a half billion dollars that we are spending over the next three years. That includes in this year, the '08-09 year, \$835 million. Budget '07 included \$300 million for priority projects that will result in 3,300 new spaces, and that included the hon. member's University of Calgary energy environment experimental learning building, that accommodates an additional thousand students at the University of Calgary.

If you took all of the projects that we have under way or that we've just completed, that results in a capacity of more than 15,000 additional postsecondary spaces that we're going to be using. That includes things like the University of Calgary's Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, the Edmonton clinic, the ISEEE building in Calgary, Red Deer College, across the Campus Alberta.

Are we building them fast enough? Well, one could argue: I don't know how we'd build them any faster. You know, that's part of the issue, as well. I think there are, obviously, a number of areas, as I mentioned in my previous answer, that we recognize that there's a need, that there's a demand. We're trying to make sure that what we build is what's right for the future and an ability to evaluate that on an annual basis so that the system as a whole continues to respond to the needs.

I think I got all of them.

**Mr. Taylor:** Just about. I'm going to take one more run at the Rutherford scholarship. The minister said: "Are we building spaces fast enough? One could argue: how can we build them any faster?" True enough. You won't get any argument from me on that. I know what it's like to try and build anything in the province of Alberta over the last couple of years.

4:10

However, the question was: will the spaces increase at a fast enough rate to accommodate all these new Rutherford scholarship recipients if they wish to go to postsecondary education in the

province of Alberta? That is a planning issue. If you're going to open up the Rutherford scholarship to this extent – of course, the uptake on it won't be 100 per cent, just like it won't be 100 per cent on anything else that you offer, going back to bursaries and grants, for instance. Still, you must have a pretty good idea – at least, I hope you have a pretty good idea – so that if this thing is anywhere near fully subscribed, you're not going to have a big bottleneck on your hands.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Chairman, my hope is that we have so many students wanting to get into our postsecondaries that it causes us even more of a problem than we have today because what that tells me then is that our participation rate is going to go up. That is something that we want to see happen. Remember that this is not just undergraduate programming. This is diploma programming; this is certificate programming; this is going into our baccalaureate and applied institutions as well as our community colleges. I think it's important to recognize that in some areas of the province, like Calgary, yes, we have space constraints. In other areas of the province where our participation rate is really quite low, we also have space that isn't being utilized. Part of what we want to make sure that we do is ensure that students understand where the spaces are, what's available to them, and how they can get there. So a better utilization of that space.

Also, we are building a lot of spaces right now. As I mentioned, we've got, you know, probably 15,000 new spaces coming on stream within the next three to five years, not counting anything that we might announce in the future. There's a fairly significant build. In fact, if you were to go across the country, we're probably spending more per capita per space in new construction than a lot of jurisdictions in this country. That is indeed showing up in the smiles that I see on the presidents of our institutions.

The other thing that I would note is that there are spaces available throughout Campus Alberta in various programming. Maybe we need a bit of a rejig on programming, too. That's something that institutions needs to deal with individually, and they'll continue to do that. Our capital dollars right now are higher than they've ever been in this province. I think that's going to continue. We'll certainly be monitoring the number of spaces that we need, as I said, in the access plan, independently building it to a Campus Alberta plan that will respond to the needs moving forward.

**Mr. Taylor:** Part of what makes this all come together from the student's point of view is the APAS system. Can the minister tell me when that's going to come on stream, and is it going to come on stream all at once, or is it going to be phased in with two or three phases?

**Mr. Horner:** It won't come on stream all at once. I'm sure the hon. member would recognize the complexities of the type of system that we're envisioning. It'll come in in stages of complexity. It'll come in in stages of pilots. In fact, this fall we anticipate having five of the institutions running the pilot, and in '09 probably the balance of the 21. We're talking to our independents as well to come on. The hon. member is quite aware that he does have more than one university in Calgary as the Ambrose University College is building a beautiful campus on the southwest side of Calgary, which is a great little independent university.

**An Hon. Member:** In my constituency.

**Mr. Horner:** Oh, is that in your constituency? Wonderful. I had an opportunity to meet with them not too long ago.



It's our intent to try to get that system up and operational with all of our institutions by fall of '09. Now, as we get it operational and go live with it, you start to add the abilities to it, right? So we'll start to link in the ACAT system, start to link in the transcripts, start to link into the ALIS system, the Alberta learning information system, so that students have a one-stop shop. They can find out what's available, find out where they need to go, and we can get the information about where they did go.

**Mr. Taylor:** Fully operational by fall of '11, fall of '12? What do you think?

**Mr. Horner:** At this point in time that operational – some would have said that fully operational is simply being able to apply to an institution. My view is that fully operational is that entire vision of what we're talking about with APAS. How fast that will be, hon. member, we don't have a timeline on that yet. We have FOIP issues we have to deal with, obviously. We have issues around how complex do we make the system. Is it a portal? Is it a link? Is it, you know, a total application system? We're working with the institutions on that. This is something that the institutions are working on their own, but we have now moved fairly significantly into that realm. The Auditor General has made a comment that the IT side of things used to have some commonality to it. It is my intention to bring that direction from government to them.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm aware that my time for this segment is running quite short. I do have a couple of other areas that I would like to get into, but I doubt that we can get much of a question-and-answer exchange going in less than two minutes.

**Mr. Horner:** Just give me the questions, and I'll give you the answers.

**Mr. Taylor:** Okay. Good. I'll fire some questions at you, then.

Here we go. With the huge amount of deferred maintenance debt that postsecondary institutions have throughout the province, why is the amount allotted to postsecondary infrastructure, on page 38 of the estimates, \$65.8 million, or 7.3 per cent, less than the forecasted amount for 2007-08, not at least on par with the '07-08 forecast? Is there a plan in place to deal with cost overruns on deferred maintenance or major rebuilds, reconstruction projects, that sort of thing? Is there money being set aside for this? Will it mean the delay or cancellation of other projects should cost overruns occur? Were the decisions on which projects get funded made in consultation with stakeholders? Do they represent the priorities of the institutions?

The minister is signalling me.

**Mr. Horner:** I just want to answer one quick one.

**Mr. Taylor:** Sure.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Chairman. On the capital maintenance and renewal if you look at your budget '07-08 and you look at what our estimate is for '08-09, that's a significant increase, from \$35 million to \$153,500,000. We are recognizing the areas of need that we have for the deferred maintenance. In fact, I think there have been some very happy people out there.

**Mr. Taylor:** Okay. That's going to do it for now, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Twenty-five seconds.

**Mr. Taylor:** Twenty-five seconds? I very rarely run short, but this time I'm going to. I'll put myself back on the speakers' list and let others have a turn. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Well, we've almost completed the first hour of the Official Opposition. Now I would like to recognize the hon. leader of the third party.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that. I'd like to thank the minister for his presentation. Unfortunately, I had some other responsibilities that took me briefly out of the House and missed most of the questions of the Official Opposition and the answers. So if I'm repetitive, I apologize. You know, give me a quick answer and point me to *Hansard* and I'll do that.

I want to begin by asking about tuition fees. It's clear that there's not going to be a renewal of the freeze on tuition. I wonder if the minister could refresh my memory about the formula around tuition that is in the policy which the postsecondary institutions must follow, the limitations. I'd like to know if the minister is prepared to consider renewing the freeze on tuition fees. I understand that our postsecondary institutions are bursting at the seams, so there's no reason to use tuition fees – I think the question, really, Mr. Chairman, has to do with equality of access in our society and whether or not the ministry monitors the question of access for all students regardless of their economic circumstances and whether or not, in fact, we have an equal representation in our postsecondary institutions of students who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

4:20

I will leave that question and go on to the question of private colleges. A major concern that's been brought to our attention has to do with the standards, the quality of instruction, the supports for students that exist in private postsecondary institutions. Is it the government's policy to encourage a proliferation of private postsecondary institutions, or would they follow a policy of trying to strengthen our publicly delivered postsecondary system?

We have had over the years numerous concerns raised with us by students at some of these postsecondary institutions who felt that they didn't receive the quality of education that they were led to believe they would get and, in fact, a strong perception with respect to at least a couple of these institutions that once the institution had their money, they no longer had an interest in maintaining the students within their institutions. We had some instances where there was strong evidence to believe that students were expelled. I'm wondering what the policy is with respect to protection of students in those kinds of situations.

Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat and await the answers, and then I will have some other questions as well. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. As the hon. member mentioned, in previous questions and answers we were talking a little bit about tuition, and there is some information in *Hansard*, but suffice to say that we have frozen the increases to tuition to a maximum of whatever that CPI is based on, what tuition was in 2005. So depending upon how you look at it, you can say we froze tuition to 2005 levels with the maximum increase to CPI every year thereafter. That's pretty good, and the students recognize that. It equates to about \$130 million or more over the last two to three years, actually more than that over the last three years, that we have subsidized the nonincrease in tuition, if you will, to the institutions.

In terms of equality of access, Mr. Chairman, I don't think that there are many provinces on a per-student basis or as a jurisdiction that provide close to \$120 million in nonrepayable type of support to postsecondary learners, and that's what you see in our estimates today: \$119,365,000 support for postsecondary learners.

You know, when you talk about socioeconomic conditions and learners in our postsecondaries, I look at places such as NorQuest and Bow Valley and Keyano and a lot of our community colleges. You see a wide diversity of students in those areas, including now in our undergraduate institutions like Grant MacEwan and Mount Royal. We're seeing a very wide diversity of students.

Part of it is making sure that all students understand where the supports are and how they can get them, whether or not they qualify and how to qualify and how to apply. I think the bigger issue for us right now, as we talked about earlier, is ensuring that students understand the importance of getting that postsecondary education to their future and their lifelong learning, and we are working on that, hon. member, and putting a lot of resources behind ensuring in the K to 12 system that our information is there. As well, with our computerized system, which we call APAS, it's going to be easier for students to identify what supports are there for them, whether or not they qualify, how do they apply, where can they go, how can they ladder themselves from one certificate, diploma, or degree, and however that's going to work, and I think that's going to be of huge benefit to our students as a whole and to our society.

The hon. member mentioned private colleges and standards of instruction. I'm sure he's very much aware of our Campus Alberta Quality Council. Any new degree programs that are being offered in the province of Alberta must go through, first, the department to ensure that it has the potential for enrolment and that there's some need in Campus Alberta to have the degree, and then it goes over to the Campus Alberta Quality Council, which is a peer review of not only the degree proposal but the institution. What does that institution need to have to be able to give the quality that we want to have in Campus Alberta for that degree? So as to the quality I'm actually quite confident in the degree-granting institutions and private university colleges we have in the province.

In the diploma and certificate levels the department does that review. Again, I'm very confident that, if you will, the strings that we have with these private institutions, being the ability for students to access student finance to an accredited institution, are substantial to that institution's livelihood and ability to deliver. So if we see a blatant disregard for that type of delivery quality, we do have tools that we can put at our disposal, which we have done in the past, and I know the institutions that the hon. member speaks of.

It's not really about strengthening the public institution as an individual institution; it's about strengthening Campus Alberta. When I talk about the clients to Advanced Education and Technology, it isn't an institution. It's not a private college. It's not a university in one of our centres. It's the student, it's the taxpayer, and it's society. Those are our three clients that we serve. The other areas are delivery mechanisms. These resources that you see in our budget are dedicated to those three clients. Those institutions are delivery mechanisms, which we will ensure that the quality is there for the students and those three clients.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the minister for those answers. I'm going to just follow up a little bit with some questions on student finance. Years and years and years ago I worked for a postsecondary student organization which was called the Federation of Alberta Students. There were a number of things that we advocated. I think one accomplishment was getting

student representation on the Students Finance Board and also the question of setting budgets. We pushed at that time and I think students have pushed ever since – and it's getting to be kind of a long time since then – for some realism in student budgets so that the student financial aid actually covered students' real costs. Now, in particular, while we've seen some significant growth in tuition fees, the real killer as far as student budgets go has to do with the cost of housing. I'd like to hear from the minister whether or not actual costs faced by students, especially in an inflated rental market, are accommodated in the financial aid that students are eligible to receive.

There was another issue at that time which I think is still a concern. As my own son has gone through university, it's come up again. That is the mandatory parental contribution towards financial budgets for students who are legally adults and may in fact be living on their own. I wonder if the minister can tell us whether that's still a requirement, whether or not there are mandatory contributions from parents for adult children, and whether or not they think that that's fair or whether or not they think that it ultimately would stand a test of a legal challenge. So I would be interested in some answers perhaps on the student finance system as it now exists. Also, how much default there is on student loans I think is an interesting question and what the debt loads are, whether the government tracks debt loads, what an average debt load might be, and what a high-end and a low-end – well, a low end would be no debt, I guess, but a high or average level of debt carried by students in different programs. I wonder if the minister could elucidate on those things.

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

4:30

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will try to elucidate on those things.

The Federation of Alberta Students.

**Mr. Mason:** Albert Hohol was the minister.

**Mr. Horner:** Minister Hohol. That was just the other day, wasn't it, hon. member?

As it relates to student financing and student participation, currently on the Students Finance Board we have representation from the graduate students, from ACTISEC, who were in our galleries this afternoon, which is all of the colleges and technical institutes, as well as CAUS, which is the university student association, so I'm very pleased about that. They have made super contributions to that entity. Of course, I know the hon. member is very familiar with the affordability framework that was completed in 2005-2006. The student bodies, the three that I mentioned, as well as all of the postsecondaries and stakeholders were involved in the development of that affordability framework. Really, that has been, I guess, the driving force for where we want to go with our affordability framework.

To that end in budget 2007, the hon. member may remember, we increased the allowances for basic costs such as food and rent by roughly 14 per cent. We reduced the level of expected parental contribution to match changes in the federal loan program, and the two were tied. We increased the yearly loan limits from \$560 to \$13,000, eliminated the provincial vehicle exemption. As a parent I wanted my kids to be actually driving a quality vehicle as opposed to a junker, and they shouldn't have been penalized for that, so we're very pleased. We led the nation on that.

[Mr. Lund in the chair]

Budget 2008 includes additional planned changes if we have the blessing of this Assembly. That would include reducing the interest rates on the variable rate student loans to prime, and that's an upfront cost of \$7 million and an annual cost to taxpayers of \$3 million; increasing the allowances for basic costs such as food and rent again, the cost-of-living adjustment of an additional 5 per cent, which is another \$5 million cost to taxpayers; increasing the part-time earnings exemption.

This was actually something that was asked for by the students. We talked about this with them last year because I've asked them each year: what is the key thing that you would really like us to try to get done? We can't do all things all the time – and I'm sure the hon. member would agree with that – but we're trying to get as much of this thing done as we possibly can. It was one of the things they mentioned because it relates to the student's quality of life while he's going to school. I think we shouldn't penalize them for being industrious. We shouldn't penalize them for that, recognizing that they need to spend some time on their studies. I know I have one of my kids going through the postsecondary system right now, actually, and my son-in-law as well. But I thought it was something kind of strange that we would penalize them for earning income outside when we're trying to help them go through school and quality-of-life issues. So they were very pleased to see that.

As well, eliminating the scholarship exemption. You know, we felt: why would you do that? That's going to cost approximately a million dollars. Again, increasing the yearly loan limits at an annual cost of about \$4 million. So we're doing a number of things, part of the affordability framework.

Also, to questions that were raised a little bit earlier from across the way as it related to residences on campus, it is our intent to continue to entertain any and all proposals from the postsecondaries as to how they might build additional residences on campus because we see that as a way not only to help the students but also to help the marketplace by increasing the capacity in terms of the inventory of affordable rental accommodations. I know the University of Calgary has got about 120 units they're working on right now; Grande Prairie is working on units; the U of A is working on units; Lethbridge. It's quite a bit throughout Campus Alberta.

In terms of the student debt load one of the things I would say on that right off the hop is that Alberta students enjoy the highest loan forgiveness, I think, of any jurisdiction in the country. We have the highest rate of loan forgiveness through the remission program we have in the province of Alberta as part of our student finance. Now, that's on the Alberta portion. It's difficult to do that on the federal component of it. But as a ratio of total debt at graduation to income at graduation we're low relative to other provinces because we offer that significant, nonrepayable financial help. Student debt usually ends up to be 75 per cent federal to 25 per cent provincial.

In terms of where we rank in the jurisdictions: probably in the mid area, I would think, of one or two in terms of the lowest. One of the interesting phenomena in a hot economy is that there are a lot of dollars out there. It kind of goes to bursaries and grants and some of the other student finance areas. A lot of students are not taking us up on some of the student finance that we have. That's the nature of the beast, I guess.

Overall the average net debt that Alberta students with Alberta-Canada student loans have, from some of our information: a university undergraduate degree for '05-06 was about \$17,000, '06-07 was about \$18,000, and we don't have the numbers for '07-08. When you take all of the institutions last year, the average net debt of Alberta students was around \$15,000 based on the information which we have.

**The Acting Chair:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to ask a little bit about research and innovation. I wonder if the minister can just outline for me what's covered by a research and innovation capacity and the reason for the significant reduction after this year. There's a marked decline, in fact almost in half, by 2010-11 as the target, and I'd like to understand why that is.

**The Acting Chair:** Hon. member, your time is up, so I will now call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few questions that I'd like to direct to the minister regarding the plans for the ministry and the budgeting for the coming year, and I would like to make a few remarks on the Mount Royal College situation, which the Member for Calgary-Currie raised.

I believe, Mr. Minister, that what we do have in the Calgary region, of course, is an access problem. We've got the requirements to have very, very high entrance marks to get into many of the programs at the University of Calgary, to the point where a lot of qualified students are in fact being turned away.

The issue of whether or not Mount Royal College should become a university rather than retaining its present status as a college with the university transfer mandate is certainly, in my view, a secondary one. It's certainly an issue which is quite complex, and I think it must take into account the broader concerns regarding the possible impact on the whole postsecondary system in the Calgary region, specifically in terms of things like quality and access and affordability.

Of course, any transition of Mount Royal College to a university would entail not only one-time costs but recurrent annual operating costs. We can think of one-time costs such as upgrading the library and the library resources and adding research space and labs and the recurrent costs, of course, of upgrading the credentials of the professors who are hired to the faculty and decreased teaching hours for faculty to accommodate a research component to their activities. I've heard a number of estimates regarding the annual cost of such a transition, and they vary quite widely from a low figure of \$5 million by Mount Royal College to the last one I think the department came up with, something in the neighbourhood of 20-odd million dollars, and based upon the experience of the University of Lethbridge and its transition from a college to a university an estimate as high as \$40 million per annum.

It's certainly my contention, Mr. Minister, that we ought to be spending money on access rather than on the status or the upgrading of a particular institution. So I would appreciate your comments and your input regarding whether or not there are any estimates of what it would cost to proceed with this proposal that Mount Royal is making based on an annual budget.

4:40

The second issue that I would like to raise with the minister is the issue of health care professionals in the Calgary region. I think it is self-evident that health care professionals tend to want to train in the area close to their home, close to their families. They tend also to want to achieve employment near to where their homes are and near to where they train. The question I have is regarding the future projected needs for health care professionals in the Calgary region specifically and southern Alberta. We have new operating rooms coming on stream, and I'm sure that the minister is in close communication with the Department of Health and Wellness regarding their projected needs for staffing those facilities and for the new beds at

the Foothills and the Rockyview and the Peter Lougheed Centre of the Calgary General hospital. When does the minister project that we will achieve a level of self-sufficiency for those professions in southern Alberta? In other words, when will the lines of demand and supply eventually meet so that we can meet the needs in southern Alberta through training our own people in southern Alberta?

The third area that I would like to ask the minister about would be regarding the plan that the government announced some three years ago for postsecondary learning and its projected increase in spaces for the province of Alberta. At that time, in 2005, the objective was to have 15,000 additional postsecondary spaces by 2008 – and I guess that's coming up fairly soon, Mr. Minister – and then 60,000 spaces by the year 2020. I wonder whether the minister is still on track and whether the budgeting and the proposals that he has before him would enable us to achieve those objectives or at least to make some mileage towards those objectives.

I'll wait for your response on those.

**The Acting Chair:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. We've got a lot of old news here, and the old news is the numbers that the hon. member was chatting about with Mount Royal College, when we're talking about taking it from what perhaps his definition of a university is versus what we're saying it's going to go to. The hon. member is very well aware of the six sectoral categories that we have in institutions. Mount Royal falls within the baccalaureate and applied sector, which does not allow comprehensive research. It doesn't allow it, so they can't do it. There is no expense up front because they can't do it. It does not allow for them to go totally to degree programs. They have to maintain a portion of diploma and certificate programming.

The quality of degrees is not based on the name of the institution and certainly not in Campus Alberta. The quality of the degree is based on what we as a government approve through the Quality Council of Alberta. So the quality of the degree and the recurrent annual costs are not an issue from the perspective of what Mount Royal is doing today. As I mentioned three or four times already in this House this afternoon, Mount Royal is an accredited degree-granting institution today just as Grant MacEwan College is. So when we talk about research space, the only research space they would require is for scholarly research because that's the only research their sectoral category would allow. When we talk about this whole transformation to a university, I don't think there's an argument to be made that says that if we were going to transform an institution from one sectoral category to another, you're talking a different thing.

It is not our intent within the Campus Alberta system to have any changes. In fact, I met with the Council of Chairs last week, and one of the things that I mentioned to them is that it is very, very important that they become the absolute best at what they can do within their sector, not the absolute best at what they think they could do in a different one. That message is going to be transferred to our presidents and also the chairs, and I think that that's a good message for our students. What we want is for our institutions to do the absolute best they can at what their mandate says they should do. The mandate for the University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge, and the University of Alberta is a different mandate than the sectoral ones. Mount Royal's mandate, really, isn't university transfer anymore because they have degrees. They're already doing degree accreditation and granting those degrees.

Again, the name is what they are. It's what they do, not what they call them.

The health care professionals. Our health workforce action plan was a provincial lens that we worked with all of the regions to develop. I recall one of the meetings that I was at where we had all of the health care professions represented from across the province, including the Calgary health region, the Capital health region, all of our regions. We had everything from the registered nurses to the LPNs to the health care aides to the doctors. The strategy was built upon: "Here is where we're going. We're building the south Calgary hospital; we're potentially going to be building hospitals in other areas of the province. What is the number of health care professionals that we're going to need?"

I think it's recognized in the strategy that it's not just about training our own. It's about recruitment, it's about keeping the ones that we have, it's about retention, and it's about improving productivity. We can't assume that just because they got trained in Grande Prairie, they're going to stay in Grande Prairie or Calgary or Edmonton. On a provincial basis how many are we going to need to ensure that we have the right number of professionals and, hopefully, even an abundance of those professionals?

That's where we came up with the 2,000 graduates. This is not 2,000 spaces. This is 2,000 graduated RNs by the year 2012 and a thousand graduated LPNs. I think it's well known that we may have a certain number of students who will enter one course, but there are only a certain number of them that will graduate from the course. But we have to have that number of spaces up front, so we are creating those spaces.

The other thing – I guess I'll go back to the old-news thing – is the prediction of the number of spaces that we're going to need. I would argue, hon. member, that if you add the postsecondary spaces which we have added already in apprenticeship training, 6,000 last year alone, in our graduate programs, in our undergraduate programs, and in our diploma and certificate programs, and the 15,000 that are currently under construction or completed construction right now, we've probably blown past the targets that we had. The right number is dependent upon how you add it up.

I would suggest to you that the right number is what is going to come out of the independent access plans that we're doing today based on an analysis of the demand, based on an analysis of the three stakeholders that we have, and based on the existing capacity that we have and that capacity that is currently under construction. That's really the number. That number may change every year. It may change every year based on the number of spaces. It may change on the program. I think we have to be flexible in how we build our spaces, and we have to be cognizant of the fact that of the three clients that we have – society, taxpayer, and student – there may be things that'll change within those three.

I want to go back to the previous hon. member talking about the research and innovation capacity decreasing. The majority of those dollars are because we had programs that were started in previous years for equipment, nanotechnology equipment and research equipment, research initiatives for specific projects that are coming to the close of their funding cycle. So the dollars start to come down.

There may be other projects in the future that we'll put into play and would get added into the budget. But these projects – like the energy institute, the nanotechnology, the life sciences, ICT – we had decreasing by \$29 million to \$91 million in '08-09, and it's expected to decrease by another \$23 million in '09-10 due to the completion of the original allocation of funding and investment in the Water for Life strategy and in the energy innovation fund. Those capital projects or scientific research projects are coming to an end.

4:50

**Dr. Brown:** Well, if I could just follow up with the minister on the issue of the health care professionals in southern Alberta. It's all very well to recruit outside of our jurisdiction, of course, to fill a short-term need, but I would suggest that at some point we're going to have to have a long-term, sustainable solution. I guess my question is: when are we going to become self-sufficient in producing the number of licensed practical nurses, the number of nurses, the number of medical doctors that we need from within this jurisdiction?

Everybody is chasing the same scarce resource. You can go to Nova Scotia and Quebec and Ontario, and I'm sure that you'll find the same recruitment drives going on. The only way that we can trump those other jurisdictions is to pay more, and of course that just drives up the cost of the system. I think the long-term goal needs to be sustainability, and I wonder: is there a target date when we will achieve self sufficiency in the training of all these various professions?

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Chairman, I think you have to take a look at the 70 some-odd thousand people moving into the province last year. A lot of them didn't want to go to college and become nurses. The other thing is that we have a certain limited number of students that come into our system every year, you know, based on the number of students that are coming out of our K to 12 system. We do have a certain number of adult students that are coming into the province by way of immigration. I'm not sure that you could pick a date when you could be self-sufficient by training your own in any profession if you could not accurately predict what the economy is going to be, how many people are going to be here, how many nurses you're going to need, and how many students you're going to have to train. We have roughly 500,000 K to 12 students within the system. That number has remained relatively constant even though our population has gone up. So there's only a certain number of those students who are going to be available to take those courses.

We are going to do as much as we can to help incent those students to take the appropriate courses, but remember, too, that all of those students coming in are not going to say, "I want to be a nurse" or "I want to be a doctor" or "I want to be a licensed practical nurse." Some of them are going to want to be welders and mechanics and carpenters, and that's great, too. Some of them are going to want to be engineers. Some of them may even want to be lawyers, hon. member. I know that may sound hard to believe, but some of them may want to go in that direction. I was thinking of a Shakespeare moment, but I won't.

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The other thing is that as part of the train-your-own, we should also be looking at productivity. How can we improve the productivity of those that we train? How can we help the scope of practice of those that we train? How can we make their jobs easier by using technology? That's the other side of the equation. How can we say that wireless technology might be able to help improve the productivity. Maybe you had three or four health care professionals whereas now you maybe only need two or one because of technology advances and improvements in productivity.

But in order to pick a date for you, hon. member, I think that's going to be the crystal ball that if you and I had, we probably would not be sitting in this House today.

**Dr. Brown:** I guess I'd like to follow up another line of questioning,

and that's regarding the participation rate in the postsecondary system here, and I'd ask the hon. minister whether or not there are any resources in his budget that are specifically targeted to drive young people toward postsecondary education. We know that in the economy which we have here in Alberta, one can always come out of high school or sometimes even without graduating from high school and make a very respectable living given the present state of the economy. That may not last forever, however. I'm wondering whether or not there are any specific programs or budgets that have been allocated to specifically recruit young people and make sure that they look at the long-term benefit to their careers and that they do pursue postsecondary education and training whenever possible.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, within our budget there are a number of areas where the hon. member could find dollars and resources which we've attributed to what would have a significant impact on the participatory rates. One of them is adult literacy. Helping the community groups that we have in the province help adults become more literate and able to participate in the postsecondary system is a huge step in helping those individuals on their learning path to achieve their dreams anywhere within our postsecondary system.

As we mentioned earlier, we are seeing a different demographic in our postsecondaries now. We're seeing where students have left high school, gone to the workforce, and are coming back now to the postsecondary system. What that means is that we have to be more flexible within our system. We have to be flexible about the hours that we instruct and the way that we instruct and the methods that we use. Certainly, that's a message that all of the postsecondaries are telling us about. That's where we're getting a lot of our information, from them. They're talking to the students. We get our information as well from the student associations, which we talk to on a regular basis.

The other programs which we have are kind of tied into the K to 12 system, as the hon. member mentioned. You know, telling a 16-, 17-, 18-year-old that he should do something is sometimes quite difficult, as many parents in this House will know. What we're trying to do is show them the benefits of making that right choice. Of course, they're bombarded with a lot of things that they have to deal with in high school, and they're bombarded with a lot of options. We're trying to create programs that will reach out to them, like Learning Clicks. We're spending a fair bit of resources there to show K to 12 students that there is a benefit to what they can do and that there are ways to choose those options.

Certainly, the RAP program and Careers: the Next Generation are also two very successful programs. For students who may have even taken an earlier choice to jump out of high school and move on to the workforce, we're showing them a way they can stay in high school, complete their high school, and move into the postsecondary system as well. The Alberta learning information system, closely tied to the postsecondary system, gives them the ability to search out careers that they might be interested in.

We're also taking from the innovation side the Science Alberta Foundation and putting resources into getting kids interested in science, interested in mathematics, interested in those things as they relate to their real-life experiences and as they relate to their future, and I think that's extremely important.

**The Chair:** I would now like to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. Would you like to use the 20 minutes with the minister?

**Dr. Swann:** Whatever it takes.

**The Chair:** All right. Go ahead.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you to the minister and to his staff for staying on to help us address these estimates for Advanced Education and Technology. I wanted to confine my remarks to the health care system and to some extent to foreign graduates and to operating budgets at the postsecondary institutions.

I was very pleased to hear some of your comments about our commitment to nursing, to medical training, and to advancing, I guess, the staffing for many of these vital services that are stretched to the maximum today. I think that's progress. As a previous member has said, it's one thing to train people; it's another thing to keep them here. We clearly have to look at some of the ways in which we are scaring people out of the province or not competing well enough to keep them here either in the context of a workforce that has become disillusioned and distressed in the present circumstances or in the context of better opportunities elsewhere. One can never entirely answer the competitive edge that some jurisdictions can bring forward. But it's obviously a national problem that we have to find a national approach to, and we have to stop robbing Africa and other parts of the world of their physicians where they're so desperately in straits as a result of our ability to compete financially with people in the professions.

5:00

I want to focus a little bit on the family physician training as a postgraduate priority. Family physicians, the front line of the medical system, are an endangered species in Alberta, as they are perhaps across the country. One of the issues has to do with the medical residency loan program and the payback program that began as soon as they started their residency program. I applaud the minister and the government for changing that program. I think it's making a much more favourable atmosphere for young graduates to stay on.

The challenge now is for us to create a more favourable environment for family physician training. We, in fact, have not enough teachers of family medicine. They are not given the opportunities and the benefits and the supports they need to be a teacher in the longer term, and frankly the role models for family medicine graduates are not there. They're increasingly dwindling, and they're increasingly unable to provide the kinds of models for young students that make family medicine attractive. So we've seen a dramatic decline in graduates who even want to enter family medicine. A combination of income and a lack of good models and high cost of practice is contributing to that.

I don't know if the minister wants to comment a little bit on how we're going to strengthen the training capacity for family medicine. I think that's a critical one. That is the very foundation of our medical practice. We can have all the high-tech medicine and all the Nobel prize researchers we want, but if we can't deliver basic primary care to people in their community, we're missing the boat.

Some comments of appreciation there and some challenges I'd like the minister to address if he could.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. A lot of issues there as it relates to the health system. I guess I'll try and relate it back to my estimates, hon. member. On things like the physicians' training, the integrated community clerkship program is one that I'm very, very fond of as my father was a country doctor for many, many

years. I've spoken with a lot of our residents that are in province right now and asked them why are they not looking at the family physician or general practitioner type role in a community. I think in some part it's not a real clear understanding of the type of reward that's out there and not from a monetary value but the type of reward of being the physician in the community, if you will.

Certainly, we need more of those types of physicians. As was announced previous to this session, we are fulfilling a promise that was made, and that is to expand the number of physician graduates to 295 by 2012. That you see in the numbers in our budget. We are increasing access. Since 1999 almost 5,800 new student spaces have been created across all of our health care programs.

In terms of the nursing the growth includes two new baccalaureate programs in nursing at Mount Royal and Grant MacEwan College – we've had a good discussion about Mount Royal and Grant MacEwan – as well as enrolment increases announced through the health workforce action plan, which I think is, again, a plan that I'm very fond of because it came from the people who are involved in that process. We'll see Mount Royal enrol about 260 students in nursing programs in '07-08, and the total enrolment there will grow to about 980 students by 2010-11. Grant MacEwan has enrolled 207 nursing students, and their total enrolment will grow to about 1,023. It's projected that about 4,600 students will be enrolled in nursing degree programs in the province in '07-08. In '07-08 there are going to be about 1,375 graduates, but we're going to take that up to 2,000, and I think that's very, very important.

What we're doing is trying to find ways that we can help students understand what it means to be a rural health care provider. But I think, too, that when you talk about the dollars for a family physician, remember that that's a tripartite agreement, and the physicians themselves have a good deal to do with how much a family physician is going to make. I've heard that from my doctors, that they don't necessarily point the finger at us because three of them are pointing back at themselves. I think that's an important concept to understand.

We talked a little bit about improvements to productivity. You know, we need to find ways that we can improve the productivity within our system, and whether that's using technology, whether that's research and development, we're going to pursue all of those things. We have some of the best medical research in the country in our institutions here in this province, so we're going to utilize some of that and try to leverage some of that.

I think, too, that you talk about things like scope of practice. Are we really getting what we're training as far as delivery goes? I would hope that the hon. member will support moves that we may or may not make in moving forward with scope of practice. I'm sure the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness is looking at those things and also utilizing SuperNet and telehealth, utilizing the infrastructure that we have in place. I think it's important that we start expanding that scope and ensuring that it's not just region by region but it's across the province. We need to find ways to make those best practices go through the province.

Interesting that the hon. member opened his comments by saying that we're robbing physicians from Africa. Interesting because my son-in-law is from South Africa, and I can tell the hon. member that nobody robbed him. They very much want to be here, and to say that we wouldn't accept them would be detrimental not only to our society but to their livelihood as well. I think it's important that we recognize that in some jurisdictions where they're doing that kind of training, we very much in some cases are helping them out. I think it's their choice, and we wouldn't want to put that down.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd appreciate a few more comments about how we're going to give more incentives to teachers in family medicine if that's even on the radar for postsecondary training.

Maybe just comment a bit about the progress you've made on foreign-trained doctors. Still, there appears to be some distance to go. If we could streamline that process, there are still many foreign-trained doctors in this province who would love to work, who have close to the capability to work and are being, I think, in some cases restricted not by their training but by the college. Maybe more and more a university could play a stronger role there, and I would advocate for a stronger role for academic review as opposed to leaving it entirely in the hands of the college. This is a controversial issue, obviously, but we are not getting, I think, as fair and expedited a movement of foreign-trained medical graduates as I think we could.

I have a question from a unionized group in the health sciences union in Calgary. I'm not sure if it's appropriate to direct it to this minister, but one of my constituents is part of the health sciences union, and the Alberta Labour Relations Board has ruled that trust employees in that union in Edmonton qualify as employees of the University of Alberta. They've made a different decision about trust employees at the University of Calgary. I don't know if you have any comments on that issue and if it's in your jurisdiction or if it's in the labour jurisdiction.

The other aspect that is expressed to me by university faculty is that we're very good at providing capital budgets, but the real struggle in many departments, including the family medicine departments that I'm in touch with, is the operating budgets. That relates to paying teachers, but it also relates to the inability to operate their departments in an effective and efficient way. I don't know if you have any comments on the operating budgets for some of the faculties even beyond the faculty of medicine, how that's going to be addressed.

5:10

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, we are looking at ways that we can expand our graduate programs and, you know, teaching the teachers. We recognize and have been working with the postsecondaries about the capacity issue because, as we've talked about in this House already, access and capacity and number of spaces is not just building the bricks and mortar; it's ensuring that we have the professors in play and in the case of medical doctors that we have the preceptors in play, whether that's at the institution level or at a primary care network or somewhere where the doctors can get the training they need. I think the more preceptors and community doctors that we can get out in those areas may just help us solve the other problem, too.

The international medical graduates and those types of decisions are housed within the Ministry of Health and Wellness. I'm sure that the minister was paying close attention to that. I know he made extensive notes about your comments there, and he'll be more than happy to probably delve into that next Tuesday, I believe.

As it relates to, you know, the accreditation or the approval process, interesting comments with regard to taking that away from the College of Physicians and Surgeons and moving it to the institutions. I'm not sure that we would really want to go all the way to that, but certainly we need and are getting co-operation from the self-regulating bodies to help us solve some of the issues that we have. CARNA, the nursing association, has streamlined their

processes and they're ensuring their quality. I know the minister is working very closely with those groups to try to help solve some of those issues as well.

The item that you mentioned as it relates to the union issues that were brought up from Calgary related to the University of Alberta – I believe it was the University of Alberta you mentioned – really is not relative to what we've got on the estimates right now. I'd certainly be happy to chat with you off-line on that one down the road.

On the operating budgets I'm sure the hon. member would agree that if you went to any one of the deans or heads of programming at any one of our institutions, they would tell you that they're not getting enough money for operating because it's their job to tell you that they need more. I understand that, and our department understands that, and we work very closely with them on their base operating budgets. In fact, the base operating grants that we gave to the institutions rose an additional 6 per cent, which is in our estimates, because we are subsidizing what would have been a tuition increase to students by providing that 6 per cent base operating grant increase over the next two years.

We recognize as well that some programs cost more than others. The faculty of dentistry is going to cost more than the faculty of business in some cases. We also recognize that lab space is at a premium and those sorts of things are at premiums. But that all comes down to the negotiations that we have with the institution and how we believe that program through the CAQC should be delivered.

I want to take an opportunity before we're done today to commend this department for what they do on their relationship with our postsecondaries because without that very, very strong relationship that we have as a department with the postsecondaries and our research institutions and the research or innovation component of Campus Alberta, it would be very difficult to accomplish what we have accomplished in the last two years and it would be very difficult to have the quality of postsecondary that we have in this province. We have quality second to none. I don't think anybody would disagree with that.

On the operating side, hon. member, it's always a discussion. It's always open to negotiation. But we are moving to and we are at a system where if there is a program being delivered, we want to be consistent across the province with the needs that those institutions have. With the delivery of the program, the costs should be the same. So we've moved in that direction as well.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. My last questions really relate to progressive research and technology and on greening the economy. I think Albertans, Canadians are looking to Alberta to lead the way with the world at war with carbon, that we show real leadership on the science and the technology that's needed to move us in a new direction here. It's not clear to me from the budget what elements of the budget this time address an advancing program in terms of technology to measure environmental footprints, energy footprints in buildings, how we're going to train and retrain workforces to get us ahead of the green economy and be leaders on the planet, selling our technology, selling our trained staff to help move us forward into more energy efficiency, reducing the demand first and foremost in our energy use and then developing the clean renewable energy that we need. How has that changed in terms of our investment this year over last?

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Indeed, one could say that our entire government research and innovation platform is based on what market push is, and right now market push is very much what is sustainable for the environment, and that is what is driving a lot of research not only in clean energy technology but in nanotechnology, in the life sciences. In this budget we have an energy research base budget of \$11.2 million, which is going into a number of various projects as a base. This is to complement things that are happening in other departments that are also involved in the environmental stewardship file.

Certainly, we recognize that we want to have a long-term green approach to our energy production, so the energy innovation fund dedicated \$200 million over three years towards research and advanced technologies and innovative projects focusing on energy supply and the protection of the environment. We want to be recognized as leaders not only nationally but globally in what we do in energy development and by utilizing things like the energy innovation fund, like the Alberta Energy Research Institute, like the Alberta Research Council. We have studies of carbon capture and storage ongoing. We have studies on clean coal technology, which are ongoing. We have gasification technology evaluation, waste to power. These are all collaborative, so the dollars you see here are dollars that we want to leverage with others in industry.

We also have our climate change projects, which are ongoing. This year in our budget we're looking at \$8 million towards that. From the energy innovation fund we have \$23 million coming in. Recently we've had some issues around the tailings ponds. We have a number of research programs that are ongoing.

**The Chair:** I would now like to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to get an opportunity to participate in the budget estimates on Advanced Education and Technology this afternoon. In light of the time, I have a number of questions for the hon. minister. The first would be around apprenticeship delivery. We had your able staff – and we missed you – the other morning at Public Accounts. They carried on very well without you, I must report. But there wasn't as much interest by the committee in apprenticeship delivery, and it is an important issue here in Alberta. I would like to know what plans the department has for reducing some apprenticeship programs, pipefitting-steam fitting for one, from a four-year to a three-year program and if the minister considers that initiative a reduction in the high quality and standard of our pipefitter and steam fitter program.

5:20

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Chairman, absolutely not. It's not a reduction in the quality. The apprenticeship board is the one that determines the qualifications for these things. We work with the industry very, very closely on apprenticeship, as I know the hon. member knows.

**Mr. MacDonald:** I appreciate that, Mr. Chairman. As we know, the steam fitter-pipefitter program is a compulsory trade. I'm hearing from the industry that people are dissatisfied with this initiative to go to a three-year program from a four-year program, and some of the students who are caught up in all of this don't know which way to turn and whether they have to go back to school and take up, for instance, the welding component of the program. I'm getting a lot of correspondence from individuals who are very dissatisfied with this program change in the steam fitter-pipefitter program.

Now, certainly some of the complaints relate to how they've been informed about some of these changes. I'll be specific. They've been told by NAIT and SAIT, but they have not received a letter from Alberta industry training that I'm aware of. If this has been a streamlined decision, all this information doesn't seem to be getting to the individuals that are interested in improving their education and hopefully improving their take-home pay as well.

We're also hearing on this side of the House that the steam fitters' final exam in Calgary was cancelled because they think there was some sort of cheating going on or the exam had been circulating – I don't know whether it was in a beer parlour or not – a week before the exam was to take place, but this is a serious issue. I understand there are up to two dozen workers in Calgary that have been affected by this rescheduling of this exam. I don't have a lot of confidence in the system, because a lot of these individuals are complaining to us that it's not been rescheduled in a timely fashion. Sometimes they have to wait weeks and months before they can get there, and of course if they get their journeyman status, their wage levels hopefully would increase. If the minister could comment on what's going on with those specific programs, I would appreciate it.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Very quickly on the steam fitter-pipefitter. He's referencing the welding ticket, I believe, encompassed in the steam fitter-pipefitter. I'm fairly certain that what we have there is a communications issue more than an issue around what the industry is asking for. Again, we work with the industry on these things. The apprenticeship board is the one that's going to make these recommendations to us to make those changes, and we will ensure that those students are apprised of their individual situations. I believe it's already been done, Member, but we'll definitely check back to that.

With regard to the red seal exam the hon. member is correct. We did have an issue of a breach of security on the red seal exam, but remember that the red seal exam is a national exam, so any replacements to that exam must be approved nation-wide. That takes some time. What we're endeavouring to do is have a bank of exams available if this happens in the future so that we can move fairly quickly. Those individuals will be able to write their exams and finish that, but I think even the individuals would recognize that security of their ticket is as important as a delay, perhaps, or an inconvenience in the timing.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again to the hon. minister: did the department find out how this security breach occurred and how many copies of this exam were floating around?

**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Chairman, we have ongoing investigations on a number of fronts. We have good information on this particular case, and rather than advertise how it was done so as not to encourage others to do the same, I'll just let the hon. member know that it is well in hand.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Okay. I appreciate that, Mr. Chairman.

Now, in regard to the accreditation of temporary foreign workers, they can come into this country as a welder and without Alberta qualifications practise their trade for up to six months. Can the hon. minister please tell us how quickly there is a turnaround in the accreditation of the temporary foreign workers' trade certificates from the department?



**Mr. Horner:** Mr. Chairman, the accreditation follows the normal process. It would depend upon when they apply. I mean, they have up to the six months. So somewhere within that period.

**The Chair:** Since there are no other members who wish to speak, I will now invite the officials to leave the Assembly so the committee may rise and report progress.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

**Mr. Lund:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has

had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Advanced Education and Technology relating to the 2008-09 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

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

**Hon. Members:** Concur.

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

I just want to remind all hon. members to clear your desks because they will be used tomorrow.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the House now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[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 May 08, 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.), 203-08 (Apr. 23 eve.), 464 (May 5 eve.), 517-18 (May 6 eve.), 572-73 (May 7 eve., adjourned)

**2 Travel Alberta Act (Ady)**

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

Second Reading -- 464-65 (May 5 eve.), 518-19 (May 6 eve., adjourned)

**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 -- 208-10 (Apr. 23 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 386-87 (Apr. 30 eve., passed)

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

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

Second Reading -- 387 (Apr. 30 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 463 (May 5 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 516 (May 6 eve., passed)

**7 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2008 (Bhullar)**

First Reading -- 348 (Apr. 30 aft.)

**8 Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2008 (Renner)**

First Reading -- 348 (Apr. 30 aft.)

**9 Land Agents Licensing Amendment Act, 2008 (Mitzel)**

First Reading -- 479 (May 6 aft.)

**10 Security Services and Investigators Act (Anderson)**

First Reading -- 586-87 (May 8 aft.)

**11 Insurance Amendment Act, 2008 (Evans)**

First Reading -- 348 (Apr. 30 aft.)

**12 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2008 (Evans)**

First Reading -- 348 (Apr. 30 aft.)

- 13 Financial Institutions Statutes Amendment Act, 2008 (Fawcett)**  
First Reading -- 533 (May 7 aft.)
- 201 Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Heritage Act (Mitzel)**  
First Reading -- 59 (Apr. 17 aft.)  
Second Reading -- 89-102 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)  
Committee of the Whole -- 430-43 (May 5 aft., passed)
- 202 Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act (Cao)**  
First Reading -- 59 (Apr. 17 aft.)  
Second Reading -- 102-07 (Apr. 21 aft., adjourned), 258-64 (Apr. 28 aft., six-month hoist amendment agreed to)
- 203 Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008 (Allred)**  
First Reading -- 224 (Apr. 24 aft.)  
Second Reading -- 265-74 (Apr. 28 aft.), 443-44 (May 5 aft., adjourned, amendment introduced)
- 204 Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008 (Johnston)**  
First Reading -- 224 (Apr. 24 aft.)
- 205 Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008 (Bhardwaj)**  
First Reading -- 401 (May 1 aft.)
- 206 Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008 (Rodney)**  
First Reading -- 587 (May 8 aft.)



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